

Behind the Screens, Beyond the Border

Scam Compounds & the 2025 Cambodia–Thailand Border Crisis



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Security Analyst, <removed>

Formerly security analyst with an interest in Linux-based systems, now working on strategic threat intelligence (aka “*others are doing the work, I talk about it and pretend I contributed*”).

Disclaimer: These slides have been cobbled together in a hurry. This is not my best work. I need sleep.

In December 2025, the Thai airforce bombed casino-scams compounds inside Cambodia.

“This was the first time in history that a cybercrime industry contributed directly to armed conflict between two nations.”

100+

Killed

750,000+

Displaced

\$500.000.000

Potential criminal losses



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A Century-Old Border Dispute

- 1904–07** Franco-Siamese treaties draw ambiguous borders between Siam and French Indochina
- 1962** ICJ awards Temple of Preah Vihear to Cambodia; Thailand contests surrounding territory
- 2008–11** Border clashes kill at least 20 people; ICJ reaffirms Cambodia's sovereignty in 2013
- 2025** Temple incident and soldier's death reignite dormant territorial tensions

The territorial dispute was a tinderbox. The scam industry was the accelerant.



TIMELINE

The 2025 Crisis Unfolds

- Feb 13 Thai soldiers block Cambodians singing anthem at disputed temple, electricity cuts at the border
- May 28 10-minute skirmish kills Cambodian Lt. Suon Roun near Preah Vihear
- Jun 18 Hun Sen leaks PM Paetongtarn's phone call; Thai political crisis begins
- Jun 23 Thailand closes all border crossings, cuts power/internet to parts of Cambodia
- Jul 1 Thai Constitutional Court suspends PM Paetongtarn
- Jul 24-28 Five days of fighting: F-16 strikes, BM-21 rockets. 38-48 killed
- Oct 26 Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord signed, witnessed by Trump
- Dec 7-27 Fighting resumes; Thai F-16s bomb scam-casinos. Second ceasefire Dec 27



SCAM CASINOS?

Fortified Fraud Factories

What are they?

Fortified compound complexes — repurposed casinos, hotels, and office buildings — that function as prison-like forced labor camps for online fraud.

Amnesty International identified at least 53 scamming compounds across 16 areas of Cambodia in June 2025.

Walls & Wire

2-4m concrete walls,
barbed wire, broken glass

Armed Guards

Security with electric shock
batons

Surveillance

Cameras throughout, iron-
barred windows

Debt Bondage

\$5K-\$30K ransom to leave



THE SCAM

How "Pig Butchering" Works

1

BAIT

Fake profiles on dating apps, social media, or "wrong number" texts

2

GROOM

Weeks or months building a fake romantic or friendly relationship

3

HOOK

Victim persuaded to "invest" in fraudulent crypto platform

4

FATTEN

Fabricated profits shown to encourage larger deposits

5

SLAUGHTER

Platform locked, funds stolen. Victim loses everything

UNODC documented a 600% spike in criminal deepfake usage in 2024 — AI is supercharging these operations.

The People Who Power the Scams

100,000–150,000

Exploited in Cambodia

46+

Nationalities of victims

74%

Of trafficking victims taken to SE Asia

The recruitment pipeline

- 1 Deceptive job ads on Facebook, TikTok, Telegram promise \$700–\$1,500/month
- 2 Victims fly to Thailand on tourist visas, then smuggled to Cambodian compounds
- 3 Passports confiscated on arrival; told they must pay \$5K–\$30K to leave
- 4 Forced to work 12–20 hours daily running scams under threat of violence



"I tortured nearly 100 Chinese people"

— Former security guard, Bokor Mountain compound (The Diplomat, March 2026)

Beatings & Electric Shock

Punishments for not meeting scam quotas

Sexual Violence

Rape documented by Amnesty International

Resale Between Compounds

Workers "sold" with escalating debts

Deaths & Disappearances

Park Min-ho (22, South Korea) found dead after torture, August 2025

UN Special Rapporteurs declared scam centers a "humanitarian and human rights crisis" — May 2025

THE SCALE

A Shadow Economy Half the Size of Cambodia's GDP



\$12.5–19B

Cambodia's annual
scam revenue



\$10B+

Lost by Americans to
SE Asian scams in 2024

(Lack of worldwide statistics)



\$40–41B

Combined illicit profits
across Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos



THE CORRUPTION NEXUS

How Elites Profit from the Scam Industry

The scam industry is not a rogue operation — it is deeply embedded in Cambodia's political and economic elite.

Chen Zhi	Prince Group chairman	Ran 10+ compounds; personal adviser to Hun Manet & Hun Sen; donated \$18M+ to government. U.S. DOJ seized \$15B in Bitcoin.
Sen. Ly Yong Phat	CPP senator, O'Smach Resort	U.S.-sanctioned (Sep 2024). Resort bombed by Thai F-16s. Thai citizenship revoked by PM Anutin.
Sen. Kok An	"Godfather of Poipet"	Thai police raided 19 properties, seized \$33.8M in assets. Controls casinos linked to scam operations.
Huione Group	Financial laundering platform	Director Hun To is PM Hun Manet's cousin. Laundered \$4B+ in illicit proceeds (2021–2025). Severed from U.S. financial system.
Interior Minister's family	Sar Sokha	Father partnered with Chen Zhi to build Jinbei Casino — one of Cambodia's largest scam centers.

How Scam Centers Became a Casus Belli

The scam industry did not start the war — but it escalated a territorial skirmish into a full-blown conflict by providing Thailand with both a strategic target and a moral justification.

Economic warfare

Thailand cut electricity, internet, and fuel to border scam zones, affecting everyone there

Political justification

PM Paetongtarn branded Cambodia "a hub of world-class criminality" to justify border closures

Elite targeting

Arrest warrants for Cambodian senators Kok An and Ly Yong Phat - attacking CPP revenue streams

Military reframing

PM Anutin called it a "war against the scam army" - F-16 airstrikes on casino-scram compounds

Targeting the Scam Infrastructure

Thailand deployed a multi-pronged strategy against Cambodia's scam economy:

- Feb 2025** Cut electricity, internet, and fuel to border scam hotspots including Poipet
- Jun 2025** Closed all border crossings; ordered telecom signals cut to Cambodian border towns
- Jul 2025** Massive asset seizures (\$33.8M seized); Interpol partnership launched
- Nov 2025** Arrest warrants for Ly Yong Phat; 36 locations raided, \$10.9M seized, Thai citizenship revoked
- Dec 2025** F-16 airstrikes on 5–6 casino-scam compounds; Royal Thai Army claims 39 compounds destroyed

"No peace will be possible until Cambodia moves decisively to destroy scamming attempts." — PM Anutin, Dec 18, 2025



Two Rounds of Fighting, Two Ceasefires

JULY 24-28

- Triggered by Thai soldier losing leg to landmine
- Full-scale fighting across 12 border locations
- Cambodian BM-21 rockets hit residential areas
- First Thai F-16 combat sorties since 1988
- 38-48 killed, 300,000+ displaced
- Ceasefire brokered Jul 28 in Putrajaya

DECEMBER 7-27

- More intense: "Operation Sattawat" seizes territory
- F-16s bomb 5-6 casino-scam compounds
- Conflict spreads to Gulf of Thailand (naval)
- Cambodia deploys FPV kamikaze drones
- 490,000+ Cambodians displaced
- Second ceasefire signed Dec 27



From Denial to Crackdown

DENIAL

Early 2025

Government dismisses scam allegations as "exaggerated" and "unverified."

PRESSURE

Mid 2025

Amnesty report, Thai border closures, and U.S. sanctions force a response. Hun Manet chairs Ad Hoc Anti-Scam Commission.

CRACKDOWN

Jul-Dec 2025

2,000+ arrested. 92 compounds raided across 18 cities. 3,455 suspects detained by October.

LANDMARK

Jan 2026

Chen Zhi arrested and extradited to China. 110,095 foreigners deported. 200 compounds shuttered.

Critics: Crackdown targets low-level workers, not operators. Many compounds tipped off in advance.



International Actors & Their Roles

United States

Sanctions & tariff leverage

146 sanctions on Prince Group; \$15B Bitcoin seizure; Trump brokered ceasefires via tariff threats

China

Complex mediator

Origin of syndicates AND key mediator; hosted trilateral meetings; USCC: syndicates had "implicit backing"

ASEAN / Malaysia

Primary mediator

PM Anwar hosted all negotiations; ASEAN Observer Team deployed; Special FM meeting Dec 22

United Nations

Humanitarian alarm

Guterres called for restraint; Türk cited civilian airstrike risks; UNODC mapped industry scale

Where Things Stand (March 2026)

The Ceasefire

- Dec 27, 2025 ceasefire holds but is "fragile"
- Most border crossings reopened
- Sporadic drone incidents continue
- ASEAN observers deployed

Unresolved Issues

- Thai forces hold territory seized in Operation Sattawat
- Cambodia calls this "illegal occupation"
- No permanent border demarcation agreement
- Nationalist sentiment high on both sides

The Scam Industry

- ~200 compounds shuttered but infrastructure intact
- Operations relocating to Vietnamese border
- Industry revenues = ~50% of Cambodia's GDP
- "Too big to fail" — deeply entwined with CPP



Thank you for your attention!

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Questions, job offers: <removed>