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Presentation
"Conflict Resolution and Anti-terrorism in ASEAN: The Case of Thailand"

The conflict, which has brought about the highest number of violent incidents over the past decade, and in many cases the gravest brutalities for Thailand, has been its Southern conflict. Since its reoccurrence in 2004 it has claimed over 6,207 lives and left over 11,248 people wounded. Confined mainly to the three Southernmost Provinces: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat (including four districts of Songkhla), where 80 percent of the population is Muslim, it is an internal ethno-nationalist conflict dating back to the time of Patani annexation in 1902. Though there has been no conclusive explanation as to why violence resurged in 2004 after a relatively peaceful decade following the Thai state's 1980s amnesty policy, it had been pointed out early on that religion though invoked to legitimize violence, is not the cause of this conflict.

The debate of whether the violence of Southern Thailand is connected to international terrorist organizations is, on the other hand, more conclusive. Against the evolving situation after September 11, 2001, when the United States as part of its counterterrorism efforts in the region, turned to Thailand as a key ally – following which the Thai government adopted the executive decree to facilitate the arrest of an international terrorism suspect in August 2003 – there has been no evidence of any substantial link between the Southern insurgents with external Islamic organizations – much less that any such organizations have a direct role in the Southern conflict. Nevertheless, attempts to resolve the Southern crisis over the past decade has taken two broad and divided approaches – one requiring long-term efforts to tackle issues believed to be the root cause, the other demanding short-term measures, believed would put an immediate end to the violence.

Following the project's objective to explore policy options as to how conflict resolution which involves long-term efforts could be pursued together with the work of anti-terrorism which usually involves short-term goals, this chapter looks at the case of Thailand's Southern conflict and the ensued incidents of terrorism as defined by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Through in-depth interviews with security personnel and analysis of information from interview/questioning records of ex- insurgent convicts together with the dataset developed in a parallel project, the chapter explains the conflict based on the existence of the major insurgency organization and its leadership as understood from a decade-long intelligence mission. It then discusses the prospects and recommendations towards conflict resolution – in terms of lessons learned from past and recent peace process – and from the research information obtained it conveys the success factors to consider towards future peace dialogues.

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