

The Lesson Learnt of Conflict between Thailand and Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

A study of conflict between Thailand and Sri – Lanka are provided a lesson learnt on how the violence between of two countries are developed. The role of the government is very significant to determine the conflict that could be a reason for ongoing violence. The conflicts neither rooted from the difference background ethnicities, culture, believe, and the way of life nor the influence by any other interested activities such as some influential power of local politician, cause of human trafficking, drug, money laundering and extremism are well defined and the root cause of the conflict too. As today Thailand and Sri Lanka are challenging in various form of violence and complicated situation that needed to clarify and maintain peace in the region. Therefore, the study aims to examine and determine the lesson learnt and the role of the government on how the governments manage to the conflict and the study is attempted to identify on how the peaceful approach can be done in Thailand and Sri Lanka and evaluate its achievement and failure to maintain peace within the country. This information will help to analyze the lesson learnt of Thailand and Sri Lanka conflicts.

Keywords: violence, conflict, peace, Muslim, religion.

INTRODUCTION:

To focus on the conflict between Thailand and Sri Lanka, there is a study which may not be neglected to approaches with the theory of conflict resolution as a basic principle to identify and how the theory could be approached. On the other hand, the conflict is based on some incompatible goals and contradictions, therefore, the conflict is viewed as to achieve one own's preferred outcome and viewed as resolved when all opposing parties are satisfied with the outcome (Gulrez, 2004).

The conflict in Southern border provinces of Thailand and Sri Lanka are considered some similarities in term of ethnic conflict and related to the consensus of the Muslim minority issues in a non-Muslim country. The challenges of Thailand and Sri Lanka are attempted to maintain peace among the Muslims and Buddhists within their countries, that having some certain circumstances of situation that led a nation facing with violence, the policy of the government should be treating people on a sincerely manner. In fact, both countries have always set up the policy on the particular issues in order to bring peace and facilitate understanding among the people in difference beliefs.

The conflicts in Thailand and Sri Lanka are considered as an internal conflict concerned with the group of Muslim community and the Buddhist community in similar, but the dimension of the conflict is rooted in the different causes. The conflict of Southern border provinces of Thailand is rooted historically where people are having a sentiment of the *Pattani*, a malay culture and identity of Islamization, especially in the border provinces of Thailand. At the same time, the conflict in Sri Lanka is rooted from the sentiment of indigenous of Sinhala people and migrant of Tamil Muslim, and as considered the clash of two different ethnics Tamils and Sinhala, there is a discrimination and suppression on one another. Therefore, challenges for the conflict between Muslim and Buddhists in Sri Lanka are much more complicated as it compares to the daily violation in the

southern part of Thailand.

The significant of the conflict seems relevance to the differences in beliefs, including influenced by an extremism of the anti-other religion sentiment. The Sinhala and Muslim conflict in Sri Lanka may called as a religious conflict between Muslim and Buddhists but in the case of Thailand cannot be called as the religious conflict due to the fact that the conflict does not shown on how Muslim and Buddhists are fighting with each other, it is the conflict between the state and the indigenous on the issue of management, lack of understanding as well as injustice. There are other factors that developed the situations such as influential person for maintaining illegal actions on its own interest, crime, and drugs that are some factors for increasing of the conflict. With these factors-based situations lead challenges to the Muslim minority in Buddhist country and determine the factor on how the conflict in Thailand and Sri Lanka are facing with violence, is the religion the matter of conflict? and what are the key factors effected to the conflict? These are some of the basic questions to identify in the way of the lesson learnt of the conflict from Thailand and Sri Lanka to each other.

CONFLICT IN THAILAND:

In Southern border provinces of Thailand, have a very long history of conflict from the past wounds of the Pattani state under the Siam to present Thailand. There are local people who are maintained a strong ideology of its own dignity of the Pattani's sentiments. The area of conflict is defined in the three provinces of the Southern Border of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, also includes the four districts of Songkhla province, Jana, Nathawee, Thepa and Sabayoy as a consequence of conflicts in the Southern border provinces (Aroman, 2017). In order to identify the causes of the conflict in the modern day, it is very important to include and concern about the matter of good governance since the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra regime, and had mentioned in willing to end the conflict by suppressing all kind of people who against the government such as during the Krue Se mosque and Tak bai incident was the big turning point that the situation turned upside down, the circumstance became a situation of awakening more members of the preparator of violence to fight against the government.

ROLE OF THAI GOVERNMENT:

Since the insurgency erupted in 2004, preparator of violence have carried out a number of violent attacks in different part of southern Thailand. These groups reportedly lack of central leadership and subscribe to differing ideologies, however, militant Islamists are believed to constitute the majority of the rebels, there are about 9,500 incidents and more than 4,500 people were killed. 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 of southern Thailand and the social structure is also different from the other parts of the country. Particularly, the people in the southern border unlike to speak Thai language except Satun and Songkhla province (Jaran Maluleem, 1998). The government spent nearly 9,000 million dollars since 2004 till present for addressing the conflict. In a result, it seems that a 13 year of conflict, Thai government have various dimensions to solve the conflict but could not yet achieve to stop conflict in Southern border provinces of Thailand as the conflict still ongoing on. However, it could not be wholly blamed to the implementation of the government alone because of the solution must be take the group of the preparators of violence into account and try to offer more opportunity for political participation. In December 2015, the government released the result of an opinion poll revealing that 99.3 percent of Thais are satisfied with the government's overall performance. (Freedom House) However, polling carried out by the Asia Foundation in Southern border provinces of Thailand in 2010 found that 37 percent of southerners believe the main cause of the conflict is the failure of officials to understand the local population.

In this situation, many scholars are focusing on how the people are not certainly trusted to the Thai government policy and how a series of anti-government sentiment are caused of ongoing conflict, by analyzing the influential of the matter, it can be identified with three conditions;

- 1) Personal condition is the group of people who have opposition idea against the government, adopting violence with reason of hate the government, revenging some of government officers and many other interested issues.
- 2) Structural condition refers to the governance and administration, people are still no satisfy with justice, discriminate, and lack of local administration.

3) Cultural condition is very complicated to make understanding between government officers who working in the area of conflict and the people of Malay ethnic that have its own unique of culture, language, religion and the way of life.

Another condition may have agreed with the preparator of violence, such as misinterpretation of religion, ideology of extremism in which applied to violence and disturbance as gorilla style in area of conflict. Without a proper understanding between government and the local people, in these condition, the role of the government could not be achieved its goals.

In fact, Thailand is a Buddhist-majority country, is another dimension experiencing a decades-long ethno-religious separatist insurgency waged by Malay-Muslim rebels in the country's south. However, there is no issue in the term of minorities and majority. Minority and human right, respect the difference of believe, understanding each other are a best way to create a peaceful society respectively. Due to the fact that the Buddhist principle has mentioned that no majority and minority in Buddhism ideology, all people are equal, respect among other differences are the best practice in the way of Buddhist life. (Report of Seminar, 2018).

Therefore, the experience of Southern border provinces of Thailand conflict is based on ethnicity, religion and sense of nationalism that collectively make it very difficult to understand the situation and to solve the conflict. In critical analysis, the religion is significantly to understand the dimension of the conflict in Southern border provinces of Thailand that the reason may refers to the people who influential ideology and guide people to think difference from the government implementation. In fact, Islam is the religion of peace as same as Buddhism, but some people who turned religion into the interest of politic are using the principle of Islam as the tool of the conflict which is not acceptable. Many groups of the violence attempted to guide the people in the way of their interests, convincing people to join their activities and make fear of feeling that is a part of the preparator of violence strategy. Moreover, the supreme leaders are interpretation in the way of teaching in Islamic principle in different manner. It is assumed that most of the people and the Muslim family are trended to send their sons and daughters to study aboard and many of them came with the idea of radical Islam and transform knowledge to local people as well as using an idea by interpretation and explaining more extremist rather than usual.

One the other hand, there were many factors caused the problem of violence, such as governance, problem of ethnicity, the gap between religion and culture, lack of education, human trafficking, money laundering, crime, drugs, etc. Indeed, 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 satisfying 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, preparator of violence were formed with the intention to use violence to achieve their goals which remain unknown to the public.

Buddhism is a religion that advocates non-violence and emphasized to the people consciously aware of both internal and external conflicts. Today, people need to live in peace with moderate idea in order to living in mutual understanding as well as to respect each other. However, misunderstood are leading more misunderstandings, without learning with each other and have more interaction the way of living may be challenges in a tension and may cause conflict and violation. Religion without understanding may turn into enemy that make much more difficult as it hit the heart of sensitive of the people from one side to the other side. Therefore, diversity of society is the key element of the social environment. Globally, people have to accept the difference in many aspects and should honor other religions as well as honor one's own religion.

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." (Thang D. Nguyen, 2008)

Realizing that the situation is becoming more sensitive and the role of the government is using only security forces and step up law enforcement were not an answer to the cause of problems. Moreover, when it considered more in depth, the real challenges of the case are 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 policy 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 descents.

It's could not be neglected to determined that the role of the Thai's government has been set up the issue of violence as the national agenda and have set up various project to develop the area such as the economic zone,

in summing up the role of Thai's government working over the past 13 years, the government attempted to address the problem by adopted the policy as the national priority to solve the problem, in 2012 was one of the turning point that the government open more space of talk for the preparator group of violence such as BRN, PULO to participate the peace talk with Malaysia as the facilitators, as a result, there is some gab of mutual understanding and both side could not reach to the point of agreement, an ongoing of peace talk project could come up with some point of mutual understanding, at least the development of conflict shown the deduction of incidents, but seems more violence increasing that caused more damages.

CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA:

Emerging of a new radical and emerging of conflict in the modern world is connected to the religious thought for misinterpretation and misuse of religion. The clashes among religions may come from the differences of thoughts and background roots of the religion. The conflict emerges with the differences of the misunderstanding with each other. The clash of civilization is referring to the tribal conflict on a global scale. In the emerging world, states and groups from two difference civilizations may form limited.

A long-standing rivalry between Tamil and Sinhalese inhabitants of Sri Lanka has ensured an extremely volatile relationship between the two groups. The combination of religious and ethnic differences continues to create violent conflicts between the parties although they have shared Sri Lanka for innumerable centuries.

Prior to colonial occupation, Tamils controlled the northern part of Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in 1972), while the Sinhalese ruled the southern regions of the land. Sri Lanka was many years under the British rule, the problem of the conflict in Sri Lanka traced from the British colonial, ruled the whole of the Ceylon Island (Old name of Sri Lanka) since the beginning of 18 century, the British sent slaves (Tamil) from India to Sri Lanka as the British labor in order to make tea plantation for British company. Ceylon tea became one of the successful business of the British colonial. The core of the conflict in Sri Lanka was started after the independent of Ceylon in 1948 when Sinhala nationalism had disenfranchised and many deprived of citizenship of Indian Tamil workers. Tamil and Sinhalese forces combined to fight for their common freedom. However, this alliance did not last long. The Sinhalese have retained power throughout most of Sri Lanka's history because of its size compared to the Tamil population, the second largest group in the country. With unquestioned economic and political power, the Sinhalese inhabitants face the anger and bitterness of the minority Tamils, who must struggle to have their voice heard. The conflict between the Tamil and Sinhalese rose to a new degree in 1956 as Solomon Bandaranaike was instated as Prime Minster and declared Sinhala the official language of what was then Ceylon. The Tamil minority was outraged by this act and opposition to the Sinhalese dominated government grew as the state backed Buddhism on an official level. In 1958, the parliament announced a new law by adopting the Sinhala language as an official language of Ceylon. A hundred of Tamils were killed as they were protested against the new law. Bandaranaike was later assassinated and proceeded by his wife who became Prime Minister in 1960. With this tension of ethnics in 1972, the Ceylon changes its name to Sri Lanka and declared the Buddhism as the country's religion. (Palamkunnel Leena, 2013)

The Ethnic tension was again crucial when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formed in 1976 in the north and the east of Sri Lanka. LTTE won over all seats in Tamil areas. In 1981, Sinhala burning the Jaffna Public Library, causing further resentment in Tamil community. In 1983, the first civil war called "First Eelam War" resulted with the increasing of violation and several hundred Tamils were killed. The situation of Sri Lanka after the long ethnic conflict which killed more than a thousand people since 1983, the UN human rights council played a very important role by adopting a resolution concerning with the investigation of the civil war in Sri Lanka, however, nor or less achievement had not been made so far, due to the rejection of Sri Lankan government.

Between 1985-1990, the Sri Lankan government attempted for peace talks with LTTE, India also involved, but most attempts were failed due to the campaign of Left-Wing Sinhala protest against Indo-Sri Lanka agreement, following by the second civil war called "Second Eelam War." Surprisingly, Rajiv Gandhi, a former Indian Prime Minister was assassinated by LTTE in south India.

In 1995, the "Third Eelam War" begins with the result of rebel sink the navel aircraft, following by 2001, the suicide bombed at International Airport destroys half of the Sri Lankan Airlines fleet and between 2002 – 2005 and the extreme violation remains exist especially the incident suicide bomb blast in Colombo in 2004. A dramatically changed with the result of Mahinda Rajapaksa, a former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka won the presidential election. He attempted to end the Tamil Tigers by depressing the Tamil leaders and achieved to kill Velupillai Prabhakaran (Tamil Tiger Supreme Leader) and announced that Tamil Tigers defeated in 2009. (Clarence, 2007)

EMERGENCE OF ARMED CONFLICT:

Until the early-1980s, ethnic conflict was primarily limited to the political arena where destruction to property and life was minimal. However, violence had occurred on number of occasions, such as in the passing of the “Sinhalese Only Bill” in 1956. Similar ethnic riots involving Tamils and Sinhalese occurred in 1958, 1977 and 1981 accordingly, with the most violent and destructive taking place in July 1983. Many observers saw the violence of July 1983 as a turning point in the conflict. (De Votta, 2000)

The failure of parliamentary politics and the entrenchment of ethnic politics which led to frustration among Tamil youth, eventually made some of these youths organize themselves into armed groups for the ostensible purpose of seeking independence from Sinhalese domination. The first of these groups was the Tamil Tigers which later came to be known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam or LTTE. In 1978, the Tamil Tigers carried out a series of bank robberies and also assassinated a number of police officers, many of whom were Tamil. Bank robberies and selected assassination of individuals within the Tamil community (who were considered traitors) later led to massacres of Sinhalese and Muslim civilians in the border villages and contested areas. By the 1980s, this phase in the evolution of political violence expanded to include indiscriminate bomb attacks in the Sinhalese-dominated south, particularly in Colombo. Subsequently, the conflict reached civil war proportions and Indian peacekeeping forces were sent to Sri Lanka in 1987. The Indian forces left in 1990 and the civil conflict between the Government and LTTE resumed three months later. The conflict escalated in the late-1990s with conventional battles being fought to capture territory. On a lasting peace, the government will need to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils that has plagued the country since its independence.

CLASHES OF ETHNICITIES:

Sri Lankan society is an ethno-religious mosaic and within the ethnic groups, there are clear religious divisions as well. To a certain extent, ethnicity and religion also have a regional basis, which is a significant reason why the Tamil militancy has a strong geographical dimension, which extended to the demand of a separate independent state. Of the ethnic and religious groups, Tamil Hindus predominate in the Northern Province and maintain a significant presence in the Eastern Province. The Eastern Province is an ethnically mixed area where Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese are found in sizeable numbers even though Tamils have a slightly higher statistical edge. Indian Tamils, the descendants of laborers brought from Southern India by the British in the 19th century to work on tea and coffee estates, are concentrated in parts of the Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces. Sinhalese Buddhists predominate in all parts of the country except the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Muslims have a significant concentration in the Eastern Province, but generally are scattered throughout the country. (Report of Seminar on ‘Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism: Interfaith Visions for Humanity)

IDENTIFYING THE CONFLICT:

The conflict in Sri Lanka is complexities to identify the causes, however, there are some prominent issues that could be identify as follows;

- 1) Ethnic politics is the most crucial dimension of the conflict which the identity of the Muslim and Sinhala people were preserving from the historical aspect during 9th – 12th century as it represents the formulation of clear Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic or cultural identities, the ethnic tradition was reflected to the idea of nationalism of Sinhalese and claimed as the Land of Buddhism. Interpretation of the ethnic politic became a long and bloody tradition conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese.
- 2) Politics of language in addition to the barriers imposed by the continued use of the English language as the official language after independence, the emerging nationalist forces perceived that Sri Lankan Tamils had access to a disproportionate share of power as a consequence of educational opportunities in the colonial period and were also disproportionately represented in the civil administration. Moreover, considerable mercantile interests were also controlled by non-Sinhalese groups. These fears and concerns were a basis for the politics of language that was to emerge.
- 3) Politics of education, since the 1970s, access to education, particularly access to higher education has been ethnicized. In addition, many other aspects of education, including the structural organization of schools and universities, content of textbooks and training of teachers have impacted directly on ethnic conflict. In compared to other ethnic and religious groups in the country, Tamils have had strong cultural norms which valued education. Many Tamils attended English language schools which were the passport to higher

education and better employment in the colonial period. As a consequence of well-funded American missionary activities, the Tamil-dominated Northern Province had comparatively better facilities for English language and pre-university education.

- 4) Some other factors including ethnic conflict and employment which is clearly ensure that religion is the based form of the employment issue as well as language and education policies have placed barriers on employment, especially in the administrative and professional ranks in which Tamils were at one point and the issue of land is also another point for taking into account ownership over and access to land has also been a consistent area in which ethnic politics in Sri Lanka have manifested, and have sustained themselves over the years. As noted, one of the peculiarities in the demographic patterns in Sri Lanka is the relative concentration of certain ethnic groups in certain geographical regions. The clearest site of politics of land and ethnicity has been in the sparsely populated areas of the dry zone in the North Central Province and the Eastern Province.

In term of political, economy and society aspects, Sri Lanka was facing with instability of inequality, socio-economic rights, unemployment, and social accountability. At the same time, peace process gradually formed with the agreement between the government and the Tamils to form the society, the majority of the Tamils mostly residing in the north and the east of Sri- Lanka and the Tamils party tuned into the political participation and won the election in the north which shown that the political participation is one of the best way to bring the demand of the Muslim community that could address in the parliament. In the current situation, the conflict in Sri Lanka has been addressed with the policy of homegrown solution that the solution should be acceptable to all the communities. (Ahilan, 2017)

SUMMARIZE THE LESSON LEARNT OF THE CONFLICT IN THAILAND:

The Southern border provinces of Thailand are the compromising conflict which the opponents of the government still demand for their rights, political participation, justice and minimize armed force as well as the martial law. From last 13 years, the Thailand learned that with the implementation of the *Krue Se* mosque and *Tak bai* incident have created a new member of radical against the government, it becomes much more complicated to understand the situation. The role of the government always attempted in providing more budget for settle down the situation, but somehow the financial support has tuned to subsidizing to the preparator of violence which interrelated between the people and the opponents. Therefore, a sustainable solution of the conflict may not rely on the government policy alone, but it must be ensuring how the government policy is properly use in the Southern border provinces of Thailand, this will be guided the government officers as well as people to understand the problem. In fact, the government should be first ensuring what is the influence of the conflict that still support the preparator of violence to continue the conflict. Education, health care, infrastructure and justice could be a big challenge for the government in order to end the conflict.

SUMMARIZE THE LESSON LEARNT OF THE CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA:

Sri Lanka conflict shown on how the society grows with the people who feel owned, during the creation of the state was leaned on how the Tamils and Sinhalese approaches to take advantage of its belonging, religion, culture and the way of life are not only make the differences of their identities, but there are some certain groups who wanted to separate from the mainland in Sri Lanka, such as LTTE which is more crucial and radical style to achieve its goals. Therefore, the government is facing with manner of violence against the opponent and caused ongoing conflict which is considered of the longest conflict in Asia.

In addition, the role of media is the factor creating social environment, media has influential the way of life of the people and the understanding of the differences in believe. A case of Lebanon is the best example for the social diversity and respect people in difference faiths. The government should also promote the role of the religion leaders should be creating peace rather than conflict and violence. It is depending on the society as some society may be very conservative, definitely, the politics is the cause of creating the social environment.

CONCLUSION:

Thailand and Sri Lanka conflict are similarly as defined ethnic conflict, the people are not satisfying with the implementation of the government policies to solve the problem, even it has been proposed with the peaceful means whether by negotiation, peace talk, and to facilitate all its form of peaceful coexistence, especially in case of peace talk which outsider such as Malaysia (for Thailand) and India (for Sri Lanka) plays as the

facilitators of the conflict.

Both countries are facing the ongoing conflicts in guerrilla style. It is necessary to summarize that the conflict of Thailand and Sri Lanka are certainly clashes of its culture and civilization as Samuel Huntington was predicted. (Huntington, 1997) Without the nature of understanding between each other, the lesson learnt shown an ongoing conflict and failure of the state to maintain peace.

The third party may be essential for development of the conflict, perhaps it shown the similarity of culture as India for Tamils and Malaysia for Malayu people. It can propose that one of the sustainable to end the clash of culture is to engage people from the differences to known each other, the role of the government should play integral part with the local people to understand the nature of the conflict. In the modern day, it should not be neglected to concern about extremist activity that may tune into the internal war, avoid discrimination, and provide a proper quality of social welfare in order to reduce the gab of inequality among the people in the difference of ethnicity.

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