



Relations Progressed Slowly during the First Half of 2006

The international press - *The Guardian* of the United Kingdom and *The Standard* of Hong Kong has referred to Thailand as "the Kingdom of Fear" because unpredictable violent eruptions were causing grave security concerns for residents. During the first half of 2006, the Emergency Law, initially enforced on July 16, 2005, was extended in the Southern provinces. The government actions exacerbated the already oppressive environment causing violence to escalate.

In response to public opinion and the People's Alliance for Democracy, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra changed military officers in charge of the Southern situation, from the Minister of Interior to Minister of Defense and to the Army Chief Commander. The daily killings continued, as well as the well-orchestrated simultaneous bomb attacks on twenty-two commercial banks in Yala's five districts on August 31, 2005. The bombings caused many deaths and injuries. In response to the bombings, the Bank of Thailand issued an immediate close order as a protective measure for bank staff and customers.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra shrugged off responsibility by saying that the responsibility had been transferred to the Army chief Commander. In response to the PM's statement, Army Chief Commander General Sonthi Boonyaratglin said that he wished the three provinces were truly free from politics and that soldiers could do their jobs.

The Fire in the South Continues after the Coup

The coup d'état on September 19, 2006 not only brought about political change, but also significantly affected the situation in Thailand's three southern border provinces. The government appeared to take a softer stance, beginning with the public apology made by the Prime Minister General Surayuth Chulanont, as well as structural changes in state security organizations and the reestablishment of the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre. However, the situation remained volatile.

To make matters worse, seven bomb blasts killed 4 people, including foreigners, and injured 59 people in Hat Yai's city center, on September 16, 2006. The district is the economic heart of Songkhla Province, as well as of the lower southern region, consequently the bombings directly impacted the entire area's economy and generally created a great loss.

The economy is driven by the tourist industry. Businessmen claimed that economy was dying, as it had just recovered from the bomb blast in the Hat Yai Airport in the previous year. Bombings in the heart of the city created countrywide ripple effects, particularly for the government who was blamed for its inadequacies. This spate of bombings was the last violent act during the Thaksin government.

The Malaysian Star newspaper published an article saying that tourists from Malaysia were afraid to cross the border to visit brothels in Thailand and that sex work business owners were importing Thai women to provide sex services in Tumpat, Kelantan, the state across the country border that is closest to Sungai Kolok of Narathiwat. Dr. Srisompop Jitpiromsri, of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Prince of Songkhla University of Pattani campus, has been collecting information on violence in the three southern provinces. He has claimed that the violence worsened during the first eight months of 2006.

Violence at "Kuching Luepah" and Disorganized Education in the Three Southern Provinces

Thai people had been continually threatened by the violence in the three southern provinces. The violent situation that took place on the afternoon of May 19, 2006, in particular, targeting teachers, justifies their fear. The incident began when a hundred soldiers, police officers and officials examined 10 places in the Moo 4, Chaloeam Sub-district, Rangae of Narathiwat, and subsequently arrested two suspects for unrest. A group of more than 300 people responded to the arrest by holding two teachers at Kuching Luepah School, Juling Pongkanmoon and Sineenart Thavornsuk, in exchange for the release of the two suspects arrested earlier in the morning.

Both teachers were brutally beaten by a group of men. The injuries of one, Juling, were so severe that she suffered from irreversible brain damage. According to the doctor, only a miracle could save her life and she finally passed away in 2007 after being in a coma for eight months.

Teachers have been targeted as victims in the past; however, the violence at Kuching Luepah disrupted education in the three provinces even more. Deliberate attempts to burn schools took place regularly. The written notice saying "School Closed" was left at the site of killings, burnings and beheadings.

Understandably hundreds of teachers in the area expressed their desire to move out of concerns for their safety and their lives. Along with the teachers leaving, hundreds of schools in Narathiwat were also closed indefinitely. The opportunity for students in the conflicting area to receive an education was disappearing.

The Office of the Educational Inspector 12 in Yala reported that between 2004 and 2006, 71 educational officers were attacked and killed, 112 officers were injured and 110 schools were deliberately burned. In the meantime, Dr. Wachira Pengchan, Director of the Mental Health Department, said that the continued unrest was causing an increasing number of people to be afflicted with mental illness.

The impact was not only experienced by teachers, but also by doctors of whom nearly 42 percent were required to work in the three provinces. According to the GIS database, 502 doctors were needed to meet needs in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat during 2005. However, doctors were in short supply as the number of doctors working in hospitals was only 290 and 212 more were still needed. Narathiwat required most the doctor (111), followed by Pattani (58) and Yala (43). Needless to say the workload far exceeded the supply of doctors.

To support local area medical staff, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) developed security measures for staff and sent in volunteer medical teams from other areas. In addition, the MOPH relocated medical staff and increased their remuneration and benefits.

The assistance also included the budget allocations and the provision of health services at all levels to support staff in conflict areas.

Fire in the South after the Coup d'état

The first formal statement by the new Prime Minister after the coup, General Surayuth Chulanont, was that his priorities included two things: addressing political conflicts and resolving the violent situation in the south. The latter, in particular, gained positive responses from Islamic leaders.

All eyes have remained focused on the coup d'état of September 19, 2006, with an expectation that it would positively influence events in the South. The government set a progressive pace soon by announcing the appointment of a new Fourth Army Region Commander Lt.-General Viroj Buacharoon. The Lt.-General soon announced that there would be peace negotiations. General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, Army Chief General and Chairman of the National Security Council stated he had assigned officials to negotiate with the insurgency group in the South.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, former Malaysian Prime Minister offered to mediate peace negotiations between high ranking Thai officials and the separatist leaders. He also added that the insurgents did not expect either independence or autonomy nor to establish Malay as an official language. A series of meetings was scheduled on the island of Langkawi and in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur.

The "negotiations" seemed to open a new channel for restoring peace in the south. Gen. Surayuth Chulanont believed in pursuing peace and that constructive meetings would lessen the tension. However, the talks would only take place on the condition that the South would not secede from Thailand.

Later in interview with Al Jazeera television, the General mentioned that various factors contributed to the situation in the South, and it was most important to recognize how people in the South were victims of social injustices. He also visited leaders in the neighboring countries of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines who have all experienced internal conflict and benefited from peace talks with insurgency groups.

Negative Reactions to the Apology

"I apologize to you on behalf of the previous government and on behalf of this government. I have come here to apologize. I would like to reach out my hand to you and to tell you that I was wrong. I sincerely apologize." This quote from the formal apology, made on November 2, 2006, at the C.S. Pattani Hotel in Pattani, was part of the speech given to 1,000 people, including religious leaders, local leaders, who lost their loved ones and suffered greatly from the Tak Bai incident. His remarks were greeted by a long round of loud applause and tears.

That was the first and only formal "apology" from a government leader after three years of ongoing conflict in the three southern border provinces. Thai people across the country felt a sense of relief and believed that the apology would ease the situation. However, three days later the unrest burst again.

The question has been raised as to whether the "apology" from the Prime Minister produced any positive effects. The violence continued and Muslim women and children began demonstrating and demanding that their loved ones be released from jail or detention. In response to the demonstration, a group of Thai-Buddhist people gathered and demanded that the government address the problem through the rule of law by just means.

Religious issues are imbedded in the conflict and were involved in Yala's Bannang Sata and Than To Districts on November 8, 2006, when 206 people from 55 Buddhist families fled their homes for Wat Nirosangkham in Sataeng of Muang District. The flight was prompted after an attack on the field army at Ban Thanthip School in Yala's Bannang Sata District that resulted in two deaths. The attack was in revenge for the deaths and burning villager's houses.

Due to escalating fears among Thai Buddhists, psychiatrist teams were assigned by the government to provide counseling services. A psychiatrist from the Yala Center Hospital and the Mental Health Center 15 reported that most of villagers were frightened, and people, whose life and properties were attacked, were in critical condition.

Brad Adams, Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, has demanded that the Southern insurgency groups stop attacking and targeting civilians for their political purposes. As he said, their actions were unlawful and had no moral basis.

Government leaders and the National Security Council agree that the attacks had been carefully planned. The aim is to disrupt the peace process, which, if successful, would generate support for the government. By increasing the scale of the violence, the rebels hope to create fear and panic. Overcoming this strategy requires a great deal of time and forbearance.

Dr. Prawes Wasi has argued that the government's "political approach" is correct. The insurgents are worried that they would lose a political contest, which is why they have launched more attacks. They hope to provoke hatred, forcing the government to abandon the political approach and return to violence. The insurgents believe that they can win a violent struggle.

Restructuring: Using Reconciliation and Non-Violent Approaches

Despite the fact that violence in the South continues, the government's non-violent policies introduced some significant changes. For example, the security-related cases of Tak Bai were dismissed and organization black lists were annulled. An initiative to trace the missing lawyer Somchai Neelaphaichit began. Most importantly, key mechanisms responsible for security in the south through two administrative orders issued by the Office of the Prime Minister were reestablished.

The first order concerned peace-building policies in the southern border provinces. The order covers factors related to reconciliation, justice and peace-building in the area.

The second order established a new administrative organizational structure in the southern border provinces with three levels: 1) *Policy level*: The National Security Council was given the responsibility for policies and strategies to solve the conflict. 2) *Policy support level* was placed under the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) chaired by the Army chief Commander. 3) *Operational level* was placed under the Fourth Internal Security Operations Command chaired by the Fourth Army Region Commander to oversee the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) and the Civil-Military-Police Unite (CMP).



In addition, the administrative order would also extend the border provinces covering five provinces including Satun, and other four districts of Songkhla: Jana, Tepa, Sabayoy and Natawee. In an effort to revive the Southern economy, the government proposed a special economic zone covering the Fourth region including, tax breaks, interest reduction and support for migrant workers. The order would be effective from January 1, 2007, until December 2009.

The Government's Structural Problems Remain

A survey revealed that the New Year's gift Thai people wanted most was for the situation in the South to be resolved peacefully. The longer the violent conflict continues, the greater the number of deaths and damages incurred. The number of deaths and injuries in 2006 were twice as many as 2005. (Refer to Table 1 and Picture on page 65)

Data collected by the Academic Coordinating Center for People Affected from the Unrest in Three Southern Provinces concluded that during the five-year period 2002-2006, there were 4,063 deaths in total. In another words, 3 people were injured or killed per day, particularly between 2004 and 2006, the number of injuries or deaths was as high as 5 per day. More Muslims were killed than persons who were Buddhist.

The Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre, would begin operating in January 1, 2007 with only 50 staff (of the total 199 requested).

Along with positive changes by the government, changes in the structure of the insurgency were also taking place. According to ISOC Region 4 Secretary-General Major General Chamlong Khunsong, the insurgent's strategy had changed significantly from the past when leaders would declare responsibility for attacks. However, now it is more difficult to identify leaders and forces that are widely dispersed throughout more than 200 villages. The information is similar to Dr. Surachart Bamrungsuk's that "armed teenagers were new fighters in the South. Those arrested and killed were mostly in their teens."

The Thai government continued to seek political solutions by clarifying the government's non-violence policies to Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary - General of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Saudi Arabia.

Acts of terrorism became more prominent the during the first two months of 2007 when a total of 210 violent acts took place that resulted in 75 deaths and 187 injuries. These acts increased during Chinese New Year on February 17-18, 2007, when 5 incidents occurred, including bombings, arson, ambushes and nail traps. Three days later, the insurgents firebombed the largest smoked rubber factory in the South damaging 5,000 tones of rubber worth more than 400 million baht.

Fortunately, Prime Minister Surayuth Chulanont supports channeling talks through the ISOC which involves people's participation. Along with people's involvement, only non-violent approaches will provide sustainable, peaceful and just solutions.

Throughout this time of destabilization in the South, the government has faced many challenges. The following box entitled 4 major measures to solve the Southern unrest of 2007 identifies ways to develop positive responses that will lead to a sustainable and just peace for all.

4 Major Measures to Address Unrest in the Southern Border Province

In 2007 the Peaceful Strategic Administrative Centre for Southern Border Provinces (PSAC) has developed measures to the insurgencies in the three Southern border provinces. There are four major measures as follows;

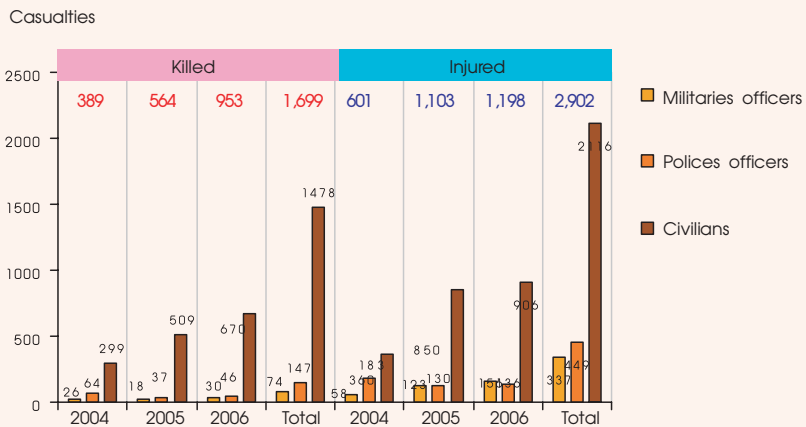
1. Focusing on accepting assistance from overseas organizations, particularly from IOC and neighboring countries, for instance, Malaysia wants to collaborate. They also perceive the situation as an internal affair within Thailand and insist on not interfering.
2. Placing importance on establishing a Justice Administration Office under the Ministry of Justice. It is believed that the cause of insurgencies derived from injustices gained by people in conflicting areas and that their dissatisfaction will take place if the justice is not done.
3. Establishing a special economic zone with tax breaks and interest reduction to motivate the investment and create jobs for local people. This way the Southern economy will be revived along with opportunities for the people to have a better life.
4. Operating proactive works with civil society. The focus is on improving the of life quality for local people and self-sufficiency. The works are under the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC).

Summary of violent incidents in three southern border provinces between 2004-2006

No.	Incidents	Number of incidents		
		2004	2005	2006
1	Shooting	531	905	1,040
2	Attack	53	52	39
3	Burning	232	308	281
4	Bombing	76	238	327
5	Theft of weapons, sim cards and electric cords	25	140	10
6	Demonstrations	2	-	14
7	Disturbances/flag burning	33	422	219
8	Beheading	-	12	3
9	Taking hostages	-	1	1
	Total	952	2,078	1,984

Source : Thai Health Report, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2007 (Calculation was based on data from the Operation Center, National Police Agency, Yala Province)

The comparison of deaths and injuries from insurgencies in the Southern provinces between 2004 and 2006



Source : Thai Health Report, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2007(Calculation was based on data from the Operation Center, National Police Agency, Yala Province)

