

Indonesian Diplomacy in Resolving the Southern Thailand Conflict in Maintaining Regional Security Stability

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Abstract

This article tries to see the role of Indonesian diplomacy in resolving the South Thailand conflict. This article describes the efforts made by Indonesia to maintain security and stability in the Southeast Asian region. The Southern Thailand conflict has been going on for 14 years since 2004. This study used a qualitative method, collecting data using in-depth interviews with Sanusi and Hazmi, as Chairperson and Former Chairperson of the Indonesian Pattani Student Association. This long-running conflict has had many impacts on the people of Southern Thailand. Indonesia has several times been a facilitator in resolving the South Thailand conflict. In addition, various assistance from Indonesia through Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, such as educational scholarships for children, building schools, or Islamic boarding schools, sent teachers to teach. The hope is that even though the conflict is not over, the children of Southern Thailand can still get their right to education, and the security stability of the Southeast Asian region will be maintained.

Keywords: *Southern Thailand, Pattani, Indonesian Diplomacy, Conflict Resolution, Human Rights*

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized and was a buffer zone for the struggle for territory in Southeast Asia between Britain and France. (Ganesan & Amer, 2010: 201). However, this does not rule out the possibility of Thailand avoiding conflict. It has been proven that the conflict between the government and the Malay Muslim ethnic minority since the early 1970s has yet to find common ground for conflict resolution because the Malay Muslim ethnicity still wants independence and is trying to break away from the territory and government of Thailand (Melvin, 2007: 2). This conflict arose as a result of the *rathniyom* policy or cultural revolution which aimed to unite advanced Thai cultural identities and the policy of "*siamkam*" non-Thais (*siamization* policy). (Yazid, 2013:3). The cultural assimilation policy was implemented during General Phibul Songkhram (1938-1944 and 1947-1957), which was the central policy of the Thai government. Efforts were made to assimilate the Thai language and culture throughout Thailand, including the southern region. The impact of this policy was substantial inequality in economic and social terms, such as the resistance of the Malay Muslim community who spoke Malay and politics, which gave rise to rebellion movements. (Kusuma, 2015:11)

The conflict in Southern Thailand was motivated by the local population's dissatisfaction with the many social, political, and economic inequalities. This triggered the desire to have the authority to regulate their territory. The many separatist movements realize these desires. The Southern Thailand region consists of four provinces, namely Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satul/Satun, where most of the population is ethnic Malay and Muslim. Previously these areas were controlled by the Pattani Malay Kingdom, which became one of the trade centers with comprehensive coverage in the South China Sea. (Yuniarto, 2004:5) argues that in 1902 the Malay Pattani Kingdom suffered a setback. During this period, an

Anglo-Siamese treaty was agreed upon between the Siamese and British governments, which stated that the Patani Raya region was no longer a separate kingdom but became the territory of the kingdom of Siam (Thailand).

Several factors are causing the separatist movement in Southern Thailand, namely social, political, and economic factors. Socially, the Thai government's policy during the leadership of Prime Minister Phibun Songgram (1938-1944) implemented a policy of national identity with the motto of the trinity (eta lak thai), which only recognizes one Thai nationality, one Buddhist religion, and submits to the authority of the King (Yuniarto, 2005, p. 92). This motto is considered an ideological imposition and revocation of identity and tradition owned by Pattani Muslims. The Patani ethnic group who do not want to mix Buddhist and Islamic cultures has led the desire to establish Patani Raya. There is a concern that the assimilation of Muslims into Thai society causes Muslim groups to lose their identity (Dulyakasem, 1984, p. 227).

Then politically, the people of Southern Thailand want to get autonomous rights in managing the government. Unfortunately, in the central government, there are very few representatives from South Thailand due to the low level of education. The reason is inseparable from the lack of interest in learning after it was enacted that schools in Southern Thailand were no longer allowed to use the Malay language. Apart from that, economic factors also became the cause of the separatist movement due to the low economic level of the people of Southern Thailand. Often the government takes the natural resources of South Thailand, which are famous for being abundant, but the local people need help to enjoy them.

When facing an ethnic conflict in demanding rights over oneself, there are at least three foreign policy attitudes that the state can take: first, the state can side with the parent country or host country where the ethnic conflict is taking place. Second, the state can side with the rebel movement. Third, the state can be neutral or ambivalent. Before intervening in the Southern Thailand conflict, Indonesia was obliged to ask for the availability of the Thai government. With the availability of the Thai government, Indonesia can carry out its role as a mediator. If all parties accept the involvement of outsiders in matters relating to state sovereignty, then the task of third parties will be easy to carry out.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method in this article uses a qualitative method. Based on the understanding (Cresswell, 2014), qualitative methods can explain social problems. This research uses a type of case study approach. The type of method that is explaining, illustrating, or in the form of narrative. As a data collection technique, there are primary and secondary sources. In this research, the technique used in data collection is to use secondary data. Primary data uses interview results, while secondary data is processed by other people and then published. This article is based on in-depth interviews with Sanusi, the Indonesian Pattani Student Association Chairperson, and Hazmi, the former Chairperson of the Indonesian Pattani Student Association. The secondary data of this research is in the form of news, journals, books, and even websites.

The writer will use constructivism theory to discuss the conflict in Southern Thailand. According to (Prarono, 2010, p. 14), constructivism is one of the thoughts that has developed in the United States since 1989 as a reaction to the failure of the dominant traditions in the study of International Relations, namely realism, and liberalism, to predict or understand systemic transformations that change the world order drastically. The Southern Thailand conflict is very relevant to be explained by constructivism theory. Constructivism has a view of

human nature that is freer and more respectable because it can reject or accept the international system. In addition, the community can reshape the profitable relationship model or whatever it wants based on the structuring rules and methods in the speech act. According to (Adler, 1997, pp. 12-13), the view of constructivism is based on meanings that arise from interactions with the international environment, which influence the behavior of states. In this process of mutual influence, collective meanings are formed; this is what forms the basis for the formation of intersubjectivity and then forms the structure and ultimately regulates the state's actions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Assistance or third-party intervention is urgently needed in the dialogue to resolve the Pattani conflict in southern Thailand, which occurred from 2004 until now in 2018. The conflict under Thailand regarding Pattani has been 232 years since Thailand colonized it. In 1909, there was an agreement between Thailand and the British regarding the division of territory in Malaysia. Since then, the Pattani area has officially entered Thailand. Indonesia's involvement in the form of soft power uses second-track diplomacy and does not rule out the possibility of multi-track diplomacy. Indonesia has sufficient capital capacity to engage in this conflict, namely (1) The fact that Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, it is hoped that Indonesia will be able to become a mediator between the Thai government and the rebels in order to find a mutually beneficial meeting point; (2) Currently Indonesia is a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Indonesia indirectly carries out the mandate to maintain world peace. Therefore, the role in this conflict is duly taken. Apart from participating in maintaining peace, a positive view will be attached to Indonesia as a good international citizen; (3) Indonesia has experience at the regional level as a mediator for the conflict between the Philippine government and the MNLF (the Moro nation). Not only that, but Indonesia has also become an interpreter of peace in Cambodia with the implementation of the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM). It has been proven that Indonesia can maintain peace in the Southeast Asian region; (4) Indonesia has experienced a conflict between the Indonesian government and GAM (Free Aceh Movement) which ended with the involvement of a third party, namely Finland. This can be evidence that the involvement of a third party only sometimes makes things worse. (5) Indonesia has also experienced dark times using military solutions to fuel separatist rebellions. When referring to these events, the role of peaceful conflict resolution is a rational choice. However, most countries in Southeast Asia prefer to use military force to suppress separatist actions.

The conflict in Southern Thailand is categorized as ethnonationalism. Ethnonationalism is nationalism with ethnic sentiment (religion, ethnicity, race) as its basis. Ethnonationalism can also be interpreted as the loss of loyalty of an ethnic group to an agreement on a more powerful bond (the nation-state). A similar conflict in Southern Thailand occurred over identity issues and unequal social and economic distribution problems. As a result, there is dissatisfaction with the government regarding redistributing natural, personnel, and economic resources, creating primordial sentiments. Then it becomes identity politics, which impacts demands to obtain autonomy over the future of a group.

(Kegley and Witkopf, 1997) His book states that religion is a transnational phenomenon that is like two sides of a coin with the potential to create harmony and conflict. After the 9/11 tragedy, the role of religion in international relations has received more attention. The theory of diplomacy can describe the Southern Thailand conflict. This is in line with the concrete actions of one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Nahdatul Ulama (NU), which is conducting diplomacy with the Thai government. NU plays an important role in the socio-

political life of Indonesia. NU has principles of moderation, tolerance, and fairness. Based on these principles, NU carries out tasks in a humanitarian context. NU is not only beautiful conceptually but also in action. NU approached stakeholders, including the ulama, through several meetings in an effort to bridge the Pattani conflict in Southern Thailand.

(Baiq Wardhani, 2008) The role of large mass organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah in supporting peace efforts is considered a factor supporting the success of Indonesian diplomacy. Prime Minister Thaksin and the King of Thailand invited NU clerics to bridge the gap (gap) between the Thai government and Patani Muslims. The visits were conducted in March-April 2005 and then 11-12 September 2006. NU's mission is to provide input to the Thai government to resolve conflicts in three provinces in Southern Thailand, namely Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat, which are predominantly Muslim. This effort is part of faith-based diplomacy. According to (Johnston: 2003), a faith-based diplomacy is a form of multi-track diplomacy that seeks to integrate religious beliefs with efforts to create international peace. Diplomacy aims to create and build world peace, which can be done by reducing (resolving) conflicts, tensions, and misunderstandings between groups or nations. Another NU effort aid in helping resolve the conflict by providing scholarships to students of Southern Thailand. After graduation, this scholarship can provide enlightenment in society, especially in strengthening the Ahlussunah wal-Jama'ah An-nahdliyah ideology. Long-term benefits Apart from protecting the right to access education, this also benefits NU cadres. Until now, 350 Southern Thai students have been studying in Indonesia through the NU college scholarship route (Abdullah Alawi, October 3, 2016).

Quoted from the NU Online website, Indonesia also has historical links with Thailand regarding the history of Islam in the archipelago. Thai Ulama Ali Matih explained that one of Wali Songo Sunan Gresik's teachers was from Campa Thailand. According to Ulama Ali Matih's suspicions, the name Gresik in Indonesia and Thailand was coined by Sunan Gresik and his teacher. During the war, some Indonesians also fought with the Muslims in Thailand. The fighter's name is Shaykh Abdussomad Al Falimbani—a scholar who composed the book *Hidayatus Solihin*. After the Kingdom of Siam defeated the Thai Muslims, many Thais moved to Indonesia, including the cities of Demak, Kudus, Aceh, and others. One of Indonesia's heroines is Cut Nyak Dien, whose father is from Gresik Pattani. Ulama Ali Matih's visit to the International Summit of the Moderate Islamic Leaders (Isomil) in Jakarta brings hope that Indonesia-Thailand relations which have been running for a long time, can be maintained and strengthened in the future by carrying out various collaborations. One form of cooperation is providing scholarships for Pattani students to Indonesia so that later the moderate Islam Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah practiced by Nahdlatul Ulama can spread in Thailand (Muchlishon Rochmat/Fathoni, May 11, 2016).

Quoted from the NU Online website, PCINU inaugurated NU Thailand at the end of 2016, the 25th PCINU abroad. NU Thailand has a unique feature because its administrators are Thai citizens. This is different from PCINU in other countries, where the board is often filled by Indonesian citizens living in that country or Indonesian students there. Most of Thailand's PCINU administrators are influential religious leaders, Muslim teachers, and traders from the provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. PCINU aims to develop Ahlussunah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) Islam. In line with the words of caliph Umar, there is no Islam if there is no organization, and there is no organization if there are no leaders, and no leaders if they are disobeyed. The relationship between state and religion must go hand in hand with peace and harmony. Love for the motherland is part of faith. If the relationship between religion and the state goes well, conducive security will be created. H Masduki Baidlowi, as Deputy Secretary General of PBNU, hopes that the Thai government will pay attention to the welfare and

prosperity of the people of Southern Thailand, who are predominantly Muslim and can seriously assist security in Southern Thailand. (Fathoni, 03 October 2016)

The conflict that has been going on for a long time has not gone unnoticed by the international community. According to (Jeppson, 2008, p. 19), in 1994, intervention efforts occurred when Thai law replaced Islamic law so that many Malay Muslims crossed into Malaysian territory to settle their cases at the Malaysian Religious Court. Since 2004, there have been security disturbances in the border area because hundreds of asylum seekers from Southern Thailand have entered Malaysian territory, worsening diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, in 2005, Malaysia attempted to carry out a peace-making dialogue between Dr. Tun Mahathir Muhammad and a separatist group on the island of Langkawi. Dr. Tun Mahathir Muhammad shared his views and advice on achieving the goal of peace between the Thai government and separatist groups. The following dialogue between Anand Panyarachun, appointed by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra with Dr. Tun Mahathir Muhammad, produced a draft containing the separatist group to abort his request for independence in exchange for forgiveness, better economic development, more allocation of funds for development in Southern Thailand region and the use of the Malay language in schools in the Southern Thai region (Fuston, 2010, p. 248)



Figure1. Malaysian PM Najib Razak and Thai PM Yingluck Shinawatra
(Source: bbc.com)

In 2013, Malaysia, a member of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation), again became a facilitator between the Thai government and BRN (National Revolutionary Front). The meeting, held on 28 February 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, contained five demands from the BRN against the Thai government. First, BRN's recognition as the representative of the Muslim people of Southern Thailand. Second is Malaysia's appointment as a mediator, not just a facilitator. Third, allow ASEAN countries, OIC, and NGOs to be involved in the peace process. Fourth, recognition of the existence and sovereignty of the Pattani Malay nation. Fifth, the release of all Pattani fighters from prison (McCargo, 2014, p. 8). (Peace-making efforts will continue until 2014 to discuss safe zones to minimize damage and losses from the conflict. The safe zone will become an area where weapons are prohibited in combat, although the details are unclear.

Quoted from the Dunia Rmol website, the current conflict in Southern Thailand is that the rebellion is starting to rise again, as evidenced by the increasing number of shootings against civilians by someone whose identity is unknown. This protects against the public's indifference to the conflict in Southern Thailand or the Deep South. This mutiny aimed to undermine the confidence of the security forces and make various areas uncontrollable until the BRN decided on the following tactical step. The separatist group realized their actions had violated Human Rights (HAM), as echoed by human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch. In October 2018, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad will meet with Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha in Bangkok, Thailand. Mahathir's agenda during this visit was to assist the peace process in Southern Thailand. (Amelia Fitriani, 24 October 2018)

The length of time the conflict has left the Pattani people traumatized. Talking about independence is a sensitive matter. They are afraid to say the term Merdeka itself. The Thai government also believes that the Pattani people have a violent ideology. Apart from all that, the people of Pattani hope that the Thai government will listen to their complaints after this conflict has been going on for so long. The hope of the Pattani people for the Thai government is that the Pattani people can determine their destiny like the others. They want the same justice that the government has given to the majority in Thailand. They can voice their opinions because Thailand is based on democracy, but in practice, it is not. Social rights, political rights, and religious rights are things that the Pattani people do not get. The Pattani people desire to live freely and peacefully. This is not just a matter of independence but a struggle for rights.

CONCLUSION

The Southern Thailand conflict has been going on for a long time, from 2004 until 2018, which has yet to end. As a result of the Thai government's cultural revolution policy, the people of Southern Thailand cannot enjoy the same rights as other people. The people of Southern Thailand cannot live freely and peacefully; sometimes, they are considered separatists by the Thai government. Human rights are hard to come by in Southern Thailand. The people of Southern Thailand are not allowed to voice their opinions; this is inversely proportional to the basis of the Thai state, which adheres to democracy. The majority in Thailand only owns freedom of opinion.

Therefore, the Indonesian government is essential in resolving the conflict in Southern Thailand. Indonesia several times became a facilitator and mediator between the Thai government and the people of Southern Thailand to find common ground to end the conflict. In addition, community organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, assist in the form of scholarships to the Pattani people who wish to study in Indonesia. The economic background of the Pattani people can be said to be relatively low because many of their families have lost a family backbone due to being arrested or shot dead by the military. Also, Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are co-founding schools, Islamic boarding schools, and teachers who will teach in the Southern Thailand region. This prolonged conflict has consumed time, energy, and materials. Indonesia's involvement in the Southern Thailand conflict is expected to immediately assist the process of resolving the conflict so that both parties can find common ground and the interests of both parties can be achieved without mutual harm.

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