

Southern thailand conflict



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Executive Summary

Although the community of the Kingdom of Thailand has reached relatively decent level of economic prosperity and basic financial and social well-beings are more or less guaranteed for the Thai community, the country still cannot be considered as the best place to live in due to the one factor.

Irrespective of all the economic and industrial achievements, the interracial conflicts have been deployed in the southern provinces of Thailand.

Allegedly, the various driving forces are suspected of the conflict exacerbation. This paper analyzed the possible involvement of different social forces of Thailand from the communist party, to the prospective allies in the ranks of international terrorism. In accordance with the main outlined arguments, the main oppressor of the Thai government are the local radical organizations, whilst the core reasons of the rebellion lies in the spectrum of economic and political isolation of the provinces,

Although the conflict has not transpired to its ultimate phase yet, it has become evident that the quell of the conflict requires close comprehension of the goals and objectives of the belligerents, their programs and social base. While the insurgents rely majorly on the separatist inclinations of the Southern Provinces Islamic Minorities, the Thai government armed forces are closely collaborating with the Buddhism part of the community. Hereby, two criterions of escalation, the religious and the geographical one have been identified. Moreover, the uniform international opinion is that unless the peaceful negotiations are launched among the rebellions and the official powers of the Thailand, the conflict will not be resolved.

Introduction

The first internationally noticeable episode of the violent behavior between the insurgents and the government forces took place in the late 2004, when the Malay Pattani region became a swarm with the revolutionary elements that were vigorously oppose the official course of the Thai government.

January 4, 2004 is considered as an official date of the conflict commencement (Chalk, 2008). That very day, a group of armed men invaded the military camp in the Southern province of Thailand, Narathiwat, murdering four military men and obtaining huge military supplies at their disposal (Imtyaz, 2009). The next day was marked by the atrocious slaughter of the two police officers by means of throwing explosives (McCargo, 2008). The official government response was the declaration of the martial law in the Southern provinces of Thailand. This initiation of the special military regime, which gave broad powers to the military forces of the Thai government forces, was not acclaimed by the insurgent elements and the escalation of the riot was becoming more and more tangible. For example, in 2005 the death toll that was reported reached the point of 1, 500 demised and 2, 400 seriously wounded, whilst the figures for 2007 are 2, 600 and 4000 respectively (Zachary, 2011).

Notably, the fact that must be particularly accentuated is the character of the rebellion forces and their tactic and strategic maneuverings. To be more exact, the parties were reported by the independent research agencies being well-armed and substantially equipped with the most advanced and sophisticated weaponry (Croissant, 2007). No lack of the bullets or the cartridges among revolutionaries was reported to have ever taken place, and

the bullet proof vests and helmets were worn by the infantry of the guerillas (Thanspiring, 2009).

The first indications of the conflict are reported to take place in 1960s, when more than 60 armed bands were ravaging the region (De Silva, 1988). At the beginning of the 1980, the set of the laws enunciating the amnesty for those, who lay down their weapons (Harish, 2006, 131). A number of the Muslim military chiefs decided to utilize this option. The results achieved by the amnesty program were impressive: by the middle of 1990, the military processes have always been quelled (Chalk, 2008). However, with the advent of the millennium, the violent trends resumed its activity. The crucial point was the notorious 4 January, 2004. Moreover, the “ bloody” January was remarkable by the employment of the New Tactics by the mutinous separatists – they commenced utilizing completely brand method of influencing local residents, brutally and mercilessly eradicating the local religious and spiritual leaders (Camilleri, 2008). April and October 2004 were the months of the sharp government reaction, when the state official detained and imprisoned more than 1 500 armed insurgents, the majority of whom have been captivated during the Muslim sacred month Ramadan (Chalk, 2008). When the alleged criminals were being transported to the local police stations, they were “ packed” the way that almost a hundred of them died from suffocation being suppressed by their neighbors in the police trucks (Croissant, 2007). The opposition forces responded with the uncontrolled flashes of violence, killing a number of police officers and local government agents. The middle of 2006 precisely indicated that the

government of Thailand was incapable of taking control over the exacerbating conflict.

The situation was closely reviewed by the number of the independent and government research agencies. Whereas the opinions of the scholars and political analysts are considerably divergent in their essences, it can be said that the contemporary escalation of the conflict is in its majority caused by the number of external and internal factors, which are subjected to close scrutiny. The aim of this paper is to outline and analyze the main reasons generating the armed clashes between the Islamic minority of the country and the traditional Buddhism government of Thailand.

The Insurgent Forces of the Conflict and the Finance of the Campaign

The Revolutionary movement in Thailand has a number of main peculiarities. Whereas the revolutionary trends in the rest of the world, e. g. the situation with Palestine and Israel, have more or less clearly denominated their goals and objectives of the insurgent trends, in the present instance, it is still impossible to formulate with exactness what the insurgents really do want.

The different war chiefs make various demands, including the installation of the autonomous law and government order of the provinces in the question or the proclamation of independence. The most flagrant assertions involved the intention to create a separate Muslim country on the territory of the three insurgent provinces (Harish, 2006, 45). Overall, the claims of the revolutionary elements have not been formulated clearly yet.

Another important aspect of this issue is the review of the financial base of the insurgent campaign (Wyatt, 2003, 14). Considering the nature of the armory of the insurgent elements, it can be confidently assumed that substantial monetary resources are spent on the regular basis to ensure that the forces of the revolution are well-equipped and do not lack neither the cartridges nor the ammunition. The source of these revenues still remains unclear (Chalk, 2008). Some analysts suggest that the money are obtained by the smuggling of the drugs and the illegal transfer of oil, whereas others assume that the campaign is financed by the foreign terrorist organizations, involving Al Qaeda and other internationally acknowledged terrorism organizations (Croissant, 2007).

The Muslim Rebellion Forces

One of the most peculiar individualities of this armed conflict is naturally the fact that Thai government, as well as the rest of the international community can not exactly say against whom the war is being waged. In other words, deft and skillful maneuvering of the insurgents somehow helped them to organize an effective concealment of their identities. Anyhow, there is no unanimous opinion of the analysts in this field (Phongpaicht, 2004). Whereas some analysts suppose that the attacks should be attributed to the local traditional insurgent groups of Thailand like the BRN group, the PULO movement and other military elements of the Ronda Kumpulan Kecil, the religiously based movement the aim of which is the installation of the Muslim dictatorship and the rule of the Muslim law, the sharia over the territory of Thailand (McCargo, 2008, 19). Another widely spread opinion is the foreign influence over the insurgent forces of Thailand. To be more exact, the

training and the equipping of the armed personnel of the insurgents is attributed to the external influential Islamic groups. For instance, the 2004 attackers have been reported to receive their preparatory military course at the Al-Qaeda training camps in Pakistan.

The PULO Organization

The first highly probable suspect and perhaps the most influential terrorist group in the country is PULO. Within the last decade the group has gained its popularity among the religious Islamic minorities of the country (Zachary, 2011). The main advantage of this organization is that apart from the rest of the insurgent movements, namely this organization is politically represented in the national as well as in the local councils of Thailand (Chalk, 2008). The organization held a number of negotiations with other revolutionary trends and its military and political Chiefs contrived to unite the insurgent forces. In particular Me Kuteh, the military and the spiritual leader of the PULO organization, was reported to be the key figure of the uniting processes. The agreement that was concluded between the insurgent forces was the treaty, which provided that the unified armed forces, the so-called Patani Liberation Army is to create and that the unified commandment is to take charge over the operations (McCargo, 2008).

With the regard to the terrorist nature of the organization, it must be additionally accentuated that the organization not only allegedly launches terrorist actions, but engages in a number of peaceful negotiations with the international humanitarian and other intergovernmental organizations (Croissant, 2007). The report entitled the Conditions of Muslim Communities

and Minorities in Jeddah was submitted to the various institutions to substantiate and somehow acquit their activity.

The Local Bandits and Muslim Partisans

Another hypothetically highly potential possibility is the fact that the insurgent forces, in fact, have nothing to do with global terrorism (Wyattm 2003, 44). The attacks on the government institutions are on their majority caused by the desire of the local Muslim authorities to seek retaliation for the atrocious oppressions of their coreligionists inside the Thailand. Notably, in 2002 the Thai prime minister and Thai army chief speculated that “ neither separatists, nor ideological terrorists did operate inside the country” and all the wrongdoings and crimes have been attributed to “ the local bandits and drug traffickers” (McCargo, 2008, 73). However, with the declaration of the Martial law in the provinces seized with local Jihad has substantially reversed the official viewpoint of Thailand, reflecting the reality in a considerably more realistic way.

The Communists

One of the most incredulous hypotheses was the undercover activity of the pro-communist elements of the Southern Thailand. Although a set of extensive and highly expensive investigations took place, no proof of the communist involvement has been reported to take place (Harish, 2006). In any case, there are proofs that the mutinous forces are deeply connected with the similar religious activity on the Phillipines, with the so-called Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The Points of Contention

In order to conceive the nature of the conflict, the reasons which engendered the breakpoint of the armed hostilities, is to be clearly analyzed and specific inferences shall be drawn to avert the negative circumstance of the similar situations in the upcoming future. The scholarly authorities in collaboration with the military and political analysts came to the conclusion that the main reasons for the inflammatory conflict of interests are the ethnical and religious animosity among the Muslim and Buddhism communities, the economic shutdown and the political isolation of the rioting provinces. This section of the paper examines the factors which might have hypothetically caused the escalation of the military outbreak in the region.

The Discrimination of the Islamic Minorities

Under the theory of revolution, it is natural to assume the bandit forces and local partisans have organized a well-planned and thoroughly -considered campaign spontaneously. In other words, this type of military that struggle against the joint forces of the Thailand Armed Forces was initiated instinctively as a folk response to the alleged oppression of the Muslim minorities. Although there is no evidential proof of this fact, it is often reported that the Islamic minorities of the Thailand are routinely and arbitrary discriminated by the official powers of Thailand (Fearon & Laitin, 2005). Due to the provocative nature of this accusation, which is commonly used by the insurgents to justify their campaign, international independent research agencies have launched a series of surveys to find out whether the discrimination of the Muslims did really take place. The published reports, in

particular the ones issued under the auspices of the Freedom House and the Amnesty International precisely and clearly evinced that the alleged discrimination of the Muslim population did not transpire on the territory of the kingdom of Thailand during the period in the question. The Muslims enjoyed the same scope of rights as their Buddhism counterparts. Islamic students were not barred from attending the universities and the official posts were occupied equally by the citizens of Buddhism and Islamic religious affiliations (Wyatt, 2003, 81). Moreover, even the commander in chief of the Thailand armed forces, which has been suppressing the insurgency, is Muslim in his religious beliefs.

The mutinous leaders vigorously assert that the discrimination is ubiquitous and the government unofficially fosters the discriminatory processes in the country doing their best to convert Thailand into the purely Buddhism state, in where the rights and the privileges of the Muslims are neither respected and observed, nor merely recognized by the state (Camilleri, 2008).

Ethnical Enmity among the Islamic and the Buddhism Communities

It is natural to assume that the ethnical issue has always been topical in the Southern Thailand. The mindsets and life-concerned approaches are entirely different in their natures and essences. The most important is that the diametrically opposite values and beliefs are inherent to these communities. (Imtyaz, 2009, 14) For example, whereas the Buddhists respect and values the rights of the women, the women's rights under the sharia law are discriminatory and limited from the democratic points of view.

Besides, the Islamic citizens consider that whilst the population of the Southern Provinces in Thailand is predominantly Islamic, the Muslims consider that the rule of law and the government order of the provinces in the question must be Islamic as well (Thanpransing, 2009). In accordance with the scholarly opinion, this is not about the religion, but about the lifestyle and the traditions (Zachary, 2011).

In contrast, the Buddhism communities of the region oppose the Islamic trends. This opinion is supported by the government of the Kingdom of Thailand, which demonstrates the trend to appoint the local officials of Buddhism religious affiliation. Naturally the proportion of the Islamic and Buddhism officials (namely the judges, the investigators, the workers of the office of prosecution and the rest key posts of the local authorities) is maintained, but at the same time the Thai government failed to safeguard the equal representation of the Islamic and Buddhism public officials. This question is not regulated in the Kingdom of Thailand on the legislative level and the ratio of the Islamic population (approximately 60% of the regions) and the representation in the local councils and the percentage of the appointed government (28 Islamic public officers) officials is not balanced (Zachary, 2011).

Although there is no proof that this disproportion affects the living standards of the communities in the Southern Provinces, the Muslims consider that their divine rights to self-regulation and their right to live under the rule of sharia are seriously endangered. The widespread scholarly opinion is that here lie the roots of the conflict.

The Economic Reasons of the Conflict

The provinces, where the riot is being escalating, are among the least developed regions of the community. The government allocates the funds to the spheres of economy in the regions where the predominant part of the population profess Buddhism. However, it is clear that this decision has not been dictated by the religious motives of the decision-makers, but by the state of the Thailand economy and the economically substantiated need to invest into the industries located in those areas, where the Buddhists dominate (Chalk, 2008). The disproportion is coinciding in its nature, and this fact is not conceived by the member of the terrorist groups and other insurgent elements.

The Attempts, the Tasks and the Problems of the Thai Government to Remedy the Situation

The policy to curb the insurgency in Thailand was twofold in its nature. The first attempts undertaken by the notorious defense minister Chavalit were purely military in its nature (Harish, 2006, 52). The armed actions of the Armed forces of Thailand were backed up by the government and the armed aggression of the Thai insurgents backfired with the extensive military operations of the Thai armed forces.

The most notable episode took place on 24 April, 2004 when the group of combatants captured the Krue Se Mosque after the attack on the dozen of the police stations across the Pattani region, one of the most mutinous provisions of the region. When the mosque was captured by the terrorists, the Defense Minister even did not consider the peaceful resolution of the

situation, it was almost immediately resolved to attack the invaders (Croissant, 2007). As a result, the negotiations didn't take place, as the general of the government forces repelled all propositions of the insurgent to enter into the conciliatory talks and eventually to reach peaceful resolution of the conflict. Whilst the capture of the mosque was an option to attract the public attention, although a terrorist act, the international community in their majority condemned the immediate eradication of the gunmen who invaded the mosque (Zachary, 2011).

The same brutal oppressive reaction took place in October 2004, when the Thai forces detained six Muslim activists, whom they suspected of supplying the insurgent forces with the weaponry and ammunition. The arbitrary apprehension of the activists resulted in the massive public rallies and series of protests against the Thai administration. The crowds have been dispersed by the water cannons, which caused more violent protests (Chalk, 2008). Ultimately the army shot to the crowd and seven persons died.

The Obstacles of the Thai Government Preventing to Take Control over the Situation

Several important obstacles impeded the effective realization of the Thai program to quell the munitions movements among the population. This section of the paper outlines the main obstacles, hindering the stabilization of the situation inside the country.

The lack of competent professional among the Thai Army and Thai National Conciliatory Commission

In order to campaign effectively against the Muslims, the nature of the Islamic mindsets should be fully comprehended by the government campaigners. In particular, the cultural peculiarities and the readiness to sacrifice one's life and personal welfare is not a problem to the Muslims at all. The negotiations and talks with them require specific approaches and mediation techniques. Overall, no more than 10% of the Thai army is represented by the ethnic minorities of the country (Camilleri, 2008), but not a single special detachment on the intercourse of the Muslims has been initiated to intercourse with the Islamic insurgents. If the Thai forces follow the guidelines of the leading independent research, who strongly admonish to create special commissions and negotiation detachments to reach the rapport and cooperation between the insurgents and the government forces, the ultimate goals of the entire government campaign will be accomplished.

In fact, the lack of mutual understandings is, in fact, the most inflamed problem on the way to the cooperation between the mutinous elements of the community and the official armed forces of the Thai government.

Geographical location and the composition of the population

Geographically, the Southern provinces are attached to the Muslim countries and the influence from them is significant. This fact must be always considered by the Thai government. The density of the Islamic population mustn't be underestimated as well and nothing can be done to remedy the situation. Massive relocations and deportations is naturally not an option, therefore, the best option of the Thais is to enter into the negotiations with

the rebels, as advised by the Conciliatory Commission of the European Union.

International Perception of the Situation

First and foremost it is necessary to stress the fact that the international democratic community does not approve the methods and the techniques utilized by the insurrectional elements of the Southern Thailand communities (Zachary, 2011). The captivation of the hostages, the violent attacks on the state officials as well as the casualties inflicted to the civilians in the course of the government attacks are classified as the acts of terrorism under the doctrine of the international and the domestic law of Thailand and other countries.

The Opinion of the United States

The first person that expresses the opinion of the United States of America was the state secretary Condoleezza Rice, who accused the terrorist nature of the Islamic protests in Thailand. However, alongside she condemned the approaches, which are used by the Thai government to rectify the negative repercussions of the situation. In her speech in 2004 to the Congress of the United States, the Department of Foreign Affairs, she stressed the fact that the murder of the Muslims who captured the mosque without a proper and legally formalized trial is nothing else but a flagrant violation of the international fundamental law of the human being. This opinion was subsequently supported by the resolution of the United States Congress, whereby the Congress recommends the government of Thailand to enter into the peaceful talks with the insurrection elements.

The Opinion of the United Nations Organizations

The opinion of the United Nations Organizations was delivered by the United States Security Council in 2008. The report of this organization extensively examined the situation in Thailand and the conclusion of the experts was unanimous: the people who instigated and who participate in the riots are terrorists and their actions constitute terrorist acts, as they precisely meet the internationally acknowledged definition (Zachary, 2011).

Conclusions

Having made a profound examination of the situation in Thailand it can be inferred that several internal and external factors contribute to the further escalation of the conflict and serious measures must be permanently considered by the Thailand government and armed forces to handle the situation, in particular the cultural and the religious peculiarities of the insurgents should be permanently considered by the government authorities which tackle the conflict.

It has become evident that the main blunder of the Thailand Government Armed Forces is their inability to determine the character of the enemy and hereby to devise the tools to tackle it. Although almost everything suggests that the enemy is the local Muslim separatists indirectly and directly supported by the international terrorist forces, the certainty has not been accomplished yet. In particular, in order to substantiate the causation among the Islamic Radical groups and the acts of violence committed against the official authorities of Thailand, the evidences shall be collected and submitted. Currently the Thai forces fail to comply with this obligation.

Overall, nowadays the enemy can not be exactly identified by the Thailand government.

The last, but not the least issue is the comprehension of the conflict. Various scholars and analysts reached the conclusion that the grounds of the conflict are of economic, political, religious and cultural origins. The mere understanding of the factors is sufficient to commence a thorough analysis and provided that it is conducted accordingly the enemies and their goals will be identified, which will eventually lead to the resolution of this conflicting situation by the set of peaceful means.

Internationally, the opinion is not unanimous. Whilst some countries, including the USA condemn the actions of the both belligerents, the NATO and the European Union supports the opinion of the Thai government and the course of actions currently employed by the Armed Forces of Thailand.