

STATE VIOLENT CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Overview and Trends

The conflict situation in September 2016 follows the fluctuating pattern of violence of the past years, especially since 2012. After a high rise in the number of incidents in August, the number decreased in September to 54 incidents (61 percent of the August total). September violence resulted in 30 deaths and 45 injuries. Despite a significant reduction in the numbers of incidents and injuries, the death toll was high compared to the previous month with 6 more deaths than in August (see the graph showing an overview of violence).

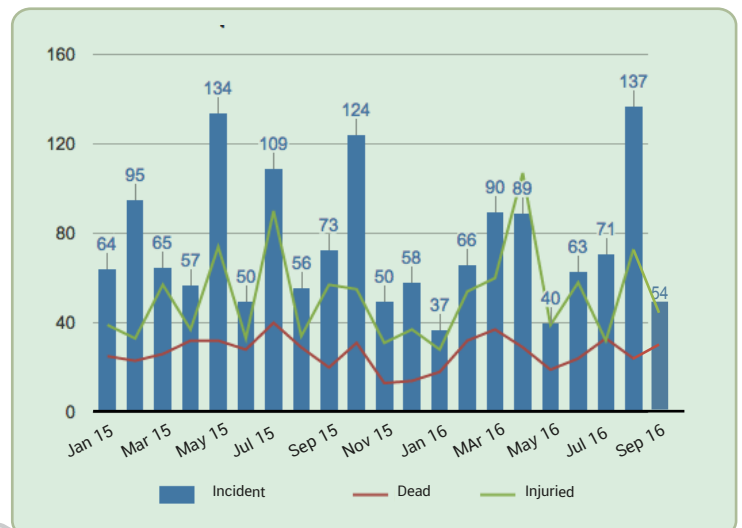
VIOLENCE IN SEPTEMBER

Number of Violent Events, Persons Dead and Injured in September

54
VIOLENT

30
DEAD

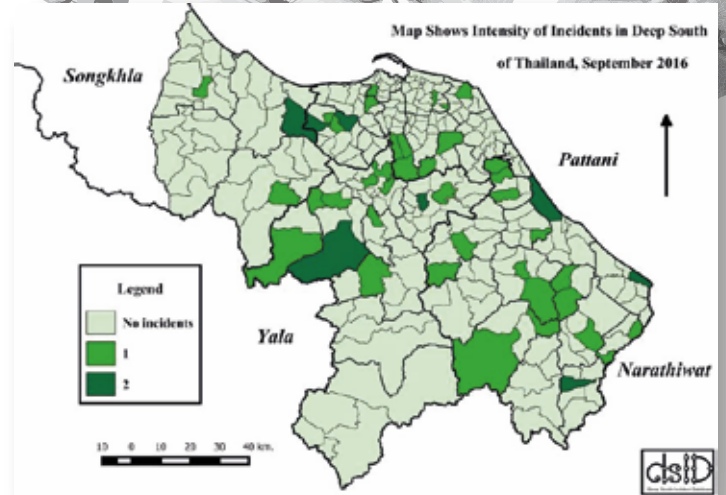
45
INJURED



Overview and Trends

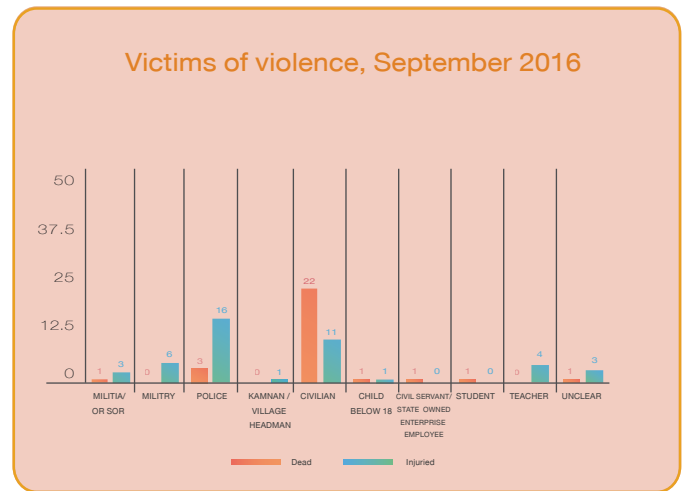
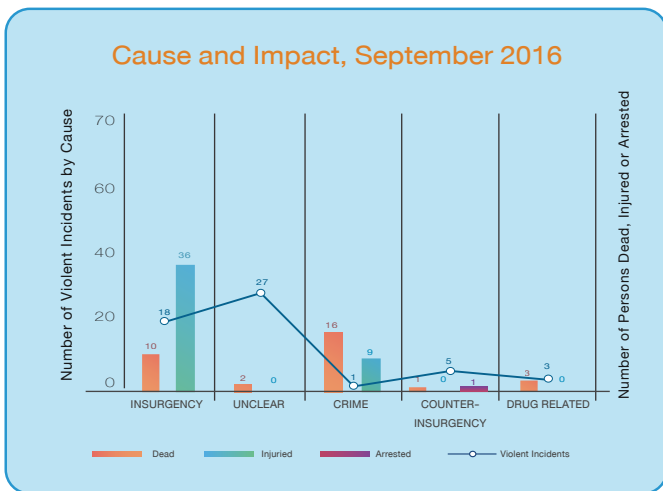


The current pattern seems to reflect the ongoing political situation on the ground which involves recent progress of the peace talks and the social movements statements on human rights issues. In the formal peace talk meeting between the Thai government and MARA Patani on September 2, 2016, both parties agreed to discuss further in detail about 'safety zones' and there was also pressure from domestic social movements and international groups on the issue of human rights violations, especially torture. Both factors in part led to violent reactions from insurgents. The restructuring of government agencies dealing with the conflict may be a positive factor in shaping the direction of the peace process.

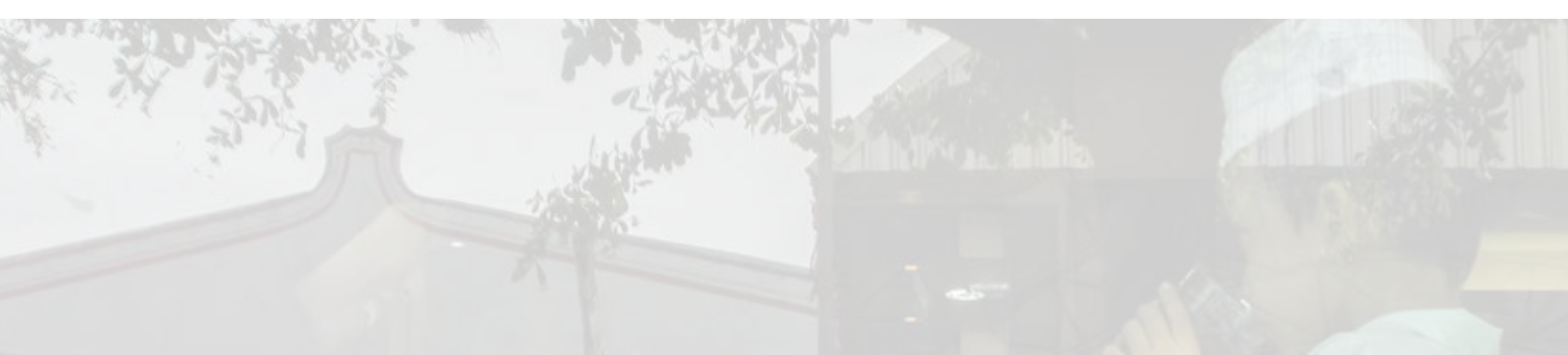


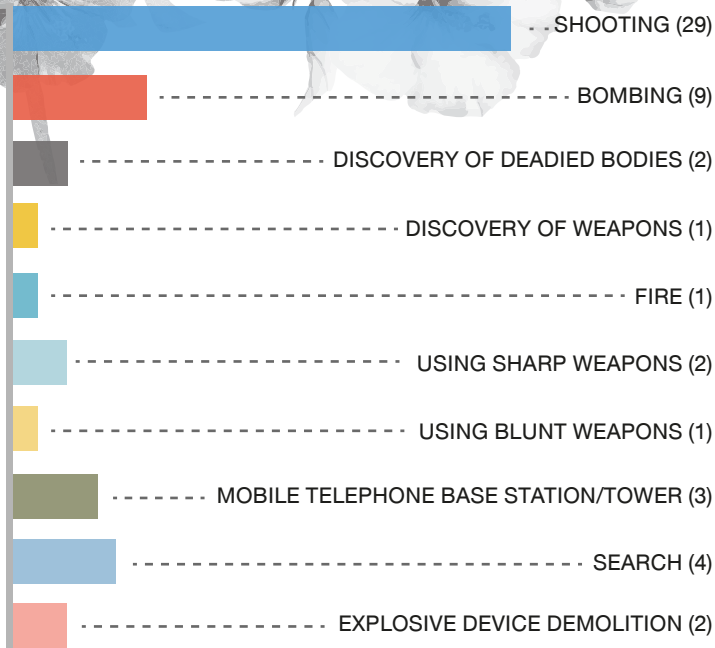
Causes and Impacts of Violent Incidents

Nearly half of the incidents that occurred in September (23 out of 54) could be verified as being associated with the insurgency and counter-insurgency. These events resulted in 75 casualties, of which 4 armed individuals were killed and 27 injured, while civilian deaths and injuries totaled 25 and 16 respectively. Although the number of incidents was not high compared to other months, they resulted in a relatively large civilian loss.



Shootings were the most common form of incidents (9 incidents). There were 9 explosions in September. This number is much lower than in the previous month. However, several of these explosions were key events which had significant political impacts, for example, the bombing of a train at Khok Pho district, Pattani province, on September 3 and the bombing at Taba School in Tak Bai district, Narathiwat province, on September 6, which led to civilian casualties. The events prompted public outcry condemning attacks on soft targets at public places and a reiterated demand for safety zones. At the same time, the explosions targeting armed officers continued such as the attack on September 23 in Krong Pinang district, Yala province, which killed 3 police officers, and the bombing of a petrol station after policemen were lured to the spot in Khok Pho district, Pattani, on September 29, which injured many. This month, many explosives were also recovered before they were detonated.





The use of explosives caused a lot of damages. However, in terms of political impact, the loss of civilian lives seems to significantly relate to efforts to uphold peace and human right norms.

Important Events

Safety Zones and Violence

Despite the severity and intensity of violence since the end of August, the scheduled peace talks between the government and the Mara Patani still continued on September 2, 2016. The meeting was the first formal discussions. The result of the meeting was later made public, revealing that the two sides had agreed on guideline or rules for the peace discussions. The sides had spent several months drafting these, although both have not signed any agreement. They also agreed to discuss about safety zones in detail in the next meetings. Another new development was their agreement to consider and assess the proposal on "public safety zone" which had been proposed by Women's Agenda for Peace group. This is significant progress as a proposal from civil society was discussed at the negotiation table.

However, it seems that this progress in the peace process has been accompanied by violence, with a bombing attempt at the center of Waeng district, Narathiwat province, and the bombing of a train in Khok Pho district, Pattani province, on September 3. An event that triggered strong public reaction was a bombing at a grocery store, opposite Ban Taba School, Tak Bai district, Narathiwat province, on September 6, which led to the deaths of 3 people and wounded 7. Two of those killed were Mr. Mayeng Wohbah and his 5-year-old daughter, Mitra Wohbah, while they were on their usual route to school. The incidents were likely a signal of opposition against the safety zone proposal of safety zone as multiple information sources continue to insist that there are groups who disagree with, and have tried to obstruct, the peace talks.

The attack, which affected many civilians, led several groups to condemn the armed group responsible for this event. Immediately, there were public statements calling for an end to civilian attacks from several civil society organizations of various political stances. This event also triggered reactions from international organizations and international NGOs, especially from UNICEF which called for protection of children and school safety. Human Rights Watch not only produced a statement condemning the insurgents for violating international humanitarian law, but also demanded that the UN Secretary General list BRN as a violator against children during armed conflict. The organization also called for the Thai government to ratify the Safe School Declaration to protect schools from the impact of armed conflict as a guarantee that the government must seek every means to ensure school safety in this conflict context. Attacks on innocent civilians, without a declaration of responsibility, have become more and more difficult to accept by various groups.

Violence and Torture

On the September 29, shooting followed by bombing against civilians at a petrol station in Khok Pho district, Pattani province, killed 1 and injured 7 people. Officers found a five-page flyer which was believed to be written by the perpetrators who planned to distribute it. A statement in the flyer says "Innocent Malayus were arrested and tortured, I will continue to kill Buddhist Thais." Using 'Malayus as victims of Thai state' as an excuse is common and is a way to turn violence into revenge. In other past events, a common claim was about the Thai state's killings of Muslims which triggered local resentment. What is interesting this time is that they referred to torture.



The torture issue is not new. It has become a hot topic due to a recent number of social movements becoming active on the issue. It is very possible that insurgent groups will use the issue as an excuse for their violent operations similar to how they commonly use the state's violations of human rights as an excuse to mobilize support for violence.

This could be an impact of the report on torture in the Deep South which was released by three local human rights organizations in February 2016. The report is based on 54 cases informed by anonymous sources. The Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) not only openly objected to the report's content openly in May; ISOC 4 also sued staff of the organizations who were involved in the report for defamation and violation of the Computer Crime Act. The lawsuit led to a campaign within and outside Thailand to protect the rights of human rights workers. In September, Amnesty International's attempt to release a report on torture at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand was also obstructed by officials. The report featured the overall torture situation in Thailand, which included cases in the Deep South. The event took place one day prior to the petrol station attack in Khok Pho.

In fact, there were interesting developments in September 2016 on the issue of torture prevention. The United Nations' Human Rights Council (UNHRC) also published a report on the situation of human rights submitted by Thai government to report to the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on September 23. The report mentioned that the Thai government accepted a proposal from other country members to establish an independent agency to investigate all allegations of torture, which includes ones in the Deep South. The report was a follow-up to the one in the second round submitted by the government in May 2016. Following that report, the cabinet approved an anti-torture and abduction bill, in compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which Thailand is a party and which has had legal binding since 2007.

The serious violations of human rights by way of torture is against universal principles and Thailand is gradually improving internal mechanisms to prevent the torture. However, the issue is still too sensitive for human rights organizations to easily monitor. On the other hand, it continues to be manipulated by insurgents to support the use of force against innocent civilians in the Deep South.

Recommendations

The Thai government and Mara Patani should seek a preliminary agreement to create a concrete safety zone as this is a first step to building trust between the two sides and it would contribute to the continuation of the peace process. It can also be a driving force to make other political efforts possible. It is necessary not to overlook the internal discussions needed for building consensus between different factions within the groups. This also includes the prevention of human rights violations and violent attacks that affect the lives and property of innocent civilians. The continuing existence of such issues may create doubt that could undermine the ongoing peace initiatives.

The establishment of a special delegation for Deep South conflict resolution may appear to be an improvement in the administration's efficiency and integrity. At the same time, it could play a role in building a balanced and an integrated government perspective on peaceful conflict resolution, especially with an emphasis on the peace talks which must address human rights violations.

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