

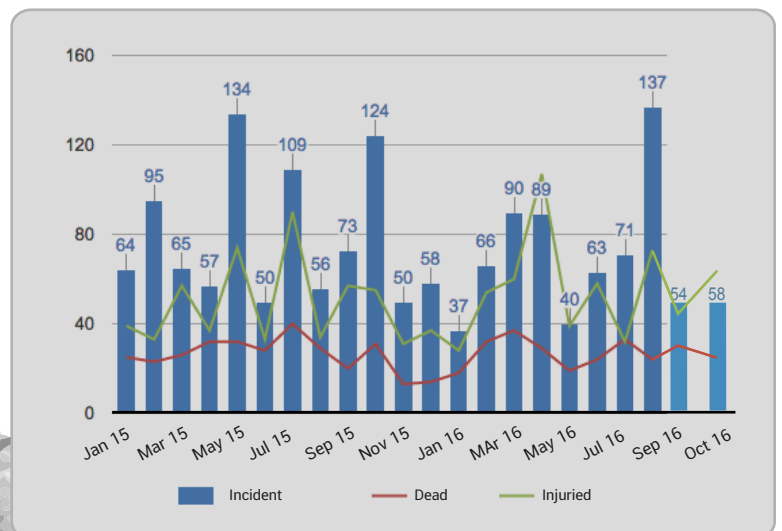
STATE VIOLENT CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Overview

Violent incidents in southern border provinces in October 2016 saw a continuation since the last month and significantly became volatile. From January 2004 to October 2016; amounting to 154 months, 15,938 are the total number of violent incidents which affected 19,182 persons including 6,770 fatalities and 12,412 injuries. October 2016 alone accounts for 58 incidents, causing 29 fatalities and 63 injuries.

VIOLENCE IN OCTOBER

Number of Violent Events, Persons Dead and Injured in October



Overview

State of violent incidents in October indicates that there are three important implications:

Firstly, it reflects that the dynamics of conflict are influenced by both Thai State's military operations against insurgents and the insurgents' retaliatory actions. These might be consequences of Thai State's military operations aiming to seize and control the situations as well as attempts of insurgents to maintain the goal of their actions. October is the month of three events signified as important and relevant to the insurgency, including Tak Bai incident on the 25th of October, the establishment of BRN armed force on the 10th of October, and the establishment of PULO on the 12th of October. Usually, annual symbolic incidents will occur provided that the appropriate circumstances and opportunities are available.

Secondly, the volatility of violent incidents is also responsive to no progressiveness on peace negotiation. Although there appeared another attempt to reconvene at the level of technical team and operational team in Malaysia at the end of October, it was in fact so slowly processed that some observers called it 'a stalemate' especially the secretive talk over a cooperation to create safety zones in order for protecting civilians or soft targets as well as an attempt to conduct violent campaign in some areas. Despite no tangible outcomes from the dialogue, it still brought about an establishment of new local coordinating committee with 37 members including some representatives from Thai State's administrative agencies and some from civil society organizations on the 30th of October. The government aims to create accommodating circumstances for peace process.

Last but not least is the implication from all other situations involved in a broader context. A factor that should not be overlooked is the dynamics of complicated and volatile situation in the southern border provinces in October in relation to political context, public policy adjustment, and indirect influences of national political situation. The last involves significantly King Rama 9 passed away on the 13th of October which brings grief to the peoples of Thailand.

In Bangkok between the 5th and 10th of October, the security authorities were monitoring closely on potential car bomb blasts because they were afraid of any symbolic incidents during the 10th and 12th of October. According to sabotage prevention measures, there were search and surround operations in Bangkok area resulting in an arrest of 44 male and female students of Ramkhamhang University from southern border provinces as suspects. Some were released later on.

Meanwhile, The Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha signed the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Order No. 57/2016 for the improvement of administration on resolving southern border provinces' problems. By that Order, 'Special Governmental Representatives' was founded with a mission to coordinate between operational units in the southern border provinces and the Prime Minister and to reduce unnecessary procedures and lateness in resolving problems. On the 3rd of October, the Prime Minister appointed 13 Special Governmental Representatives or so-called 'Forward Cabinet' which is chaired by General Udomdej Sithabutr; Deputy Minister of Defense. The importance of this organization is to create a new structure of coordination for operational units which directly responds to the Prime Minister and to exercise powers over financial and budgetary matters. There was an annual rotation of positions in leadership in several local agencies of military, civil administration, and police including Commander of Fourth Army Region who took a position of Director of Internal Security Operation Command Area 4 (Lieutenant General Piyawat Nakawanich), Secretary General of Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (Mr. Supanat Siranthawinaeti), and Southern Border Provinces Police Operation Centre (Police Lieutenant General Ronnasil Phusara).

Furthermore, there were some policy moves regarding southern border provinces. The Cabinet approved a project to create a model of 'secure, wealthy, and sustainable cities starting with economic development in Nongjik district of Pattani, Sungaigolok district of Narathiwat, and Betong district of Yala. Also, the Cabinet principally approved an investment of 5,175.3 million Baht for such project to be conducted from 2017 to 2020. The budget will be allocated from the contingency fund for emergency matters in the central fund 2017. In addition, 1,190.953 million Baht were approved for any urgent projects having to commence within 2017 such as the development of transportation network project.

The policy implication can be illustrated from the adoption of economic development policy as a measure to gain popularity from the people according to counterinsurgency approach. The current government focuses on effective and unified management, integration, command and control. Therefore, it is fair to say that the Thai government has pulled significant amount of human and financial resources in order to achieve the goals. In the year of 2017, the government is expected to spend more than 35,000 million Baht for resolving southern border provinces' problems.



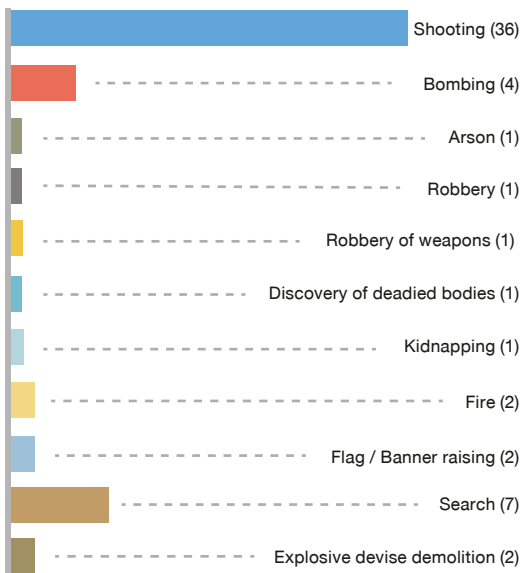
Consequently, it brings about the cycle of violent reactions, especially violence against soft targets and Buddhist people after any killing of insurgents by Thai authorities.

Observations and Trends

Overall, there were 58 incidents in October; including 36 shootings, 4 bombings, 2 explosive ordnance disposals, and 2 fires. It is observable that there were 7 search and surround operations by Thai security authorities which may significantly link to all other incidents taken place this month. Some observations can be drawn from the state of violent conflict in October as follow:

First

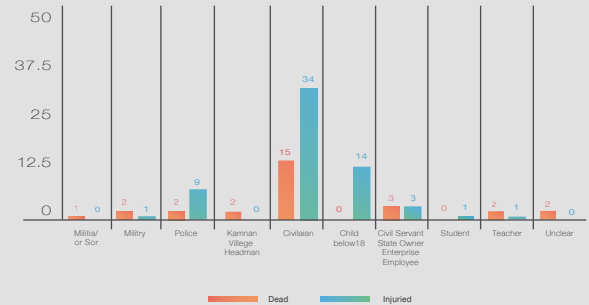
The number of incidents occurred in October 2016 is 58, slightly higher than that of September. It suggests no significant implication; however, the geographical distribution of incidents shows a wide-spread pattern with some high profile incidents such as bomb blasts at a local market in Pattani province.



Second

Many incidents in October were shootings which mostly targeted at civilians while there were none of military and police fatalities. Moreover, although the objective causes of some incidents could not be identified, it is clear that violent operations tend to have a causal relation to search and surround operations and extrajudicial killings of suspects in the previous period.

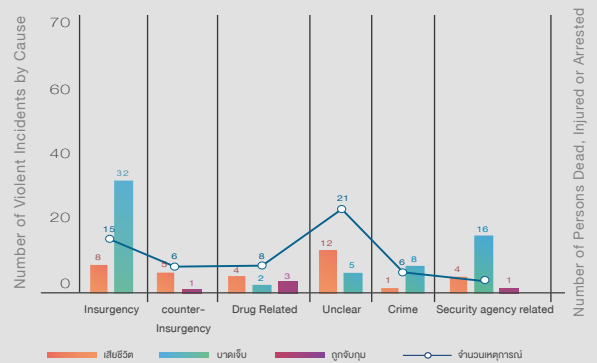
VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, OCTOBER 2016



Third

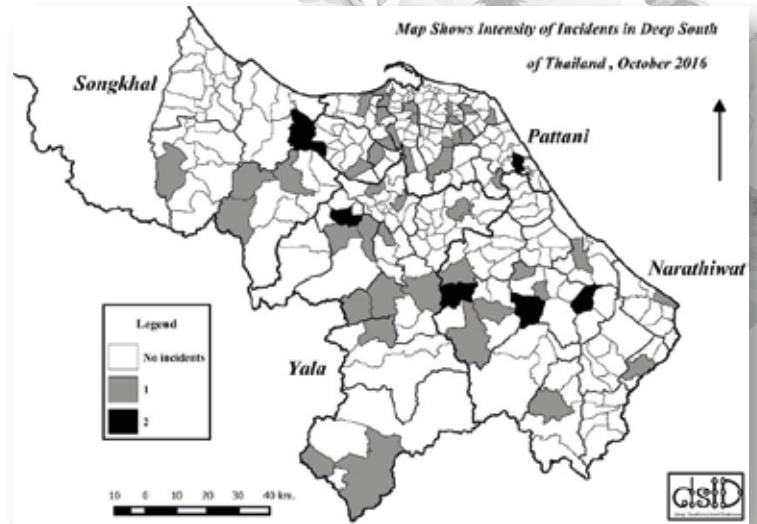
Most incidents occurred in October involved insurgency (40 percent) which included Thai State's counterinsurgency operations. While crimes and drug incidents accounted for 24 percent, unidentified incidents were about 36 percent. It can be seen that violence in southern border provinces was mostly caused by insurgency and counterinsurgency.

CAUSE AND IMPACT, OCTOBER 2016



Fourth

although there is an accommodating circumstance for peaceful resolution of this conflict which results in a downward-sloping violence graph from 2004 to 2016, internal leverage is likely to cause a decrease and a volatility in violence level simultaneously. However, multiple non-linear regression line shows a downward trend from 2004 to 2016. While this level of violence is consistently dropping, it seems to remain at the same level during the past few months. The level of violence is mitigated by several social forces developed from within consisting of military measures, public policy process, political process such as peace dialogue. Despite all these internal factors that prevent violence from rising, sometimes internal conflict itself could be a driven factor for spike of intensifying violence.



Recommendations

Inclusive peace process should be a top priority. In achieving that, every party in the society must be able to accept peace process which would not be possible if the peace dialogue does not actually happen and if there is no tangible progress from all stakeholders. An interesting phenomenon is the dissemination of declaration on BRN's internal restructuring on the 28th of September followed by the Thai government's establishment of Special Governmental Representatives (Forward Cabinet) on the 1st of October. After that, a new project on the model of secure, wealthy, and sustainable cities was approved, and 37 local coordinating committee members were appointed by Internal Security Operation Command

Region 4 on the 30th of October. Especially, there was an effort to resolve the issue of safety zones during the meeting between Thai representatives and MARA Patani on the 25th of October; which happened to be the anniversary of Tak Bai incident.

Although dynamics of violent conflict still persisted and sometimes became volatile, many parties make efforts to cooperate. The voice of civil society was increasingly heard by conflicting parties, and more acceptance towards the importance of independent common space was obtained from all parties. These are positive signs for peacebuilding at this moment.

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