INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM IN THAILAND: SITUATION, PREVENTION, AND SOLUTION[*]

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Abstract

Since the 9/11 incident, global political and security landscape have drastically changed. Terrorism and counter-terrorism have inevitably become significant global agendas. For Thailand, threats of terrorism have just recently manifested, that is, the bombing incident in Sukhumvit 71 on 14 February 2012 by five Iranians. The incident was a very hot topic in Thai society at the time.

However, looking at historical facts, it would be found that Thailand had been the location of terrorist incidents arising from foreign organisations or groups of individuals for at least 10 times since 1972. Hence, this article has been written with an urge to answer two major questions regarding the incidents: 1) situational question; what were the causes of the terrorism incidents in Thailand, how was the overall pattern of each incident, and how likely it would be for another incident to occur in the future and why?; and 2) question on policies and strategy; how were Thailand's public sector's previous policies, strategies and actions to manage the threats from transnational terrorism, especially those of security agencies, were there any problems and obstacles, and what would be the public sector's plans for the time ahead?

In this article, the researcher has employed documentary analysis, in-depth interviewing, and organisation of focus-group conferences under the conceptual frameworks on international terrorism in globalisation era and national advantages, with expectations that answering the aforementioned questioned would meaningfully help in predicting the trends and risks of Thailand to become a place of incident in the future, as well as providing an analysis on potential solutions and approaches to control such threats in a more efficient manner.

Keywords: Transnational/International Terrorism, Thailand, Incident, Policy, Strategy

Introduction

Globalisation is a process that has globally integrated the entire world with 3 major paradigms, that is, of capital, information, and value (Chinwanno, 2001: 25-26), across national borders, rendered the world virtually borderless. Hence, the era of globalisation era is infused with "exchanges and interactions" of cultures across borders of nations to an immense degree. Arjun Appadurai proposed that globalisation has brought about exchanges or flows of cultures in five dimensions (Appadurai, 1996); 1) Ethnoscapes, 2) Technoscapes, 3) Financescapes, 4) Mediascapes, 5) Ideoscapes.

In such time that renders international circumstances as above, globalisation is thus a context that allows international terrorists to operate much easier; terrorists can transfer data, instructions, and action plans via encrypted internet connections, which are difficult to detect (Bamrungsuk, 2006). Transnational crime organisations and international terrorist

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organisations have developed more complex patterns and methods operations so as to circumvent authentication and suppression by officers of the law, in addition to modern and systemic operational networks on both regional and global levels. The incomes from transnational crimes, particularly drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, and forgery and alteration of documents, can be used to fund the activities of international terrorist organisations. Principally, these particular problems concern many countries; no country can solve these alone. In Thailand's case, although it has never been a direct target of international terrorist organisations, terrorist organisations have used Thailand as a zone of operations many times. On top of that, there are factors supporting operations of terrorist groups and transnational crime organisations in certain aspects, such as open-door tourism policies and border crossing convenience. The emergence of these threats affects the society and livelihoods of people, and also hinders economic and social development in overall (Office of the National Security Council, 2007).

This article is a part of a research written in awareness of that the confrontation with said threats of Thai society is not something remote. The researcher has employed documentary analysis, focusing on primary documents and organising academic conferences with the public, which were also meant to be focus group meetings within themselves, and in-depth interviews with directors and officers of relevant security agencies[1], in which certain topics of information are confidential. These means were utilised to answer three main questions of this article: 1) How many international terrorist operations have occurred in Thailand, how were the situations, and why was Thailand the intended zone of operation?; 2) How are Thai governments' past and current policies, strategies, and actions in prevention and suppression of international terrorism?; and 3) What are the problem factors, obstacles, and challenges to prevention and suppression of international terrorism in Thailand?

International Terrorist Incidents in Thailand
Summary of international terrorist incidents in Thailand

Throughout the modern history of Thailand, there were 11 international terrorist incidents in total, which can be summarised (Retrace...Terrorism in Thailand, 2012) as follows:

1st incident, December 1972; Palestinian al-Fatah terrorist group "Black September" raided Israeli embassy building in Bangkok and held 6 individuals in the embassy hostages, demanded that 35 Arab war prisoners, including Kozo Okamoto, a member of Japanese Red Army captured by Israel, be released from Israeli prisons. After hours of negotiations, the hijackers agreed to abandon the embassy in exchange for safe conduct and were flown to Egypt.

2nd incident, April 1976; three members of Moro National Liberation Front hijacked a plane from Philippines, holding 70 passengers hostages, and landed in Thailand, demanding a USD300,000 ransom from Philippines and two political prisoners be released. The suspects then hijacked another two planes, and demanded refuelling, but Philippines' government sent a plane in exchange before the terrorists flew the planes to Libya.

3rd incident, March 1981; five members of Jihad Commando hijacked a plan from Indonesia to Sri Lanka, but stopped by Thailand. The terrorists demanded that Indonesia must release 84 political prisoners, that no Israelites be in Indonesian Armed Forces, and condemned then Indonesian vice-president Adam Malik. The negotiation resulted in a failure, so Thai Air Force commandos, together with Indonesian commandos, stormed the plane and killed four of the hijackers, captured the fifth. Apart from the casualties of a member of the flight crew and an Indonesian commando, all other passengers and crew were unharmed.

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[1] This article forms a part of an ongoing research project, thus the data collection therein is still in progress.

4th incident, December 1982; Iraqi Islamic Action Organization planted a bomb in an office building at Soi Nana, which was the location of Iraqi Honorary Consulate, causing the building to collapse and kill a Thai police officer, injuring 17 people.

5th incident, April 1988; 6-8 members of Hizballah seized a Kuwait Airways flight from Bangkok to Mashhad, Iran, took 112 passengers and crews hostages, three of which were members of the royal family of Kuwait. The terrorists demanded that Kuwait release seventeen Shiite terrorists imprisoned for crashing a bomb-carrying truck into the Embassy of the United States and bombing the French Embassy in Kuwait.

6th incident, October 1989; two Burmese students hijacked a Burma Airways aircraft from Mergui to U-tapao air base, Rayong Province, to demand democracy in Burma. The then deputy prime minister, Lt. Genaral Tianchai Sirisumpan, conducted a negotiation and the perpetrators ultimately surrendered.

7th incident, November 1989; two Burmese students hijacked a Yangon-bound Thai Airways plane from Don Mueang to Calcutta, India, to demand democracy in Burma, and that Burmese government release political prisoners, which resulted in a failure. The perpetrators ultimately surrendered to Indian officials.

8th incident, March 1994; Iranian terrorist drove a six-wheel tanker, containing improvised explosive devices of two C4 explosives and ammonium nitrate, along with a large amount of detonators, intended to crash into the Embassy of Israel of Thailand or the Embassy of the United States of Thailand. Fortunately, the tanker rammed into a motorbike taxi first.

9th incident, October 1999; five Burmese students/extremists raided the Embassy of the Union of Myanmar, held 30 people hostages, and demanded that Burmese government release political prisoners, that negotiations be opened between the National League for Democracy and the Burmese government, and that a Parliament be convened based on the results of the 1990 election. Thai authorities initiated a negotiation and later conducted an exchange for the hostages with a helicopter carrying (then) Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra, flew to Ban Mae Phia Lek, area of influence of the Karen National Union

10th incident, January 2000; 10 members of Karen military group "God Army" seized a Ratchaburi hospital, held doctors, nurses, and patients as hostages, and demanded that Burmese government cease to eradicate marginal people along the border. Thai authorities later joined an international counter-terrorism unit to rescue the hostages and retake the building, resulting in death of all God Army and eight Thai officers injured.

11th incident, February 2012; a group of Iranians assembled explosives in a rented property near Soi Pridi Banomyong 31. Thai officials assumed that they were intended for Israeli officials in Thailand, but ended up blasting themselves and eventually arrested (Two years later from Bangkok Terror: the 'Jews' Massacre Plan in Sukhumvit, 2014).

Reasons why Thailand was the location of operations

Surachai Nira, former Deputy Director General, Office of the National Security Council, has stated eight reasons why Thailand was the location of operations for international terrorists, as follows (Rangsit University, 2014):

1) Thailand had a number of targets for terrorists, such as embassies, international establishments, airlines, and properties of western countries

2) There were human trafficking rings and many points to cross the border illegally along the border, while the number of Thai officers were limited

3) Immigration processes of Thailand were not exactly strict, partly due to tourism promotion policies

4) Thailand had many document forgers

5) Thailand was a probable source of funds for terrorism

6) Thailand was a regional transportation hub
7) Easy to procure weapons and equipment to be used in terrorist activities
8) Southern Thailand Insurgency

Moreover, Mr. A (alias, as the interviewee did not want to reveal personal identity), a security official has further analysed the statement above that it was observable that the intended causes of several attacks focused on the interests of Western nations, particularly the U.S. and Israel, located within Thailand. The reasons why the terrorists chose to attack those targets in Thailand, instead of attacking the target countries directly, were partly due to the highly-standardised security systems of incident prevention in those countries (Mr. A, 2014), so regions in Asia, South America, and Africa, which situated many countries where security standards were not as robust as The West, especially nations allied or closely-affiliated therewith, such as Thailand and India, become main targets of operations, even though they were not direct oppositions of the disputes.

Policies and Approaches to Prevent and Solve International Terrorism Problems

Policies and approaches to prevent and solve of international terrorism problems in Thailand have been implemented under three associated policy frameworks, as follows:

Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies under the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2550

Counter-terrorism has been deemed an important section in the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies in terms of security; any party rises to political power must give an emphasis thereupon in accordance with the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies, except for those do not rise to power in conformity with the Constitution. The security aspect of the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies is legislated in Section 77 of the Constitution of Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2550. Even though counter-terrorism is not specifically scripted, it has always been an important part of the Directive Principles, as evident in Summary of the Performance of the Cabinet in Accordance with the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies of various governments, which gave emphasis on the development of approaches to counter terrorism in a progressive manner. This matter will be further discussed later on.

Policy on National Security

In aspect of security agencies, the government sector considered the Chief of Staff or "think tank" proposing major policies is the Office of the National Security Council. The researcher has found that Thailand's approaches to counter international terrorism and the implementation in each of aforementioned government were not only in line with the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies, but also implemented under a larger umbrella of National Security Policy, which had laid down the groundwork for the approaches since even before the Constitution B.E. 2550. Still, in the National Security Policy (B.E. 2541 - 2544), there was not much matter on prevention and solving international terrorism problems inscribed, but it was a part of National Security Policy for Defence (article 22-26), particularly emphasising on the policies on international relations (article 26) and countermeasures for terrorist activities originated from politics in neighbouring countries (article 25) (Office of the National Security Council, 1998).

The succeeding National Security Policy was the B.E. 2546-2549 issue, establishing policies regarding prevention and suppression of international terrorism in greater detail, as evident in article 18, which focused on root cause problem solving, dealing with movements in support of terrorist activities, and formulating incident response plans, and article 19, which emphasised on the development of international cooperative networks to prevent and counter international terrorism and transnational crimes (Office of the National Security Council, 2003).

As for the National Security Policy B.E. 2550-2554, which is still in effect to date (B.E. 2557), the Policy on Prevention and Suppression of International Terrorism has been defined in specific details and related to other forms of transnational crimes, in support of each other, as observed in the content of article 8, regarding polices to reinforce potentiality to solve transnational threats of 11 topics, which established practical guidelines for relevant public sectors to implemented as operational frameworks right away.

Policy to Prevent and Solve Terrorism Problem B.E. 2545

The essence of National Security Policy was derived into practical operational strategies titled "Policy to Prevent and Solve Terrorism Problem B.E. 2545"

This particular policy was drafted during the term of Thaksin Shinawatra, and passed to the cabinet on 12 October 2002 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2003). The context contributed to the formulation thereof was that, after the 9/11 incident, the United States of America forced allied nations to take side in the War on Terror, and thus Thaksin's government decided to 1) act in terms of legislation by amending the content of the Criminal Code, and 2) act in terms of policy by formulating this particular policy and established an integrated measure, that is, the Counter Terrorism Operations Center (CTOC), in affiliation with the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters (Mr. A, 2014).

The essence of this policy could be divided into two sections; 1) prevention, by organising intelligence conferences amongst the agencies in the Intelligence Community, so as to monitor the situations and movements regularly, and 2) solution, by formulating terrorist incident response plans, determining responsibilities and duties of relevant agencies and how to coordinate in-between. This also led to annual joint exercise, hosted by the CTOC (Mr. A, 2014).

The mechanism of policy implementation established two committees, Committee of Counter International Terrorism (COCIT), a policy-level organisation, to facilitate coordination in accordance with practical guidelines defined in the Policy to Prevent and Solve Terrorism Problem B.E. 2545 and the National Plan on Countering International Terrorism, and instruct the Sub-Committee of Counter International Terrorism (SCOCIT), as well as relevant subcommittees, to assist in operations by posing Counter Terrorism Operations Center (CTOC) as coordinator and director of special operation units, as required in situation control. The government may declare state of emergency in specific areas through the power bestowed upon by the Decree on Government Administration in States of Emergency B.E. 2548

From all of the above, the three policy frameworks shared similar trends and associated in aspects covered by the National Security Policy in terms of conceptual frameworks and directionality, and derived into the Policy to Prevent and Solve Terrorism Problem B.E. 2545, which was a security policy specifically on practical strategic approaches. The two frameworks must be in line with, not against, the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies for the reason that they were obligations mandated in the Constitution.

Past Operations to Prevent and Solve International Terrorism

From the policy frameworks in the big picture mentioned before, the researcher has discovered a development of approaches and operations to counter international terrorism in each government, as follows:

Thaksin Shinawatra's government (9 February 2001-19 September 2006) was the starting point of the security policy specifically on countering international terrorism, that is, the Policy to Prevent and Solve Terrorism Problem B.E. 2545, approved by the cabinet on 12 October 2002. Since that year, including the term of 2014 government, the world was cautious from the terrorism incident of 9/11, the pressure from the U.S. pushing countries to

take side on the War on Terror, and the bombing incident in Bali in 2002 made Thaksin's government become enthusiastic towards this particular matter. Hence, many policy frameworks, strategies, measures, operations, and development of operational guidelines were conceived during Thaksin's term. All of which could be summarised into 4 major categories as follows:

1) Implementation of policies to restrict the opportunities and movements of those related to terrorism, such as reducing the amount of immigration from high-risk counties (Office of the Prime Minister, 2003), launching Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluate System (PISCES) by setting up computer systems to screen the people travelling in and out of the country (Office of the Prime Minister, 2005), and amending relevant laws by issuing two royal decrees; (a) the Emergency Decree on Criminal Code Amendment, adding punishment related to terrorism, and (b) Amendments to Money Laundering Act B.E. 2542, adding punishment related to terrorism in accordance to the Criminal Code in this act.

2) Establishing cooperative networks with the people and human sources in targets of terrorist acts, thus providing deeper information.

3) Adding more aggressive roles in international society in terms of counter-terrorism, by establishing a committee to approve parties to conventions on international terrorism (Office of the Prime Minister, 2003), as well as Joint Working Group (JWG) in security aspects between Thailand and allied nations, such as India, Vietnam, Chinese, and Russia (Office of the Prime Minister, 2005).

4) Formulating new mechanisms related to counter-terrorism, such as the Counter International Terrorist Operations Center (CITOC), responsible for both administrative and budgetary duties, to coordinate operations between relevant agencies, in aspects of intelligence and situation analyses, establishing networks to prevent and counter international terrorism and transnational crimes (Office of the Prime Minister, 2005).

General Surayud Chulanont's government (1 October 2006-29 January 2008) categorised counter-terrorism in the category of promotion of unification between the public, private, social, and academic sectors, and category of the armed forces' potential development and reinforcement. The development in terms of countering international terrorism consisted of three main topics (Office of the Prime Minister, 2008);

1) International Operations: negotiations and consultations in both bilateral and multilateral frameworks, as well as issuing ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism.

2) Law Amendment: amending the Criminal Code by raising punishment severity of passport forgery to match official document forgery.

3) Media System Improvement: implementing in accordance with the framework of National Intelligence Policy, which aimed to established unity and improve efficiency of agencies in the Intelligence Community, and establishment of National Intelligence Coordination Center as a measure to coordinate intelligence operations.

Samak Sundaravej's government and Somchai Wongsawat's government (29 January 2008-2 December 2008) The terms were rather short, so there was not any summary or report on the performance in accordance with the Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies.

Abhisit Vejjajiva's Government (17 December 2008-5 August 2011) categorised terrorism in potential development in dealing with international threats and narcotics. The development related to international terrorism branched out to two main matters;

1) Development of systems and mechanisms to prevent potential problems, such as establishing efficient intelligence system, and procuring modern equipment and technologies for immigration process.

2) Development of cooperative networks between nations, on bilateral and multilateral levels. On the bilateral level, for example, intelligence was exchanged, and JWG meetings were held, and, on the multilateral level, emphasis was placed on cooperation within frameworks of ASEAN, BIMSTEC, ARF, ASEM, and APEC (Office of the Prime Minister, 2011).

Yingluck Shinawatra's Government (5 August 2011-7 May 2014) In aspects of development of national preparedness system in terms of prevention of international terrorism, the Counter Terrorism Operations Center (CTOC), Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, organised regular role-specific proficiency trainings (Office of the Prime Minister, 2014). Furthermore, the CTOC also proposed National Plan on Countering International Terrorism to the Committee of Counter International Terrorism (COCIT) for approval, so as to be utilised as practical incident response plans if international terrorist incidents were to occur, and conducting annual training to prepare the units (Office of the Prime Minister, 2013).

As for the policy on operational strategies and frameworks, there were six significant aspects in the term of this government (Office of the Prime Minister, 2014);

1) Formulation of strategies to prevent and solve terrorism B.E. .... and defined practical guidelines for prevention and solving international terrorism problems, practical guidelines for prevention and solving sabotage problems causing severe effects, and significant operational measures in the prevention and solving international terrorism and transnational crimes, as well as exchanging news and information and intelligence between relevant agencies.

2) Publishing manuals for the prevention of terrorism and revising existing policies in reference to the new draft of Strategies to Prevent and Solve Terrorism B.E. ...., as well as coordinating in aspects of counter-terrorism and transnational crimes by conferring and consulting with dialogue partners/groups of dialogue partners, such as China, Japan, and members of ASEAN.

3) Organise annual trainings and specific proficiency trainings between agencies, workshops, and internships.

4) Funding the Counter Terrorism Operations Center (CTOC), Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters in organisation of regular meeting between intelligence coordinators.

5) Enforcing seven issues of royal acts, ministerial regulations, and regulations related to prevention and suppression of money laundering and terrorist financial support, thus allowing relevant authorised public agencies to integrate the suppression of financial movement of international terrorist groups and transnational crime organisations in a more systemic manner. The examples of these particular laws were the Anti-Money Laundering Act (4th Amendment) B.E. 2556 and the Counter Terrorism Financing Act B.E. 2556.

6) Establishing a review committee to revise designated name list of Anti-Money Laundering Committee and Monetary Affairs Committee B.E. 2556, and enforcing the Act on Prevention and Suppression of Involvement in International Crime Organisations in the Royal Thai Government Gazette, so as to supress groups of influence or transnational organised crimes conducting illegal business activities.

Problematic Factors, and Challenges

From preliminary examination on the problems through documentary analysis, interviews, and focus-group meetings, it has been found that there was a significant problematic factor that hindered operations of the public sector, along with a challenge; (this research has not reached its completion point, so it is still unclear whether there is any other problematic factors, obstacles, and challenges or not).

Problematic Factor: Coordination between Agencies

The problematic factor in terms of a lack of coordination between agencies have long been a major problem in Thailand's public sector, and it could be said that the problem was found in nearly all of the work dimensions. Looking back to the first international terrorism incident, where the Black September stormed Israeli Embassy in 1972, the evidence remarkably reflecting the aforementioned problem would be found in the statement of Pol. Col. Thep Theerajantranon, the then Deputy Commander of the Immigration Bureau (Strict Arab Screening: Four Suspects Still Unknown, 1972);

"Black September might have immigrated with fake passports, since there are organisations forging them. The automatic weapons the group used in the incident might have been concealed in bags, which is the responsibility of Customs Office to search, not Immigration Bureau"

So, the prevention and suppression of incidents could not be carried out effectively and timely if all the relevant agencies do not cooperate in work and intelligence operations altogether.

Challenge: The Changing Trend of International Terrorism

The motives, forms, and methods of operation of international terrorist organisations from the past to present have been constantly changing. James D. Kiras (2008) has stated that the development of said change could be divided into four major periods: (1) 1968-1980; recurrent form of terrorism was skyjacking; (2) 1980-1990; incidents were carried out by smaller groups of individuals at non-specific targets, causing more casualties than before, and the perpetrators tended to have stronger will to use suicide attacks; (3) 1990-2001; international terrorism was on a declining trend, often occurred in forms of domestic terrorism, but, meanwhile, groups of terrorists distorting Islam to their own purposes grew larger; and (4) 2001-present; the form of terrorism clearly manifested is global-level terrorism, which the Al-Qaeda are not the central hub for other terrorist organisations, but rather a "model of revolutionary movement" for other groups.

Moreover, the security officer interviewed by the researcher also raised an observation that another significant change in international terrorism was terrorism in the modern days tended to cause damages, sabotage, or use violence to signify/to send a message to the target, not skyjacking or taking hostages to bargain politically like in the part, and modern incidents tended to occurred without warning, leaving no space or time for negotiation, thus the incident response plans from the government, as well as various measures, should be adapted to these particular changes (Mr. A, 2014).

Summary and Preliminary Proposal

Globalisation has brought the threats of international terrorism closer to Thai society. Even though there has never been any major disastrous incident occurred therein, but the past incidents should be enough to warn that Thailand still has some risks as a zone of operation for terrorist activities and sabotages from international terrorist organisations.

The researcher has discovered that many governments have tried to raise the standards of the prevention and suppression of problems from international terrorist organisations, and develop approaches in keeping with the dynamically and constantly changing trends of international terrorism in each era. The solution to said problems should be formulated through research and emphasis on laying groundwork for prevention and suppression approaches and systems against various factors in terrorist activities, such as financial flows or relocations of material inputs, like urea fertiliser used in bomb making.

All of the operational aspects mentioned above, Thai government already has responsible agencies, but separately carried out under different 'principles/practices', adhering to 'different code of laws', and clinging to 'different work cultures', and this particular reality brings about the problems of coordination between relevant public agencies.

However, said integration does not mean just the establishment of cooperative work environment, but also integrative thinking to follow the same work philosophy and conceptual framework in the same direction.

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