

**Civil Unrest in Southern Thailand: Roles and  
Challenges of Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** Civil Unrest in Southern Thailand: Roles and Challenges of Malaysia

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Series of violence in Southern Thailand resurgence in late 2001 and eventually escalated dramatically in 2004. Many scholars regarded this conflict entailed from the manifestation of deep resentment of the people in the southern provinces towards the central government especially with regards to the historical factor, culture, leadership style and economic deprivation. Being an immediate neighbour, Malaysia in an absolute sense, is affected physically in this situations. The Southern Thailand is experiencing a situation where there is neither total nor civil war. But the “tone” of having some kind of conflict and unrest in these provinces is clearly evident. Malaysia has significantly played several roles in assisting to restore peace and stability in Southern Thailand provinces. One of the examples is the establishment of General Border Committee (GBC) between Thailand and Malaysia with the primary objective of GBC is to enhance the security and stability in the border areas. It has helped bridging differences, building contacts and facilitating communication between the two countries. Additionally, leaders from both sides maintain close ties through regular official and non-official visits in various forums. The Malaysian government has viewed the conflict in the Southern Thailand seriously. The geographical proximity between the two countries placed Malaysia within the parameters of what is essentially as Thai internal problem.

The establishment of various bilateral initiatives focusing in the southern region of Thailand and northern Malaysia indicates that the situation in the southern Thailand is of priority in Malaysia's strategic interests. A vast majority of the actions and initiatives promulgated were precautionary measures indicating that safeguarding Malaysia's national security and preventing the conflict from spreading into the Malaysian territory is the ultimate goal. Both Malaysian and Thailand leaders claimed that their bilateral relations at all time high because of the friendship and trust factors. However, the conflict in the Southern Thailand remained problematic. Tension between the two countries continued to build for many years. Thailand regards the conflict in the south as a purely internal matter. Malaysia fears that the instability there could spill across the border. Although the relationship between Thailand and Malaysia sometime seems to be problematic, however, both respective Armed Forces and Police have shown very professional and harmonic friendship.

The Southern Border Provinces Admiration and Development Policy 2017 – 2019 orders that have been promulgated by the Office of Thailand National Security Council need to be implemented and strictly adhered to by all parties involved. Malaysia on the other hand can play a role in assisting the government of Thailand to support those policies. Apart from that, all the existing bilateral agreements between Malaysia and Thailand requires further strengthen and adjustment as well as to be implemented according to what it has been agreed upon.

## **Preface**

Prosper-thy-neighbour policies is simply means that if you assist your neighbour to prosper, in an absolute sense, you will prosper along with it. When countries are prosperous, they become more stable and their people need not immigrate to your country. Instead, their prosperity provides you with a market for your goods, with opportunities to invest and to enrich yourself. On contrary, problematic neighbours are source of the problems for everyone surrounding it.

A geographical land and maritime border predisposes bordering countries to work together in ensuring that the border areas remain safe and secure for the people on both sides. It goes without saying that what happens on one side, particularly with regard to the security related issues, it will affect the other. Some of the spillover effect has given a negative impacts upon the security of the neighbouring countries particularly due to the geographical, ethnic, linguistic and religious proximities and affinities that people in the border areas on both sides share.

The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of the effect of the restive Southern Thailand on Malaysia-Thailand security related issues. The nature of the conflict and the players in the Southern Thailand makes it essential for Malaysia to tread carefully. Malaysia needs to posture in assisting to resolve the issues without appearing to be

meddling in the internal problems of Thailand as what is known as ASEAN WAY.

It is hoped that this study would provide an understanding of the problem as well as state behavior with regards to Malaysian and Thailand security relations and finally promoting options of way ahead in order to maintain peace and stability in the Southern Thailand.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Background

Series of violence in Southern Thailand resurgence in late 2001 and eventually escalated dramatically in 2004. Being an immediate neighbour, Malaysia in an absolute sense, is affected physically in this situations. The Southern Thailand is experiencing a situation where there is neither total nor civil war. But the “tone” of having some kind of conflict and unrest in these provinces is clearly evident. It is imperative not to view the civil unrest as primarily about radical Islamism or indeed as an essentially religious conflict. Some even claimed that the insurgency is based on historic causes including a 200 year occupation, the 1960s resettlement of the Northeastern Thais into the region, Thai cultural and economic imperialism in Pattani which includes allegations of police brutality, criminal activity, disrespect of Islam, the presence of culturally insensitive businesses such as bars, drug trafficking and corruption. There were further claims that drug trafficking is one source of insurgent money.<sup>1</sup> However, these series of unlawful activities that have created unrest or conflict can just be called *restive*, instead of civil war, conflict or insurgency. In 2002, Thaksin Shinawatra stated, "There's no separatism, no ideological terrorists, just common bandits."<sup>2</sup> However in 2004, he reversed his statement and regarded the issue as a local front in the global War on Terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> Brain Mc Carton and Shawn W Crispin, “An Atol Investigation, Southern Test for New Thai Leader”, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/JL\\_2\\_Aeo2.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JL_2_Aeo2.html) (4 December 2017)  
<sup>2</sup>*Thai districts impose martial law*. BBC News. 3 November 2005 (4 December 2017)

Malaysia has significantly played several roles in assisting to restore peace and stability in Southern Thai provinces. One of the examples is the establishment of General Border Committee (GBC) between Thailand and Malaysia with the primary objective of GBC is to enhance the security and stability in the border areas. This is achieved by introduced the cross-border cooperation with the main aimed of finding resolutions of common problems, development and promotion of matters of mutual interest in the border areas. The GBC meets once a year alternately in Malaysia and Thailand to discuss security and related problems in the affected areas. It has helped bridging differences, building contacts and facilitating communication between the two countries. Additionally, leaders from both sides maintain close ties through regular official and non-official visits in various forums. This study examines the civil unrest situation in Southern Thailand and studies the roles and challenges of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability within the affected surrounding regions. For the purpose of this study, the affected surrounding regions is defined as an area within certain provinces in southern part of Thailand ie Songkhla, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat as well as northern part of Malaysia Peninsula which is geographically having a land border with some of those provinces.

### **Problem and the Significance of the Study**

Malaysia and Thailand relations are multifaceted; covering bilateral, political, economic and security issues. A geographical land border predisposes both countries to work together in ensuring that the border areas remain safe and secure for the people on both sides. It goes without saying that what happens on one side, particularly with regard to

the security related issues, it will affect the other. The reality that the Southern Thailand is restive and prone to conflict impacts upon the security of Malaysia. This is particularly due to the geographical, ethnic, linguistic and religious proximities and affinities that people in the border areas on both sides share. From the Malaysian perspective, there is a need to study the restive and violent prone situation in the Southern Thailand. There is a further need to study how that will affect Malaysia, its security relations with Thailand, and assess the roles and challenges of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability within the surrounding regions.

The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of the effect of the restive Southern Thailand on Malaysia-Thailand security related issues. The nature of the conflict and the players in the Southern Thailand makes it essential for Malaysia to tread carefully. Malaysia needs to posture in assisting to resolve the issues without appearing to be meddling in the internal problems of Thailand. The primary responsibility lies with Thailand. Consequently, it is imperative that Malaysia strives to maintain a high level of bilateral and security ties. Territorial integrity is the crux of the matter for Thailand, and Malaysia needs to recognize Thailand's desire to defend its national sovereignty at all costs. Malaysia has, for more than 40 years, relied on the GBC to take care of the problem and provide border. The main challenges are that the nature of the threats arising out within the affected surrounding regions might be turning into asymmetrical, violent and terrorism related. Innovative approaches are thus required to strengthen and perhaps to supplement existing bilateral arrangements. It is hoped that this study would provide an understanding of the problem as well as state behavior with regards to



Malaysian and Thailand security relations and finally the way ahead to resolve the issues.

## **Objectives of the Research**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To analyse the root causes of the restive situation in Southern Thailand.
2. To analyse the roles and challenges of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability in Southern Thailand and within the surrounding regions.
3. To discuss and promoting the way ahead as well as to intensify the roles of Malaysia in restoring peace and stability within the affected surrounding regions with regards to security and development related issues.

## **Literature Review**

The collective factors by the majority of the authors stated that the conflicts in Southern Thailand are stemmed from history, culture, economy, religion, identity and ethnic.

## **Scope of Research**

This study is organized into five chapters that are as follows:

1. The first chapter provides the introduction of the study, which covers the background of conflict in the Southern Thailand, the problem statement and the significance of the study, research objectives, and scope of the research, conceptual/theoretical framework, hypothesis, limitations and research methods.
2. The second chapter highlights survey books, scholar's articles and other sources related to the restive situation in the Southern Thailand.
3. The third chapter explores the historical background and the analysis of the root causes that leads to a restive situation in the Southern Thailand. This chapter also highlights some of the major outbreaks of violence in 2004 such as the Ban Cho Ai Rong tragedy, the Krue Se Mosque incident and Tak Bai tragedy.
4. The fourth chapter focuses on the Malaysia's Strategic Interests within the affected surrounding regions. This chapter also analyses the roles of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability with regards to security related issues. It also covers the issues, threats and challenges to the security relations between Malaysia and Thailand. This chapter also

concludes Thailand's behaviour with regard to security relations with Malaysia.

5. The final chapter summaries some conclusions relating to the effect of the restive situation in Southern Thailand and promoting the way ahead in restoring peace and stability within the affected surrounding regions with regards to security and development related issues.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is drawn from the following concepts.

### **1. Sovereign State**

The state has perhaps no greater function than the provision of sovereignty. Sovereignty puts the state in an unassailable position reciprocally with respect to its equals abroad and absolutely with respect to its citizens at home. But sovereign immunity comes at a price. The right of sovereignty generates for the state an attendant responsibility for security, the security of its territorial boundaries both as intrinsic good and as precondition for the physical, economic and cultural security of its citizens. States are territorially defined political units that exercise ultimate internal authority and that recognize no legitimate external authority over themselves. Sovereignty in other words also includes the idea of legal equality among

states. So a sovereign state can be defined as an organized political community, occupying a territory, and possessing internal and external sovereignty, that enforces a monopoly on the use of force.

Thailand as sovereign state is responsible for protecting its territorial integrity, sovereignty, independence, rights and other interests as core elements that constitute security. Furthermore, the nation's independence and sovereignty is threatened not only by external aggression but also by other factors such as internal divisiveness and inappropriate economic policies which lead to economic collapse, subversion or intervention by external powers.

## 2. Interdependence Theory

Interdependence theory is part of a larger scale of social exchange theories. Social exchange theories look at how people exchange rewards and costs in a relationship. Interdependence theory takes it further and demonstrates how these rewards and costs collaborate with peoples' expectations of relationships. This theory comes from the idea that closeness is the key to all relationships; that people communicate to become closer to one another. This theory states that all

relationships constitute rewards and costs and that people try to maximize the rewards while minimizing the costs.<sup>3</sup>

Interdependence liberalism is a strand of liberal international relations thinking which argues that increased interdependence between countries reduces the chance of them engaging in conflict. Interdependence liberals see modernization as increasing the levels and scope of interdependence between states leading to greater cooperation. Such thinkers also see welfare as the primary concern of states.

Complex interdependence in international relations is the idea put forth by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye that states and their fortunes are inextricably tied together. The concept of economic interdependence was popularized through the work of Richard N. Cooper. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye analyze how international politics is transformed by interdependence. The theorists recognized that the various and complex transnational connections and interdependencies between states and societies were increasing, while the use of military force and power balancing are decreasing but remain important. In making use of the concept of interdependence, Keohane and Nye also importantly differentiated between interdependence and dependence in analyzing the role of power in politics and the relations between international actors.

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<sup>3</sup>Kelly, H. H., & Thibaut. 1978. *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*. New York: Wiley.

Complex interdependence therefore is characterized by three elements involving (1) the use of multiple channels of action between societies in interstate, trans-governmental, and transnational relations, (2) the absence of a hierarchy of issues with changing agendas and linkages between issues prioritized and the objective of (3) bringing about a decline in the use of military force and coercive power in international relations.

### 3. Special Relationship

‘Special Relationship’ is used in the Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations literature to describe a somehow particular and outstanding type of bilateral relations.<sup>4</sup> It is now used to designate a great number of other bilateral relations. However, this concept remains vague in meaning and applicability.<sup>5</sup>

It appears acceptable to define a special relationship as an analytical category of bilateral interaction between two international actors, particularly states. A special relationship exists in the external context as a part of the structure of the international system, and in the internal context of the national system of the foreign policy. The relationship originates from a sense of shared interests and values and maintained by the same. A special relationship has a high capacity for adaptation and it is through such durability that the special relationship

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<sup>4</sup> Gardner Feldman & Lily. 1984. *The Special Relationship between the West Germany and Israel*, p. 15. New York: George Allen & Unwin.

<sup>5</sup> Bar-Simon-Tov & Yaacov. 1990. United States and Israel Since 1948: A “Special Relationship”? *Diplomatic History* 22(2): pp. 231-262.

turns into a stable pattern of the international reality. A special relationship between states should meet the following criteria:

3.1 The existence of the special relationship must be recognized as an observable trait of the international environment by other relevant actors in the system.

3.2 A special relationship is observable when a state recognizes the partner of the relationship as a relevant actor for its own international position and when the actor bases its policies towards the partner on an attitude of diffuse reciprocity or responsiveness.<sup>6</sup>

3.3 A special relationship should perform three patterns; cooperation, intensity and durability. Current bilateral and security relations between Malaysia and Thailand for the period since 2004 would hence be classified as special relations.

## **Hypothesis**

This paper adopts the following three hypotheses as follows:

1. There are some areas of dissatisfaction by certain populace or a group of people in Southern Thailand towards the

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<sup>6</sup> Robert O Keohane. 2006. Reciprocity in International Relations. *International Organization* 40(1). pp. 1-27.

ruling government particularly with regards to the history, cultural and economic imperialism which drives to the restive situation.

2. The effect of the restive situation in Southern Thailand had given an impact on security and development related issues within the affected surrounding regions.

3. Malaysia basic premise in dealing with the situation in the Southern Thailand is interdependency in the realm of security. Malaysia sees that prolonged violence in the provinces of Southern Thailand would adversely affect the security situation of the northern states of Malaysia Peninsula. Thailand and Malaysia are seriously adamant to resolve and restoring peace and stability within the affected surrounding regions.

4. Malaysia's role in the conflict in the Southern Thailand is crucial in determining the direction of the security relations between the two countries. Its ability to contribute positively to peace in the region would be viewed positively by Thailand and would lead to enhance bilateral ties.

## **Limitations**

Although this research was carefully prepared, it is inevitable of its limitations and shortcomings. First of all, the research was conducted mainly based on the secondary sources which are often based on the perceptions of the writers. Second, the proposals of way ahead are



very subjective due to the result will be only becomes evidence after a long period.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methodology is qualitative and the analysis is descriptive. Data are collected from primary and secondary sources. It is not based on direct field research, but relies on various sources available that are related to this study.

Primary data is obtained through the source from Malaysian Armed Forces Army Intelligence Department of Malaysian Armed Forces Headquarters as well as those who are appointed at the GBC. The primary data also derived from the input of the staff of Thailand's National Security Council as well as from few prominent scholars from Thailand's University in order to augment the content of this thesis.

Secondary data is generally derived from books, academic journals, news, interviews in newspapers, published articles from credible authors and internet sources. The library facilities in "*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*", "*Universiti Malaya*", Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relation (IDFR), Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) and Ministry of Defence provided a vast majority of the above-mentioned secondary sources.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This chapter will highlight literature review from the survey books, scholar's articles and any other sources relevant to the restive situation in the Southern Thailand that are related to the focus of the study.

#### Security Related Issues in Southern Thailand

Kavi Chongkittavorn (2004) mentions that contemporary literature on the conflict in the Southern Thailand has attempted to study the turmoil through the lens of international terrorism and this has led to an extensive analysis of the active terrorist groups in the region.<sup>7</sup> Some analysts have further implicated the strife in the southern provinces of Thailand with "jihad" at the regional level. Other inquires like that of Wan Kadir Che Man (1990) is predisposed towards emphasizing the role of Buddhism and Islam since the beginning of the conflict.<sup>8</sup> They do not question whether religion has always been a factor since the inception of the unrest and if not, the *raison d'etre* for the change.

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<sup>7</sup>Kavi Chongkittavorn. 2011. Thailand: International Terrorism and the Muslim South, *Southeast Asian Affairs*. <http://www.questia.com> (27 November 2017).

<sup>8</sup>Che Man, Wan Kadir. 1990. *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Earlier studies on the unrest in Southern Thailand place less emphasis on religion. They instead consider the involved parties as Thai and Malay. Christie (1996) mentions that a few studies recognize this change and make the analytical distinction between ethnicity and religion when analyzing the conflict in Southern Thailand. The notion of being Thai or Malay is identified primarily by cultural symbols such as language and education. The idea of being Buddhist or Muslim is established by references specifically to Buddhism or Islam. These attributes are located within local and global events, state policies as well as the aims, demands and actions of the rebel groups involved in the unrest.<sup>9</sup>

The analytical differences between ethnicity and religion are significant to facilitate the accurate classification of the opponents in the discord. When scholars make the assumption that the notion of being Thai or Malay is closely associated with being Buddhist and Muslim respectively, they miss the fact that being Buddhist is not limited to being Thai and the conception of being Muslim is much broader than being Malay. Loosely identifying the two warring sides in an insurgency can lead to gross misunderstanding and the implementation of flawed policies, thus contributing to the cycle of violence.<sup>10</sup>

The conflict has forced substantial numbers of Thai Muslims to seek refuge and employment in Malaysia. At one time, this was mainly in

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<sup>9</sup>Christie, Clive. 1996. *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

<sup>10</sup>S.P. Harish. 2006. Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28(1). <http://www.questia.com> (8 December 2017).

the agricultural sector whereby the Thais came over during the rice harvesting seasons. John Funston (2010) has indicated that in recent decades larger numbers of Thais have moved to take up opportunities in a wide range of agricultural and secondary industries, and to set up businesses - particularly food stalls selling tom yum kung, Thailand's famous spicy prawn soup. There are no precise figures on the numbers of the Southern Thai Muslims in Malaysia, but it has been estimated to be around 300,000.<sup>11</sup>

Julie Dolan and David Rosenbloom (2003) argue that since the border between the two countries has been rather open, large numbers of people on both sides of the frontier have dual nationality and this allows them to maximize their employment and social opportunities. Legally, Malaysia does not permit dual citizenship, though in the case of Southern Thais, the practice is an open secret. Thailand has traditionally allowed dual citizenship, but in recent years has moved towards withdrawing it from citizens in the south. There is no consensus on the number of dual nationals. Thai authorities generally estimate around 30,000, but others have claimed the true number to be 100,000 or even in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>12</sup>

John Funston (2010) mentions that when conflict in the Southern Thailand resumed in 2001, Malaysia's primary focus was on assisting the Thais deal with their security concerns. This concern is reflected through strong bilateral relations, which have been consolidated after a key irritant -

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<sup>11</sup>3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Intelligence Report. 2012. Malaysian Army Intelligence Division, MINDEF, 10 September.

<sup>12</sup>Julie Dolan and David Rosenbloom (eds). 2003. *Representative Bureaucracy: Classic Readings and Continue Controversies*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

the CPM - was removed as a result of surrender in 1989. At the same time, Malaysia's own concerns about militant Islam in the form of the KMM or JI, predisposed it to support a neighbour with potentially similar problems. After the tragic incidents at Krue Se mosque and Tak Bai in 2004, popular opinion in Malaysia forced the government to accord higher priority to the protection of Malays in the Southern Thailand. Responding to Thai Premier Thaksin's provocative diplomacy, Malaysia pushed the issue much harder than would normally be the case, stretching the boundaries on the regional doctrine of non-intervention. Nonetheless Malaysia took steps to ensure it did not lead to open confrontation in the ASEAN arena, and that the OIC passed no resolutions that would humiliate Thailand in the Islamic world. Malaysia also refrained from reverting to its earlier practices of extending covert support to the insurgency.<sup>13</sup> Although the ruling UMNO had to tread carefully to ensure it would not lose public support to political undercutting by PAS, it never lost sight of its interest in the Southern Thailand's stability, and supported Thai efforts in this direction.

In 2004, Bangkok invoked the principle of non-interference to rebuff criticism from Kuala Lumpur over the brutal treatment of Muslim demonstrators by the Thai army in its southern provinces. Robert Ayson (2006) mentions that anger with Bangkok is not confined to the Southern Thailand, but seeps over the border into the northern Malaysia where many people have longstanding historical and cultural links with Thai co-religionists. Indeed, the actions of the Thai military are likely to feed a sense

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<sup>13</sup>John Funston. 2010. Malaysia and Thailand's Southern Conflict: Reconciling Security and Ethnicity, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32.2.

of solidarity with Thai secessionists among some Malaysian Muslims. Reports have suggested that Malaysia is already a fertile recruiting ground for the Kumpulan Belia Koodinasi (KBK) - the Coordinate Youth Group wing of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) - the National Revolutionary Front - which is one of the main players in secessionist violence in the south.<sup>14</sup>

Kavi Chongkittavorn (2011) takes issue with Robert Ayson (2006) by basing his argument on the history of Thailand. Thailand is no stranger to providing safe haven to freedom fighters and underground movements. In the 1920s former Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh lived in the northeast part of Thailand while he conducted his anti-French guerrilla war. Other underground fighters from the Southeast Asia also set up offices in Bangkok throughout the 1930s to the 1940s. That trend continues even today. Currently at least a dozen underground movements have representatives stationed in the Thai capital. Thai authorities fervently believe that Thailand should leave such fighters alone and not ruffle their feathers as long as they do not harm Thai citizens. This has been a sort of de facto policy of the Thai government for decades, although nobody likes to discuss it openly. The Tamil Tigers, which have been fighting the Sri Lanka government for the past twenty years, have been using Thailand's western coastal provinces to supply arms to their fighters in northern Sri Lanka. Illegal arms smuggling from Thailand to the rebels in Aceh is also not uncommon.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Ayson, and Desmond Ball (ed). 2006. *Strategy and Security in the Asia Pacific*. Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>15</sup>Kavi Chongkittavorn. 2011. Thailand: International Terrorism and the Muslim South.

Duncan McCargo (editor), (2007) examines the reasons behind the unrest in Southern Thailand from a variety of perspectives. The contributors reject the simplistic mantras of ‘terrorism experts’, and call for a more nuanced, subtle and critical readings of events. Their topics include the political meanings of history and monuments, the ambiguous role of the Thaksin government, alternative explanations of the violence, the salience of political Islam, the voices of ordinary people in Pattani and the misleading paradigms of the insecurity industry. McCargo’s expression highlights new paradigms and ways to understand the conflict in Southern Thailand.<sup>16</sup>

Aurel Croissant (2005) takes a historical approach in examining the patterns of the conflict in Southern Thailand until late 1990s. He provides an outline of the current wave of insurgency, examines causes to the conflict and possible consequences for democracy in Thailand.<sup>17</sup>

Imtiyaz Yusuf and Lars Peter Schmidt (2006) explore the historical development of the conflict and trace the continuous efforts by those involved to effect reconciliation. The historic-political background, local perceptions of disputed or unacceptable policies, the fate of the 2005 National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) and religion, identity, cross-border and international factors are all discussed by scholars and analysts.<sup>18</sup>

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*Southeast Asian Affairs*. <http://www.questia.com> (11 November 2017).

<sup>16</sup>Duncan McCargo (ed). 2007. *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence*. Singapore: NUS Press.

<sup>17</sup>Aurel Croissant. 2005. Unrest in South Thailand: Contours, Causes, and Consequences since 2001. *Strategic Insight, Vol IV, Issues 2*: Naval Postgraduate School.

<sup>18</sup>Imtiyaz Yusuf and Lars Peter Schmidt (ed). 2006. *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand*. Thailand: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

## Chapter 3

# Historical Background and Analysis of the Root Causes That Leads to a Restive Situation in the Southern Thailand

### Introduction

Muslims comprise 5.5% of Thailand's population but constitute the majority in the nation's southernmost provinces. More than 70% of the population in the southernmost provinces is Malay and Muslim.<sup>19</sup> They live in poverty due to the lack of formal education, lack of economic opportunities, limited facilities and poor infrastructure. On this issue, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told the nation during his weekly Talk over the People's radio program in 2004 that:

*'People in the three southernmost provinces are poor. The pace of development in the area is slower than neighbouring Malaysia, causing villagers to cross the border for jobs. Some families have many children. Some allow their children to study only in Islamic teaching schools, depriving them of the opportunity to learn vocational subjects or other fields. Children are unable to*

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<sup>19</sup>Syed Serajul Islam. 2000. The Liberation Movement of the Muslims in Thailand. *Asian Profile (Canada)* October 28(5). pp. 400-411.



*find jobs after completing schools, leaving them in chronic poverty.*<sup>20</sup>

They feel oppressed and unjustly treated by their own government. Several incidents such as deaths at the Kerisik Mosque and Tak Bai which involved security issues made the situation worse. Following the Tak Bai incident, former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad called upon the Thai government to give autonomy to the South as a way of resolving the southern conflict. However, the statement was not well received by the Thai government and their response implied that Mahathir did not understand the real problem that was faced by the Thai government and the people in the area.

The issue which involves the Muslims in these provinces could affect bilateral relations with Malaysia, which feels sympathetic towards the situation faced by its Muslim brethren. In addition, the unrest and instability in the border areas can influence and impact upon Malaysian security. Thailand believes that Malaysia supports the separatist movements operating in the region.<sup>21</sup> Thailand continues to seek Malaysia's cooperation to curb this problem when it became one of the main agenda during Thaksin's official visit to Kuala Lumpur in 2001. But after the uprising in 2004, Thaksin had a negative perception regarding Malaysia's role in volunteering assistance to solve the conflict in the Southern Thailand. Thaksin accused Malaysia, amongst others, of

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<sup>20</sup>National News Bureau Public Relations Department. 2004. *Prime Minister Thaksin and The Southern Development*. <http://202.47.224.92/en/news.php?id=254705250001> (6 December 2017).

<sup>21</sup>Smith. W.E. 1981. *Thailand - A Country Study*. Foreign Area Study: American University. p.77.

providing training to the separatists. He also accused the Malaysian leaders of trying to exploit the insurgency to score domestic political mileage. In response, Malaysia's then Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, called on Thai leaders to be more "mature".<sup>22</sup>

The military coup on 19 September 2006 led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin – a Thai Muslim, ended and discredited Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's five-year rule. Thailand was subsequently ruled by Ex - Army General Surayud Chulanont. Surayud inspired hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the south and showed a great deal of tolerance. This provides an opportunity for Malaysia to work more closely with Surayud in handling the conflict in the Southern Thailand. Surayud called on then Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2006 and invited him to reciprocate in 2007. During both visits, the main agenda of the meeting was peace efforts in the Southern Thailand and how to improve the bilateral relationship.

Thailand received a new government in January 2008 that was led by the Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej. Soon after taking office, Samak announced his desire to resume collaborative efforts with Malaysia to resolve the Southern Thailand conflict.<sup>23</sup> Samak's 9-month old government however fell in September 2008. His successor, Somchai Wongsawat was also in office for hardly 3 months and could not do anything substantial with regard to the problem in South.

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<sup>22</sup>Nick Cumming-Bruce. 2005. News Analysis: Thailand and Malaysia Bristling. *International Herald Tribune*. 27 October.

<sup>23</sup>*Berita Harian*. 2008. 12 February.

The succeeding Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva pledged to reclaim leadership of peace efforts in the Southern Thailand from the military. Despite glimpses of new thinking in Bangkok, the weakness of the government and its reliance on the military for political support meant the armed forces continued to dominate policymaking in the South. Harsh and counterproductive laws remained in force and there were no effective checks on abuses by the security forces.<sup>24</sup> Alternative policies were not been seriously explored and, after a temporary reduction in violence in 2008, the frequency and intensity of the attacks kept rising. Thailand saw a new government in August 2011.

Yingluck's speeches in the heart of Thailand's largely Muslim south were cause for optimism. This was especially so considering that her brother Thaksin Shinawatra had left a legacy of hostility with respect to his southern policy. In March 2012 however, a triple bomb blast in the province of Yala highlighted that fact that Yingluck had not broken any new ground even with the government's pledge to grant "special administration zone" status to three southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat.<sup>25</sup>

## **The Conflict – An Overview**

In analyzing the problem in the Southern Thailand, it is imperative to look at the historical background of the region. It is estimated that 5.5% or around 2 million<sup>26</sup> of Thailand's populations are

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<sup>24</sup> *International Crisis Group Asia Report 8 December* (181).  
[www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/thailand](http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/thailand) (24 November 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Tim LaRocco. 2012. Yingluck's Southern Failure. *The Diplomat*, 12 April.

<sup>26</sup> Syed Serajul Islam. 2000. The liberation movement of the Muslims in Thailand. *Asian Profile*, October.

Muslims. While Muslim communities are all over the country, a majority of them live in the southern provinces particularly in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani. Most of them are of Malay-ethnic origin. Historically, the Malays have been living under an independent Muslim Sultanate of Pattani Raya that survived for six centuries. As the Thai Kingdom, then known as Siam expanded, its rulers began to covet the Malay Peninsula. By 1786, the Kingdom of Pattani was conquered by the King of Siam and forced to pay tribute to Bangkok but the sultanate retained its nominal independence.<sup>27</sup>

In 1904, after secret negotiations between Siam and the British, the latter formally recognized Siamese rule over Pattani in return for exclusive trading rights in Malaya. With that treaty, Siam formally annexed the Kingdom of Pattani,<sup>28</sup> and from that moment on the civilian and military regimes changed hands in ruling the country. The Anglo-Siamese Treaty was a significant event in a sense that it had changed the history of the Southern Thailand. It was also from that moment in time that the Southern Thailand changed from a peaceful independent state to a region of conflict.

## **The Conflict - Emergence**

The Southern Thailand is no stranger to armed conflicts and violence. Historically, there were many conflicts in this region, as people of the independent Kingdom of Pattani opposed the annexation by Siam. King Chulalongkorn introduced a centralisation programed (thesaphiban),

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<sup>27</sup>Benjamin Pauker. 2006. Thailand: A fire this time. *World Policy Journal*, Winter .

<sup>28</sup>Andrew D. Forbes. 1982. Thailand's Muslim minorities: Assimilation, secession, or coexistence?. *Asian Survey* (22). pp. 1056-1073.

which was to increase the strain of direct control from the capital Bangkok. In 1901 Siam regrouped the seven provinces of Patani under one single administrative unit called “Area of Seven Provinces” (boriween chet huamuang) and placed it under the control of an area commissioner who worked directly under the Interior Ministry. The treasuries of the Malay kingdom were handled directly by the Revenue Department as in other Siamese provinces. By 1906 the area of the seven Malay provinces was administratively reorganized into a “circle” (monthon) called Monthon Patani. The Monthon Patani incorporated the seven provinces into four larger provinces: Patani, Bangnara, Saiburi and Yala.<sup>29</sup> Starting with low key protests, demonstrations and complaints, it grew to an armed insurgency in the late 1940s mainly because of Thai central government's policies. As mentioned earlier, the conflict started as early 1904 when Bangkok took control over the South via the Anglo-Siamese Treaty 1909. The Malay-Muslims in this newly annexed region continued to rebel against Siamese rule in a series of uprisings between 1909 until 1932.<sup>30</sup> Several of these uprisings did turn violent, most notably the Pattani Revolt in February and March 1923. Part of the government strategies to solve the problem was to assimilate the people in the south into Thai society. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the Thai government developed a policy of nation building that forced the transformation of the multi-ethnic society of Siam into a unified Thai nation.<sup>31</sup> Thus schools and 'Wats' (Buddhist temples) were built and a Thai system of education was imposed on the locals. In addition, local

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/reports/6750-a-brief-introduction-to-the-malay-kingdom-of-patani-1/> (27 May 2018)

<sup>30</sup> Clive J. Christie. 2000. *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism, and Separatism*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers. p. 174.

<sup>31</sup> Ariel Croissant. 2005. Unrest in South Thailand: Contours, Causes and Consequences Since 2001. *Strategic Insights* IV(2), February.

political elites were eliminated and they were replaced by governors and bureaucrats from Bangkok.<sup>32</sup>

However, the policy was a setback in the south because the locals subscribed to a different culture and beliefs and speak a different language. To make things worse, Bangkok appeared to have no understanding of the local culture. As a result, Thai culture never really took root in the south. Instead of promoting integration, efforts to impose Thai culture upon them provoked confrontations between them and the central government. The resentment against the Thai government continued to grow and it was perhaps during the period of Prime Minister Phibun that this grew into a formidable issue.<sup>33</sup>

Pattani experienced the apex of this ultra-nationalism under the regime of Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram<sup>34</sup> that began in 1938. Phibun followed a policy of forced assimilation of the various minorities into the mainstream Buddhists 'Thai-ness'. Upon assuming power, Phibun immediately launched a campaign to eliminate the Malay-Muslim cultural identity for the sake of nationalism. This campaign assaulted the Malay-Muslim identity on all fronts, including the arenas of education, language, dress and religious practices. The government simultaneously advanced a program of modernization for which the Pattani people were not prepared. This forced them to avoid the program and as a result they

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<sup>32</sup> Syed Serajul Islam (2000).

<sup>33</sup> Chidchanok Rahimmula. 2003. *Peace Resolution: A Case Study of Separatist and Terrorist Movement in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand*. in S. Yunanto, et al, *Militant Islamic movement in Indonesia and Southeast Asia*. Jakarta: FES and the RIDEP Institute. pp 263-277.

<sup>34</sup> PM Phibun first ruled Thailand from 1938 to 1944. He lost in the following election but came back to power in 1948 and ruled until 1957 when he was removed through a coup.

continued to be lag behind even further from the Thai mainstream especially in the fields of education and economy.

For the next four years starting in 1939, Phibun enacted a series of regulations for Thailand called the *Ratthaniyom* that eventually became law in Thailand. These laws affected Malay-Muslim identity. These laws were an attempt to create a uniform language and social behaviour.<sup>35</sup> Phibun also attacked the traditional institution of Islamic law. In the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, he eliminated both the Sharia Courts and the Muslim Qadhi. Administration of civil law in accordance with the precepts of Islamic law was an essential religious-cultural feature of the Malay-Muslims. The abolishment of these institutions was a direct affront on Islam as well as the Malay culture. Phibun also revoked the legal traditions of marriage and inheritance. The government forced all Malay-Muslims to submit to Thai civil jurisdiction.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Thai civil courts had full legal control over Islamic matters. Malay-Muslim ire continued to grow.

Phibun's reign ended briefly when he was forced out of office by a public that was angered over Bangkok being bombed by the Allied Forces in 1944 as reward for siding with Japan during WWII. He however resumed power in 1948. It was his return that marked the beginning of armed insurgency in the southern Thailand. It was during that time that the first organized separatist movement in the south was established. The *Gabungan Melayu Pattani Raya* (Malay Union for Greater Pattani) was formed in 1948. This was followed by *Barisan*

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<sup>35</sup>Omar Farouk Shaeik Ahmad Bajunid. 1980. *The political integration of the Thai-Islam*. Ph.D.diss, University of Kent at Canterbury. p. 110.

<sup>36</sup>Bajunid, p. 177.

Revolusi Nasional in 1960, Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Pattani (BNPP) in 1963 and Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) in 1968.<sup>37</sup> These groups were often blamed for the attacks although in many cases no evidence could be provided.

Phibun was removed from office by a coup in 1957, but this did not stop the violence in the Southern Thailand. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s numerous violent incidents occurred, including the 1975 mass demonstration of 40,000 persons who protested in the streets over the alleged extra-judicial killings of five villagers by security forces and the bombing of Bangkok's central airport and Hat Yai's train station.<sup>38</sup>

It was when General Prem Tinsulanonda became the Prime Minister in 1980 that the government made serious efforts to bring order to the South. One of his most important contributions was the founding of the Southern Border Provincial Administration Center (SBPAC) which was established in 1981. One of its primary functions was educating the Thai public about Malay-Muslim culture.<sup>39</sup> It also served as a key advisory body to the central government. The SBPAC was extremely successful as it provided for a working interface between Bangkok and local provincial administrators.<sup>40</sup> Communication lines between Bangkok and the south that had ceased in the previous decades were restored. General Prem also offered amnesty to the separatists and was successful in getting a large number of these secessionists to lay down their

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<sup>37</sup>Rahimmula, p 269.

<sup>38</sup>Peter Chalk. 2002. Militant Islamic Separatism in Southern Thailand. *Islam in Asia: Changing Political Realities*. ed. Jason F. Isaacson and Colin Rubenstein. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. p. 1062.

<sup>39</sup>Joseph Chinyong Liow. 2004. The Pondok School of Southern Thailand: Bastion of Islamic Education or Hotbed of Militancy? *IDSS Commentaries* 32(1).

<sup>40</sup>Contemporary Southeast Asia No 1 (2005).



weapons. As a result the situation improved and throughout the 1990s to early 2000 the region was relatively peaceful.<sup>41</sup>

However, after a lull of almost 12 years, Thailand's southern crisis re-emerged in 2001 with the killings of 19 policemen. Some 50 other violent incidents worsened the crisis in 2004. The most serious was the Tak Bai incident in which Thai security units were alleged to have used force to suppress an organized protest by the Malay Muslim groups. The incident claimed over 200 Muslim lives, including 32 who were killed in a mosque and over 80<sup>42</sup> who suffered suffocation as they were being transported for detention. Feeling that the situation was getting worse, the government declared martial law on 5 January 2004 in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat (later was expanded to several other provinces) and deployed 12,000 army troops into the region.<sup>43</sup>

## **Causes of the Conflict**

Several historical factors continue to loom large in Thailand's current crisis. These factors cover the spectrum of leadership, economics, politics, education and culture. This study has already examined the historical origins of these factors as well as their continued existence. This section briefly further explains why these factors are indeed a cause for the problem in the south. No single factor, whether the history, the leadership, economic underdevelopment, political negligence or attempted cultural assimilation, is by itself be the cause of the current

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<sup>41</sup>Wan Kadir Che Man. 2001. Democratisation and national integration: A Malay Muslim community in Southern Thailand. *Intellectual Discourse* 10. p. 16.

<sup>42</sup>*The Nation*. 2004. October 26.

<sup>43</sup>*The Strait Times*. 2004. September 25.

insurgency. However, the cumulative effect of all these factors is indeed a cause. This cumulative effect is an environment in which the people feel wholly suppressed, denied their identity and denied what they once had and want to be again.

## **Leadership Style**

The first factor is the leadership style. What Phibun had done during his reign as the Prime Minister had contributed to the problem. Other equally important actors who could be blamed for the uprisings were Sarit and Thaksin. The Thai government under Sarit initiated a policy that enacted and enforced the strictest regulation of the *pondoks* (religious school) to date.<sup>44</sup> *Pondoks* were converted to private educational institutions that would receive funding, but only at the cost of complete oversight by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>45</sup> This is an example of further intrusion into Malay-Muslim affairs that further raised their resentment against the government.

Meanwhile Thaksin's biggest mistake was the elimination of the SBPAC which eliminated the only channel for the Southerners to express their grievances and problems. In handling the southern conflict, Thaksin relied much on the Thai military. This was evidenced when he ordered a large number of military personnel to be stationed in the South and declared martial law in that area.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Surin Pitsuwan. 1985. *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand*. Thailand: Thammasat University.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*The Strait Times*. 2004. September 25.

However, the deployment of the military only increased the heavy-handedness of the authorities and further enhanced the resentment. In January 2004, Thaksin's administration renewed attacks against the *pondoks*. The government banned the opening of new *pondoks*. It later declared that any *pondok* that did not properly display the Thai flag would be charged with treason,<sup>47</sup> thus reviving the memories of Phibun's ultra-nationalist regime.

## **Economic Deprivation**

The next factor is economic deprivation. The southern provinces have always been among the poorest and this embitters the populace. They perceive that the Thai state has done little to develop the region, while concentrating its efforts and finances in the other regions of Thailand. They also feel that the Thai government had not only neglected the region, but plundered its natural resources, with financial benefits going back to Bangkok rather than remaining in the area. When the Malay-Muslims look across their southern border into Malaysia they see that their ethnic kin are considerably more prosperous.<sup>48</sup>

The southernmost provinces relied largely on agriculture as their economic mainstay, which only promised dismal returns. Measured in terms of gross provincial product (GPP), the economic well-being of the provinces is poor and they account for only 5% of the GDP with per capita income of only 50% of the national average. Many Malay-Muslims are living below the poverty line. The statistics are telling in this regard.

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<sup>47</sup> *The Nation*. 2004. 17 February.

<sup>48</sup> Kevin Hewison. 1986. Thailand's Malay-Muslims: The Deep South. *Inside Asia* (9), July-August. p. 31.

According to the 2000 Census, 25.5 percent of the people in Pattani, 28.1 percent of those in Yala, and 35.1 percent of the people in Narathiwat are impoverished.<sup>49</sup> This means that one in every three persons is living below the national poverty line. The Malay-Muslims have a much higher poverty rate than that of Thailand as a whole and the rest of their southern region in particular where non-Malay Muslims live.<sup>50</sup>

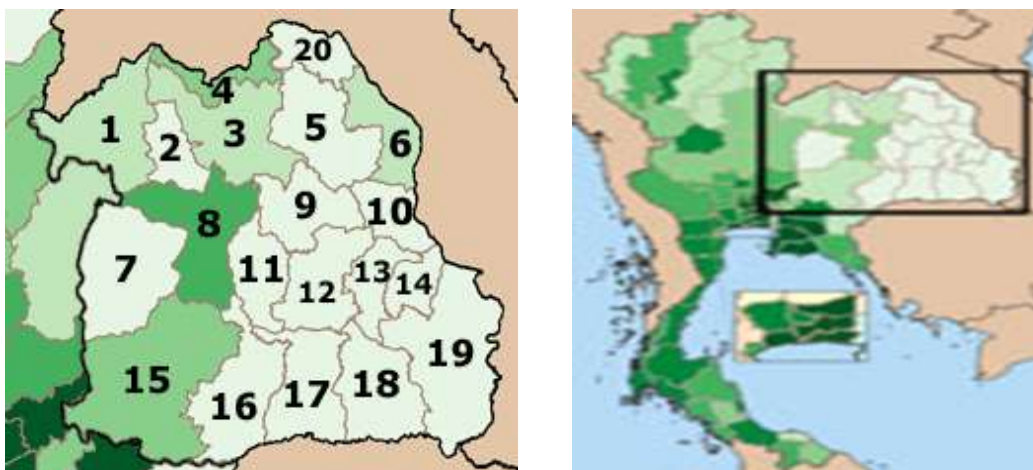
The Thai economic miracle has not reached the south. Lack of economic development has left the region without proper infrastructure and low living standards. This is mainly because of difficulty in accessing development capital and marketing agricultural produce. Most of the people are self-employed either as anglers or as farmers whose occupations are largely seasonal. Despite having popular tourist spots, most of the job opportunities are monopolized by non-locals. High unemployment has driven some youths to join criminal gangs for a living. 12 of the 15 provinces with the lowest GDP per capita are located in the Northeastern Region of Thailand. The remaining three are located in the Northern Region. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures for 2015 in all the provinces of Thailand from the source of NESDB 2015 as illustrated below:

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<sup>49</sup>United Nations Development Program (UNDP). 2003. *Thailand Human Development Report 2003*. Bangkok: UNDP.

<sup>50</sup>UNDP (2003).

Figure 3-1  
GDP per capita in 2015 for Northeastern Region.

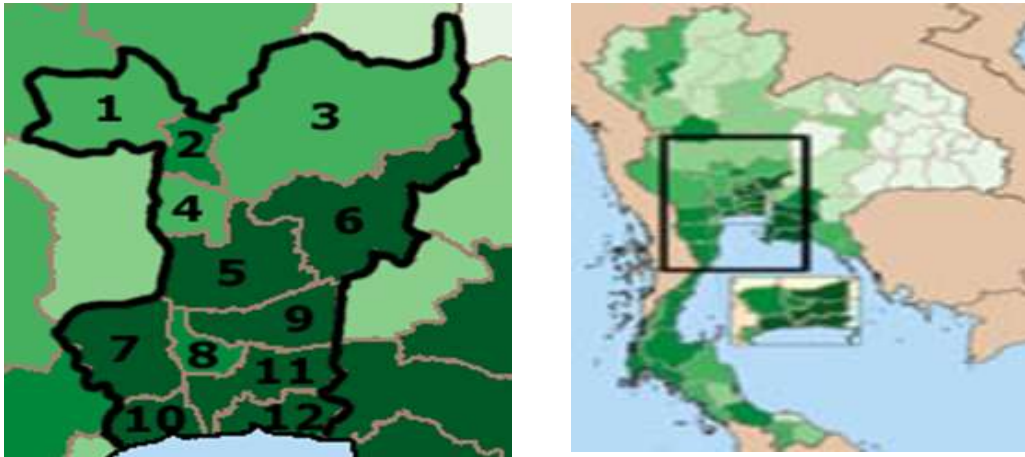


North Eastern Region	74,532	18,828
Province :	GDP	perPopulation:
	capita :	(thousands)
1. Loei	77,485	540
2. Nong Bua Lamphu	41,963	476
3. Udon Thani	78,095	1,265
4. Nongkhai	78,558	450
5. Sakon Nakhon	57,559	817
6. Nakhon Phanom	66,799	570
7. Chaiyaphum	55,665	957
8. Khon Kaen	107,607	1,740
9. Kalasin	51,147	922
10. Mukdahan	61,630	349
11. Maha Sarakham	57,069	830
12. Roiet	55,982	1,074
13. Yasothon	47,333	483
14. Amnat Charoen	51,221	279
15. Nakhon Ratchasima	106,000	2,500
16. Buriram	58,554	1,255
17. Surin	56,159	1,113
18. Sisaket	56,137	1,040
19. Ubon Ratchathani	65,489	1,720
20. Bueng Kan*	60,457*	352*

\* The province of Bueng Kan was created in 2011. It lies adjacent to Nongkhai province and was previously part of that province.

Source:[http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=4317](http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4317)  
NESDB 2015 (4 December 2017)

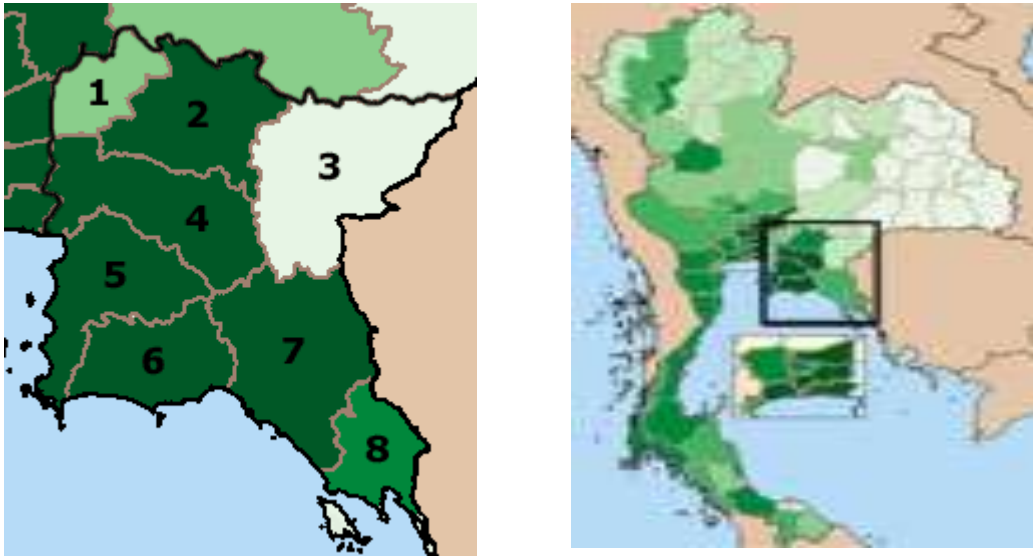
Figure 3-2  
GDP per capita in 2015 for Central Region.



Central Region	239,078	3,131
Province :	GDP capita :	perPopulation: (thousands)
1. Chainat	81,072	313
2. Singburi	111,856	204
3. Lopburi	129,962	776
4. Ang Thong	87,290	259
5. Ayutthaya	475,795	868
6. Saraburi	284,180	717
<b>Bangkok and Vicinity</b>	<b>376,463</b>	<b>15,203</b>
Province :	GDP capita :	perpopulation: (thousands)
7. Nakhon Pathom	288,820	1,039
8. Nonthaburi	193,426	1,487
9. Pathum Thani	236,145	1,447
10. Samut Sakhon	364,354	946
11. Bangkok Metropolis	513,397	8,643
12. Samut Prakarn	339,972	2,016

Source:[http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=4317](http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4317)  
NESDB 2015 (4 December 2017)

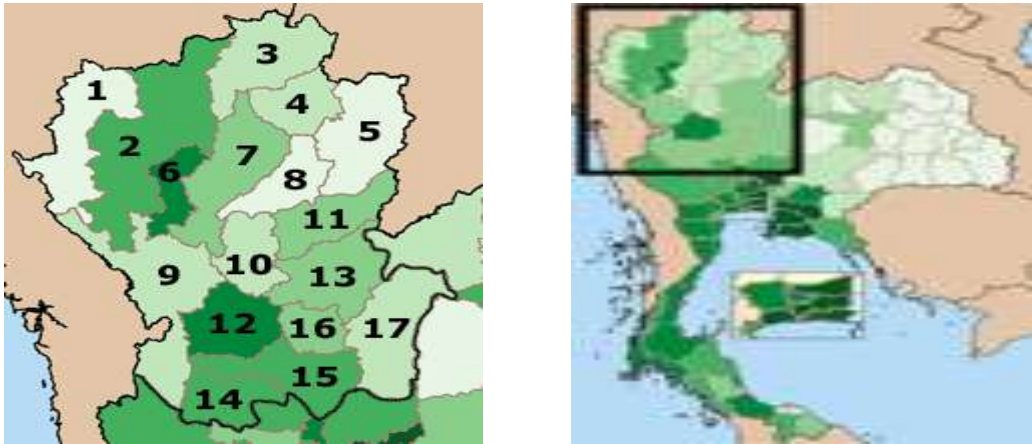
Figure 3-3  
GDP per capita in 2015 for Eastern Region.



<b>Eastern Region</b>	<b>430,584</b>	<b>5,406</b>
Province :	GDP	perPopulation:
	capita :	(thousands)
1. Nakhon Nayok	102,052	269
2. Prachinburi	345,795	593
3. Sa Kaew	60,573	604
4. Chachoengsao	399,194	775
5. Chonburi	491,971	1,645
6. Rayong	982,500	878
7. Chanthaburi	218,411	527
8. Trat	148,446	267

Source:[http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=4317](http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4317)  
NESDB 2015 (4 December 2017)

Figure 3-4  
GDP per capita in 2015 for Northern Region.

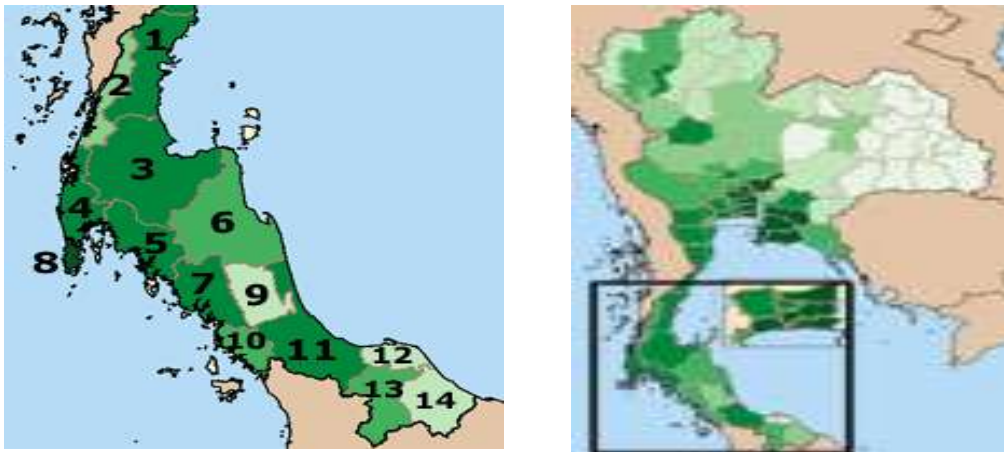


<b>Northern Region</b>	<b>98,268</b>	<b>11,557</b>
Province :	GDP capita :	perPopulation: (thousands)
1. Mae Hong Son	56,862	201
2. Chiang Mai	126,976	1,716
3. Chiang Rai	81,835	1,154
4. Phayao	80,802	413
5. Nan	64,305	444
6. Lamphun	142,771	408
7. Lampang	84,151	739
8. Phrae	61,013	425
9. Tak	88,680	510
10. Sukhothai	59,921	621
11. Uttaradit	71,365	435
12 Kamphaengphet	123,428	780
13. Phitsanulok	91,577	900
14. Uthai Thani	92,952	293
15. Nakhon Sawan	99,724	980
16. Phichit	68,922	542
17. Phetchabun	92,171	921

Source:[http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=4317](http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4317)  
NESDB 2015 (4 December 2017)



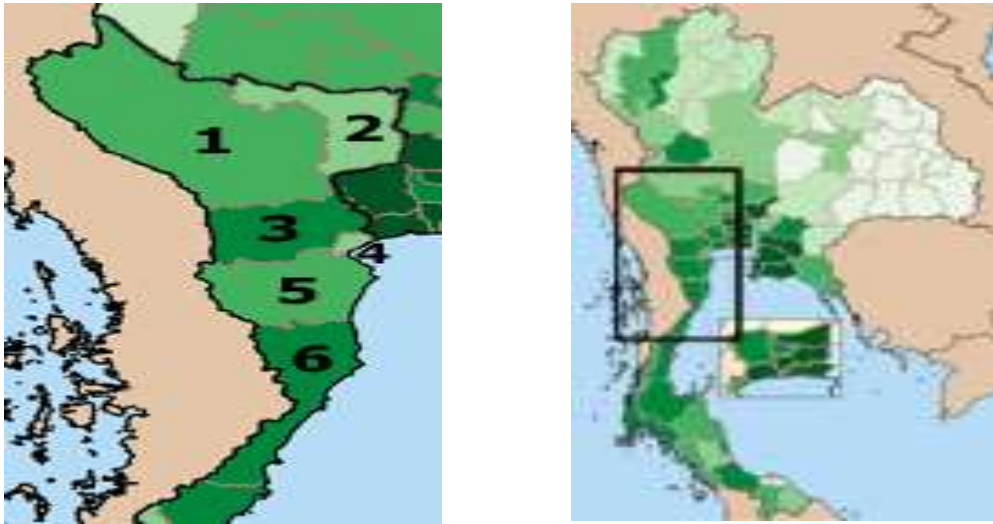
Figure 3-5  
GDP per capita in 2015 for Southern Region.



<b>Southern Region</b>	<b>123,270</b>	<b>9,044</b>
Province :	GDP	perPopulation:
	capita :	(thousands)
1. Chumphon	151,835	485
2. Ranong	91,452	254
3. Surat Thani	183,584	1,041
4. Phang Nga	177,350	267
5. Krabi	217,685	372
6. Nakhon Si Thammarat	91,648	1,514
7. Trang	96,801	621
8. Phuket	306,779	535
9. Phatthalung	60,497	503
10. Satun	112,051	280
11. Songkhla	153,505	1,530
12. Pattani	73,338	625
13. Yala	89,875	444
14. Narathiwat	54,922	686

Source: [http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=4317](http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4317)  
NESDB 2015 (4 December 2017)

Figure 3-6  
GDP per capita in 2015 for Western Region.



<b>Western Region</b>	<b>127,294</b>	<b>3,586</b>
Province :	GDP per capita	Population:
	:	(thousands)
1. Kanchanaburi	106,303	802
2. Suphanburi	90,458	859
3. Ratchaburi	204,753	803
4. Samut Songkhram	106,513	189
5. Phetchaburi	123,800	477
6. Phraechuaphon	171,357	466

Source: [http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=4317](http://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4317)  
NESDB 2015 (4 December 2017)

## Educational System

The next factor is the educational system. *Pondoks* remain one of the most central symbols of the Malay-Muslim culture. Scholars continue to note how this Islamic system of education, centered on the *pondoks*, has successfully nurtured the Malay-Muslim consciousness in southern Thailand.<sup>51</sup> The Thai government has always understood the central importance of *pondoks* within the Malay-Muslim community. To eliminate the traditional role of these *pondoks* is the same as eliminating the traditional culture in the minds of Thailand's Malay-Muslims. This is why the attempts by the Thai government, particularly under Phibun and Sarit, to transform the *pondoks* met with such widespread local opposition. The local community responded to Thaksin's threats for more direct control of the *pondoks* with equally rigorous opposition.

Given the long-standing symbolic as well as educational importance of *pondoks*, it is widely assumed that most Malay-Muslims today insist that their children attend traditional *pondok* schools rather than state schools. Research conducted by Prince of Songkhla University in the Pattani province indicates that 64% of Malay-Muslims want their children to have a comprehensive general education and balanced with religious instruction.<sup>52</sup> The point worth noting is that the majority of locals do not want secular education at the expense of religious education, but in addition to it. They realize the importance of secular education in improving their economic status and they want their children to be at par with the rest of other people.

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<sup>51</sup>Joseph Chinyong Liow, 2004.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

Much of the past conflict over *pondoks* centers on how and why the Thai government attempted secularization. It is one thing for the government to register the *pondoks* in order to standardize the secular curriculum and provide federal funds. It is another thing altogether for the government to register the *pondoks* as part of a larger assimilation scheme that would eliminate the region's unique cultural identity. The local Malay-Muslims perceive that the real intent behind the government's actions is assimilation. There are currently 500 *pondoks* in southern Thailand, approximately 200 of which are unregistered with the Thai government.<sup>53</sup>

The Malay-Muslim community has long complained that it is especially difficult for *pondok* students to find employment upon completion. As such, many begin their own *pondoks* to earn a living. While 5.5% of Thais do not have a formal education, the figure is 7.7% for the Southern region, and 17.5% for Pattani, 14.1% for Yala and 20.1% for Narathiwat.<sup>54</sup>

## **Inefficient Bureaucracy**

For most of the past century the southern provinces have remained Bangkok's dumping ground for inept and corrupt government officials. The central government sent many of these bureaucrats there as punishment.<sup>55</sup> These bureaucrats certainly did not act in the best interests of all as they failed to represent the Muslims in the south. For one, Bangkok always had its own political agenda for the region that was built

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Chinyong Liow (2004).

<sup>54</sup> UNDP 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Hewison, p 32.

without a sufficient understanding or regard for the Malay-Muslims. Additionally, Malay-Muslims were woefully missing from this body of bureaucrats. The majority of civil servants in the provinces continue to be non-Muslim Malays.<sup>56</sup> These non-Muslim Malays from outside the region were inept, enforced an external agenda, and were always a source of contention for the region.

Experiencing decades of such malfeasance, the Malay-Muslims simply avoid these bureaucrats as best they could. These bureaucrats had proven over time that they were not in the region for the interests of the locals. As such communications between the southernmost provinces and the central government remain broken. It did the locals no good to attempt to communicate their needs and fears when closed ears continually met them. This history of broken communications is having its effect in the current crisis. Bangkok sent a succession of envoys to the southernmost provinces in 2004 to hear the problems of the locals. Yet these envoys were met with distrust and indifference. The pervading fear in the region is certainly one cause of this local reaction.

## **Security Forces**

Heavy-handedness by security forces has further inflamed the situation and added to the general atmosphere of mistrust. On 28 April 2004, security forces clashed with over a hundred militants throughout Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. The majority of these militants were teenagers, most of who were armed with little more than machetes. The security forces killed 107 insurgents, while losing five of their own. This

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<sup>56</sup> The Call of Allah in Southern Thailand. 1988. *Human Rights in Thailand* 12(3). p. 14.

incident accounted for the largest single-day death toll caused by internal conflict in Thailand's modern history.<sup>57</sup> This tragedy occurred at the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani, an extremely historically significant mosque for the Malay-Muslim community. Commenting on the day's events, Thaksin praised the actions of the security forces, suggesting that the youths who were killed were worthless drug addicts.<sup>58</sup> It is true that the militants had initiated the attacks. However, confronting machete-wielding youths with automatic gunfire seemed excessive to the local Malay-Muslim community. The Malay-Muslim community had already lost their trust in the security forces. With this episode what little trust had been remaining was completely destroyed.

The second incident occurred on 25 October 2004. At a demonstration in Tak Bai, Narathiwat, the police dispersed the crowd with water cannons and tear gas. Over 300 protestors were arrested while 9 were killed. The arrested protestors were horizontally stacked in the back of the army trucks and, after waiting in the trucks for six hours, were driven a few hours more to Pattani for documentation. Upon arrival and removal of the prisoners in Pattani, 78 had suffocated-to-death, and one more died shortly thereafter.<sup>59</sup> This incident marked the second highest single-day death toll from internal strife in Thailand's modern history, second only to the 28 April 2004 incident. Thaksin again praised his security forces. Commenting on the suffocations, he suggested the cause of death could be attributed to the weakened physical state resulting from *Ramadhan* fasting.

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<sup>57</sup> *The Nation*. 2004. 29 April.

<sup>58</sup> *Bangkok Post*. 2004. 29 April.

<sup>59</sup> *Bangkok Post*. 2004. 27 October.

The two incidents mentioned above have caused the Malay-Muslims to perceive Thai security forces as brutal, heavy-handed agents of a repressive state. Excessive force and lack of concern for the Malay-Muslim detainees resulted in scores of unnecessary deaths. While the locals saw this physical incident as an attack against the people, they viewed Thaksin's appraisal for the security forces as a direct assault against Islam. By this time, all trust of Thai authority in the southernmost provinces was completely shattered. The Malay-Muslim community was outraged.

Additionally, claims of extra-judicial kidnappings and killings were rampant throughout 2004. On 18 March 2004, Minister of Parliament Tharin Jaisamut of Satun claimed over a hundred residents of the three southernmost provinces had disappeared over the preceding months through illegal abductions.<sup>60</sup> The abduction and murder of well-known Muslim defense attorney Somchai Neelahphaijit, Chairman of the Muslim Lawyers Association, brought the reality of these abductions to the forefront of media attention. First reported missing from Bangkok on 12 March, but the media finally forced Bangkok police officials to launch a rigorous investigation into the lawyer's murder. Rogue police officers, apparently upset that Somchai was defending Muslim insurgents in the South, were found guilty of ambushing and killing him. Before his abduction, Somchai had publicly accused police officials of brutalizing five suspects arrested in relation to the 4 January 2004 army post raid. In a situation in which there is a high level of violence, fear and loss of trust by all parties, the possibility that individuals will attempt to take the law

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<sup>60</sup> *The Nation*. 2004. 20 March.

into their own hands is a natural outcome. It appears that this may be the case in the ongoing southern unrest.

In response to the elevated level of insurgency, the Thai government continues to send more security forces into the region. The number of military forces alone in the three southernmost provinces now number approximately 20,000 equivalents to eighteen battalions. Bangkok has also reinforced the police force, which totals over 10,000.<sup>61</sup> Inserting more security forces has failed to restore peace and order. Instead, the insurgency has grown.

## **Major Outbreaks in 2004 - Overview**

After a long stand-off, violence abruptly escalated in the Southern Thailand in 2004, resulting in three major outbreaks in that year. The first outbreak occurred on 4 January 2004 at Chao Ai Rong, followed by a second one on 28 April 2004, at the Krue Se Mosque and the third incident on 25 October 2004 at Tak Bai.

### **1. Cho Ai Rong Tragedy**

On 4 January 2004, there was an uproar in the Southern Thailand when a group of about 30 attacked the Pilling Camp at Cho Ai Rong, Narathiwat. At the same time, 19 Muslim religious and national schools around the Southern Thailand were burnt, believed to be the work of a group of strangers. The attack took the lives of four personnel from the

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<sup>61</sup> Davis (2005).



camp and more than 300 weapons of various types were stolen. Taking into consideration the swift action, surprise, diversion and clean break, it is believed that both incidents were meticulously planned by the perpetrators.<sup>62</sup>

The Thai authorities failed to identify the groups involved. It is believed that the incidents were executed by a group of drug traffickers, criminals and dishonorably discharged military personnel. The motive, among others, was said to be vengeance on the Thai authorities for the damages that were done to their drug trade circulation and source of income. Based on the information gathered, the losses that were faced by these drug pushers were as follows:<sup>63</sup>

- 1.1 Execution of 1040 drug pushers.
- 1.2 Detention of 29,501 drug pushers.
- 1.3 Confiscation of drug worth RM1.5 billion (THB 12.2 Billion)
- 1.4 Properties of the drug pushers worth RM4.88 million (THB 39 Million) seized.
- 1.5 60,000 drug addicts were arrested.

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<sup>62</sup> OIC. 2004. Briefing Conference Note. *Council of Foreign Ministers*. Turkey: OIC.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

After those incidents, the situation in the Southern Thailand became unpredictable. Many members from the Security Forces (SF) as well as Muslims and Buddhists were killed and injured from attacks and explosions that were conducted by unidentified groups. It was believed that these violent activities were carried out by the group which was involved in the earlier attacks. Weapons from the Pilling Camp were seized to distract the SF from their location of movement and hide-outs. To facilitate the hunt for the groups involved as well as to pacify the chaotic situation, the authorities declared martial law in the Southern Thailand. Through its implementation, curfews and aggressive military operations started to take place in a number of areas in the Southern Thailand.

In the eagerness of implementing the operations, many Muslims leaders including members of the separatist groups who were suspected were arrested by the SF. At the same time, many Islamic religious schools and Muslims sacred places were broken into at the convenience of the SF, disrespectfully entering the holy places with shoes and tracker dogs. These insensitive acts had indirectly upset and further enraged the Muslim community in the Southern Thailand.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the safety measures that were taken, the situation at the Southern Thailand remained tense. Between 5 January and 27 April 2004, there were 94 killings and 95

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<sup>64</sup> OIC. 2004. Briefing Conference Note. *Council of Foreign Ministers*. Turkey: OIC.

injuries. The Thai SF hastily accused the separatist groups as being responsible for the violent activities. This groundless accusation had made the Muslim community felt insulted and infuriated.

## **2. Krue Se Mosque Tragedy**

On 28 April 2004, there was uproar in the Southern Thailand when more than 100 Muslims attacked the SF posts in Pattani and Yala using sharp weapons and a few firearms. The incident had caused the lives of 107 people including 32 Muslim's who were at the Krue Se Mosque and 15 members of the SF were injured. It was believed that the kamikaze attack might have been conducted by the Wahabi Movement's militant wing. The Wahabi Movement is a religious group which was established in the Southern Thailand and it was said to have a direct connection with the Wahabi Movement based in Saudi Arabia. There was likelihood that the act was conducted by an extremist group. The group was believed to have existed and expanded in the Southern Thailand by religious gurus who were educated in the Middle East and Pakistan.<sup>65</sup>

After the Krue Se Mosque incident, various measures were taken by the Thai authorities to prevent violent activities in the Southern Thailand. Besides increasing the number of security personnel and intensifying operations, the Thai authorities had also planned a range of socioeconomic

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<sup>65</sup> OIC. 2004. Briefing Conference Note. *Council of Foreign Ministers*. Turkey: OIC.

programs to upgrade the Muslim community's standard of living. Other than that, the Thai Prime Minister made attempts to approach the Muslim community by meeting with them. Even though there was a positive reaction from the Muslim community towards the government efforts, the violent activities still continued. Between 29 April and 24 October 2004, there were 119 lives lost and 178 injured.

### **3. Tak Bai Tragedy**

On 25 October 2004, the world community was shocked when the SF had brutally acted in the effort of dispersing a gathering of 2,000 to 2,500 Muslims in front of a police station in Tak Bai, Narathiwat. The incident took the lives of more than 100 Muslims and another 100 were injured. Many of the dead were shot dead while others suffocated as a result of pinned down by other people en route to the detention camp. Other than that, more than 1,000 Muslims were detained. This incident triggered widespread anger and hatred of the Muslim community towards the Thai authorities.<sup>66</sup>

It has been few decades since the 'Tak Bai bloody tragedy'. Although there were numerous conciliatory efforts by the Thai authorities such as the release of captives, compensation payments to the victims of the tragedy, establishment of a non-aligned investigation council, and the

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<sup>66</sup> OIC. 2004. Briefing Conference Note. *Council of Foreign Ministers*. Turkey: OIC.

dropping of thousands of paper birds as the symbol of truce, tension in the Southern Thailand remain.

### **Incidents of 2004 - An Analysis**

Based on the chronology of events throughout 2004, the data that can be gathered are as follows:

Referring to Table 3.1 deaths and injury occurred mostly in districts with Muslims majority such as Narathiwat (83%) and Pattani (84%), as compared to districts with small number of Muslims like Yala (57%) and Songkhla (10%).<sup>67</sup> It is being impossible for Muslim separatist groups to murder their brothers in Islam, such incidents were seen as acts of other groups to initiate animosity between the Thai authorities with the Muslim community. Most of the victims of the Krue Se Mosque and Tak Bai tragedies were killed by the SF.

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

Table 3-1  
Death and injury by districts for 2004<sup>68</sup>

DISTRICTS VICTIMS	YALA		NARATHIWAT		SONGKHLA		PATTANI	
	DEAD	INJURED	DEAD	INJURED	DEAD	INJURED	DEAD	INJURED
<b>POLICE/ MILITARY</b>	9	19	20	27	1	2	25	13
<b>GOVERNMENT SERVANT</b>	1	0	6	2	0	0	10	4
<b>HEAD OF VILLAGE</b>	4	0	5	1	1	0	2	0
<b>BUDDHIST MONK</b>	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>POLITICIAN</b>	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>CIVILIAN</b>	9	31	141	93	0	0	123	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>28</b>

Source: [www.deepsouthwatch.org](http://www.deepsouthwatch.org).2012 (27 December 2018)

Table 3-1 illustrates that besides civilians, the SF teams (police and military) as well as government servants were the objects of attacks. This demonstrates that the attackers were trying to weaken the government mechanism in the territories so that the vital targets could be easily manipulated. Other than that it can be seen as an act to scare and

<sup>68</sup>Jitpirom, Srisompob. 2011. Deep South Watch. *The Obvious Trend Of Violence's Intensification In Deep South Over 7 Years*. <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/node/1603> (29 December 2017).

demoralize the SF in pursuing their tasks. It is also evident from the table that this act might be conducted by separatist groups seeking revenge on the loss of their friends' at the hands of the SF.

Table 3-2  
Casualties by districts for 2004

DISTRICTS	YALA	NARATHIWAT	SONGKHLA	PATTANI
<b>VICTIMS</b>				
SHOT	30	110	5	173
STABBED/NICKED	3	5	0	9
BOMBED	43	104	0	6
SUFFOCATED	0	78	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>188</b>

Source: [www.deepsouthwatch.org](http://www.deepsouthwatch.org).2012 (27 December 2018)

The statistics of victims who were killed and injured in Table 3-2 show that most of them were shot by attackers on motorbikes and the group had adopted an attack pattern which is usually used by small groups (mafia, drug pushers etc). They were very active and were familiar with the targeted victims.

Table 3-3  
Types of target chosen for 2004

DISTRICTS	YALA	NARATHIWAT	SONGKHLA	PATTANI
<b>VICTIMS</b>				
GOVERNMENT BUILDING	0	2	0	1
SCHOOL	5	30	0	0
TEMPLE/WAT	0	4	0	1
POLICE STATION/MILITARY CAMP	1	4	0	3
HOUSE	3	12	5	12
WAREHOUSE	1	1	0	2
SUPERMARKET/STORE	2	1	0	8
NIGHT CLUB/RESTAURANT	0	4	0	0
TELEPHONE BOOTH	0	24	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	82	5	27

Source: [www.deepsouthwatch.org.2012](http://www.deepsouthwatch.org.2012) (27 December 2018)

Table 3-3 shows that schools and houses were the main targets of the separatists. This was to give maximum impact to attacks against the government.



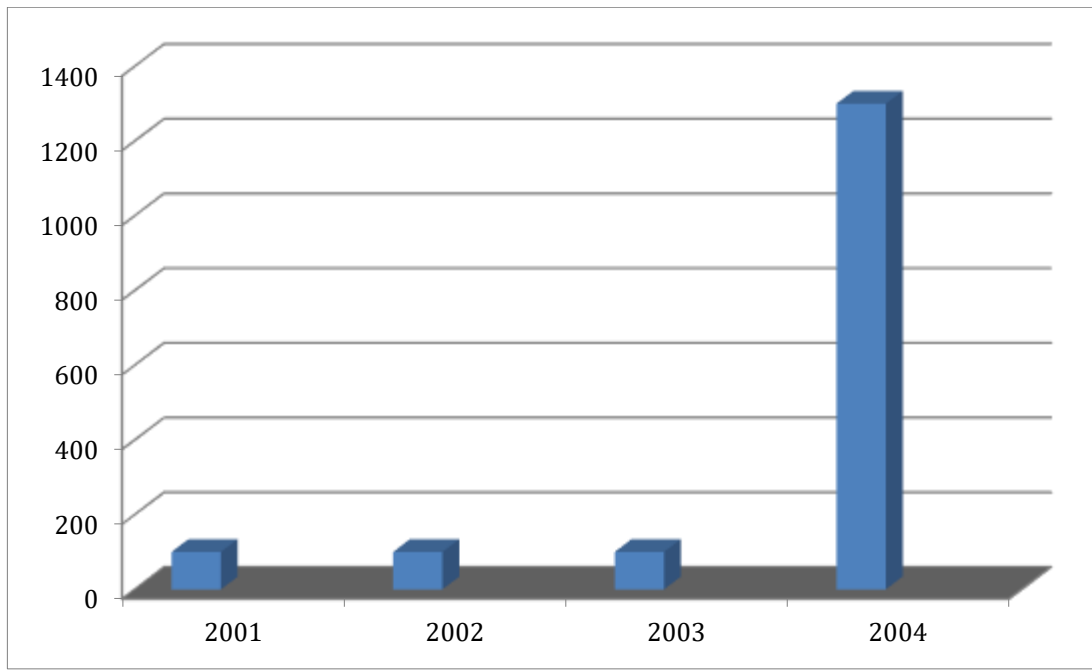
Table 3-4  
Types of attack on targets for 2004

VICTIMS	DISTRICTS			
	YALA	NARATHIWAT	SONGKHLA	PATTANI
BOMBS	6	9	5	20
SET TO FIRE	6	70	0	7
SHOT	0	3	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	82	5	27

Source: [www.deepsouthwatch.org](http://www.deepsouthwatch.org). 31 March 2011

The statistics for the types of attacks carried out by setting fire and bombing are shown in Table 3-4. Such attacks resulted in total loss and cost the government time-consuming recovery. Furthermore, it reflects badly on the government's reputation for the negligence of safety and the welfare of the Muslim community in the Southern Thailand.

Table 3-5  
 Statistics of violent cases in Southern Thailand in 2001-2004



Source: Research Report on 'One Decade and A Year of Violence in the Southern Border: Mysteries of the Problem and Solution. The Nation. 20 December 2004

Table 3-5 shows the statistics for violent cases in the Southern Thailand from 2001 to 2004. From the statistics, it is clear that there was an abrupt increase from the average of 66 cases annually in 1993 until 2003, to 1,253 cases in 2004. This is 19 times higher as compared to case average and it is clear that for violent cases which took place in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat since 1993 to 2004, 79 percent happened under during the reign of Thaksin. This increase stemmed from the Thaksin government's use of violence in dealing with the territories.

The violence was likely carried out to attract attention as well as to convey a message to Thaksin that the crisis in the Southern Thailand needed more attention and could not be settled with empty promises. The upgrading of facilities, the living standards of the community, job opportunities as well as enhancing children's educational level in the Southern Thailand remained the best measures to alleviate the problem.

As predicted, the issue of violence, safety and negligence on Muslims' socioeconomic welfare in the Southern Thailand attracted attention from the media and international organizations such as the UN, the OIC, and governments in the South East Asia region as well as the United States of America. This had adversely affected the image of the Thaksin's government who chose to boycott the ASEAN Summit Meeting in Vientiane, Laos in anticipation of condemnation of the Tak Bai incident by ASEAN members.

## **Summary**

In the past, the situations in the southern part of Thailand provinces were violent and faced with constant unrest. The underlying problems are complex, sensitive and multidimensional. Major factors which were raised as causes of the problems include ethnicity, religions, culture and historical backgrounds, which are unique to the areas, including the people's desire to participate in choosing their way of life to exist in Thai society with understanding and acceptance on the basis of such unique identity. Moreover, the growing use of violence was a result of a certain group of people, whose ideologies were different from the state and who felt resentful of and being unfairly treated by the public

sector's operations. Taking these causes to justify and retaliate with the use of violence, and consequently creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust between the state and people and among people, including direct and indirect impact towards the loss of lives and property of the local people. Furthermore, some groups of people lacked a genuine understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity which was taken for granted to claim the justice for violent incidents, resulting in public suspicion an injustice caused by some state officials. In addition, the local development in terms of economy, the equality of life, society and education was not consistent with the local identity, and the lack of genuine uniformity, integration and collaboration in the public sector's management also caused such violent and unrest situations.

At present, the violent situations in the southern border provinces tend to decline, although the ongoing violence and unrest still continue and the same old major factors as ethnicity, religions, culture and historical backgrounds are still used to justify the violence. The latest violence incidents took place on 22 January 2018 in Yala province where a motorcycle bomb exploded at a market killing 3 people and injuring 18 civilian and on 20 May 2018 where multiple bombs were blasted killing 3 civilians in. This Incident appears to be as an indicator that the violence is still imminent although it has significantly reduced. In a nutshell, the violent situations from 2004 to present have been highly sensitive and jeopardized the security. Such violent problems are caused by complex and correlated conditions in three levels, namely:

1. Individual level, which arises from certain groups of people whose ideologies differ from the state, such conditions

created by certain state officials, collateral threats and the use of violence caused by resentment and hatred.

2. Structural level, which refers to the administration and management structures that, despite the decentralization, in some people's feeling, may not respond to their needs and they are unfairly treated, discriminated and deprived of the genuine administrative power in their localities.

3. Cultural level, by which the Thai-Malay people in some areas feel alienated and excluded from Thai society, and view that certain state officials lack of knowledge and understanding, have suspicion and prejudice, and act against the local culture and way of life.

These conditions thus serve to persuade some local people to adopt or agree with those using violence and more importantly, they are raised by those disagreeing with the state to justify the use of violence to achieve their goals. Moreover, the rapid and profound changes in Thai and world societies in terms of politics, economy, society and technology have given rise to social impact on the southern pace with such changes. They also encounter major collateral threats, namely, drug abuse among young people, poverty and feeling of social injustice, not to mention such contributory factors as external trends and movement, e.g., localism, extreme resistance, conflicts between the western world and the muslim world, and political and civil rights, which have made the above situations and problems even more complex.

## **Conclusion**

The conflict in the Southern Thailand is internal and has no external involvement. It is a manifestation of deep resentment of the people in the southern provinces towards the central government. It is the battle between the people of the former Kingdom of Pattani who were angered by the way the government has been treating them and wants freedom and the Thai government that does not want the territorial integrity of Thailand to suffer.

Violence in the Southern Thailand, mainly in Malay Muslim provinces has been progressively escalating since early 2004, exacerbated by the heavy handed policies of Thaksin. There is extensive concern in the region that if left unchecked. The unrest could turn into mass-based insurgency or even a regional jihad even if there is no evidence of external involvement in the bombings and killings that have become almost a daily occurrence.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Malaysia's Strategic Interests, Roles, Issues, Threats and Challenges to the Security Relations Between Malaysia-Thailand**

### **Introduction**

Since the resurgence of violence in January 2004, the Malaysian Government has been closely monitoring the developments in the Southern Thailand. Of particular concern is the possible spillover effect on Malaysia's security. Although many approaches had been endeavored to restore peace, the conflict is still ongoing. Malaysia feels the heat of this conflict and obliged to assist the Thai government in addressing the problem.

### **Malaysia's Strategic Interests Relating To Southern Thailand**

There are a number of factors that explain why Malaysia has strategic interests relating to the Southern Thailand. There are as follows:

#### **Historical Factor**

During the 19th century what is now the Southern Thailand was controlled by local principalities that had varying degrees of affiliation to Siam. The present-day provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, along with parts of western Songkhla and of northern peninsular Malaysia comprised the independent Sultanate of Pattani. Siam then formally included the province into its territory, although it had already

been a dependency of Siam for some time. In 1909, an Anglo-Siamese Treaty led to the demarcation of a border between the Pattani territories in Siam and the Malay states of Kelantan, Perak, Kedah and Perlis in British Malaya (now part of Malaysia). The Siamese authorities deposed the Sultan and decreed that the Thai-speaking local officials report directly to the central government in Bangkok, thereby displacing the political role of the local aristocracy.<sup>69</sup>

The effect of the above developments was that ties between the peoples on both sides the newly constituted borders began to loosen as a result of different political allegiances. But despite these developments and other setbacks every now and then, the socio-cultural and kinship between the Muslim-Malay societies across both nations continued. The Tak Bai district, where the 2004 bloodshed occurred, was historically part of the Kelantan state and this reality played in the minds of Muslim Malays in Malaysia when deciding which party to emphasize with.

Perhaps due to this historical factor, there are strong ties between the people in the Southern Thailand and the people of the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. There is likelihood of this connection sustaining even if not growing deeper.

## **Culture**

The South Thailand comprises fourteen provinces, but majority of Thailand's Muslims live in the four southernmost provinces of

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<sup>69</sup>Neil J. Melvin. 2007. Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Pattani Insurgency. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Policy Paper* (20). p. 12-13.



Thailand; Satun, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Although the Malay culture clearly resembles the Muslim culture, which is demonstrated through the local customs, and traditions such as marriage ceremonies, dance and arts, it is, however, a complex mix of Buddhist, Muslim and early Langkasuka Hindu cultures.<sup>70</sup>

People in the southernmost provinces are distinct in terms of Malay ethnic identity, the Malay language is widely spoken and the people practice the Islamic way of life. Due to their geographical proximity with Malaysia, continued communication, visits, religious education and inter-marriages, the southern people seem to identify more with the Malays than the Thais. As such they perceive themselves as more oriented towards Malay culture of Malaysia and less toward Thai culture.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, Malaysia feels that due to this close cultural linkage, it would be a duty for the Malaysian government to offer their assistance to the Thailand government in bringing peace to the Southern Thailand.

## **Religion**

According to the statistics provided by the Thai government, the Muslim population of Thailand is approximately 5 percent of the overall population of 69.2 million. The Southern districts of Thailand have the highest density in terms of Muslim population.

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<sup>70</sup>Darwish Moawad. 2005. Southernmost Thailand Violence: Illiteracy, Poverty, Politics, Illicit Drugs Trafficking, Smuggling and nationalist Separatist - not Religions and Cultures - the Issue. Presentation on the Occasion of the UNESCO Conference on "Religion in Peace and Conflict". Melbourne, Australia, 12 April.

<sup>71</sup>Mala Rajo Sathian. 2006. Malayu dan Militari di Pattani: Analisis Krisis Politik di Selatan Thailand, in Hanizah Hj Idris (ed). *Asia Tenggara Kontemporari, Siri Khas Sastera dan Sains Sosial*. Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya. , 2006, pp. 53-54.

Given high concentration of Thai Muslims in those districts, religion is one of the natural factors that bind the Southern Thai Malays to their brethren within the Malay community especially in Kelantan and Kedah. The concept of Muslim brotherhood (*ummah*) within the worldwide Muslim community is a significant point in shaping the direction of the Malaysian foreign policy in relation to both Muslim majority and minority relations. Additionally, the pan-Malayan concept also plays an important role in shaping the Malaysian public opinion about the conflict in the Southern Thailand and the involvement of Malaysia in resolving the matter.

## **Security**

The common land and sea border between Malaysia and Thailand makes security a crucial part in the bilateral relationship between the two states. Any instability in the Southern Thailand would certainly cause concern to Malaysia as the conflict could spillover to the northern part of Malaysia. The possibilities of the northern areas of Malaysia being targeted by Thai separatists as conduit for weapon smuggling, explosive ordnance smuggling, illegal intrusions, refugees and other problems are very high and this would threaten the security of Malaysia. As such, Malaysia has hoped the Thai authorities understand Malaysia's concerns regarding the conflict especially efforts to improve border security together with initiatives to enrich and develop the border areas as a preventive measure to contain the Southern Thai conflict and to arrest the problem before it spreads beyond the border of Thailand.

## Malaysia's Roles

Protecting the nation's security is every state's crucial role. As such, Malaysia's role in bringing peace to the Southern Thailand can be seen as protecting its national security. The protection of security ranges from state's physical borders to include aspects of the national culture.<sup>72</sup>

Malaysia's role in the Southern Thailand basically follows the 'ASEAN Way' of doing things as well its experiences in handling the communist insurgency from 1948 to 1989. Both paradigms are applicable through the following approaches.

First is mutual trust which is a key element to establishing viable and stable bilateral relations. This has never been an easy task and is especially difficult for Malaysia and Thailand because of their historical baggage. Nurturing mutual trust is easier if both sides share significant common interests and values. Trust can also be enhanced by facilitating mutual understanding of each other's interests, intentions, and concerns even though Malaysia and Thailand may not see eye to eye on the issue at hand. Confidence Building Measures (CBM) are instrumental for promoting mutual trust. At the very least, CBM can reduce the chance of misunderstanding; at most, they can become building blocks leading to more substantial and institutionalized cooperation. Given historical background of Malaysia-Thai relations, CBM, need not be applied in a narrow and purely security-military sense.

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<sup>72</sup>Muthiah Alagappa. 1987. *The National Security of Developing States: Lessons from Thailand*. Dover: Auburn House Publishing Company, p. 29.

The second approach is the "prosper-thy-neighbour" policy. Malaysia's success in using Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as a development tool taught Malaysian businesses to venture out to foreign, especially developing countries especially under Mahathir's "prosper-thy-neighbour" policy. This was aimed at helping less developed countries to prosper so that they too could become markets for the Malaysian products. This was one of the lessons learnt from Malaysia's Look-East policy whereby the Japanese investments in Malaysia helped to prosper Malaysia which in turn became a lucrative market for Japanese products.

The third approach can be termed the constructive approach. Developing close bilateral relations with neighbours remains a high priority for Malaysia. A constructive approach had been taken to resolve outstanding problems. Every diplomatic effort is made to ensure that bilateral relations do not become adversely affected on account of problems with neighbours. The establishment of separate joint commissions between Malaysia and Thailand has provided a useful framework to develop wide-ranging bilateral cooperation in all fields of mutual interest.

The fourth approach is *KESBAN* - an acronym of '*Keselamatan dan Pembangunan*' (Security and Development). It is the sum total of all measures undertaken by all the Malaysian Government agencies to strengthen and protect the society from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency. *KESBAN* remained the chosen response by Malaysia during

its own insurgency; both to quell it and to prevent it from escalating.<sup>73</sup> *KESBAN* operations are divided into two main parts, namely, internal security and internal economic development. Each part has its own individual objectives but they are, however, planned, coordinated and implemented together. *KESBAN* operations involve economic, political, social and psychological as well as police and military operations. Overcoming popular discontent and frustrations of the people through balanced development is the *KESBAN* objective.<sup>74</sup>

Based on the approaches mentioned, Malaysia has established the following initiatives as part of its effort to bring peace to the Southern Thailand.

### **Malaysia-Thailand Joint Authority**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in 1979 between Malaysia and Thailand on the establishment of a Joint Authority for the exploration and exploitation of the resources of the seabed in a defined area of the overlapping claims of continental shelf of the two countries in the Gulf of Thailand. The establishment of the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Authority (MTJA) in 1979 marked yet another milestone to the existing bond of traditional friendship between the two neighbouring countries of ASEAN.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Malaysian Army Manual of Land Warfare. 1984. TJ030-*The Fundamentals of KESBAN*.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup><http://www.mtja.org/main.htm> (30 January 2017).

The preamble of the MOU of 1979 between Malaysia and Thailand sums up the underlying concept of the Joint Authority and the Joint Development Area (JDA):

1. Desiring to strengthen further the existing bonds of traditional friendship between the two countries.
2. Noting that the existing negotiations between the two countries on the delimitation of the boundary of the continental shelf in the Gulf of Thailand may continue for some time.
3. Convinced that such activities can be carried out jointly through mutual cooperation.
4. Considering that it is in the interests of the two countries to exploit the resources of the seabed in the overlapping area as soon as possible.
5. Recognizing that as a result of overlapping claims made by the two countries regarding the boundary line of their continental shelves in the Gulf of Thailand, there exists an overlapping area on their adjacent continental shelves.

Located offshore on the continental shelf in the Gulf of Thailand, there exists an area of overlapping claims between the two countries, of approximately 7,250 square kilometers. This area, situated in the northern part of the Peninsula of Malaysia believed to have substantial hydrocarbon deposits.

The MTJA was created as a statutory body under the laws of Malaysia and Thailand in 1991 to assume all rights and responsibilities on behalf of the two Governments to explore and exploit petroleum that in this JDA. With the launching of the MTJA, both countries look forward to realizing the development of JDA's resources and sharing its economic benefits.

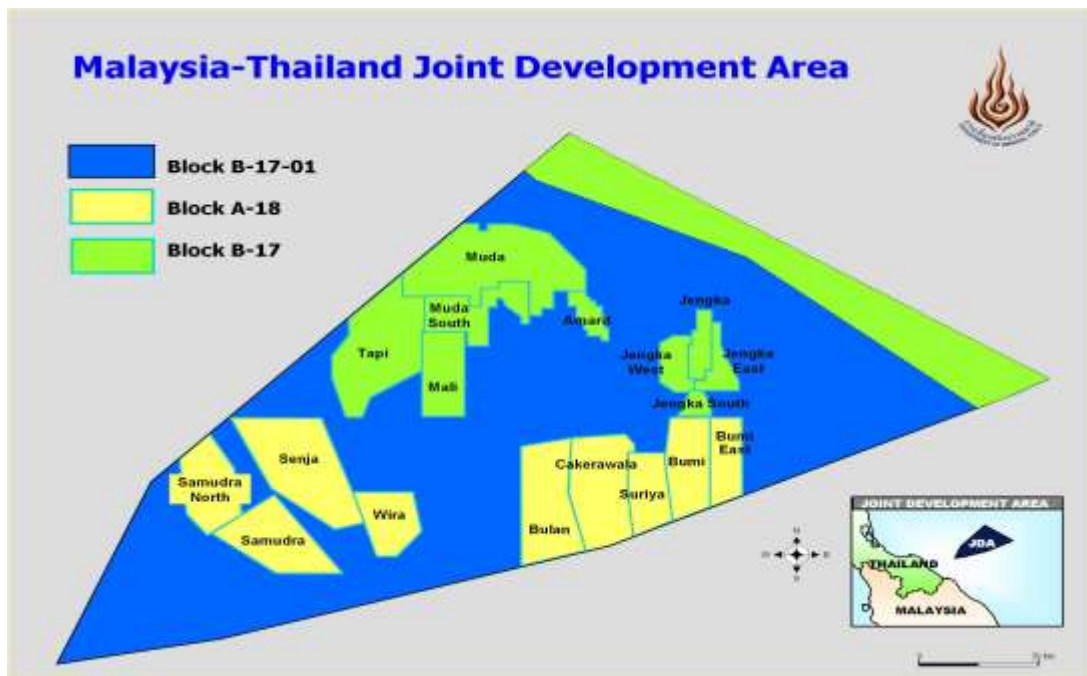
The MTJA, with its Head Office located in Kuala Lumpur, is governed by a Board with seven government appointed representatives each from Malaysia and Thailand. Under the supervision of MTJA Board, the MTJA Management consists of staff covering technical, legal and financial aspects of the petroleum business. The MTJA prides itself as being one of the world's first to be implemented from this unique model of cooperation between two countries.

### **Joint Development Area (JDA)**

The JDA plan was agreed by both parties in February 1979. It is a platform for both countries to work together in developing their economies particularly in the fisheries, petroleum and gas sectors. Whereas previous cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia was a government-to-government arrangement, the JDA synergizes the efforts and initiatives of government, private sectors and peoples of both states. The involvement of the private sector in boosting economic growth in

both countries served to enhance bilateral relations between Thailand and Malaysia.<sup>76</sup>

Figure 4-1  
Joint Development Area Location Map



Source: Malaysia-Thailand Joint Authority (MTJA). 2012

Some of the achievements resulting from such cooperation is the bridge across the Golok River, linking Buketa in Narathiwat to Bukit Bunga in Kelantan. This is symbolic of the efforts to link the two peoples in this shared destiny of peace and prosperity.

<sup>76</sup>Mala Rajo Sathian. 2007. Thai Malaysian Relations: Celebrating 50 Years of Friendship and Alliance. in Rajaphruek Bunga Raya (ed). *50 Years of Everlasting Friendship Between Thailand and Malaysia 1957-2007*, p.140. Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



## **Joint Commission (JC)**

The Thailand-Malaysia JC was established in 1979. The main objective of this Commission is to coordinate the bilateral cooperation in the areas of boundary survey and demarcation, communication and transportation, trade and investment, agriculture, tourism, science, technology and environment, energy, health, youth and sports, technical cooperation in human resources development and culture.

During the 10th Meeting of the JC for Bilateral Cooperation between in Bangkok in 2007, both countries shared concerns about the situation in the Southern Thailand. The JC agreed that it was imperative that peace, stability and security be achieved so that social and economic development in the areas could be fully pursued for the benefits of the people.<sup>77</sup>

Malaysia will continue to cooperate with Thailand on CBM to promote peace and stability in the Southern Thailand. Programs under the Three E's Initiative, namely employment, entrepreneurship, education, have been progressing well. These programs include study visits, services training and the extending of scholarships to 60 Thai students from the Southern Thailand to study at the Malaysian residential schools.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.mfa.go.th/web/35.php?id=18197> (30 September 2017).

## **Joint Development Strategy (JDS)**

From the Malaysian perspective, one of the root causes of the conflict in Southern Thailand is the poor socio-economic conditions of its people. In August 2004, the two countries agreed to initiate a JDS aimed at boosting economic linkages between the five southern provinces and Malaysia's more economically developed northern states. The JDS spearheaded by the Thailand-Malaysia Committee aims to develop better living standards for people in the five southern provinces of Thailand (Songkhla, Yala, Satun, Pattani and Narathiwat) as well as four states of Malaysia (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and parts of Perak).<sup>78</sup> Kuala Lumpur's strategy is to help with the economic development of Thailand's southern provinces. The JDS Action Plan therefore covers the development of infrastructure and transportation, agriculture, trade and investment, energy, education, human resources, disaster relief and people-to-people relations.<sup>79</sup>

However, the Malaysian government cautioned that the success of the JDS was dependent upon the people on the ground that must have confidence in the sincerity and commitment of their respective governments in bringing development to them.

## **Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT -GT)**

The IMT-GT consists of the two Indonesian provinces of North Sumatra and Aceh; the four northern Malaysian states Kedah, Penang,

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<sup>78</sup> *The Nation*, 12 February 2007.

<sup>79</sup> D.Arul Rajoo. 2007. Malaysia and Thailand to Accelerate Development in Border Areas. *BERNAMA*, 12 February.

Perak, and Perlis; and five provinces of southern Thailand: Narathiwat, Pattani, Satun, Songkhla, and Yala. The IMT-GT was officially launched in July 1993, at a ministerial meeting on the resort island of Langkawi and the objective of this growth triangle is to promote economic growth in the less developed areas of the sub-region.

Activities were conducted through various mechanisms including government-to- government, government and the private sector as well as among the private sectors of the participating countries. At the governmental level, efforts were directed at developing common rules and procedures for the conduct of trade and investments while the private sector organizations were encouraged to identify partners for joint-venture projects as well as to expand their business operations in member countries. Through the growth triangle cooperation, several joint-venture projects were implemented, mainly in human resource development, tourism, infrastructure, manufacturing, and plantation as well as transportation and mining sectors.

### **General Border Committee (GBC)**

The GBC was formed by agreement in March 1977 between Thailand and Malaysia. This committee deals with common problems in border areas as recognized and agreed upon by the two countries, which affect the security and stability in the border area.<sup>80</sup>

The objectives of the GBC are to promote cooperation for the enhancement of security and stability in the border areas by the resolution

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<sup>80</sup> The Government of Malaysia and Thailand. 2000. *Agreement on Border Cooperation*. 18 May, p. 1.

of common problems therein, and the development and promotion of matters of mutual interest in the border areas.<sup>81</sup>

The GBC consist of two Joint Chairmen and other members appointed by their respective Governments. The committee meets annually, alternately in Malaysia and Thailand. According to the guidelines of the establishment agreement the committee may look into the following areas:<sup>82</sup>

1. Curbing of smuggling in the border area;
2. Curbing of illegal entry into the border area;
3. The promotion of cooperation in security matters in the border area through training, joint/combined exercises, visits, exchange of personnel and information;
4. Encouragement and promotion of cooperation in socio-economic development activities;
5. Facilitating, upon request, other Malaysian-Thai bilateral efforts in the delimitation and demarcation of boundaries by the provision of technical assistance in any such demarcation;
6. Facilitating, upon request, other Malaysian-Thai bilateral efforts in taking measures and providing assistance during disaster; and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

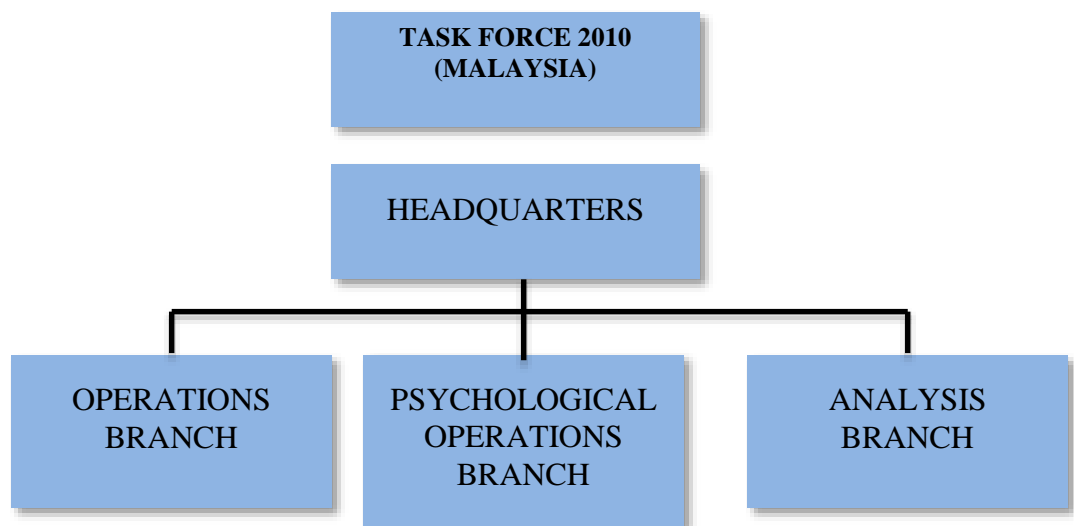
7. Any other common problems in the border area to be agreed upon by the GBC.

The GBC provides a platform for the both states to discuss the promotion of a stable security environment along the common border areas. It further facilitates socio-economic growth and development for the betterment of the Southern Thais.

### **Task Force 2010 (Malaysia)**

Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) was established in October 2006 and actively in operation until 31 December 2010. This organization can be seen as another approach by the Malaysian government to assist the Thai government to alleviate the conflict in the South Thailand.

Figure 4-2  
Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) Organization



Source: Former Director General Task Force 2010 Malaysia.

This organization was headed by a three star general from the Malaysian Armed Forces<sup>83</sup> and comprised 30 officers and personnel tasked with carrying out missions entrusted to the task force. The establishment of the task force elicited positive reaction from the Thai government which reciprocated the initiative by establishing the Task Force 960 (Thailand) to enable a more direct and clearer line of communication between both governments.<sup>84</sup>

In its effort to accomplish its given missions, Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) had formulated the following strategies.<sup>85</sup>

1. To determine the main causes of the conflict in South Thailand;
2. To establish ties with the society in South Thailand and to propagate information of the ongoing mission;
3. To provide basic training, courses and exposures that were beneficial to the people in the Southern Thailand;
4. To unite the separatist groups, and;
5. To achieve mutual agreement with the Thai government in the formulation of resolutions that best fit the conflict in the South Thailand.

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<sup>83</sup> Leftenan Jeneral Datuk Wan Abu Bakar Omar . (Retired Malaysian Army)

<sup>84</sup> Tan Sri Wan Abu Bakar bin Omar, former Director General Task Force 2010 Malaysia. 2012. *Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) Roles and Tasks*. Interview, 14 November.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) had carried out a number of activities in their mission to return peace and stability in South Thailand. Among them are the followings:

1. Provided vocational training for youths from South Thailand;
2. Organized trips to visit Malaysia's administrative centre in Putrajaya for imams, village heads and teachers from Southern Thailand;
3. Helped educate the populace of South Thailand on the true concepts of Islamic teachings;
4. Helped provide training for Muslim nurses from the Southern Thailand, and;
5. Established the Foundation for Welfare and Education of the Southern Thailand.

The Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) was a good initiative by Malaysia in the sense that it involved the setting up of a special agency to monitor the progress of the conflict. On 31 December 2009, both governments decided to end the services of Task Force 2010 (Malaysia) and Task Force 960 (Thailand) on completion of a 3 years period. Both task forces have accomplished all the tasks laid down to them by respective government in an effort of bringing peace to the Southern Thailand.

## **Border Regiment**

The Malaysian Border regiment was set up in 2008 and given the responsibility of ensuring that the borders of Malaysia and Thailand are systematically monitored.<sup>86</sup> This Border Regiment was the starting point for concerted efforts by Malaysia to improve border security and stem illegal cross border movement. The 506 kilometer-long territorial border required an effective mechanism to eradicate undesirable cross border activities such as smuggling and illegal immigrants and the Border Regiment's setting up was timely.

A total of 3,600 soldiers from the Malaysia Territorial Army were absorbed as regular soldiers to establish the Border Regiment. The establishment was seen as a precautionary measure by the Malaysian government as a result of the occurrences of several incidents at the Malaysia -Thai border. This initiative is also evidence of serious proactive actions that are undertaken by Malaysia to cement the relationship and ties between Malaysia-Thailand and to find solutions to border problems that involve both nations.<sup>87</sup>

## **Peace Talks**

In 2006, then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir mediated three rounds of peace talks between senior Thai military officers and exiled leaders of the older insurgency groups, including the PULO. Although the talks were brokered by a Malaysian Foundation,

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<sup>86</sup> Anon. 2008. Rejimen Sempadan Kawal Perbatasan Malaysia-Thailand. *Berita Harian*, 3 March.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



PERDANA, both the Thai and Malaysian governments appeared to have given their blessings. The talks produced a joint peace and development plan for the South that rejected the idea of independence and autonomy but called for an amnesty for exiled leaders, the restoration of the SBPAC and the introduction of the Malay language in schools. However, this initiative had minimal impact because the exiled leaders had little influence over the new generation of insurgents.<sup>88</sup>

### **Malaysia-Thailand Bilateral Relations – An Overview**

In 2007, Malaysia and Thailand celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic ties. The then Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar in his keynote address at the Malaysia-Thailand Business Forum in Bangkok in August 2007 stated that bilateral ties between Malaysia and Thailand were at all time high. He also stressed that:

*‘Being neighbours, we have to live with each other and most importantly not be at odds with each other. Whatever happens in Malaysia or in Thailand will have ramifications on both sides.’<sup>89</sup>*

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<sup>88</sup> Neil J. Melvin. 2007. Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Pattani Insurgency. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Policy Paper* (20), September. p. 35.

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.thailand.com/forum/showthread.php?t=15757> (25 September 2017).

Speaking at the same function Thai Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsonggram on his part said that Thailand and Malaysia had a shared stake in their prosperity and well-being. He also mentioned that based on the history of bilateral relations, Thailand and Malaysia were not just neighbours but members of the same family. He added:

*'This was stated not recently but way back in 1961. If these were the sentiments then, how much warmer should the sentiments be today, when relations between Thailand and Malaysia are at an all-time high?'*<sup>90</sup>

Based on these two statements it appeared that there were no serious problems in Malaysia and Thailand bilateral relations. But was it true that the relations between these two countries at an all-time high? The answer probably lies in the history of Malaysia-Thailand relations. The two governments have been facing problems in security cooperation dating way back to the Communist Party of Malaya's (CPM) insurgency of the 1950s. The insurgency was eventually quelled with the help of Thailand in 1989. But, the insurgency never became a thorn in the flesh of bilateral ties. On the other hand, the southern Thailand conflict is actually the issue that sometimes derails the bilateral relations between Thailand and Malaysia. This conflict has often caused bilateral relations to deteriorate. For example in 1970, a Thai Police Major General alleged that "a certain Lieutenant Colonel from another country" was training politically motivated bandits in the southern provinces. Although he did

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<sup>90</sup> <http://www.Pattaninews.net/ReadSreport.asp?ID=63> (25 September 2017).

not name the country, it was clear that he was referring to Malaysia.<sup>91</sup> In 1974, in a feature article in the Thai English daily, *The National*, carrying the by-line of a known Thai journalist, Termsak C. Palanupap identified Malaysia as a prime supporter of the separatists.<sup>92</sup> He alleged that "the Malaysian government has hardly made any serious attempt to stop these separatist terrorists and Thailand's repeated pleas for help have largely been ignored". These and other similar incidents had adverse impact of the state of bilateral relations between Thailand and Malaysia. But it would not stop there. In June 1974 the then Malaysian Land Development and Special Functions Minister Dato' Haji Mohamed Asri, also leader of the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) when this party was the ruling party's coalition partner said that he thought the Thai secessionist groups' struggle for autonomy, with specific conditions, was "reasonable". Realizing the potential for damage of the statement, Malaysia's Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak calmed the situation by saying that Asri's utterances did not represent Malaysia's policy, which was non-interference in Thai internal affairs, adding that Malaysia cherished its good relations with Thailand and he hoped that the incident would not damage them.<sup>93</sup>

The misperception by the Thai government toward Malaysia on the issue of the Southern Thailand continued throughout the 1980s till currently. In August 2005, in what is now known as the Tanyong Limoh

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<sup>91</sup> Omar Farouk. 1984. The Historical and Transnational Dimensions of Malay-Muslim Separatism in Southern Thailand. In Lim loo-lock & Vani S. *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia*, p. 247-248. Singapore: Regional Strategic Studies Programme, Institute of Southeast Asia Studies (ISEAS).

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Dennis P. Walker. 2005. Conflict Between the Thai and Islamic Cultures in Southern Thailand (Pattani) 1948-2005. *Islamiyyat* 27(1). p. 97-98.

episode, 131 Southern Thai Muslims fled to Kelantan and sought refuge there. Thailand accused the refugees of being insurgents (even though women and children were in the group) and demanded that they are to be returned, sparking a diplomatic spat. The Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister then, Dato' Seri Najib Razak made clear that:

*'We will not release them to Thailand except if we have assurance that their human rights are not being infringed upon by the Thai government.'*<sup>94</sup>

Immediately after this incident, the Foreign Ministers of Thailand and Malaysia commenced a verbal war of accusations of blame against each other, and relations between the two countries fell to a new low. The Thai-Malaysian impasse shows just how badly a bilateral relationship can go within ASEAN due to an unresolved internal conflict.<sup>95</sup>

## **Bilateral Relations: Issues**

There are several other issues that needed serious attention of the two countries. These issues are important in strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries and resolving these lesser issues will help resolve the bigger issue. Those issues as follow:

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<sup>94</sup> *Diplomatic Stalemate: KL says it won't release 'refugees'*, 29 September 2005. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com>. (20 September 2017).

<sup>95</sup> Michael Vatikiotis. 2006. Resolving Internal Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Domestic Challenges and Regional Perspective. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 28(1). p. 13.

## **1. Dual Citizenship**

Dual citizenship has always remained the reason for tense relations between the two countries following Thai media and government officials' accusations that separatists in the Southern Thailand would flee to Malaysia following attacks in the region. The issue was resolved when the two Premiers agreed to a solution on 13 February 2007 in Bangkok. It was agreed that people living on the borders of both nations should not have dual citizenship. Based on the formula agreed by PM Abdullah and General Surayud Chulanont, Thai nationals living in Malaysia and Malaysians living in Thailand were to be offered permanent citizenships of the country they were living in. This meant that those of who are Thai citizens but still wanted to reside in Malaysia would be offered permanent citizenships. Thailand would also offer the same conditions to those Malaysians residing in Thailand.

If this formula proposed by the two premiers was properly implemented and accepted by the locals, it would go a long way in resolving the issue which has always remain 'a thorn in the flesh' of bilateral relations. On this issue, difficult as it may be, it required Thailand to take the lead role while Kuala Lumpur was to play a supportive role in view that the issue mostly involved Malay descendants in the Southern Thailand. As a start, both countries agreed to surrender the names of 500 citizens holding dual citizenships. Malaysia hopes that with this process, Thais in Malaysia and the Malays

living in Thailand will be able to live in a harmonious atmosphere and be free to practice their faith, language and culture. They need not to worry about their kin on either side of the border as they will be able to live in the country of their choice as citizens.

Even though, the respective governments agreed to award citizenships and permanent resident status, certain aspects need to be taken into consideration such as: loyalty and contribution to the nation, however both governments felt that all the people involved would be given due consideration. Both governments also would not want any party to take this opportunity to threaten or jeopardize the good relationship between the two nations after citizenship is granted. For this purpose it is necessary that diligent assessment is carried out before either government awards citizenship or PR status. Offering this privilege is the highest honour that can be bestowed and the government must be diligent when considering the application so as not to award it to people that may abuse the rights.

This decision will help ensure that a peaceful situation prevails in the Southern Thailand especially in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani. This process will also enable Thais living and trading at the borders especially in Kelantan, Perlis and Kedah to continue their daily activities in a peaceful manner with the locals.

This will prevent untoward incidents, terrorist's activities, illegal entries and smuggling especially about arms and drugs.

## 2. **Border Security**

Malaysia cannot afford to allow the violent situation at its borders with the Southern Thailand to continue. Any insecurity in the Southern Thailand affects border and national security of both states. Incidents involving Malaysians being killed in bomb blasts in the Southern Thailand are indications that the issue may be getting out of control and hence needs speedily resolution. Malaysia feels the most important aspect in resolving the conflict is to get to the root causes of the conflict.<sup>96</sup>

Given the gravity of the situation and the need to keep its borders free of violence Malaysia is always open to negotiations. Both warring factions must be invited to the discussion table with Malaysia as the facilitator to rebuild confidence and adopt effective preventive measures. This approach creates confidence and gives hope for unity and harmony. This in turn will contribute to economic growth through development at the border provinces. It is for this reason that Malaysia is serious in addressing and solving the issues such as borders passes, details and accurate marking of borders lines, the building of a bridge across the Golok River

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<sup>96</sup> Azim Syafi Azman. 2005. Memakmurkan Wilayah Sempadan. *Dewan Masyarakat*, January. p. 44.

and the Bukit Putih-Satun Expressway Project. The buildings of the bridge across the Golok River linking Buketa, Narathiwat in Thailand and Bukit Bunga, Jeli in Kelantan are other examples of the firm commitment of the two countries. With such projects providing benefits to the people, the locals will not be easily swayed by the separatists' appeal.

### **3. Political Refugees**

Malaysia's willingness to offer temporary protection to Thai Malay Muslims that fled Thailand in August 2005 shows that the Malaysian government is sensitive to the plight of the people in the affected provinces. Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Hamid Albar made clear that the amnesty was given solely on humanitarian grounds and ought not to be viewed as interference in the internal affairs of Thailand. Hamid Albar also stressed that Malaysia felt that adverse incidents in the Southern Thailand would inevitably affect Malaysia due to the close relations between the people living along the borders of both countries.

What is clear here is the sincerity of the government of Malaysia in offering aid to Thailand be it expertise in addressing the threats of militants or to moderate their extremist Islamic beliefs. To avoid similar misunderstandings, Malaysia is always careful in addressing these issues. It is for



this reason that all parties concerned need to understand why the government decided not to identify them as political refugees and not to offer them political asylum.

The seeking of refuge by Thai Malay Muslim population from several provinces in the Southern Thailand has been going on for some time. Their actions were due to fear for their safety followings several violent attacks, bombing and killing of many Muslim people. However, border security forces and the Malaysian immigration had no choice but to turn many away as they did not have proper documentation. This step is needed to prevent the entry of undesirable elements with justifiable reasons or otherwise for entry into Malaysia. Although the situation has subsided, Malaysia is confident that the security forces manning the borders will continue to perform their task well especially in Kelantan.

This complex conflict which threatens the security of both countries resulted from unfounded suspicions amongst the Southern Thai populaces regarding religious administration, social, and economic issues as well as dissatisfaction over the years of being treated as second class citizens. Malaysia, however, hopes that the issues faced by Thailand would be resolved without harming the bilateral relations and security of both countries.

## **Bilateral Relations: Threats**

The bilateral relations between Malaysia and Thailand face the following categories of threats resulting from the unrest in the Southern Thailand.

### **1. Political Threat**

The Thai government has adopted various strategies to reduce internal threats arising from its southern provinces and at the same time to prevent any external interference in its internal affairs. As far as Thailand is concerned, the situation in the south has much to do with Malaysia's attitude stemming from historical animosity. Thai bureaucrats are suspicious that Malaysia wants the southern provinces to secede to Malaysia. Mahathir's repeated call for autonomy in the three provinces raised eyebrows in Bangkok and become the fuel for such suspicions. The Thais also realized that Malaysia's eminent position in the Muslim world can influence international perception towards Thailand. As the Chairman of the OIC and of the Non-Aligned Movement as well as the ASEAN, Malaysia has delicate balancing act to perform. At the OIC Ministerial Meeting in Yemen in May 2005, the Thai delegates were unhappy with Malaysia's performance. They expected Malaysia, as an ASEAN member to assist them and voice sympathy in favour of Thailand about the situation in the southern provinces. The southern crisis is getting worse, and stakes are higher for Malaysia. In the past few years, heavy

accusations have been leveled across the border, implicating Malaysia for supporting the militants and providing them with sanctuary.<sup>97</sup>

Malaysia on the other hand has maintained that it will not meddle in the internal affairs of Thailand based on ASEAN's principles of non-interference.<sup>98</sup> Malaysia would also not want to get involved in the Southern Thailand conflict because of its role in other regional insurgencies such as the Mindanao and Aceh conflicts. Malaysia has played an important facilitator task towards the success of the peace process between the Philippines government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Currently, Malaysia is still leading the International Monitoring Team (IMT) in Mindanao. Malaysia was also part of the Aceh Monitoring Mission, which was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the MOU between the Indonesian government and Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM, the Free Aceh Movement). Given Malaysia's efforts to forge peace in the region, it is not in its advantage to support an insurgent group in Thailand.<sup>99</sup>

The way out of this current impasse is for the two countries to further enhance their cordial bilateral relations. Both countries can support joint economic development in the troubled region. The conflict shows how an unsolved internal

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<sup>97</sup> *The Nation*. 2005. October 3:10A.

<sup>98</sup> M.Ghazali Shafie. 1982. *Malaysia: International Relations*. Kuala Lumpur: Creative Enterprise Sendirian Berhad. p. 165.

<sup>99</sup> S P Harish. 2006. How Malaysia sees Thailand's southern strife. *Malaysia Today*, Wednesday, February 8.

conflict has the potential to effect the bilateral relations of ASEAN states.<sup>100</sup>

## **2. Security Threat**

Thai officials see the Southern Thailand as vulnerable to its security given that most Muslim Malays who live along the northern border of Malaysia hold dual citizenship. Thailand's efforts to assimilate the Malays into the dominant central Thai culture has created security threats of their own and the Thai Malays look upon the policies as a form of cultural imperialism and have decided to resist the efforts by force.<sup>101</sup>

For the Malaysian government, the sharing of border between the two states makes security a crucial part in the relationship between the two countries. Any instability in the Southern Thailand will be of concern to Malaysia as the conflict could spillover in to the northern part of Malaysia. The possibilities of the northern areas being targeted by Thai separatists as conduits for weapon smuggling, explosive ordnances smuggling, illegal intrusions, refugees and other problems are very high and this would threaten the security of Malaysia. As such, the Thai authorities need to understand Malaysia's concern regarding the conflict, especially the efforts

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<sup>100</sup> Michael Vatikiotis. 2006. Resolving Internal Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Domestic Challenges and Regional Perspective. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 28(1). p.13.

<sup>101</sup> International Crisis Group. 2005. Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad. *Asia Report* 98, May 18.

to improve border security together with initiatives to enrich and develop the border areas as a preventive measure to contain the Southern Thai conflict and to arrest the problem before it spreads beyond the borders of Thailand.

### **3. Economic and Social Threat**

On the whole, the conflict in the Southern Thailand does not adversely affect the overall economy of Thailand. However, the situation does have an impact on the economic activities in the Southern Thailand. Moreover, the practice of "black" or "illegal economy" in Thailand had posed a threat to the long-term economic stability of the southern region. The conflict has badly affected businesses and transport services in the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat.<sup>102</sup> Tourism in the Southern Thailand is also badly affected so much so that economic activities generated by tourism are in a state of collapse. The spillover effect also impinged on Malaysian visitors to these regions. Overland border-crossings from Malaysia have slowed down considerably. Both Thailand and Malaysia have a substantial stake in ending the conflict, which has ravaged the economy along their common land border and strained their bilateral relations.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Syed Umar Ariff. 2005. Students flee Thailand: Exodus due to escalating violence. *New Straits Times*, 19 August: 14.

<sup>103</sup> J. Cochrane & L. Holland. 2005. A peace plan? *Newsweek* May: 16.

Besides the separatists fighting for an autonomous state, there are other elements that deploy violence in the southern provinces. Among them are illegal border traders, drug traffickers, smugglers, gamblers, arms dealers, illegal migrant labour, sex industry people and other human traffickers.<sup>104</sup> All these create social problems for both governments and if no serious actions are taken, they impact negatively on bilateral relations.

### **Bilateral Relations: Challenges**

One major obstacle to managing and resolving the conflict in the Southern Thailand has been Bangkok's unwillingness to recognize the nature of the conflict as one involving deep-rooted social and cultural issues. It prefers to blame the criminal elements and religious militants and relies on tough security measures to deal with the violence. Bangkok's inability to suppress the conflict and address the public grievances has been compounded by a number of incidents that have inflamed public anger and driven more young people into the arms of the separatists.<sup>105</sup>

### **Southern Thailand: Thaksin Era (January 2004 - 19 September 2006)**

The year 2004 saw a very challenging period for Thaksin with several key incidents like the arms heist at Chao Ai Rong Camp,

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<sup>104</sup> R. Slagter & H.R. Kerbo. 2000. *Modern Thailand: A volume in the comparative societies series*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education. pp. 114.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Vatikiotis. 2006. Resolving Internal Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Domestic Challenges and Regional Perspective. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 28(1). pp. 27-47.

tragedies at Kerisik Mosque and Tak Bai – all of which tested his government in handling of the sensitive situation in the Southern Thailand. Several short term measures were implemented by his government to defuse the situation, one of which was to declare a state of emergency in the three districts and the deployment of 3,000 additional troops in the Southern Thailand.

In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister, Chaturon Chaisang proposed a Seven point Plan to resolve the situation which included:

1. Ending the emergency.
2. Offering pardons to those involved in subversive activities.
3. Supporting instead of monitoring religious schools.
4. Re-evaluating development plans amounting to 12 million Baht in Southern Thailand.
5. Reducing police presence and role in security matters.
6. Stopping the detention of suspected elements in subversive activities.
7. Re-evaluating the law on citizens with dual citizenships.

Even though Thaksin did not sanction the Seven Point Plan it received warm acceptance by the people of the Southern Thailand. But Thaksin's objection meant that the plan was never implemented; instead the Government issued a Prime Minister's Directive 68/2547 to resolve the situation which consisted:<sup>106</sup>

1. Avoidance of any operation that may result in continued violence.
2. Eliminating the source of the conflict, discrimination and similarities resulting from different religion and social standing.
3. Promoting locals involvement in federal projects and creating transparency.
4. Encouraging exchange of ideas amongst local politicians.
5. The coming together of religious leaders, media and the NGOs to resolve public interest issues.
6. To recognize the people of the Southern Thailand as bone-vide citizens of Thailand.
7. To instill and encourage an understanding and tolerance at district level and global communication so that the

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<sup>106</sup> Wan Shawaluddin Wan Hassan. 2004. *Kemelut di Selatan Thailand*. *Dewan Masyarakat* Disember: 45.



local population of different races and religion will be able to enjoy the same rights and freedom.

8. To encourage vibrant economic development and growth to bring about a higher standard of living.

9. To continually use intelligent work ethics and psychological operations.

Although the above methods and several other initiatives were implemented to persuade and win over the hearts and minds of the locals, the government hit a dead-end. As a result the Thaksin government resorted to aggressive measures to resolve the conflict. The government dispatched thousands of troops to the districts and implemented emergency rule which ultimately gave Thaksin full authority over the Southern Thailand.<sup>107</sup>

The implementation of the above action was rejected not only by the locals but also by many government officials. They were of the opinion that Thaksin's approach would not resolve the issues but worsen it. Thaksin remained adamant and continued to blame the violence on the separatists. Ironically, the government had never proven this allegation except for isolated incidents of suspected separatists being detained or shot.

Unable to find an end to the situation in the Southern Thailand, Thaksin blamed foreign countries and organizations, Malaysia, Indonesia

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<sup>107</sup> Zulkiflee Bakar. 2006. Thaksin Perlu Ubah Pendekatan. *Mingguan Malaysia*, 8 January.

and the OIC of instigating the locals to retaliate against him. Malaysia felt the action and approach that were taken by the Thai government was affecting bilateral relations between the two countries. A few of the accusations hurled at the Malaysian government were:

1. On 19 December 2004, Prime Minister Thaksin alleged that militants and terrorists were using forests bordering the state of Kelantan in Malaysia and the Southern Thailand districts as their training camps.<sup>108</sup>
2. On 10 September 2005, the Defense Minister of Thailand, Jeneral Thammarak Isarangkura Ayudhya hurled accusations that separatists leaders met in Langkawi to plan violent activities in the Southern Thailand. He went on further to implicate Mahathir in Malaysian plans to give support to the separatist's movement.<sup>109</sup>
3. The Thai government accused Kuala Lumpur of interfering with the internal running of the Thai government regarding the issue of 131 Islamic Thai nationals who were seeking political asylum in Malaysia.

### **Analysis on Thailand-Malaysia Bilateral Relations during the Thaksin Era**

The Thaksin era often created anxiety with Malaysia, especially in relation to South Thailand which affected the bilateral relation between the two countries. Malaysia was seen to be the 'scape goat' whenever any

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<sup>108</sup> Anon. 2004. Tuduhan Thaksin Tidak berasas. *Berita Harian*, 20 December.

<sup>109</sup> Anon. 2005. Jeneral Thailand Didesak Minta Maaf. *Berita Harian*, 14 September.

untoward incident occurred in the provinces. Such actions constituted slick political maneuvering on the part of Thaksin.

The Malaysian government under Ahmad Badawi was disturbed by Thaksin's actions which continued to tarnish Malaysia's image by hurling accusations. It is widely known that Malaysia's securities forces have always maintained tight measures in patrolling the borders during conflict situations in the Southern Thailand to prevent any terrorists or undesirable elements from seeking refuge in Malaysia.

The government of Thailand especially Thaksin continued to reiterate that relations between Thailand and Malaysia were still cordial despite the exchange of verbal barbs regarding the situation in the Southern Thailand. He emphasized that this was only normal between neighboring countries despite the fact the two countries' Foreign Ministers were at loggerheads. He further remarked that the issue could be amicably resolved.

However, Thaksin admitted that relations with Kuala Lumpur were strained when 131 Muslim residents from Narathiwat that took refuge in Kelantan in August 2005. He expressed confidence that the issue could be resolved with cooperation from officials of both countries. The situation worsened when Thaksin rejected Malaysia's suggestion that bilateral discussions were required to be held to discuss border security issues. Thaksin firmly insisted that bilateral discussion would only be held upon the handing over of the 131 refugees.

Thaksin's action was seen as trying to win sympathy and support from the population as the incident was made out to be one that threatened the national sovereignty of Thailand. Demonstrations instigated by the "Thai Patriotic Club" in front of the Malaysian Embassy in Bangkok were held. The group urged the government of Malaysia not to involve itself in the internal affairs of Thailand and the situation in the Southern Thailand. They alleged that Malaysia's response to the situation was an interference of the internal affairs of Thailand.

The strategy of obtaining public sympathy from the people of Thailand has always been a norm among the majority of government officials of Thailand. However, this strategy that Thaksin applied faced complications and rejection as it involved other countries, namely Malaysia. On top of that this was not the first time Thaksin had blamed Malaysia with regards to the issues in the Southern Thailand.

### **Southern Thailand: General Surayud Chulanont Era (19 September 2006 - January 2008)**

The approach and stand of the new government of Thailand under General Surayud Chulanont to the situation in Southern Thailand were very much open and cordial, focusing more on discussions rather than force as compared to the Thaksin era and this move seemed appropriate to resolving the long standing conflict.<sup>110</sup>

Prime Minister Chulanont believed in the peace process and continued to work diligently towards achieving it. The first step taken

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<sup>110</sup>M Thillinadan. 2007. KL, Bangkok Perkukuh Keakraban *Berita Harian*, 10 Feb 13.

was the formation of the South Border Administrative Center, which was the center for the people to voice out their grievances and obtains immediate solutions. Secondly, he took a big step by fulfilling his promise of fairness and enforcement of law in the provinces where it was never implemented during the last 5 years. Thirdly, Surayud made an effort in restoring trust and understanding among the locals.<sup>111</sup>

The decision by Surayud to openly extend the government's apologies to the Muslim population in the Southern Thailand on the Tak Bai tragedy and the decision to pardon 92 Muslim locals who were detained during the demonstrations as well as to openly admit the previous administrative error in dealing with the situation in the Southern Thailand were seen by the locals as the government's seriousness in resolving the security issue and the discriminations suffered by them.<sup>112</sup>

Bilateral relations between Thailand and Malaysia, especially with regards to the situation in the Southern Thailand showed positive developments during the Surayud era as compared to his predecessor Thaksin. Even though there continued to be minor issues related to the Southern Thailand, Surayud's policies and reactions to maintain cordial relations with Kuala Lumpur were perceived to be more cordial. This was proven when Surayud extended an official invitation to Abdullah Badawi to visit Thailand, which took place in February 2007. The purpose of the invitation was to negotiate and resolve several issues, especially the future of the troubled provinces in the Southern Thailand. The invitation

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<sup>111</sup> Anon. 2007. Peluang Malaysia Melabur di Thailand. *Berita Minggu*, 25 February: 17.

<sup>112</sup> M Thillinadan. 2007. KL, Bangkok Perkukuh Keakraban. *Berita Harian*, 10 Feb 13.

was also a result of an earlier meeting between the two premiers in October 2006.

Abdullah Badawi's visit which coincided with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries further strengthened the cooperation and friendship between them. The two leaders not only took the opportunity to jointly resolve several outstanding issues but also laid a solid foundation for future diplomatic relations even though many issues remain unresolved.

During the visit, PM Abdullah Badawi highlighted the importance on joint action in resolving the issues in the Southern Thailand such as dual citizenships, refugees, smuggling, creation of a border partition and the IMT-GT.

### **Analysis on Thailand-Malaysia Bilateral Relations During the Surayud Era**

With the positive stand and approach adopted by Surayud as opposed to Thaksin's strong-arm tactics in stabilizing the country's political situation especially in the Southern Thailand, Malaysia was optimistic that the long standing conflict would be resolved. Kuala Lumpur urged Bangkok to continue negotiations with leaders and separatists as well as implement development projects in the less developed areas in the Southern Thailand.

Several reasons can be advanced as to why the relations between Malaysia and Thailand became strained. Among them are concerns of Malaysia that Thailand ensures the continued stability and

peace in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani and the dual citizenships issue. The latter is especially important as it makes it difficult for those who rebels who conduct violence in Thailand and then seek refuge in Malaysia. Both problems need to be quickly resolved in the interest of bilateral relations between the two countries.

### **Southern Thailand: Samak Sundaravej Era (January 2008 - October 2008)**

The willingness of the new Thai government under the leadership of Samak Sundaravej to reopen discussions on the conflict in the Southern Thailand was seen to be a healthy advancement in putting the peace process back on track. Malaysia had its part to play in the efforts to find a peaceful solution to end once and for all the conflict in Yala, Pattani dan Narathiwat which has been continuing since 2004 and had sacrificed more than 2,900 lives. What was expected and hoped for was for discussion between the new Premier, Samak and regarding Thailand's plans and ideas for continued peace in the region. Malaysia also hoped that even though the new Premier was a close Thaksin ally, he would not revert to the violent approach that was adopted by Thaksin to handle the situation in the Southern Thailand.

### **Analysis on Thailand-Malaysia Bilateral Relations with the Samak Sundaravej Government**

Samak's decision to maintain cordial bilateral relations with Malaysia with regards to the situation in the Southern Thailand was a good move. He also dispelled fears that he will revert to Thaksin era policies in the South.

The meeting between the two premiers opened a new chapter for dialogue on the conflict of the Southern Thailand. Both governments remained confident that an amicable and permanent solution to the violence would be found. Sundaravej who was also the Defense Minister appeared serious and sincere in ending the conflict. The expectation was for him to abandon the use of force and order all parties including the armed forces to lay down their weapons as well as end the military rule imposed on the region by Thaksin.

### **Southern Thailand: Abhisit Vejjajiva Era (17 December 2008 – 5 August 2011)**

The Abhisit Vejjajiva government lacked a systematic approach to implement the declared principle that "politics leads the military" (kanmuang ham kantahan); structural political changes or reforms to solve the problems in the long term had not been proposed, let alone implemented.

The use of economic development policy and civil affairs activities to enhance military operations failed to achieve intended goals. Socio-economic development statistics showed that the indicators of poverty and quality of life still had not yet improved; in survey research questionnaires, many informants declared that the main problems in their community were unemployment, drugs, unrest and poverty. Although there was a high level of need for state assistance and there were positive responses towards short-term programs such as the 4,500 baht employment project and the Graduate Volunteer programs, as well as development in infrastructure and transportation, they seemingly had



little impact in terms of distribution of income or poverty reduction. State projects still lacked capacity building, and the economic development potential of the area remained unrealized. One serious indicator of social problems is drug use. Abuse of illicit drugs is still widespread, reflecting the failures of socio-economic development in the area seen in such problems as youth unemployment.<sup>113</sup>

Despite much talk of politics leading the military and "winning hearts and minds", public trust in the military and the police still had not improved after six years, partly due to persistent human rights violations and a lack of acceptance and understanding of the rights for identity of the local population. After mid-2009, people in many areas appeared more accepting of the role of the military in community development and political activities. In the long term, however, a great deal of work needed to be done to create greater trust among the people in general, particularly among the Malay Muslims who form the majority in the far south.

### **Analysis on Thailand-Malaysia Bilateral Relations with the Abhisit Government**

During his visit to Putrajaya in June 2009, Abhisit and Najib Razak agreed to go to the ground and visit religious schools in the Southern Thailand to ease tensions there. This was clear indication of their willingness to work closely together to find a solution for the troubled south.

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<sup>113</sup> Srisompob Jitpiromsri. 2010. Analysis of Current Socioeconomic and Political Situation in the Southern Border Provinces. Research report submitted to the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT). [www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com) (20 March 2017).

The 9 December 2009 meeting of Thai and Malaysian prime ministers in the troubled southern Thailand province of Narathiwat was symbolic. It contained a degree of risk for both leaders. But it could also be seen as a political show which was not expected to bring about any real change in the situation.

For Thailand's Abhisit, it provided a means of showing that he was at least trying to make progress on the issue, in contrast to the disastrous policies pursued by Thaksin. A meeting with Najib in the south also gave the impression that Malaysia was earnest about not allowing Pattani separatist sympathizers on the Malaysian side to aid the bomb makers and slogan painters in the southern provinces.

### **Southern Thailand: Yingluck Shinawatra Era (5 August 2011 – 7 May 2014)**

High expectation was put forward to Yingluck with the victory of her Pheu Thai Party (PTP) in the July 2011 elections towards bringing peace and stability in the country. Restoring peace in the south will be a major task for the new government and Yingluck will have to carefully balance the political situation in Bangkok along with her policies to combat insurgency. She made a few promises during her election campaign such as increasing the number of Muslims for the annual Hajj pilgrimage quota and establishing a special administrative zone in the south. To this date, no such policy has been declared.

Yingluck's agenda focuses on six objectives - from reducing drugs related problems to minimizing drug abuses and increasing

resistance to drug trafficking along the borders.<sup>114</sup> This has caused a major setback for the insurgents as most of their funds are generated from these activities. The insurgents retaliated with a series of attacks. The Sungai Kolok bomb blast, the series of attacks on the defence volunteers (recruited by the Royal Thai Army to combat insurgency in south) and security officials, and the bomb blast at the Narathiwat 31<sup>st</sup> Special Task Force military base are a few instances where militants have tried to challenge state efforts to combat insurgency.<sup>115</sup>

It will be an uphill task for her government to implement new policies or track insurgents and resist drug trafficking without public support in this region. The lack of public support in the south is evident from the fact that her party did not win any single seat in these provinces, despite many promises made during her campaign. In addition, because of her brother Thaksin's negative reputation in these provinces, Yingluck will have to face the consequences. Due to his aggressive counter-insurgency policies, Thaksin had to face deep resentment in these provinces during his premiership. The suppression by security force in Krue Se mosque and the Tak-Bai incident where detainees were harassed in October 2004 exacerbated hatred for him among the communities in the south. To garner public support and developing new policies for these provinces will be quite difficult for Yingluck.

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<sup>114</sup> Panchali Saikia. 2011. Impediments to Yingluck's New Approach for Southern Thailand. *IPCS*. <http://www.ipcs.org/article/southeast-asia/3477.html> (29 September 2017).

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*.

## **Analysis on Thailand-Malaysia Bilateral Relations with the Yingluck Government**

During Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' summit on 9 September 2012 held at Vladivostok, Yingluck had received assurances from Najib Abdul Razak that Kuala Lumpur will cooperate fully in solving problems in the restive south. Najib has supported the idea to set up more checkpoints along the border and would cooperate with Thailand to boost economic progress in the south. Within those fundamental, Bangkok must endeavor to find workable solutions in term of greater participation in economic activities of people in these provinces. Bangkok must find ways to have greater say in matter close to their heart such as education, religion, cultural matters and seeking more economy development and opportunities in the south.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that the Malaysian government has viewed the conflict in the Southern Thailand seriously. It is also evident that the majority of the people in the Southern Thailand have demonstrated close affinities with Malaysia. A similarity in culture, religion, language and custom makes South Thailand's residents more willing to deal with Malaysia. They further seem to believe that Malaysia understands better the nature of the conflict they are experiencing.

For the Malaysian government such similarities were not a ticket to encroach into the internal affairs of Thailand. Malaysia has shown no intention to interfere with the management of the issues in the Southern Thailand other than the need to protect its own interests. The

geographical proximity between the two countries puts Malaysia within the parameters of what is essentially a Thai internal problem. Nevertheless, Malaysia has been forthcoming in its assistance to the extent of offering to send religious '*ulamas*' to South Thailand Muslims to explain that the 'real' struggle is spiritual and that Islam abhors violence and aggression.

The establishment of various bilateral initiatives focusing in the southern region of Thailand and northern Malaysia indicates that the situation in the Southern Thailand is of priority in Malaysia's strategic views. A vast majority of the actions and initiatives promulgated were precautionary measures indicating that safeguarding Malaysia's national security and preventing the conflict from spreading into the Malaysian territory is the ultimate goal.

The conflict in Southern Thailand began in January 2004 when Muslim separatists decided to take up arms against the Thai government. Everyday reports of people being killed were published although several methods and initiatives were implemented to prevent violence. Thaksin's hard line approach and use of force to combat the Muslims in the Southern Thailand worsened the situation. This was one reason that resulted in Thaksin's overthrow in a military coup in September 2006.

Even though the government was being ruled by the military under the leadership of General Surayud, it adopted a soft approach in dealing with the separatists. Surayud favoured a peaceful engagement and preferred to hold discussions, as well as offering his apologies openly for the wrongdoings of the previous government. This solution, however, did

not succeed in maintaining peace as it did not receive support from security personnel on the ground. The separatists took advantage of this predicament to intensify their attacks and increase their resistance. The detention of the separatists angered the Muslim population in the region and it worsened the already delicate situation, people were living in fear and were being denied basic amenities like education and economic development. Prime Minister Samak aimed to continue cooperating with Malaysia to stem the violence in the Southern Thailand and to involve Malaysia in the peace process, both of which were seen as positive signs. But Samak couldn't contribute much because his government was only lasted for 8 month. Abhisit was showing little sign of understanding the nature of the conflict, and little capacity to curb the excesses of the military. The biggest policy initiative announced on the south during Abhisit's first hundred days was the deployment of an additional 4,000 troops which created a negative image in the eyes of outsiders, who might regard the region as an "occupied territory". People of the south are hoping that Yingluck would be the one to deliver the title of "special economic zone" that would signify autonomy more than independence, the same status endowed to Bangkok.

The issues that have always remained problematic for both countries and continued to plague bilateral relations, namely dual citizenships, political refugees and border security. Malaysia's willingness to assist Thailand is often positively viewed as the concept of Prosper-Thy-Neighbour policy.

Both Malaysian and Thai leaders claimed that their bilateral relations at all time high because of the friendship and trust factors. However, the conflict in the Southern Thailand remained problematic. Tension between the two countries continued to build for many years. Thailand regards the conflict in the south as a purely internal matter. Malaysia fears that the instability there could spill across the border. Although the relationship between Thailand and Malaysia sometime seems to be problematic, however, both respective Armed Forces and Police have shown very professional and harmonic friendship.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **Conclusions**

The conflict in Southern Thailand can be traced back as early in 1904 immediately after Bangkok took control over the South Thailand via the Anglo-Siamese Treaty 1909. The populace, especially among some of the Malay-Muslims in this newly annexed region continued to rebel against Siamese rule in a series of uprisings between 1909 until 1932. Since then, the resentment against the government was growing on and off with series of violence. The year 2004 recorded the highest number of fatalities in the history of the conflict in the Southern Thailand. The tense situation reached its peak after the incident in Tak Bai, which reflected the distrust and suspicious between some Muslim populace and the ruling government. At present, the restive situations in the Southern Thailand provinces tend to decline, although the ongoing violent and unrest still continue with the cliché of cumulative driving factors such as ethnicity, religions, culture and historical backgrounds.

Since the resurgence of violence in January 2004, the Malaysian Government has been closely monitoring the developments in the Southern Thailand. Of particular concern is the possible spillover effect on Malaysia's security. Malaysia feels the heat of this conflict and obliged to assist the Thailand government in addressing the problem. The involvement of Malaysia with regards to the security related issues between two countries through bilateral platform seems to be working in



a harmonic atmosphere and appreciated by the majority of Thailand's leaders except during the era of Prime Minister Thaksin. The height of the worsening bilateral relations was when 131 Muslim citizens of Thailand sought refuge in Malaysia in November 2005, when Bangkok alleged that Malaysia was interfering in the internal affairs of Thailand. The Foreign Minister of Malaysia Syed Hamid Albar issued a statement that the refugees would only be released after Kuala Lumpur was satisfied that their safety was guaranteed. Prime Minister Thaksin aggravated the situation by refusing to have a discussion on Malaysia's request on border security issues.<sup>115</sup> Some of the findings on the analysis of bilateral relations between the two countries are as follows:

1. The relationship was very highly strained during the Thaksin era. Thaksin's indecisions and the use of force amongst others created distrust among Thai security forces and the Muslim populace of the Southern Thailand. Malaysia was seen to be the 'scape goat' whenever any untoward incident occurred in the Southern Thailand.
2. The era of General Surayud saw new hope that peace would finally be restored in the South of Thailand. He adopted a softer approach to the situation. He revealed his sincere intent to resolve the issue by apologizing to the victims of the longstanding conflict. Due to lack of support from some of military personnel, his efforts did not bring the desired results. Separatists groups took advantage of this show of disloyalty to

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<sup>115</sup> Anon. 2005. News Analysis: Thailand and Malaysia Bristling. *International Herald Tribune*, October 27.

mount further attacks and put up resistance to the new government. The Muslim populaces were further incensed when government officials apprehended the separatists. The violence receded for the period until which Surayud handed the governance to new premier Samak Sundaravej. Bilateral relations between Thailand and Malaysia, especially with regards to the situation in the Southern Thailand showed positive developments during the Surayud era.

3. Samak Sundaravej vowed to follow his predecessor's efforts and measures to resolve the situation. He saw the willingness of the new Thailand government to have open discussions with Malaysia regarding the issues of South Thailand and the Muslim populace as a stepping-stone to the peace process. However, his premiership was short-lived. Samak decided and portrayed in maintaining cordial bilateral relations with Malaysia with regards to the situation in the Southern Thailand. He also dispelled fears that he will revert to Thaksin era policies in the South

4. Like his predecessor, Abhisit spoke the language of tolerance, justice and fairness, though the core problem was actually power, participation and accountability. Notions of allowing more freedom for southern region are considered off the table, since the Thai Constitution states that the country is an "indivisible" unitary state. As for Yingluck, she was very much keen to start a peace process that would eventually result in substantial concessions for the southern region, including

special regional governance arrangements with elected representatives. Both Abhisit and Yingluck continued to maintain good bilateral relation with Malaysia.

Although conflict in the Southern Thailand had temporary disrupted the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Thailand during Thaksin era, but bilateral trade between grew from USD 12.5 billion in 2006 to USD 13.78 billion in 2007. Malaysian exports also rose from USD 6.79 billion in 2006 to USD 7.24 billion in 2007. Imports from Thailand also registered impressive growth with an increase from USD 5.72 billion in 2006 to USD 6.52 billion in 2007. Malaysia's investments in Thailand amounted to USD 32 million in 2007. Bilateral trade between Malaysia and Thailand has an upward trend. The 2011 trade value was at USD 17.44 billion.<sup>116</sup> In 2017, the trade value between Malaysia and Thailand increased to USD 26.5 billion.<sup>117</sup>

Malaysia's roles in the Southern Thailand basically follow the 'ASEAN Way' of doing things as well its experiences in handling the communist insurgency from 1948 to 1989. To date, Malaysia had established several bilateral agreements with Thailand in various fields. Both countries regarded this as the concept of Prosper –Thy- Neighbour policy. Malaysia is endeavouring benign posture in assisting to resolve the issues. Nevertheless, the study shows despite the crisis in the Southern Thailand, bilateral relations between remained cordial with both countries cooperating to overcome the crisis in a peaceful manner.

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<sup>116</sup> Anon. 2012. Latest News: Anifah will host his Thai counterpart. *New Straits Times*, 2 December 2012.

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.Aseanbriefing.com.now> (9 May 2018)

## **Recommendations**

There are several initiatives that have been taken into action in order to maintain peace and stability in Southern Thailand. The followings are the recommendations:

1. **Government of Thailand.**

The Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy 2017 – 2019 that has been promulgated by the Thailand National Security Council office need to be implemented and strictly adhered to by all government agencies and other relevant parties in promoting a way ahead. The brief outline of the said policy as below:

- 1.1 The Office of the National Security Council has worked out the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019, as a framework for all relevant agencies to use in tackling problems in the South on a continual basis and in a systematic manner. In working out this policy, public forums had been held to listen to the views of all sectors, such as members of government agencies, the private sector, and civil society, as well as religious leaders, media representatives, and academics. Their views and suggestions were gathered to work out this policy in response to the needs of local people and in line with

the local way of living, culture, and traditions and the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies. The Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019, still maintains the guidance accepted by all sectors. This guidance seeks to adopt His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's royal advice to "understand, reach out, and develop" as the central strategy to tackle unrest in the southern border provinces, together with the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy as a path to well-balanced and sustainable development. Emphasis is placed on unified operations by relevant agencies and efforts to enhance the efficiency of local officials. The process of peace dialogues will be included as part of the national agenda, with the participation of all sectors involved. The peace dialogues will play an important role in handling the southern situation.

1.2 According to the Office of the National Security Council, violent incidents in the South are on the decline. They have resulted from complicated issues, at individual, structural, and cultural levels. Such problems as drug abuse among local young people, poverty, and the feelings of social injustice have made the southern situation even more complex. The vision of the Southern Border

Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019 is that the southern border provinces will be a safe society, without any conditions that lead to violence. All local residents will be protected and developed on the basis of a multicultural society and participation in the sustainable peace-building process. The principles involve the tackling of southern problems through peaceful means, the participation of all sectors, local development on the basis of a multicultural society, and the upholding of human rights, rule of law, and respect for international rules and laws. The objectives are to create mutual trust, allow local people to play a greater role in local development and in solving southern problems, promote awareness of co-existence in a multicultural society, enhance the potential of local residents, build confidence in the peace dialogue process, and create better understanding about the real situation in the South.<sup>118</sup> Further details on the policies are as per Appendix A.

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<sup>118</sup> Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy 2017 - 2019

## 2. Government of Malaysia.

Malaysia should continue in the effort of assisting to resolve the conflict in Southern Thailand without appearing to be meddling in the internal problems of Thailand. The existing bilateral arrangement between two countries should be strengthened and perhaps it could be intensified in the certain areas. The possible options for way ahead that the Malaysia could play significant roles is by supporting the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019. Those options are:

2.1. Supporting Policy Objective 1 (Education) of the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019. This can be achieved by offering to conduct a special course for the village heads, religious cleric, prominent leaders and relevant NGOs with regards to Islam with the main aimed to eradicate and avoiding misinterpretation of the true concepts of Islamic teaching pertaining to security related issues especially the term “Jihad”. The course must be structured in such a way that it reaches to the maximum level of folks such as the information is promulgated during the weekly Muslim Friday Prayers. On the aspect of psychology, Malaysia can offer to conduct a Terrorist De-radicalisation

Program with the aim to eradicate the negative idea that could be led to the act of violence.

2.2. Supporting Policy Objective 4 (Economy) of the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019. Malaysia also can play a role in the field of development and economy by crystalizing the existing avenues such as IMT – GT. As Thailand is currently world's third largest producer of palm oil and most of it grown in the Southern Thailand, thus, the Palm Oil industries is seen to be a potential investment of Malaysia Owned Company such as FELDA. As most of the Palm Oil industry in Thailand is dominated by smallholders, therefore, it is worst to explore the business at government level. If this is achieved, it eventually will increase job opportunity for the local populace as well as GDP in those areas. Hence, the economic growth in Southern Thailand can be improved for the better quality of life for the populace of Southern Thailand.

In a nutshell, all the actions that are recommended above will eventually fulfill the most important elements of security aspect in modern term i.e politic, social and economy. It is strongly recommended that further deep study to be carried out on the above recommendations for its suitability, feasibility and acceptability.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Southern Border Provinces Administration And Development Policy 2017 - 2019**

#### **Policy Framework**

In order to set a clear direction for the next phase of the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy following the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy 2012-2014, which may be used by the responsible agencies as framework for setting out strategies and action plan, based on the strategic principles graciously recommended by His majesty the King through “**understand, reach out, develop**” and the “**Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy,**” the Policy framework is set out as follows:

1. To adhere to the peaceful problem-solving approach by transforming violent conflicts to peaceful solutions;
2. To implement a genuine participatory procedure from all sectors;
3. To administer on the basis of a multicultural society for the problem-solving and local development;
4. To adhere to the principles of human rights, legal state, rule of law as well as recognize and respect international covenants.

## **Vision**

“Society in the southern border provinces is safe and free from any conditions contributing to violence; everybody’s way of life is protected and improved on the basis of a multicultural society, with participation in a sustainable peace-building process.”

## **Objectives**

In order to ensure that the problem-solving is consistent with and corresponds to the nature of the problems, the Policy framework and vision, the objectives of the Policy have been concluded in 6 clauses as follows:

1. To ensure that the southern border provinces are safe, peaceful, trustworthy and free from any conditions that contribute to the use of violence from all parties concerned.
2. To develop participation of all parties concerned in the local areas in order to encourage people to participate in the development and problem-solving in the southern border provinces.
3. To ensure that Thai society and local communities recognize and appreciate the value of co-existence under a multicultural society, and share joint responsibility for the problem-solving in the southern border provinces.

4. To enhance the potential of people, society and economy in line with the cultural diversity and local wisdom and uphold equality and social justice all over to be habitable and attract tourists and investments.

5. To build confidence in and secure the continuity of the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces, which shall be defined as part of the national agenda, and make preparations for participation of all parties concerned under the circumstances that promote solutions to the conflicts.

6. To create better understanding of the real situations to society, both in the country and abroad, in order to gain support and contributions to the problem-solving in the southern border provinces.

## **Policy**

**Objective 1 To ensure that the southern border provinces are safe, peaceful, trustworthy and free from any conditions that contribute to the use of violence from all parties concerned by means of:**

**1. Enhancing the potential, competency and efficiency of life and property security;** preventing and resolving collateral threats, e.g., narcotics, illegal businesses, local

influential groups, as well as ensuring secure locations and minimizing influential zones of violent forces through participation of all sectors to strengthen the communities and villages; and providing public safety and threat watch for vulnerable targets and risky communities.

**2. Improving the efficiency of people's intelligence services by focusing on gathering information and identifying pending issues which may give rise to negative factors to the areas;** relying on intelligence from mass media sources, preventive intelligence; upgrading the efficient dissemination of intelligence to the relevant authorities and people at all levels rapidly and timely.

**3. Promoting trustworthiness and collaboration between the State and people,** by focusing on recruitment and development of State officials from all agencies with awareness attitude, personality and behaviour towards peace and respect for human rights, to be assigned to perform the duties in the southern border provinces; introducing a mechanism for collaboration between the public sector and the people to monitor and examine the State officials operations in strict compliance with the legal framework as well as providing knowledge, understanding, development of confrontation skills to handle conflicts and cultural skills to the State officials on a regular basis.

**4. Effectively build people's confidence in the justice system in all dimensions** through the judicial administration and law enforcement with fairness and without discrimination in order that offenders will be brought to justice without any exception, so as to eradicate all forms of injustice; developing laws accommodating the local way of life and culture; promoting legal knowledge and understanding to the local people; encouraging people's participation in the justice system; developing the local judicial affairs and alternative justice system; accelerating fact-finding process in controversial cases or incidents for final conclusion that meets international standards; as well as ensuring that State officials realize their commitment to strictly comply with the laws, regulations, traditions, conventions, and respect the principles of legal state, rule of law and human rights.

**5. Completely eradicating the conditions and causes of the local people's feeling of exclusion or inequality** in order to build a sense and atmosphere of happiness and dignity.

**6. Building confidence in the public sector's remedy process to cover all groups and levels** by developing a system and improve the remedy process to ensure transparency and fairness without discrimination and delay, and subject to an audit, monitoring and evaluation system to enhance the efficiency of the remedies and prevent any exploitation and abuse of such remedies by all parties; as well as promoting

women's group and civil society to play a part in the remedy process for those suffering from losses and affected.

**Objective 2 To develop participation of all parties concerned in the local areas in order to encourage people to participate in the development and problem-solving in the southern border provinces, by means of:**

**1. Supporting the public sector's central and provincial agencies, local administration organizations, civil society, people and all groups of stakeholders to be more involved in the development and problem-solving, by arranging an efficient mechanism of State's administration, and allowing all parties concerned to participate in every step of the problem-solving and local development and in the formulation of strategies, action plans and programs/projects under the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy.**

**2. Effectively providing secure locations at all levels for people and all groups of stakeholders, both in and outside the areas, to share opinions freely on the basis of trust, by encouraging all sectors' participation to a degree that would truly trigger changes at the policy and operation levels.**

**3. Promoting, supporting and strengthening the roles of women, children and youth at all levels in the decision-**

**making for the problem-solving and local development in all dimensions and on a continual basis,** by developing the use of peaceful approach and creating peace-building movements in families, communities and society on the basis of rights and liberties between women and men, in pursuance of the provisions of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, taking into account the suitability for the local context.

**Objective 3 To ensure that Thai society and local communities recognize and appreciate the value of co-existence under a multicultural society, and share joint responsibility for the problem-solving in the southern border provinces, by means of:**

**1. Promoting the value and recognition of co-existence on the basis of a multicultural society with honour, dignity and equality,** by respecting the values of all religions and ethnicities, focusing on local languages, culture and education, as well as instilling morality and ethnics into the youth in accordance with the guiding principles of the religion.

**2. Promoting the sharing and learning process among State officials from all agencies** in order to realize and gain insight, adopt and appreciate the value of cultural identity and local way of life, including adhering to the good governance in their operations, and recruiting knowledgeable and capable civil servants who can comprehend the issues of religions, languages and culture, as well as volunteering to perform the

operations in the localities, and providing ongoing training for better understanding.

**3. Promoting the way of life and practices in accordance with the principles of all religions without challenges,** by adjusting attitude, legal principles and relevant rules and regulations to facilitate the freedom of living based on the religious principles; eliminating any cultural discrimination, and requiring all parties to study, understand and recognize the way of life and culture to enable the people to feel a sense of belonging in Thai society.

**4. Developing the understanding and trust among people, both in the local areas and in Thai society to co-exist peacefully, and joining forces to tackle the problems,** by opening communication channels to ensure common understanding of the real situations in the areas, and sharing and learning to co-exist peacefully on the basis of diversity, especially among children and youth of different religions.

**Objective 4 To enhance the potential of people, society and economy in line with the cultural diversity and local wisdom and uphold equality and social justice all over to be habitable and attract tourists and investments,** by means of:

**1. Developing the potential of people in society,** by accelerating the management and development of educational



quality at all levels to genuinely accommodate the local needs, way of life and culture; opening the opportunity for religious leaders, qualified individuals and all sectors in the localities to share ideas for educational management; promoting the development of knowledge, occupational skills and providing more educational opportunities especially both local and overseas scholarships, in response to local people's way of life and needs along with valid accreditation of academic status for those personnel who have completed overseas study, as well as development of labour force to accommodate the local economic conditions in order to establish potential linkages with the development of the neighbouring countries in ASEAN.

**2. Accelerating the improvement of the quality of life and well-being of the people, particularly under privileged people in the southern border provinces in all dimensions,** by extensively and fairly reaching out to the local people and areas with an emphasis on public participation in response to the problems and needs of the people and the specific geo-social nature of each locality; as well as promoting sport activities and creating good relationships and understanding.

**3. Creating the opportunity for economic development,** by developing basic infrastructures for border trading and human resources to accommodate the local economic development; promoting major agricultural sources from local communities, e.g., Para-rubber, fishery, etc., to

ensure their commercial sufficiency; supporting the halal industry which may create jobs and generate revenues for people, sufficiency economy projects in the communities, distribution of industries, services, tourism, and solutions to unemployment problems, including providing incentives to attract investment, and promote the role of private businesses to accommodate the enlargement of ASEAN.

**4. Developing and promoting the management of local natural resources to ensure the optimal benefits towards the improvement of the quality of life and poverty eradication,** by supporting and increasing the involvement of people, civil society, communities and local organizations to protect, regulate, allocate and rehabilitate resources, particularly, coastal fishing areas, mangrove forests, basins and forest areas; as well as preventing the interest groups from unfairly exploiting the local resources.

**5. Promoting the learning of Thai, Malay, Malay dialect, Arabic and other major foreign languages** at all levels to serve as tools for learning, communication and opportunities for all areas of development, as well as to ensure the readiness for communications and connection in ASEAN and the Arab world.

**Objective 5 To build confidence in and secure the continuity of the peace dialogue process for the southern border**

**provinces, which shall be defined as part of the national agenda, and make preparations for participation of all parties concerned under the circumstances that promote solutions to the conflict, by means of:**

**1. Promoting the peace dialogue process among the stakeholders concerned with the problems in the southern border provinces in term of principles, goals and appropriate model of decentralization on the basis of a plural society of the southern border provinces subject to the intention of the Constitutions of the Kingdom of Thailand, and in line with international rules, without any conditions leading to separatism, by opening forums and creating an environment of trust to secure safety and freedom of expression of opinions and dialogues from all groups to reflect concerns of the people from all ethnic and religious groups.**

**2. Promoting the continuity of the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces with those individuals whose views and ideologies differ from those of the State and unifying them, and securing safety for participation in sharing ideas by all groups of stakeholders in the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces, by efficiently proceeding in accordance with the action plans for peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces.**

**3. Promoting the preparations and understanding of all sectors in the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces,** especially the public sector's agencies, mass media and people in the local and outside areas to have knowledge and understanding towards the development of the real situations of the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces, including their continual participation in and contributions to the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces.

**Objective 6 To create better understanding of the real situations of the real situations to the society, both in the country and abroad, in order to gain support and contributions to the problem-solving in the southern border provinces, by means of:**

**1. Developing mechanisms, communication patterns and integration between public and private sectors,** by way of public relations, intelligence operations, strategic communications, optional media and press relations through public and private sector media, social media, educational institution, religious institution as well as public forums to disseminate information regarding management of the problems in the southern border provinces, including sharing facts to society, both in the local and outside areas, to understand and constructively participate in the problem-solving.

**2. Promoting good understanding and collaboration with the neighbouring countries, international organizations and private development organizations regarding factual situations in the southern border provinces,** by applying the results of the operations of the State Policy, facts relating to rights, liberties, equality and justice of people of all ethnic groups so as to strengthen the relationships to support and contribute to the problem-solving in the southern border provinces.

## **Management**

In order to ensure that the implementation of the Policy into practice shall achieve the results according to the Policy objectives with efficiency, effectiveness and concrete outcome, this Policy places the first priority to administration affairs, as follows:

**1. The Policy shall be put into practice by formulating strategies and action plans in line with and in support of the Policy implementation in the same direction,** by introducing a mechanism for carrying out the operations with uniformity and integrated collaborations at the policy, practical and operational levels. The power, authorities and responsibilities must be clearly defined, with systematic management, program/project integration and budgets to support the implementation of the Policy with uniformity and efficiency through public participation. In addition, the

implementation of the Policy, strategies and action plans at all levels must be regularly monitored and evaluated with concrete outcome and the success indicators must be clearly identified.

2. **State agencies and civil servants directly involved with the problem-solving in the southern border provinces shall be engaged to share the common understanding of the framework and direction of the problem-solving under the Policy,** and have as sense of accountability for their integrated collaborations as well as realize the commitment to perform the operations to the best of their ability to ensure the unified and collaborative problem-solving.

3. **A network of supports for the Policy implementation shall be built and developed to cover all areas and sectors concerned.** The public sector, civil society, people, private sector and social network, both in and outside the areas, and the world society, particularly the neighbouring countries, ASEAN and the Muslim world, shall be involved to establish a network to put the Policy into practice, create channels for complaints, audit, monitoring and evaluation of the public sector's operations, and to contribute budget to facilitate various sectors' participation in the problem-solving in collaboration with the public sector. Appropriate information technology shall be introduced to support the operations of various agencies and the communications with local people.

## Success Factors

1. **Emphasis is placed on the problem-solving in the southern border provinces, including the peace dialogue process for the southern border provinces, as part of the national agenda, and the government provides clear and ongoing support in terms of mechanism for administration of programs/projects and budgets** to ensure that all relevant sectors are confident and unified in respect of their ideas, direction, guidelines and management for the concerted efforts towards the problem-solving under the Policy.
2. **All sectors which are the direct stakeholders of the problems in the southern border provinces adopt and participate in the problem-solving under the Policy,** which will serve to secure the efficient problem-solving through network contributors at the policy, strategic and operational levels on a widespread basis in response to the issues, problems and needs of the target groups.
3. **Academic research and studies are applied to support the problem-solving operations and local development in the southern border provinces under the Policy,** which will support the drafting, development, evaluation and conversion of the Policy into practice at the strategic and operational levels with concrete results.

## Biography



<b>Full Name:</b>	Rear Admiral Syed Zahrul Putra Royal Malaysian Navy
<b>Date of Birth:</b>	24 May 1965
<b>Education Background:</b>	Master in Social Science – Defence Studies (National University of Malaysia) - 2009
<b>Military Course:</b>	International Navigation – HMAS Watson, Sydney, Australia – 1990 Long Communication – PNS Bahadur, Karachi, Pakistan – 1992 Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College – 2003 Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College - 2009
<b>Military Experience:</b>	Commanding Officer of KD SERAMPANG Commanding Officer of KD PAHANG Commanding Officer of KD KASTURI Commander of Malaysian Armed Forces Joint Task Force 2
<b>Current Position:</b>	Assistant Chief of Staff Human Resource Naval HQ



## SUMMARY

### Field Strategy

**Title:** Civil Unrest in Southern Thailand: Roles and Challenges of Malaysia

**Name:** Radm Syed Zahrul Putra RMN      Course:NDC Class 60

**Position:** Commander MAF Joint Task Force 2

### Background and importance of the problem

Malaysia and Thailand relations are multifaceted; covering bilateral, political, economic and security issues. A geographical land border predisposes both countries to work together in ensuring that the border areas remain safe and secure for the people on both sides. It goes without saying that what happens on one side, particularly with regard to the security related issues, it will affect the other. The reality that the Southern Thailand is restive and prone to conflict impacts upon the security of Malaysia. This is particularly due to the geographical, ethnic, linguistic and religious proximities and affinities that people in the border areas on both sides share. From the Malaysian perspective, there is a need to study the restive and violent prone situation in the Southern Thailand. There is a further need to study how that will affect Malaysia, its security relations with Thailand, and assess the roles and challenges of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability within the surrounding regions.

The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of the effect of the restive Southern Thailand on Malaysia-Thailand security related

issues. The nature of the conflict and the players in the Southern Thailand makes it essential for Malaysia to tread carefully. Malaysia needs to posture in assisting to resolve the issues without appearing to be meddling in the internal problems of Thailand. The primary responsibility lies with Thailand. Consequently, it is imperative that Malaysia strives to maintain a high level of bilateral and security ties. Territorial integrity is the crux of the matter for Thailand, and Malaysia needs to recognize Thailand's desire to defend its national sovereignty at all costs. Malaysia has, for more than 40 years, relied on the GBC to take care of the problem and provide border. The main challenges are that the nature of the threats arising out within the affected surrounding regions might be turning into asymmetrical, violent and terrorism related. Innovative approaches are thus required to strengthen and perhaps to supplement existing bilateral arrangements. It is hoped that this study would provide an understanding of the problem as well as state behavior with regards to Malaysian and Thailand security relations and finally the way ahead to resolve the issues.

### **Objectives of the research**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To analyse the root causes of the restive situation in Southern Thailand.

2. To analyse the roles and challenges of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability in Southern Thailand and within the surrounding regions.
3. To discuss and promoting the way ahead as well as to intensify the roles of Malaysia in restoring peace and stability within the affected surrounding regions with regards to security and development related issues.

## **Scope of Research**

This study is organized into five chapters that are as follows:

1. The first chapter provides the introduction of the study, which covers the background of conflict in the Southern Thailand, the problem statement and the significance of the study, research objectives, and scope of the research, conceptual/theoretical framework, hypothesis, limitations and research methods.
2. The second chapter highlights survey books, scholar's articles and other sources related to the restive situation in the Southern Thailand.
3. The third chapter explores the historical background and the analysis of the root causes that leads to a restive situation in the Southern Thailand. This chapter also highlights some of the major outbreaks of violence in 2004 such as the Ban Cho Ai Rong

tragedy, the Krue Se Mosque incident and Tak Bai tragedy.

4. The fourth chapter focuses on the Malaysia's Strategic Interests within the affected surrounding regions. This chapter also analyses the roles of Malaysia in assisting to restore peace and stability with regards to security related issues. It also covers the issues, threats and challenges to the security relations between Malaysia and Thailand. This chapter also concludes Thailand's behaviour with regard to security relations with Malaysia.

5. The final chapter summaries some conclusions relating to the effect of the restive situation in Southern Thailand and promoting the way ahead in restoring peace and stability within the affected surrounding regions with regards to security and development related issues.

## **Methodology**

The research methodology is qualitative and the analysis is descriptive. Data are collected from primary and secondary sources. It is not based on direct field research, but relies on various sources available that are related to this study.

Primary data is obtained through the source from Malaysian Armed Forces Army Intelligence Department of Malaysian Armed Forces Headquarters as well as those who are appointed at the GBC. The primary

data also derived from the input of the staff of Thailand's National Security Council as well as from few prominent scholars from Thailand's University in order to augment the content of this thesis.

Secondary data is generally derived from books, academic journals, news, interviews in newspapers, published articles from credible authors and internet sources. The library facilities in "*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*", "*Universiti Malaya*", Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relation (IDFR), Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) and Ministry of Defence provided a vast majority of the above-mentioned secondary sources.

## **Results**

The conflict in Southern Thailand can be traced back as early in 1904 immediately after Bangkok took control over the South Thailand via the Anglo-Siamese Treaty 1909. The populace, especially among some of the Malay-Muslims in this newly annexed region continued to rebel against Siamese rule in a series of uprisings between 1909 until 1932. Since then, the resentment against the government was growing on and off with series of violence. The year 2004 recorded the highest number of fatalities in the history of the conflict in the Southern Thailand. The tense situation reached its peak after the incident in Tak Bai, which reflected the distrust and suspicious between some Muslim populace and the ruling government. At present, the restive situations in the Southern Thailand provinces tend to

decline, although the ongoing violent and unrest still continue with the cliché of cumulative driving factors such as ethnicity, religions, culture and historical backgrounds.

Since the resurgence of violence in January 2004, the Malaysian Government has been closely monitoring the developments in the Southern Thailand. Of particular concern is the possible spillover effect on Malaysia's security. Malaysia feels the heat of this conflict and obliged to assist the Thailand government in addressing the problem. The involvement of Malaysia with regards to the security related issues between two countries through bilateral platform seems to be working in a harmonic atmosphere and appreciated by the majority of Thailand's leaders except during the era of Prime Minister Thaksin. The height of the worsening bilateral relations was when 131 Muslim citizens of Thailand sought refuge in Malaysia in November 2005, when Bangkok alleged that Malaysia was interfering in the internal affairs of Thailand. The Foreign Minister of Malaysia Syed Hamid Albar issued a statement that the refugees would only be released after Kuala Lumpur was satisfied that their safety was guaranteed. Prime Minister Thaksin aggravated the situation by refusing to have a discussion on Malaysia's request on border security issues.<sup>1</sup> Some of the findings on the analysis of bilateral relations between the two countries are as follows:

1. The relationship was very highly strained during the Thaksin era. Thaksin's indecisions and the use of force amongst

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<sup>1</sup> Anon. 2005. News Analysis: Thailand and Malaysia Bristling. *International Herald Tribune*, October 27.

others created distrust among Thai security forces and the Muslim populace of the Southern Thailand. Malaysia was seen to be the 'scape goat' whenever any untoward incident occurred in the Southern Thailand.

2. The era of General Surayud saw new hope that peace would finally be restored in the South of Thailand. He adopted a softer approach to the situation. He revealed his sincere intent to resolve the issue by apologizing to the victims of the longstanding conflict. Due to lack of support from some of military personnel, his efforts did not bring the desired results. Separatists groups took advantage of this show of disloyalty to mount further attacks and put up resistance to the new government. The Muslim populace were further incensed when government officials apprehended the separatists. The violence receded for the period until which Surayud handed the governance to new premier Samak Sundaravej. Bilateral relations between Thailand and Malaysia, especially with regards to the situation in the Southern Thailand showed positive developments during the Surayud era.

3. Samak Sundaravej vowed to follow his predecessor's efforts and measures to resolve the situation. He saw the willingness of the new Thailand government to have open discussions with Malaysia regarding the issues of South Thailand and the Muslim populace as a stepping-stone to the peace process. However, his premiership was short-lived. Samak decided and

portrayed in maintaining cordial bilateral relations with Malaysia with regards to the situation in the Southern Thailand. He also dispelled fears that he will revert to Thaksin era policies in the South

4. Like his predecessor, Abhisit spoke the language of tolerance, justice and fairness, though the core problem was actually power, participation and accountability. Notions of allowing more freedom for southern region are considered off the table, since the Thai Constitution states that the country is an "indivisible" unitary state. As for Yingluck, she was very much keen to start a peace process that would eventually result in substantial concessions for the southern region, including special regional governance arrangements with elected representatives. Both Abhisit and Yingluck continued to maintain good bilateral relation with Malaysia.

Although conflict in the Southern Thailand had temporary disrupted the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Thailand during Thaksin era, but bilateral trade between grew from USD 12.5 billion in 2006 to USD 13.78 billion in 2007. Malaysian exports also rose from USD 6.79 billion in 2006 to USD 7.24 billion in 2007. Imports from Thailand also registered impressive growth with an increase from USD 5.72 billion in 2006 to USD 6.52 billion in 2007. Malaysia's investments in Thailand amounted to USD 32 million in 2007. Bilateral trade between Malaysia and Thailand has an upward trend. The 2011 trade value was at USD 17.44



billion.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, the trade value between Malaysia and Thailand increased to USD 26.5 billion.<sup>3</sup>

Malaysia's roles in the Southern Thailand basically follow the 'ASEAN Way' of doing things as well its experiences in handling the communist insurgency from 1948 to 1989. To date, Malaysia had established several bilateral agreements with Thailand in various fields. Both countries regarded this as the concept of Prosper –Thy- Neighbour policy. Malaysia is endeavouring benign posture in assisting to resolve the issues. Nevertheless, the study shows despite the crisis in the Southern Thailand, bilateral relations between remained cordial with both countries cooperating to overcome the crisis in a peaceful manner.

## **Recommendations**

There are several initiatives that have been taken into action in order to maintain peace and stability in Southern Thailand. The followings are the recommendations:

1. Government of Thailand

The Southern Border Provinces Admiration and Development Policy 2017 – 2019 that has been promulgated by the Thailand National Security Council office need to be implemented

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<sup>2</sup> Anon. 2012. Latest News: Anifah will host his Thai counterpart. *New Straits Times*, 2 December 2012.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.Aseanbriefing.com.now> (9 May 2018)

and strictly adhered to by all government agencies and other relevant parties in promoting a way ahead. The brief outline of the said policy as below:

1.1 The Office of the National Security Council has worked out the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019, as a framework for all relevant agencies to use in tackling problems in the South on a continual basis and in a systematic manner. In working out this policy, public forums had been held to listen to the views of all sectors, such as members of government agencies, the private sector, and civil society, as well as religious leaders, media representatives, and academics. Their views and suggestions were gathered to work out this policy in response to the needs of local people and in line with the local way of living, culture, and traditions and the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies. The Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019, still maintains the guidance accepted by all sectors. This guidance seeks to adopt His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's royal advice to "understand, reach out, and develop" as the central strategy to tackle unrest in the southern border provinces, together with

the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy as a path to well-balanced and sustainable development. Emphasis is placed on unified operations by relevant agencies and efforts to enhance the efficiency of local officials. The process of peace dialogues will be included as part of the national agenda, with the participation of all sectors involved. The peace dialogues will play an important role in handling the southern situation.

1.2 According to the Office of the National Security Council, violent incidents in the South are on the decline. They have resulted from complicated issues, at individual, structural, and cultural levels. Such problems as drug abuse among local young people, poverty, and the feelings of social injustice have made the southern situation even more complex. The vision of the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019 is that the southern border provinces will be a safe society, without any conditions that lead to violence. All local residents will be protected and developed on the basis of a multicultural society and participation in the sustainable peace-building process. The principles involve the tackling of southern problems through peaceful means, the participation of all sectors, local

development on the basis of a multicultural society, and the upholding of human rights, rule of law, and respect for international rules and laws. The objectives are to create mutual trust, allow local people to play a greater role in local development and in solving southern problems, promote awareness of co-existence in a multicultural society, enhance the potential of local residents, build confidence in the peace dialogue process, and create better understanding about the real situation in the South.<sup>4</sup> Further details on the policies are as per Appendix A.

## 2. Government of Malaysia

Malaysia should continue in the effort of assisting to resolve the conflict in Southern Thailand without appearing to be meddling in the internal problems of Thailand. The existing bilateral arrangement between two countries should be strengthened and perhaps it could be intensified in the certain areas. The possible options for way ahead that the Malaysia could play significant roles is by supporting the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019. Those options are:

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<sup>4</sup> Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy 2017 - 2019

2.1. Supporting Policy Objective 1 (Education) of the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019. This can be achieved by offering to conduct a special course for the village heads, religious cleric, prominent leaders and relevant NGOs with regards to Islam with the main aimed to eradicate and avoiding misinterpretation of the true concepts of Islamic teaching pertaining to security related issues especially the term “Jihad”. The course must be structured in such a way that it reaches to the maximum level of folks such as the information is promulgated during the weekly Muslim Friday Prayers. On the aspect of psychology, Malaysia can offer to conduct a Terrorist De-radicalisation Program with the aim to eradicate the negative idea that could be led to the act of violence.

2.2. Supporting Policy Objective 4 (Economy) of the Southern Border Provinces Administration and Development Policy, 2017-2019. Malaysia also can play a role in the field of development and economy by crystalizing the existing avenues such as IMT – GT. As Thailand is currently world’s third largest producer of palm oil and most of it grown in the Southern Thailand, thus, the Palm Oil industries is seen to be a potential

investment of Malaysia Owned Company such as FELDA. As most of the Palm Oil industry in Thailand is dominated by smallholders, therefore, it is worst to explore the business at government level. If this is achieved, it eventually will increase job opportunity for the local populace as well as GDP in those areas. Hence, the economic growth in Southern Thailand can be improved for the better quality of life for the populace of Southern Thailand.

In a nutshell, all the actions that are recommended above will eventually fulfill the most important elements of security aspect in modern term ie politic, social and economy. It is strongly recommended that further deep study to be carried out on the above recommendations for its suitability, feasibility and acceptability.