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Viewpoints has been following the Cambodian-Thai standoff recently as the latest round of a century long dispute involving the Preah Vihear Temple in Preah Vihear Province. This temple, built during the 9th and 10th centuries, has been at the centre of conflict and debate between the two nations goes back to the early 1900s but the ownership dispute has reappeared in recent years Cambodia submitted an application to UNESCO requesting that the site be designated as a World Heritage site after the 46 years of disputes. Thailand contended that the land surrounding the site belonged to them. The Cambodians withdrew the application, and in 2008, after winning support, resubmitted a modified request requesting the designation just for the temple, not surrounding land. The World Court now has ruled that it belongs to Cambodia, was listed as a UN heritage site, angering nationalists in Thailand who still regard it as Thai.

The standoff began on July 15th when three Thais were arrested in the area by Cambodian forces, sparking the deployment of about 1,000 Thai and Cambodian troops on a small patch of disputed land near the temple, with Cambodia claiming that Thai troops crossed the border illegally. Thai authorities say their troops are deployed in home territory. However, in the early days of the standoff, relations between the troops themselves were evidently peaceful, although one Thai soldier lost his leg through an abandoned landmine.

Now 3 weeks into the dispute, Cambodia's new prime minister has reiterated his call for a peaceful solution to the border dispute with Thailand, warning on August 6th that both countries' economies would suffer if the conflict erupts into a full-scale war. In his first public speech since winning national elections last month, Prime Minister Hun Sen said both countries must "narrow the conflict and expand friendship and cooperation.....We cannot just carve out Thailand to put in the sky or move our land away."

This past week however a second temple along the border sparked controversy, Cambodian and Thai officials said Wednesday that tension over the Khmer ruin on their joint border had been resolved and troops had returned to their stations. Thailand and Cambodia began trading barbs on Sunday over the Ta Muen Thom ruins, which are about 130 kilometres (80 miles) west of the better known Preah Vihear temple and are currently under Thai control.

Thailand's cabinet agreed in principle Tuesday to pull back some troops from near the Preah Vihear temple, although no timescale was laid out. Major General Kanon Netrakavaesana, the commander of Thailand's border task force, said the atmosphere at the temple had eased. "We have not received an order from our superiors. We'll move when we have that order," Kanon added, "If the prime minister were not Prime Minister Hun Sen, a Cambodian-Thai war would have happened."

But he said Cambodia would resolve the problem through "cooperation and friendly negotiations, because there is a misunderstanding about the border".

About 800 troops from Cambodia and 400 from Thailand remain in the Preah Vihear area despite a tentative agreement reached by foreign ministers last week to redeploy them in an effort to ease tensions. "The sooner the redeployment takes place, the better," Kanon has stated.

Hun Sen said another meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers would take place August 18 in the Thai resort town of Hua Hin, where delegates would discuss plans to redeploy troops and conduct mine clearing operations.

Although it looks as though the dispute is relatively peaceful and positive talks are in progress, Viewpoints will be following any further developments.