The Roles of International Conference of Islamic Scholar (ICIS) in Conflict Resolution of South Thailand

Beta Arif Muhammad[*]   Najamuddin Khairur Rijal   Gonda Yumitro

Department of International Relations, University of Muhammadiyah Malang

Raya Tlogomas St. No. 246 Malang, East Java, Indonesia 65144

[*]E-mail: betaamuhammad@gmail.com

Abstract

The conflict in Southern Thailand involving the Malay Muslim Group and the Government of Thailand has long been the beginning of the integration of the Kingdom of Greater Pattani into the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand). The government has made resolution efforts both through dialogue and the military but also never found common ground. This condition causes prolonged conflicts to be feared could threaten the stability of security in Southeast Asia. Some international actors ranging from countries, international organisations to individuals have paid considerable attention to this issue, one of them is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This paper attempts to describe the role of NU as one of the largest Islamic Organizations in Indonesia in assisting conflict resolution in Southern Thailand through the International Conference of Islamic Scholar (ICIS).

Keywords: South Thailand, second track diplomacy, ICIS

1. Introduction

Southern Thailand is a country with a multicultural population. The Thai group is the largest group, and there are many groups in Thailand with different sociocultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Northern Thailand is populated by Tibeto-Burman, the group of terms Mon-Khmer and Laos, while Southern Thailand is populated by the Malay term group (Nikolov, 2008).

In the southern region of Thailand called Changwad Chaiden Pak Thai consists of four provinces namely Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani and Satun populated by Malay Muslim verses. The area of Southern Thailand has a powerful sociocultural attachment to the Malay region as it used to belong to the Greater Pattani kingdom. This fact makes the Muslim community in Southern Thailand different from religions, beliefs, customs, languages and ordinances of life than the Thai people in general.

Since the consolidation of the Pattani region into the territory of Thailand under the Anglo-Siam Treaty agreement of 1909, the Thai Government created diversity in Thailand into a homogenous country identity (Anheier, 2008). Because of different composition as a threat of government stability and national development of Thailand (Nikolov, 2008).

The existing diversity conditions can be a social capital for the pursuit of a positive social transformation while still practising religiously and multiculturalism. Instead of creating a positive social transformation, it gives birth to various social kinds such as intolerance, discrimination, violence, and even social-religious conflict (Satria, 2014).

Nahdlatul Ulama as one of the Islamic Organizations in Indonesia felt concerned and moved to be able to solve the problems that befall the society of Southern Thailand and the Government of Thailand. Through the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), NU Participating in the process of peaceful endeavours in Southern Thailand conflict.

In this study, the authors use the concept of second track diplomacy because the actors of diplomacy is a not-official organisation. One of the pioneers of second track diplomacy, as a theorist and as a practitioner, Joseph Montville, defines the term as "an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations aiming to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict" (Montville, 1990). Problem-solving workshops represent second track diplomacy. Problem-solving workshops are intensive, private, and non-binding meetings between politically influential which are not official representatives of conflicting parties drawn from the mainstream of their respective communities (Yilmaz, 2004). ICIS as an unofficial by NU with the background of Islam Indonesia as *rahmatan lil alamin.* ICIS welcomed by both parties, the government and the Malay Muslim community in South Thailand and able to give its role in the process of resolution through such a meeting with both parties, Government of Thailand and Malay Muslim. A proposal was offered to the government and Malay Muslim for the benefit of both.

1.1 Method: This research in this paper used the library resources and interviewed with qualitative analysis of the data. The materials collected for the information were various books, journals, actors and other resources related to the topic.

2. Understanding South Thailand Conflict

Southern Thailand is comprised of 5 border-provinces: Songkhla, Stun, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The separatist movement of the Patani-Malays concerns the three southernmost border provinces of Thailand, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Most of the population are Malay Muslims and speak Malay or Yawi (Thnaprarnsing, 2009). Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia make up a significant cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic frontier. The southern border region is predominantly Malay and Muslim, giving it a unique character within a Thai-speaking and mostly Buddhist country. The local language, religion and culture are akin to those of the Malay Muslims in neighbouring Malaysia. While Malay Muslims form a majority in the southern border area, making up about 80 per cent of the population in the region, they are a small minority in Thailand as a whole (Engvall, 2014).

Historically, the region was part of the ancient Malay kingdom Langkasuka. Under the influence of Indian and Arab merchants, the Court of Patani converted to Islam in 1457(Yuniarto, 2004). The subsequent centuries saw alternating periods of independence and Siamese suzerainty. The Patani sultanate became a semi-independent vassal kingdom and tributary to the Siamese Empire of Ayutthaya. The influence of Western colonisation finally brought about the complete incorporation into the Siamese state with the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 (Abuza, 2007). Currently, the Thai government is creating a diversity of existing conditions in Thailand that creates a homogenous country identity (Anheier, 2008).

The existing diversity conditions can be a social capital for the pursuit of a positive social transformation that still occurs in religiously diverse and multiculturalism. Instead of creating a positive social transformation, it generates a variety of social, religious, and religious societies (Satria, 2014).

The southern border region has historically been volatile and prone to periodic outbreaks of insurgencies. An analysis of the history of relations between the south and the central government in Bangkok shows that violent opposition against the state has escalated at times when central control over the area has increased, and when systems for local resolution of grievances have been absent. In particular, the latest outbreak of violence is associated with the dismantling of a system of governance that had guaranteed relative stability in the region since the 1980s (Engvall, 2014).

Drawing on the historical background of the Southern border region, it is clear that ethnic relations have shaped the interactions between the state and local population. The central part of the population in the southern border region is ethnically Malay, which is manifested in some unique cultural characteristics (Fraser, 1966). To the extent that culture is a defining element of a person's identity, individuals and groups will seek to protect their cultures against outside influences. This reality may lead to resistance and frictions in their relations with a state that, to a great extent, is built on Thai ethnic identity (Engvall, 2014).

As Patani perceives itself as an entity under foreign control, rebellions and uprisings against Siamese rule have always been part of its history. With Bangkok's intensified efforts to disseminate Thai national identity in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Patani Separatist Movement started to manifest itself politically. Especially the two authoritarian governments of Phibunsongkram (1938–1944 and 1948–1957) enforced strict assimilation policies "that adversely affected all facets of Muslim identity and ethnicity, including matters of attire, bureaucratic administration, education, judicial settlements and revenue collection" (Tan, 2007). The 1950s also saw the systematic resettlement of Buddhists from the Northeast of Thailand into the Patani region (Abuza, 2007).

Consequently, three main Muslim separatist groups emerged in Patani, which demonstrates the continuing heterogeneity of the insurgents' political agenda. The first group, Patani National Liberation Front or *Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani* founded by Malay aristocrats, was mainly a conservative group committed to orthodox Islam. As stated in its constitution, the fundamental political ideology of the BNPP was based on the Al-Quran, Al-Hadith and other sources of Islamic law (Che Man, 1990). However, the BNPP was divided into several fractions that favoured either independence, autonomy within Thailand, or integration into Malaysia (Abuza, 2007). In contrast, the Patani United Liberation Organization or PULO was more pragmatic and less religious in its outlook. With a broader base than the BNPP, its declared goal was to achieve an independent sovereign Muslim state through armed struggle, which also led to the establishment of its armed wing, the Pattani United Liberation Army (PULA).

The third group, National Revolutionary Front or *Barisan Revolusi Nasional* was opposed to the nationalist agenda of PULO and mistrusted the BNPP's goal of restoring the feudal Pattani sultanate (Abuza, 2007). With close ties to the Communist Party of Malaya, it had a much more leftist, anti-capitalist orientation. Besides these three main separatist groups, there was a wide range of smaller groups that emerged primarily in

the 1970s, but all of them were highly prone to fractionalization and internally divided on issues of ideologies, strategies, and aims. During the 1980s and 1990s, the insurgency movement in the South waned partly because of increased divisions among all its sub-groups (Haberkorn, 2013).

Elements of armed struggle have existed in the Patani separatist movement since its beginning. However, in 2004 under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, the conflict was revived with a new dimension of violence. Right after several coordinated actions in January 2004 that included raids of army camps, weapons and ammunition theft, the burning of schools, and several bomb attacks, the Thai Prime Minister declared martial law across the three southern provinces (Haberkorn, 2013). The situation has dramatically deteriorated since then. The International Crisis Group estimated in a report from December 2012 that between 4 January 2004 and 30 November 2012, violent incidents in the southernmost provinces killed 5,473 people and injured 9,693 (ICG, 2012). By these numbers, the separatist conflict in Patani is one of the most violent, contemporary state-internal conflicts in Southeast Asia.

In early 2013, the Thai government agreed to start peace negotiations with one insurgent group, the BRN (Rustici, 2013). Whether or not this step leads to a nascent 'peace process' in Patani is yet to be seen. The talks had to be repeatedly postponed due to the recent political turmoil in Thailand's capital (Hunt, 2014). As long as political stability in Bangkok is not restored, the insurgency in the South will most likely remain at the periphery of the Thai government's agenda.

Thailand's policies towards the southernmost provinces have been focused predominantly on integrating the Patani-Malays into the Thai nation-state. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Patani people have repeatedly been affected by Thai national policies of forced assimilation, especially regarding culture, language, religion, and identity. These policies gave particular attention to education and the role of the local Islamic schools (Aphornsuvan, 2007). Besides, Islam as religion has been integrated into the body of Thai administrative structures. A system of provincial Islamic councils is headed nationally by the Chularajmontri, "the advisor of the King on Islamic affairs" (Dubus & Polka, 2011). This effort to nationalise Islam through institutionalisation was aimed at diffusing Malay nationalist tendencies but proved to be futile. The Patani-Malays do not see themselves represented through this body (Che Man, 1990). Another feature has been the notion of facilitating economic development, based on the assumption that socio-economic grievances constitute the cause of the separatist insurgency. However, economic development schemes alone have not been successful in curbing the grievances of the Patani-Malays.

2.1 The Existence of ICIS

The International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS) was established in Jakarta on 24 February 2004 initiatives by KH Ahmad Hasyim Muzadi and Dr N. Hasan Wirajuda. The idea of ICIS formation comes since the tragedy of 11th September 2001, the world beginning from the West had been engaged in unhealthy debate and suspicion towards Islam. Since the terrorist attack towards the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, New York, Islam was viewed as a religion that condoned terrorism and other forms of violence in the name of faith (Slamet, 2014). The tension between the East and West and post-tragedy that killed 3000 people further inflamed the animosity instead of garnering effort for cooperation. Which is increasingly heating the tension between both sides West and Islam because it has damaged the symbol of world economic power that became the starting point for the US government with its allies against global terrorism.

The American war campaign against terrorism is an indirect impact on the position of Muslims as the party which responsible for every act of terror for years. The high tensions of Islam and the West are also felt by all Muslims around the world, including in Indonesia which is the largest Muslim population in the world. The various tension and conflicts in the Middle East that mostly comprised of Muslims seemingly justified the views of the West that Islam is a region of violence, an ideology of terror and so forth. The media, especially in the West were also seen to be supporting such negative views even though each incident had their backgrounds and motives; these views were further exacerbated by the lack of information and knowledge, and by other factors that were perpetrated by propaganda (Hasan, 2013).

Observing these challenges, the Ulamas and Islamic Scholars do not remain silent and idle. They contribute to finding a solution to resolve these conflict so that Islam may be free from the stigma of being the religion of violence. Instead, ulama and scholar need to promote the nature of Islam as the religion of peace as *rahmatan lil alamin* or blessing for the universe. Strengthening the position of Islamic community world full will benefit the image of Islam its self.

NU as the most significant mass organisation of Islam in Indonesia with a mission to promote Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin* is called to relinquish its adherence to world peace based on universal Islamic values. Therefore, KH Hasyim Muzadi established a group that would explain to the world that Islam was not as it was being accused of being, Islam was anti-violence and anti-terrorism. This group would have the authority to conduct its duties, not only by government and the state but also by local and national religious figures and

ulama. The ICIS forum that comprises of scholar and ulama's worldwide attempt to provide an effective and efficient explanation to the world that violence is not a part of Islam. Structurally, ICIS was initially under the NU as an international organisation is expected to be a venue for NU and world Muslim leaders to respond to global issues.

ICIS is a non-profit, non-ethnic organisation, working together to build dialogue and cooperation among Muslim scholars around the world to a peaceful, justice and civilised society. ICIS is registered with the United Nations (UN) and has members in 67 countries (Syarkun, 2015). With the pattern of "people to people linkage and contact" allows as second track diplomacy. In this case not only the government that strengthens the diplomacy of a country but the community. All elements such as scholars, intellectuals, people in business and social organisations can also play an active role in strengthening the diplomacy of a country.   Thus the state policy is taken based on thought and strategy that is mature and at the same time relevant and supported by all parties. No matter how small the ICIS decisions can be made as a suggestion to the world to overcome various international problems that have occurred so far. In this position too, scholars can play a role in strengthening and government diplomacy.

The ICIS is expected to galvanise such commitment and also produce a movement that contributes to multilateralism. The role of Islamic Scholars in an international relation can contribute significantly to diplomacy that has been traditionally promoted by the government. The consensus of produced within the ICIS can contribute to resolving challenges of international relationships that continue to persist. To this end, the ulama play an essential role to promote second track diplomacy. So that reason, ICIS was requested to resolve a conflict in the three provinces that were mostly Muslim in South Thailand in March-April 2005, namely Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. The presence of ICIS on occasion was on the special invitation of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

From then on, NU has been recognised as one of few organisations that are capable of communicating with all the parties involved in various sectarian conflicts. The existence of ICIS is increasingly recognised worldwide, especially after ICIS is registered and a member of the United Nations as a non-governmental organisation, in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and *Rabithah Alam Islam* (World Muslim League) based in Mecca. ICIS is increasingly being taken into account to assist in the resolution of various conflicts, not only in Muslim-majority countries but also in Muslim minority countries, from regional to global levels. So far ICIS has made several agreements to overcome the problems of the Islamic world, with the OIC, the Rabithah, the UN, and the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) (Syarkun, 2015).

2.2 Second Track Diplomacy By ICIS

KH Hasyim Muzadi as a chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama and general secretary of ICIS feel called and concerned to campaign Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin* and create peace in a country that there is Muslim especially in Southeast Asia. To realise the idea of the ICIS, Khariri Makmun explains that "ICIS placed the South Thailand conflict as the priority of its attention, so that he expressed his intention to the Embassy of Thailand in Jakarta, and welcomed well by the ambassador. Then he visited Thailand twice to assist the government of Thailand in creating peace and conflict resolution with the Muslim minority in Southern Thailand" (Makmun, 2018). The first meeting was on March-April 2005, and receive by PM Thaksin Shinawatra and King Bhumibol Adulyadej and other senior officials. The second meeting was on 11-12 September 2006, a week before Thaksin experienced a military coup d Etat (Hasan, 2013).

ICIS suggested that the Thai government hold an open discussion with the three provinces of Southern Thailand. Yala-Pattani-Narathiwat after the military attack of the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani and Killed 84 Muslim demonstrators in Tak Bai, Narathiwat on October 2004 (Syarkun, 2015). The two bloody events had become a grave concern for the Prime Minister and The King, therefore profoundly appreciated the effort of the NU to share its experience in maintaining harmony and promoting moderate of Islam. Also, KH Hasyim conveys the state of life in Indonesia, which is a multicultural religious background with Pancasila as a unifier so that Thailand can take an example from the following events that the Government can facilitate Southern Thailand communities that are more accommodating for minority people (Zamhari, 2018). The Muslim in Southern Thailand was viewed to share a similar perspective with NU and hence had greater ease in working with NU to overcome the ongoing tension.

Since the first meeting, ICIS had hoped for a conflict resolution in Southern Thailand and appealed to parties to resolve the matter as an issue of internal national conflict and avoid labelling it as a Muslim problem. In ICIS perspective, this conflict is considered as an international conflict. It will be feared the intervention of the countries which involved and allow the transnational Islamic movement to infiltrate in the conflict would make the conflict became more complicated such as those conflicts in the Middle East to fight for their interests (Syarkun, 2015), and secondly to establish a Thai Muslim Southern Thailand, so as to ensure protection of Thai Muslim. Specifically, on the matter of terrorism, ICIS suggested that it be resolved through military means but involving the due process of law. Through the courts, they could then understand the anatomy of terrorism in

Thailand, be it national or internationally organised. Apart from a security approach, KH Hasyim also suggested a social approach, meaning the use of educating, welfare secure and justice (Hasan, 2013).

Further, ICIS persuaded the Thai Government to appoint an adviser that was familiar with Islam to prevent potential misunderstandings, particularly in understanding the critical ritual of Muslims, also to connect between the Government of Thailand and Malay Muslim minority, some conflicts that intersect with Muslims are triggered by government policies that are not in line with Islam (Zamhari, 2018). KH Hasyim also advised the Government to be cautious of infiltrators, such as those conducting arms sale during the time of crisis. There was also an invisible hand that needed to be attended to, such as the sensitivity of Islamic teachers to avoid tension in communities. ICIS would be willing to dispatch teachers who were able to blend in easily in such communities (Hasan, 2013).

Because NU had experience in communicating with Hindus and Bhudist and is considered to have the same characteristics as Thai Muslims (Munim, 2018), KH Hasyim was able to demonstrate to King Bhumibol, Prime Minister Thaksin, Foreign Minister Kanthathi also Buddhist Thai leaders such Somdej Phra Buddhacharya that Islam was *rahmatan lil alamin* . Islam promotes the necessity of living in harmony with other religions. Although there exist differing views on ritual faith, it was important that Islam and other religion no focus on such differences. The Government should resolve lingering differences that caused tension.

ICIS can penetrate the boundaries that cannot be done by the Government of Indonesia so that ICIS's involvement can represent the interests of the government as well as to help create a dispute in Southern Thailand. Diplomacy carried out by ICIS could be a significant role in the conflict. Khariri said, "KH Hasyim during his visit to Southern Thailand has created a new formulation that can be adopted as a conflict resolution by accommodating the needs of the South Thai minority community and vice versa…" (Makmun, 2018). What had not been created before was a meeting point because the government takes the approach through military violence which was immediately rejected by the Malay Muslim in response to the rebellion.

Furthermore, Zamhari argues that: "ICIS also facilitates the Muslim Community of South Thailand to get scholarship and study in Indonesia especially in Islamic University (UIN). He expects that ICIS will be able to imitate the life in Indonesia where Pancasila does not make opposite with the values of Islam and can run parallel to democracy. While the students return to their homeland, they can promote an alternative that can be adapted to become more moderate in Southern Thai state life. Moreover, also conduct a religious meeting leaders by inviting Thai Muslim Scholars to the ICIS office in Jakarta continuously to share and exchange ideas and solutions whenever new problems arise in life in Southern Thailand" (Zamhari, 2018).

3. Conclusion

The presence of ICIS in Southern Thailand as a form of a non-official second track of diplomacy gives colour to the southern Thailand conflict. Through the meeting conducted by ICIS represented by KH Hasyim Muzadi for two periods giving such significant influence. The protracted conflict in South Thailand since the consolidation of the Greater Patani region into the Thai Kingdom began to find a meeting point after the efforts carried out by ICIS included the offer of a solutive alternative to resolve the problems that occurred there. It may be quite successful because after ICIS's visit to Southern Thailand, the Thai government began to open itself with the Malay Muslim Community and accommodate the aspirations of the Southern Thai Muslim and the conflict slowly began to decline. Such a condition especially happened after the government was replaced by Yingluck Shinawatra who was more moderate in its policies since August 2011.

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