

## **IMPACT OF SOUTHERN BORDER PROVINCES OF THAILAND TOWARDS ASEAN COMMUNITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The building of the ASEAN Community among ten member nations of the Southeast Asia region needs stability, especially in terms of security and economic areas among its members. The situation in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand is a major factor for the development of the ASEAN community due to the location and historical conflicts in those Southern Border Provinces. This paper aims to examine the root causes of conflicts and to determine the role of the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand in building the ASEAN Community especially during the period of 2012-2014.*

**Keywords:** Community, Conflict, Economic, Security, etc.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Southern Border Provinces of Thailand have a very long history of conflict from the historical wounds of the Pattani state under the Siam to its present. The conflicts covered the area, particularly the three provinces of the Southern Border of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, also includes the four districts of Songkhla province, Jana, Nathawee, Tepa and Sabayoy as a consequence of conflicts in the Southern Border Provinces. There were many factors caused the problem of violence, such as good governance, problem of ethnicity, the gap between religion and culture, lack of education, human trafficking, money laundering, crime, drug, etc. The most important problem is the anti-government sentiment which the group of the movement feels that they are not treated with the justice. On the other hand, misunderstanding between people to people, government authority and people were caused of the complicated situation affected to the entire society in the region which is known as "Lankasuga or Malayu". Certainly, the people in the region are the ones who suffering from the impact.

With the emerging of ASEAN's moto "One Vision, one Identity and one community." The situation in the south of Thailand might be one of the majors, the impact of the development of the ASEAN community especially in term of security and economic cooperation among its members. ASEAN may lose the benefit and suffer from this region due to the important strategic locations connected between the southern Thailand and the northern Malaysia and it is the inland transportation from Singapore to Myanmar in the northwest and Laos in the northeast. Without the proper management of the Thai government, with the assistance of ASEAN members, it could be affected by the development of ASEAN, not only the political and security pillar but also the in various aspects as economic and cultural pillars too.

## **THE CAUSE OF CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN BORDER PROVINCES OF THAILAND:**

The major cause of conflict in the Southern Border Provinces occurs from disagreement in certain people with the government policy and its implementation in the past. Some are not happy with negative behavior of certain government officers, this situation has subsequently created gradual displeasure among the local people and turned them toward violence under the influences of radical leaders. Thus, underground movements were formed with the intention to use violence to achieve their goals which remain unknown to the public.

Analyzing the root causes of conflict can clarify on the following:

- 1) The lack of true mutual understanding between the two races, the Thai and Malay-Pattani race; Pattani people were rooted from the historical prosperity, the people's identity based on the way of life and religion. Pattani was considered as the place of prosperity in term of religion, and culture. With misunderstanding may increase the violation rather than peace. Some Thai officer has ignored to understand the reality by stating that "We must tell them that they are Thai, they are not Malay, they are of the Thai race, born in Thailand." (Siyarnnork, 2009) This statement shown the untrue understanding of people in southern border province.
- 2) With the varieties of ethics in the area concern, the mutual understanding between the Malay-Pattani ethics (Thai-Malays) and the Thai is also one of the roots caused by a problem in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. Naturally, there is a Muslim majority within the region and the social structure is also different from the other parts of the country. Particularly, the people in the southern border do not like to speak Thai language except Satun and Songkhla province. (Maluleem, The Coming of Islam to Thailand. PROSEA Occasional, 1998) Actually, to force people for speaking the same language of us is not the key to make understanding.
- 3) The Pattani state's historical wounds that occurred in the past; It is very significant matter that the Kingdom of Siam was colonized the Pattani state. These scenario mindsets with its hurtful feelings passed down from generation to generation. (Maluleem, The Coming of Islam to Thailand. PROSEA Occasional, 1998)
- 4) Some parts of the structure of the management and administration, law, and political, economic, social and cultural policies, are still not compatible with the identity and the way of life of the people in the area, and are not conducive to the people's participation to the extent that their feeling of true and equal ownership can be created. (Maluleem, The Coming of Islam to Thailand. PROSEA Occasional, 1998)
- 5) The engagement of conflict today is based on the situation in Takbai and Krue-Se Mosque in 2004 which affected about 200 innocent people who died during the incident, the reaction of the perpetrators of violence shown an increasing of violence with anti-government sentiment and some of them wants to take revenge to the government officers in the region. According to deepsouthwatch the statistic shown 6,286 death and 11,366 injuries from 2004 to 2014. In 2014 alone 793 deaths, including children, teachers, Monk, and other civilians. (Supaporn, 2014)

Nguyen concludes that “the roots of the violence in southern Thailand lie in the historical grievances and a pattern of neglect, discrimination but the violence does not appear to be having an any noticeable impact on the stability of the Thai government.” (Nguyen, 2008)

Realizing that the situation is becoming more sensitive and using only security forces or step up law enforcement were not an answer to the root cause of problems. Moreover, when it considered more in depth, the real challenges of the case is not just the perpetrators of violence, but the challenge that causing and giving live with violence is that, the majority of Muslim people still distrust and misunderstanding the government and state officials. To overcome the violence, therefore, required for the most part political measures that aim to rearrange the relationship between the state and the people as well as between people and people who belong to different descent.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THAI GOVERNMENT DURING 2012-2014:**

The Thai government realized that the problem in the Southern Border Provinces is not the conflict which occurs from religious clashes, but it is the conflict from misunderstanding which has been left ignored for a long time in the dimensions of history, culture, and way of life.

Although, the Thai government declared as the national agenda and following the philosophy of King Phumiphon Adunyadet as he advised to the government with “Understanding, accessing, and developing.” This is one of the indicators to show all the level of government officers and the people that must take this problem into serious account as the problem of the nation and cooperation with the government in order to find out the way to end the conflicts with peaceful means.

However, this conflict is considered as the internal conflict in Thailand, but as long as the situation is concerned, it hasn't shown any potential to end the conflict within the region, even the Thai government attempted in every possible way to solve the conflict by peaceful means. Many policies have been introduced concerning to this particular issue such as Administration and Development Policy for Southern Border Provinces (2012-2014). (Santisar, et al., 2012)

The administrative management of the Thai government, which include the Thai law, political, economic, social, and cultural policies could not meet with the identity of the local people and the people could not have the feeling of ownership as well as treated equally as compared with the people in different region in Thailand.

The Thai government has put an emphasis on exchanging opinions with those who have different views and ideologies in order to listen to their opinions and work together toward approaches of solving the problems and correcting any mistakes occurred and open channels for dialogues with different groups of people, including members of underground movements. The government has assigned the Office of the National Security Council (NSC) to be the main agency in charge of the Peace Dialogue by organizing the Steering Committee composed of senior officials from NSC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre, the Royal Thai Army, and intelligence agencies. The security agencies of Thailand constructed the Road Map of Peace Dialogue based on the principle of mutual understanding.

The dialogue concerning the members of ideological groups as Thai citizens who have different thought, belief and ideology of the state. But this group is not considered as the enemy of the state. It has to maintain confidentiality of dialogue partners in order to guarantee safety and anonymity of those who participate in the dialogue.

Peace dialogue can create channels of direct communication with the underground movements, but there should not be any demands in the form of negotiation. The dialogue aims to create mutual understanding and confidence-building which leads to the reduction of violence in the area and the seeking of peaceful resolution to end the conflict in the Southern Border Provinces. Any agreement must conform to the scope of the Thai Constitution and facilitate the security of people of all religions in the area. (Official Document, NSC, Thailand, 2012)

The dialogue with underground movements has gradually progressed as it can bring stakeholders in the area to have a discussion with one another. The groups which have an ideology and connection with violence perpetrators have agreed that Peace Dialogue is the only way to bring peace in the long-term and they would like to witness sincerity of the government in maintaining the continuity of the dialogue. They also have admitted that civil society in the area must have a participatory role in the peace-building process.

Due to the fact that many ideological group members, who are not directly involved with the use of violence, reside in foreign countries, therefore it is necessary for Thailand to cooperate with the governments of these countries in order to support and facilitate the dialogue but not in the role as the mediator.

The Thai's policy since 2012 -2014 has emphasized on the following aspects:

- 1) To adhere to H.E. The King's philosophy: 1) to have a good understanding of what the people in the area are thinking 2) to try to reach out to them, and 3) to put the emphasis on the development aspect or to improve their livelihood.
- 2) The justice system must be transparent; the people in the area must be felt that they are treated fairly and equally, in accordance to the rule of law and respectful of human rights. Government officers who abuse their power or break the law must be promptly brought to justice or face disciplinary action.
- 3) To create the atmospheres that conducive to peaceful dialogue and peaceful solution to the conflict. This can be divided into two steps.
  - 3.1) to promote dialogue between stakeholders, with the emphasis on the long – term objective, or the proper model of administrative bodies in the Southern provinces, that is decentralized within the framework of the Constitution and multicultural in nature.
  - 3.2) promote the ongoing peace dialogue with all groups with all different views and aspirations.
- 4) To seek international support for the Country's efforts in solving the problem. The global community has to have a correct understanding of what is really going on in Southern Thailand. The global community as well as the International organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), should understand that Thailand is determined and has a strong willing to solve the problem by peaceful means.
- 5) To promote the concept of multi-culture or social pluralism within the Thai society. This is to help the Thai people to understand, appreciate and be able to tolerate the cultural and religious differences. In this regard, Malay as well as Thai languages should both be taught and learnt by the students in the region. Other foreign languages would also be taught in order to help the student to be able to adapt and live in a much more globalized world of the future.
- 6) To ensure that the Southern Provinces Development Policy implemented in a systematic and unified manner. Most importantly, the participants from people and civil society, are the key factor to achieve the ultimate goal of the policy, that is the sustainable and peaceful solution to the problem.

The prevention of conditions leading to the use of violence by justice facilitation and promoting fairness in the area and urgently resolving incidents that cast doubt among the people is needed. When the incidents took place, the government set up an independent committee to investigate and remedy families of dead persons, this resulted in public satisfaction in the area. They implemented the special law, this is used only when necessary by upholding the human rights and humanitarian principles and also giving an emphasis on the evaluation with opening space for the academic community and the people to have a role in evaluating the enforcement of this special law.

The national security council of Thailand played a very good role as the agency at the policy level, implemented the Administration and Development Policy for Southern Border Provinces, 2012-2014. (National Security Council Thailand, 2014) This policy requires a participatory process from all sectors: the capital, the local area and overseas such as listening to Thai Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Malaysia. It also takes into account opinions of the Advisory Council on the Administration and Development of Southern Border Provinces of Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) which is directly-elected council from the local people. It is the first policy presented to the parliament to acknowledge. Therefore, it is the policy that is accepted by all parties.

The Administration and Development Policy for Southern Border Provinces has an important concept to solve root causes of the problem; not only situational problem solving. It is based on His Majesty the King's strategies to "understand, reach out, and develop" and peaceful approaches to solve the problems with an emphasis on development of education, society and quality of life. It relies on the wide participation of people and the respect for local identities.

Regarding the peace dialogue, it has been clearly defined in the policy as a way to resolve conflict of all sectors. Thailand will run the process by herself under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. It is not a negotiation because it aims to create mutual trust and understanding which will lead to the design of living together with differences and it is not a condition leading to separatism.

#### **IMPACT ON ASEAN COMMUNITY:**

The major impact of ASEAN are includes of security and economic issues which concerning to the border trade area, not only the inland but also the water way. The ASEAN members understood that the problem could not interfere due to the problem is considered as the domestic problem of Thailand. ASEAN members are observers of the situation and become the facilitator, aims to reduce the violence, and try to bring peace in the region. But

it is very complicated that the government of Thailand could not ensure and can not identify who are playing behind the scene as the group of anti-government or cannot address that who is the leader among them. Malaysia alone played a very great role as the facilitator for peace talk between the Thai government and the perpetrator of violence. Indeed, Malaysia has done well at least to bring the Thai government and group of perpetrators on peace talk process. But there is no any signal to indicate the peaceful or the dialogue among the group concern are coming up with the positive response, only one party as BRN involve while the group remains hidden. On the other hand, the situation seems to be rising more from the reaction of the group of perpetrators.

**1) Impact on Political and Security of ASEAN:**

The situation of the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand is only one unrest situation in the ASEAN region. There are many important violations that impacts on the development of the ASEAN that includes the situation in Mindanao of Philippine, Saba Island of Malaysia, Preah Vihear between Thailand and Cambodia. It reflected with shaking the stability of ASEAN, and the pillars of the political and security of ASEAN community get a difficulty to integrate into the goal of ASEAN rather than the pillars of Economic and Socio-cultural. (ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint, 2009)

ASEAN's mechanism has not been achieved so far to end up the conflicts within the region and does not seem strong enough ASEAN or ASEAN WAY. Indeed the cooperation in ASEAN has progressed based on three key principles: (i) consensus decision-making; (ii) respect for national sovereignty; and (iii) non-interference in the domestic affairs of members. (The ASEAN Experience, 2007) The Security and Political cooperation among the ASEAN members seems to have much difficulty to address the problem of the unrest situation within the region. There are limited of interest within the ASEAN members due to the situation is almost belong to the domestic level, which the government of those countries is not allowed ASEAN to interfere.

The Southern Border Province of Thailand is one of the cases that directly affected in the ASEAN community, even the situation depends on the Thai government's implementation in order to bring peace and security in the region. The ASEAN could be a facilitator by approaching to diplomatic by assisting Thai's government to come up with the end of violence. On the other hand, Malaysia and Thailand attempted to address the problem and responds to the basic needs of the people, such as proper education, support the people by improving the quality of life, and understand the way of life of the people in the region. Although, ASEAN aims to promote cooperation in political and security to enhance and maintain the peace and stability of the region. The countries in the region live together with peace, prosperity and stability. ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint, stated that;

ASEAN's cooperation in political development aims to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the member states of ASEAN, so as to ultimately create a rules-based Community of shared values and norms. In the shaping and sharing of norms, ASEAN aims to achieve a standard of common adherence to norm of good conduct among member states of the ASEAN Community; consolidating and strengthening ASEAN's solidarity, cohesiveness and harmony; and contributing to the building of a peaceful, democratic, tolerant, participatory and transparent community in Southeast Asia.

Moreover, cooperation in political development will bring to maturity the political elements and institutions in ASEAN, towards which the sense of interstate solidarity on political systems, culture and history will be better fostered. Such interstate solidarity can be achieved further through the shaping and sharing of norms.

**2) Economic:**

ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has its impact on the problem in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand in which the border trade areas in these provinces much ignored from the companies and investors, not only in Thailand, but also impacts the other nation especially Malaysia, due to the unrest situation. It is very risk to invest in these particular areas, even the delivery trucks might not be transport goods in this area. More truck will transport to Malaysia via Hatyai Songkhla (Sadow District). By the ways, the border between Thailand and Malaysia are also faced with smuggling trade across the border, with a large number of goods smuggled into Malaysia such as Thai's rice, fruit production, palm oil, alcohol, cigarettes, and frozen beef.

However, most of the goods between Thailand and Malaysia concerned with the Sadow's customs and Padang Bedsar's custom of Songkla province. This is clear to mention that the situation in the Southern Provinces of Thailand has a very limited possibility to access the border trade. Certainly, its link to the logistic system of ASEAN, especially the import and export between Thailand and Malaysia. Indeed, the trade value between Thailand and Malaysia reached up to 459,219.84 Million Baht in 2013. The major exports of Thailand include rubber, computer. Equipments, and Components, other rubber products, coatings, automotive parts and

accessories. On the other hand the major import items include computers and accessories. Audiovisual media, magnetic tape, computer parts, Industrial equipment and components, and so on.

ASEAN might need to support the Thai government to solve the problem in this region. Otherwise, it could be a very difficult to reach its achievement of ACE. In fact, the development of economic cooperation among the ASEAN member could be one of the factors to improve the quality of life among the people in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. Perhaps, this way of cooperation, the violation in this area will be reduced.

Moreover, when the AEC has begun, most of the local people would have more chance to develop and improve their production, which can increase the competitiveness among the ASEAN members. The advantage of the people in this region is that they have a very similar culture with Malaysia and Indonesia where it consists of 250 million populations. With this fact, the people can apply their production, which meet to the need of the ASEAN markets.

### **3) Socio-Cultural:**

Most of the population in the ASEAN community has a similar in its culture with the people in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. The Malay language is one of the indicators to identify its similar culture. However, there are many factors that affected to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Education can be considered as one factor that the area of the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand is lack of modern education (Secular studies). Within the region, there are about 300 private schools (Pondok) which focusing on the Islamic studies, many of them do not qualify the standard of the Thai Qualification Framework, which required the basic need of its general test. But most students have convinced by their parent to study at Pondok school, which is known as the school of Islamic thought. Most of Muslim families prepare to send their children to study at the Pondok private School rather than send them to the public school. (Aroman, 2013) Therefore, Thai's government has to set up the policy by supporting the private school to teach more secular studies as well as Islamic Studies parallel.

It is significantly the education is not only the key of life, but also develop the quality of life, in order to develop the education in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand, the financial assistant and the human resources must be concerned. In fact, the Pondok schools are mostly funded by the "Zakat" (a pillar of Islam) (Liow, 2009), this financial assistance became the Thai Muslim tradition, in which the people donate to fund rinsing in its Pondok, not only in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand but Thailand as a whole. Therefore, without the proper education in these three provinces, the problem will remain occur and it may lead to the misunderstanding with the other community. Actually, English is the main language of ASEAN community. Local people are needed to develop the skills of language, not only Thai but also English and Malay.

However, the ASEAN concerned to promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society, regardless of gender, race, religion, language, or social and cultural background is encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building. In the implementation, ASEAN should also strive towards promoting and supporting gender-mainstreaming, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality and mutual understanding.

Realizing the people and people connect within the ASAEN, there are about 240 million Muslim (approximately 42% of ASEAN population), one of the important issues to link between people within the region that there is the common basis framework of Sunni Islam and they are diverse in different perspectives towards Islam. Therefore, the interaction between Islam and politics, ethics, and social structure could help to strengthen the ASEAN Community. (Maluleem & Mohd. Faheem, 2013)

The impact of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural community in this regard seems to have less impact to the ASEAN community. But it would be the strongest point to connect the people across the country and the people outside the country. This, perhaps the similar culture among the local people in the southern part of Thailand and ASEAN community especially from Malaysia and Indonesia.

### **IN SEARCH OF THE ROLE FOR ASEAN:**

ASEAN ensured that the peoples and member states of ASEAN live in peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment. The pillar of ASEAN in Political and Security shall promote political development in adherence to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and promotion and protection of human rights

At the same time, the interest of preserving and enhancing peace and stability in the region, the ASEAN Political and Security Community should seek to strengthen the mutually beneficial relations between ASEAN and its dialogue partners and friends. In doing so, it also maintains the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive, while remaining actively engaged, forward-

looking and non-discriminatory.

## CONCLUSION:

The problem in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand is directly making a difficulty for the sustainability of ASEAN especially in term of political and security. It is also direct impacts from the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand, including the value of exchange of its import and export, the transportation, and the sense of the disunity in the region. Although the problem is not considered as religion problem, but it is the problem of misunderstanding between Thais Buddhist and Thais Muslim, the government officers and the local people. The problem remains considering as the internal problem of Thailand. Only Malaysia alone paid an attention as the facilitator of the conflict. Without strong security in the area, there is no hope for the development of the region. ASEAN members remain no active so far. Perhaps, the role of ASEAN could only achieve in the economy.

Therefore, within the concept of security cooperation, Thailand could cooperate with the ASEAN members, especially Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam who have a similar culture, same language, and they have a same sentiment of being a Muslim in the region. Moreover, they can be a good facilitator who can address the problem, by the way Thai government also must sincerely solve the conflict and must show the spirit of justice, people could have a chance to participate and address the problem by themselves whether by political participation, improve the condition of life, and support them with proper education. This might be the sustainable way of solution. This can be motivated the people in the region to trust the government and bring peace in the region. ASEAN could also share the benefit with trade, tourism, people to people channel, and support the mutual understanding between people of both countries.

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