

A Meaningful Peace:

Ramadan Ceasefire Assessment

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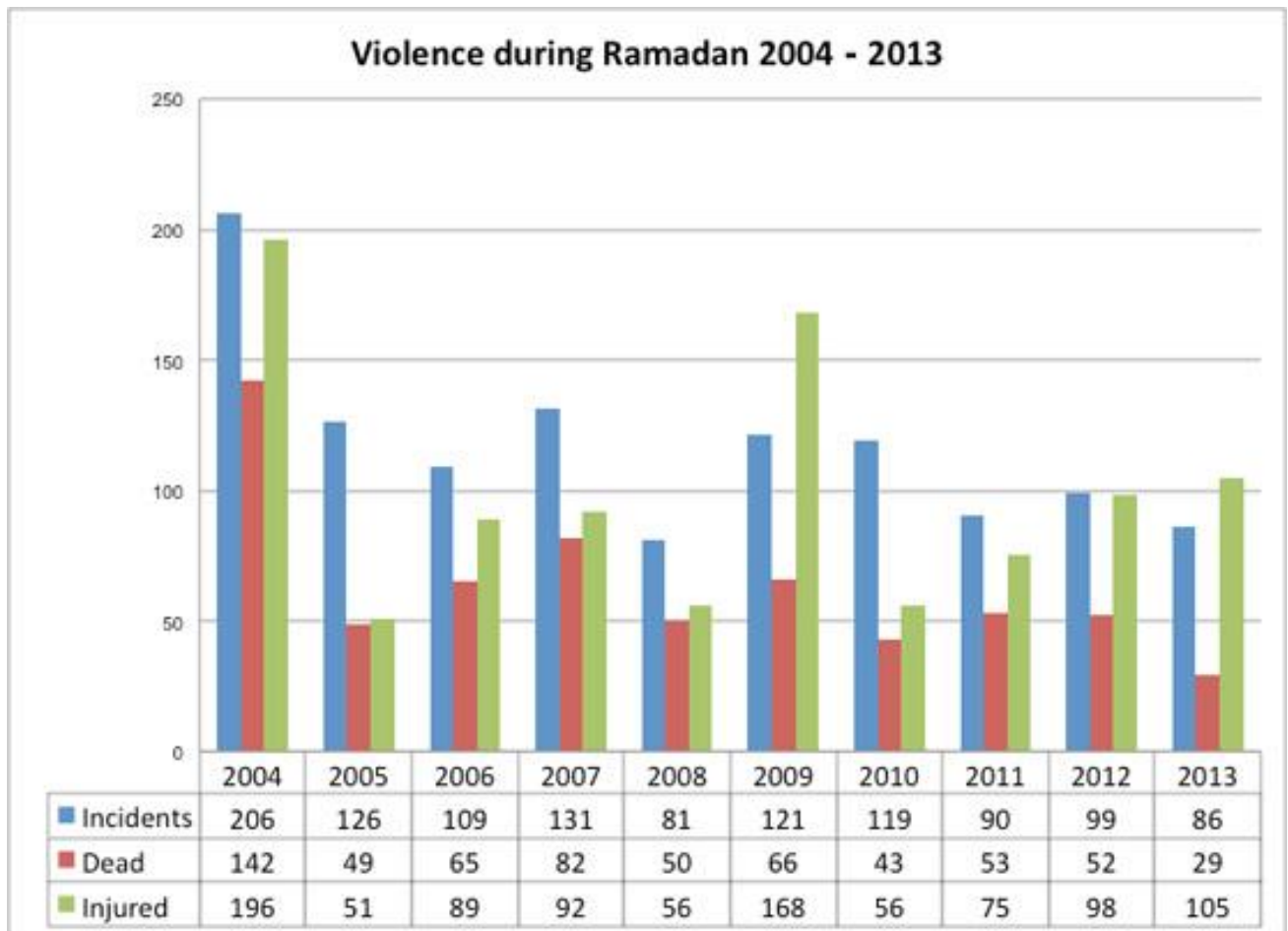
The 40-day ceasefire agreed between the Thai National Security Council the BRN separatist movement did not succeed in putting an end to violence in the southern Thai border provinces. Yet, there are notable achievements as the 2013 Ramadan saw the lowest number of insurgency related deaths since the outbreak of violence in 2004. The ceasefire was an initial success with very few violent incidents during July, but later broke down as both parties seem to withdraw from the agreement leading to an escalation in violence during August. The implication is that the peace dialogue and ceasefire have partial success. Absence of an outside monitor and weak dispute settlement processes was the primary cause of the breakdown of the ceasefire.

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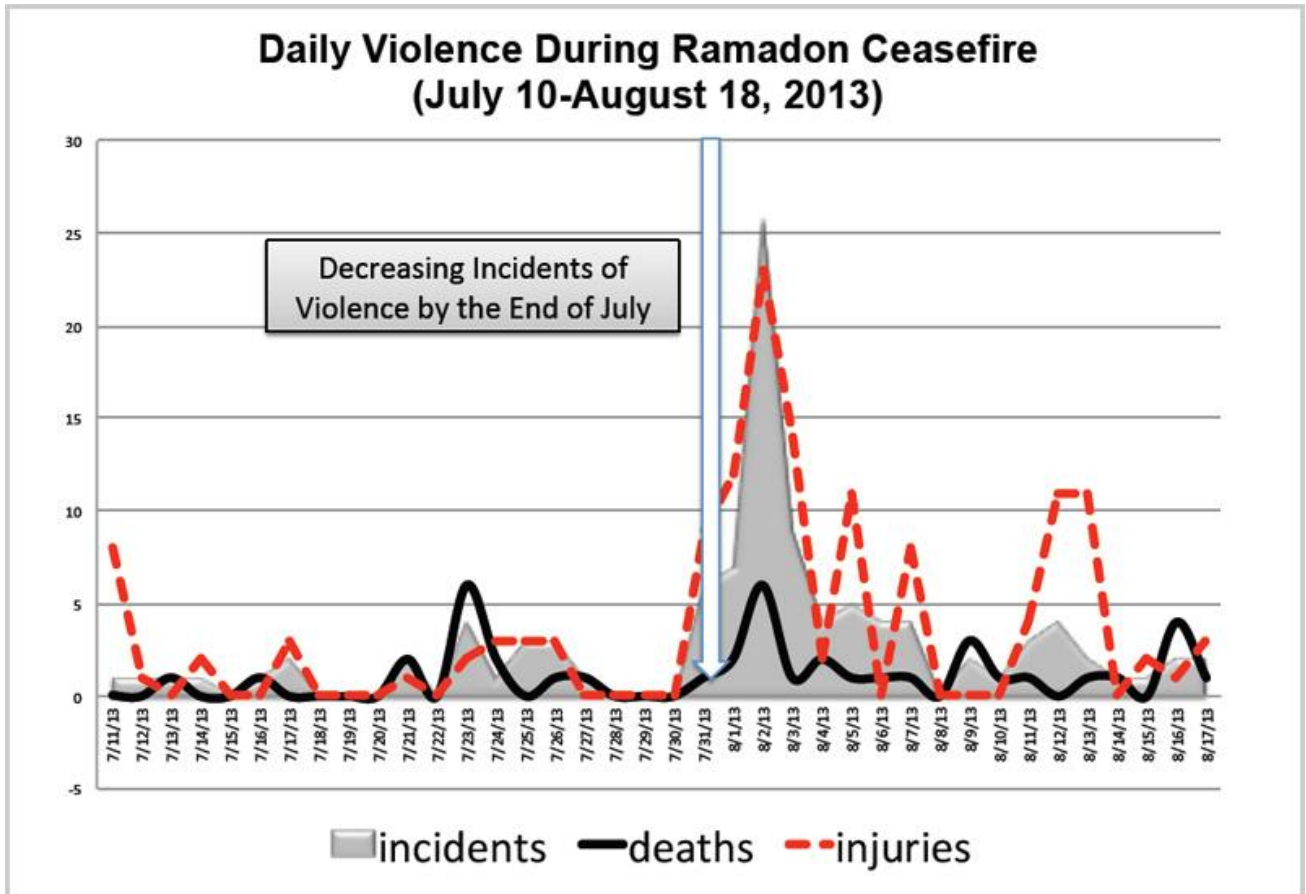
On 28 February 2013, Thailand's government through its National Security Council agreed to initiate a peace dialogue process with Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the major separatist group active in southern Thailand. The talks facilitated by Malaysia, initially showed few concrete accomplishments prior to the announcement of a ceasefire during a 40-day period covering the holy month of Ramadan. The agreement covered the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat as well as bordering districts in Songkla and would be in place from July 10 - August 18 2013.

According to data collected by Deep South Watch (DSW) and Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity (CSCD) of Prince of Songkla University in Pattani, the 2013 Ramadan period was the least deadly since the outbreak the conflict nine years earlier. Yet with 29 fatalities and 105 injured 86 violent incidents, there was a clear failure to put a definitive end to violence.

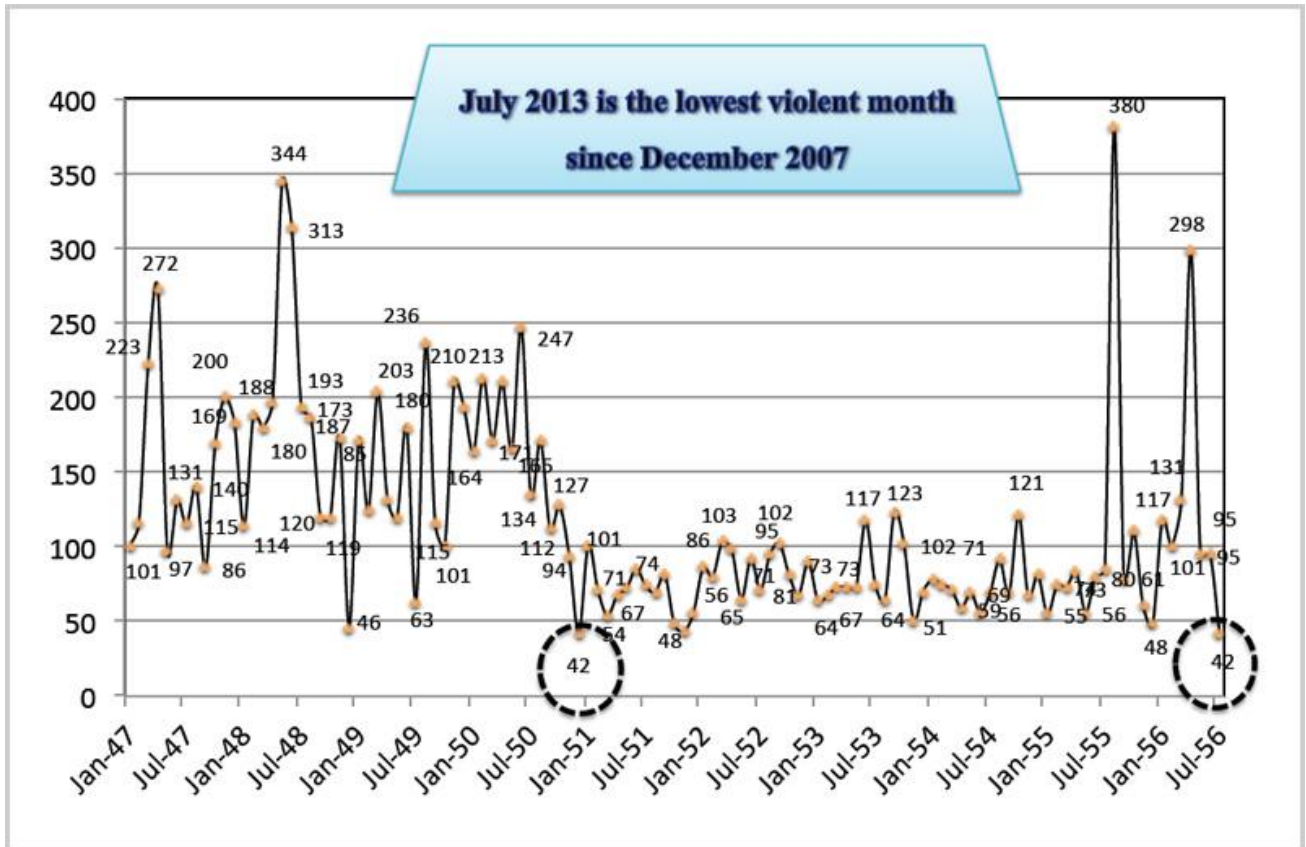
* This article is part of the joint-project between the Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity (CSCD), Prince of Songkla University, Thailand, and Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden.



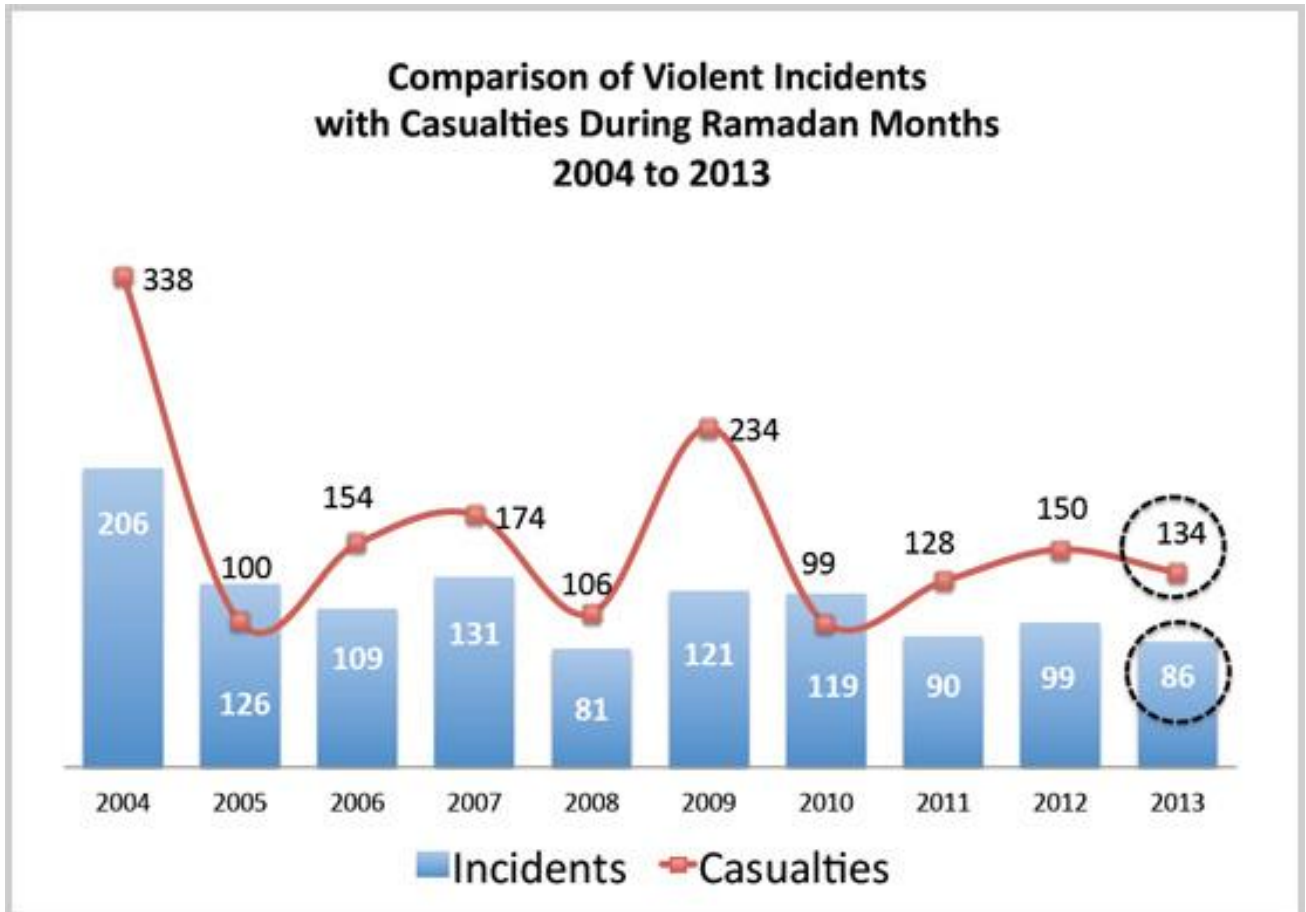
Most of the violence occurred in the latter part of the 40-day period as BRN declared their withdrawal from the ceasefire agreement in the first week of August. This justification to reinstate militant operations was the claim of allegedly continuous attacks against BRN members by the security agencies. While there had been isolated violent incidents prior to BRNs withdrawal, there was a rapid escalation of the number and severity of the attacks in August. The high profile killing of Imam Yacob Raimanee of the Pattani Central Mosque at a crowded market on August 5 was of symbolic importance as he had been an outspoken critic of the militants.



Nevertheless, the call of partially successful ceasefire is indisputable. Statistics of incidents of violence just in July, including the early weeks of ‘Ramadan Peace Initiative,’ verified as about 42 incidents, is clearly the lowest violent month since December 2007. Therefore, December 2007 and July 2013 are just the two lowest violent months in the Deep South provinces since January 2004.



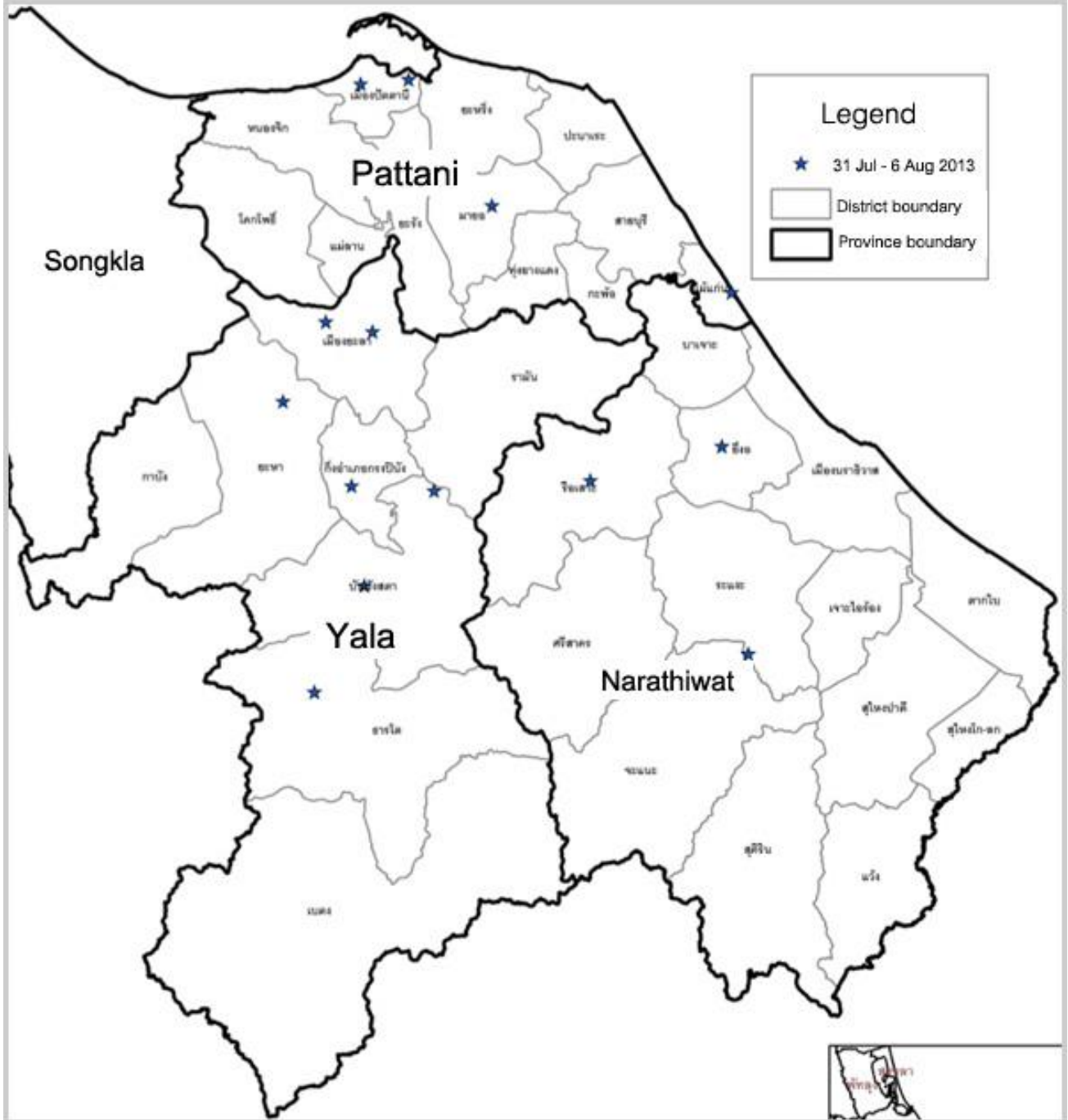
Looking at the overall statistics of incidents of violence and casualties during the Ramadan months from 2004 to 2013, one can practically say that the incidents of violence in Ramadan month of 2013 were decreased from the previous year, 99 incidents in 2012 compared with 86 incidents in 2013. The level of casualties is also dropped from 150 cases in 2012 to 134 cases in 2013. Notwithstanding the escalation of the attacks in August, the reported frequencies of the incidents of violence and casualties during the Ramadan weeks of this year were still lower than the previous year.



Clearly the ceasefire couldn't last in the absence of an independent monitor and mechanisms for conflict resolution, given the lack of trust between the two sides. BRN claimed that there were 11 cases of violence committed by security agencies during early weeks of the ceasefire; an accusation vehemently denied by the Thai side. While both sides provided some support for their claims, the ceasefire agreement lacked mechanism for outside or unbiased monitoring. Unable to get their claims of ceasefire violations investigated and settled within the framework of the agreement, the BRN choose to withdraw.

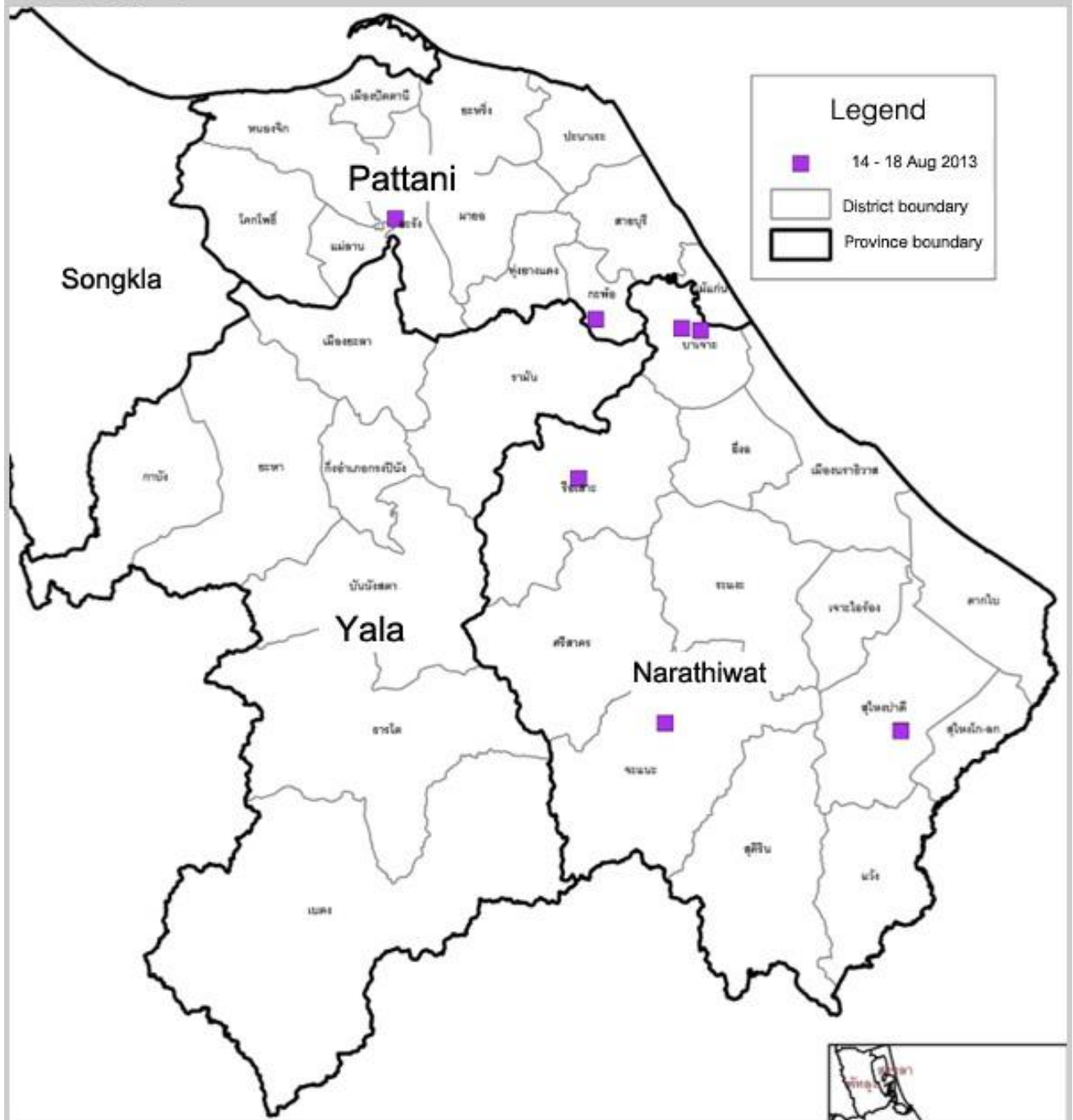
During the course of the conflict, most violence has occurred in a conflict hotspot covering the central parts of the deep south – Yala’s Muang District, several districts in Narathiwat and increasingly in Pattani province. Violent incidents in the initial weeks of the ceasefire followed a different pattern (see Map Week 1 and 2, below). The few attack that did occur before BRN withdrew from the ceasefire affected peripheral areas along the border with Malaysia and in mountainous districts. No attacks happened in or around the Muang Districts of Yala and Pattani. BRN were apparently able to control violence among cells in their strongholds. The violence that did occur affected peripheral areas where other separatist groups can be expected to have more leeway for action. This pattern held for the last week of July – Week 3 of the ceasefire.

Week 4



Once BRN withdrew from the ceasefire, violence increased in the strategically important center of the region with early attacks in both Pattani and Yala. This highlights how BRN are able to exert a higher degree of control over the center of the region rather than peripheral areas where minor separatist groups act outside of their control.

Week 6



Conclusions and recommendations

This rapid assessment has highlighted the apparent success and failure of the Ramadan ceasefire. A substantial decrease in lethal violence is the primary accomplishment – the number of dead from insurgency related violence has not been this low since the outbreak of violence in 2004. Yet, the Thai Government and BRN failed in maintaining the ceasefire throughout the 40-day period initially agreed to.

The partial failure has developed from the circumstance that ceasefire agreement was flawed because there had not been a thorough negotiation process with some give and take from both sides. Instead both sides operated to a large degree through public statements undermining each other's position, while the facilitator did some discreet arm-twisting in the background. It is more likely that the leader of BRN team was willing to support this gentlemen's agreement, but that factions in the BRN were more frustrated with it in light that they got so little in exchange. Unfortunately, the same is true of the Thai counterpart.

Thus, this failure is also directly related to the absence of mechanisms to investigate and resolve alleged ceasefire violations. The authors recommend including outside monitoring as a part of any future agreements between the parties. This is of particular importance in light of the lack of mutual trust between the two sides.

The report also notes that initial ceasefire violations occurred outside of the conflict hotspot, providing evidence that BRN successfully enforced control over militant cells at the center of the region. Once BRN withdrew from the ceasefire, violence again erupted in contested areas around the urban centers in Yala and Pattani.

The implication of this analysis has shown that statistics counts, if applied and interpreted reasonably. Statistics does not lie, but sending varied messages to any sensible person for better understanding the complicated and dynamic situation. As Francis Bacon puts it, "Truth emerges more readily from error than confusion," we have to open our view to accept the other realities and fine-tune errors emerging from empirical analysis to live in a better world. Therefore, for the sake of the long-term peace process, this is unquestionably a meaningful ceasefire.