



Sustaining the Momentum in Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue

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What's new? Peace talks between the Thai government and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) separatists resumed recently after a two-year hiatus, leading to a commitment from both sides to cease hostilities during the month of Ramadan, and a broader agreement to discuss reduction of violence and political solutions based on public consultations.

Why does it matter? In 2021, casualties associated with the insurgency rose for the first time since 2012. The conflict has killed over 7,300 people since 2004. Failure at negotiations in Malaysia could lead BRN to splinter and its armed wing to repudiate dialogue, triggering more fighting and putting a resolution further from reach.

What should be done? Both parties should strengthen internal consensus on resolving the conflict through dialogue. The Thai government should devote greater resources to its delegation, while BRN needs to narrow the gap between its armed and political wings. As facilitator, Malaysia should respect the conflict parties' choice of the dialogue's format and substance.

I. Overview

The official dialogue between the Thai government and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), which resumed in January after a long hiatus due to COVID-19 precautions, has resulted in the endorsement of General Principles of the Peace Dialogue Process and a shared commitment to reduce violence during the month of Ramadan. Talks started almost two years earlier, when representatives of BRN, the main Malay-Muslim insurgent group, came willingly to the table for the first time. The pandemic then interrupted meetings, but back-channel talks led in November 2021 to a protocol to discuss a reduction in violence, consultations with the public in Thailand's southernmost provinces and a commitment to political solutions to the conflict, now codified in the General Principles. This progress notwithstanding, the dialogue is still beset by structural problems, disunity on both sides, capacity constraints and mistrust. Both sides should shore up internal consensus that the conflict should be resolved through negotiations rather than force. As facilitator, Malaysia should be flexible regarding the format and substance of talks.

In January, the separatist insurgency in southernmost Thailand entered its nineteenth year. Militants have carried on a violent campaign in defence of their Patani-Malay identity from what they see as Thai colonialism. Their rebellion is characterised by sabotage, assassinations of alleged state collaborators, improvised explosive device attacks and small-scale ambushes on security forces. The number of incidents has declined steadily since the parties started talking in 2013, a trend that accelerated after the 2014 military coup. But casualties started climbing again in 2021. In recent years, Thai security forces have increased pressure on militants through cordon-and-search operations that have driven up the insurgent body count. Some Malay-Muslims have responded by publicly honouring the dead fighters as martyrs, an apparent indication that the grievances and ideology underpinning the insurgency remain potent.

Developments in the talks are publicised only sporadically. Official meetings facilitated by Malaysia are only the most visible manifestation of the process, which is supported by back-channel discussions. The parties reveal only scant information about these parallel informal talks, especially as Malaysia is displeased that they have taken place. But the back channel has proven its utility, from smoothing the way for BRN to return to the negotiation table to generating substantive proposals. Eventually, it produced the November 2021 protocol serving as the framework for the formal dialogue that resumed in January.

This broad framework is promising but faces serious constraints. Ambivalence about talks in both camps hinders the prospect of resolving the conflict through dialogue. BRN has been riven by a split between its armed and political wings, the former merely countenancing talks until the latest round. On the Thai side, some officials fear that BRN aims to internationalise the conflict and provoke foreign intervention. Devising mechanisms for public consultation will also challenge the top-down Thai bureaucracy, which has little tolerance for dissenting views, and a reduction in violence depends on the cooperation of armed forces over which the dialogue panel has little leverage. While the announcement of a cessation of hostilities during Ramadan is welcome, a precipitous ceasefire designed to demonstrate concrete results, but without sufficient trust building and reliable monitoring, could easily backfire.

In spite of these impediments, the resumption of talks between Bangkok and BRN represents good progress, and advocates of dialogue within each party should act to ensure that positive momentum is sustained. BRN, which needs to mend the rift between its armed and political wings, should be provided with the technical resources and space to do so. Senior Thai leaders should more publicly endorse dialogue as a means of ending the conflict, both to build confidence in the process and to reassure domestic sceptics that talks are consistent with protecting national sovereignty. The Thai government should also fund a full-time dialogue secretariat and ensure that security forces adhere to agreements made at the negotiating table. Finally, Malaysia should reassess its facilitation procedures to ensure that they accord with the conflict parties' preferences, including sustaining direct contact between the sides in informal back channels at their discretion.

II. Dialogue Developments

Dialogue between the Thai government and Malay-Muslim militants, with Malaysia as facilitator, has proceeded in fits and starts since April 2013.¹ The dialogue ostensibly aims to end an insurgency that reignited in 2004, killing 7,300 people to date and wounding over 13,500 more. There are, however, sound reasons to question whether the parties have engaged in talks for tactical advantage rather than genuine commitment to end the conflict.² Many observers criticised the first official dialogue with BRN for being rushed and poorly prepared. Critics said the BRN delegates, who live in exile in Malaysia, participated only under duress from their Malaysian hosts and did not speak for BRN's armed wing.³ This dialogue sputtered out before the 2014 Thai coup, after which a fitful and ultimately fruitless dialogue continued with MARA Patani, an umbrella organisation comprised of representatives of largely defunct Malay-Muslim separatist fronts with little influence over fighters on the ground.⁴

In parallel, however, Thai negotiators worked behind the scenes to try to get BRN to join the talks. A Malaysian official on the facilitator's team informed reporters that BRN representatives had met Thai officials in Berlin in November 2019.⁵ The meeting was one in a series of quiet back-channel efforts beginning in 2018 under the auspices of a non-governmental organisation, but it was significant for bringing BRN's political wing voluntarily into talks with Bangkok's emissaries for the first time.⁶ The outcome was a roadmap for talks dubbed the Berlin Initiative.

It was also significant because it took place without Malaysia's participation or foreknowledge. Kuala Lumpur did not recognise the meeting as part of the official process and the facilitator, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim bin Mohammad Noor, a septuagenarian former inspector-general of police, was reportedly upset at Malaysia's exclusion from the back channel.⁷ Neither Bangkok nor BRN could disregard his pique: Bangkok

¹ For earlier reporting on the dialogue, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°270, *Southern Thailand: Dialogue in Doubt*, 8 July 2015; Briefing N°148, *Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue: No Traction*, 21 September 2016; and Report N°304, *Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue: Giving Substance to Form*, 21 January 2020.

² The insurgency has largely been confined to Thailand's southernmost provinces, Songkhla, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. The conflict zone includes the latter three provinces as well as Songkhla's four south-eastern districts: Chana, Na Thawi, Saba Yoi and Thepha. The region has a population of roughly 1.8 million, approximately 85 per cent of whom are Malay-Muslim, with the remainder mostly Thai or Sino-Thai Buddhist.

³ See Crisis Group Report, *Dialogue in Doubt*, op. cit.

⁴ Majlis Syura Patani, or Patani Consultative Council, better known as MARA Patani. See Crisis Group Briefing, *No Traction*; and Crisis Group Report, *Dialogue in Doubt*, both op. cit. "Patani" refers to the sultanate that governed the area before Siam (later Thailand) conquered and eventually annexed it in 1902. The conflict zone corresponds roughly to the sultanate's former domain. "Pattani", with a double "t", is the transliteration of the Thai province name.

⁵ Crisis Group Report, *Giving Substance to Form*, op. cit., p. 4. See also "Hardline rebels may join southern Thai peace talks, officials in Malaysia say", Benar News, 2 December 2019.

⁶ The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, based in Geneva, Switzerland, is an independent mediation organisation. "Back-channel talks have pushed Thai peace talks forward, sources say", Benar News, 30 March 2022.

⁷ Noah Lee and Nisha David, "Hardline rebels may join southern Thai peace talks, officials in Malaysia say", Benar News, 2 December 2019. "The Malaysians were incensed when they found out", said

because of the need to maintain friendly relations with its neighbour and partner in the Association of South East Asian Nations, and BRN because its leaders in exile depend on Malaysia's hospitality.

Accordingly, Thailand and BRN brought their contacts into the open. On 20 January 2020, their delegations met in Kuala Lumpur, facilitated by Malaysia in the first official meeting of the Joint Working Group-Peace Dialogue Process on Southern Thailand. Retired General Wanlop Rugsanaoh, a former National Security Council chief, headed Thailand's ten-member Peace Dialogue Panel.⁸ Anas Abdulrahman, BRN's former head of political affairs, led the insurgency's negotiating team.⁹ BRN acknowledged that the meeting was the outcome of "several back-channel processes" over recent years.¹⁰ For the Thai negotiators, it was the start of "a process to bring [Malaysia] into the framework agreed with BRN".¹¹ The outcome, according to the Thai delegation, was "[acknowledgement of] a working framework which would help ensure the progress and continuity of the dialogue".¹²

A second gathering took place in Kuala Lumpur on 4 March 2020, with Rahim Noor as facilitator, but the COVID-19 pandemic soon prevented further face-to-face meetings, and despite some technical talks held virtually, the dialogue seemed to lose momentum.¹³

The two sides remained in indirect contact, however, albeit not in the public eye. In a video posted online on 15 February 2021, Abdul Aziz Jabal, a member of BRN's delegation, revealed that the parties had discussed resolution through a "political or administrative solution"; reduction of military activities; and "involvement of civil society groups, NGOs, religious figures, political figures [and] community leaders in the negotiation process, in accordance with the concept of inclusivity".¹⁴ According to a later BRN statement, the Thai and BRN delegations submitted these three substantive issues to the Malaysian facilitator that May.¹⁵ In November, BRN representatives in Turkey agreed to discuss political solutions, engage in public consultations and reduce

an Asian diplomat". Marwan Macan-Markar, "Thailand angers Malaysia in push for peace in troubled South", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 20 February 2020.

⁸ The Thai delegation includes officials from the foreign affairs and justice ministries, National Security Council, National Intelligence Agency and Internal Security Operations Command, as well as the Command's Region 4, which oversees the counter-insurgency campaign in the deep south. Wanlop was appointed head of the panel in September 2019.

⁹ Anas Abdulrahman was formerly a teacher at the Thamvitya Muliniti School in Yala, the largest private Islamic school in the region.

¹⁰ "Press statement", BRN, 21 January 2020.

¹¹ Crisis Group interview, senior security official, Bangkok, March 2020.

¹² "Press release: Latest updates on Peace Dialogue Process", Thai Secretariat for Peace Dialogue, 21 January 2020.

¹³ Technical talks took place by teleconference on 3 February and 29 April 2021.

¹⁴ "Announcement of the Information Bureau of the BRN Negotiation Secretariat," video, 15 February 2021.

¹⁵ Press release, BRN Peace Negotiations Secretariat, 13 January 2022. The release wrongly states that the communication with the facilitator took place on 10 May 2022, an obvious typographical error.

the level of violence.¹⁶ This exchange again took place without Malaysia's participation or sanction.¹⁷

Talks then came back above ground. The Third Joint Working Group meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur on 11-12 January 2022 – the first face-to-face meeting of the official dialogue in almost two years. Two foreign experts observed the proceedings at BRN's invitation and with the Thai delegation's consent.¹⁸ The attendees discussed the general principles first broached in the back channel, including the establishment of joint committees to work on the three substantive issues of political resolution, public consultation and reduction of violence.¹⁹ One aim of the committees is to have "greater flexibility and more direct contact between the parties".²⁰ Additionally, the parties agreed in principle to formulate a "Terms of Reference and procedures to be used in the field during implementation" of any agreement upon the three substantive issues being discussed.²¹

The apparent progress at the January 2022 meeting was marred by events far from the negotiating table. On 12 January, the second day of talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia handed over to Thai authorities three suspected militants whom it had detained in Kedah, a state bordering southern Thailand, on 25 December 2021.²² Thai and Malaysian officials insist that the prisoner transfer's timing was a coincidence, noting that Malaysian immigration officials handled the deportation without coordination with the Special Branch, which oversees the dialogue.²³ This explanation carries little weight with BRN sympathisers, who interpret the handover as Kuala Lumpur's retribution for its exclusion from the back-channel negotiations in Turkey and a warning that BRN figures must toe the line in talks with Thailand or risk the end of their stay in Malaysia.²⁴

The Fourth Joint Working Group meeting took place from 31 March to 1 April in Kuala Lumpur, with the two sides formally endorsing General Principles of the Peace

¹⁶ The first public mention of BRN talks in Turkey with Thai officials that Crisis Group has found is on Bicara Patani, a Facebook Livestream, 4 January 2022. Crisis Group interviews, Bangkok, Hat Yai, Pattani, Yala, February 2022.

¹⁷ Malaysian Special Branch police reportedly interrogated the BRN delegation members individually after they returned to Malaysia. Crisis Group interviews, Malay-Muslim activist, Yala; Malay-Muslim academic, Songkhla, both February 2022.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, civilian security official, Pattani, 25 February 2022. The two experts were former senior diplomat Jonathan Powell of the UK and Siri Skåre of Norway. There are five foreign experts associated with the dialogue, but only two are present to observe any given meeting. Press release, BRN, 13 January 2022.

¹⁹ The Thai delegation was reportedly uncomfortable with the political solutions plank of the framework, but BRN insisted on it. General Wanlop proposed that the political solutions committee instead be called a study group in order for it to be more palatable to the Thai side. Crisis Group interview, academic, February 2022.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Thai security official, Bangkok, 1 March 2022.

²¹ Press release, BRN 13 January 2022.

²² "มาเลเซียส่งมอบ 3 นักรบจู่โจม โยงคดีมันคงขายแดนใต้ให้ทางการไทย, *Naew Na*, 13 มกราคม 2565", [Malaysia hands over 3 *juwae* fighters with security charges from the southern border provinces to Thai officials, *Naew Na*, 13 January 2022].

²³ Crisis Group interview, senior Thai official, Bangkok, March 2022.

²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Chaiyong Maneerungsakul, journalist, Hat Yai, 18 February 2022; Malay-Muslim activist, Yala, February 2022; Thai official, March 2022.

Dialogue Process that had been discussed at the January meeting.²⁵ A member of BRN's armed wing, Deng Awaaji, was present at the negotiating table for the first time, clearly in order to display BRN unity. While the parties stopped short of publishing a joint communiqué, both sides issued statements indicating progress.²⁶ A signal achievement was the announcement of a Ramadan Peace Initiative, a pledge by each side to reduce violence from 3 April to 14 May.

The General Principles are not public, but some sense of their substance is reflected in each parties' statements. According to the Thai panel's statement, the General Principles include a commitment that "both sides will ... strive to seek political solutions in accordance with the will of the Patani community under the Unitary State of Thailand in accordance with the Constitution".²⁷ Use of "Patani community" is noteworthy, as it indicates Bangkok's recognition of a political and social identity distinct from the Thai national identity that has been central to nation-building efforts in the modern era. Nodding to the existence of a distinct Patani community is no small concession from a state that exalts "nation-religion-monarchy" as the essence of nationhood. Ascertaining the popular will and reflecting it in administrative changes will be the acid test of a negotiated settlement.

That any political solution must accord with the unitary state and Thai constitution suggests that BRN has relinquished the goal of independence, at least in the near term. It would be a major concession, given that the organisation has always proclaimed a commitment to self-determination. The BRN's post-meeting statement conspicuously did not mention that it has made any such decision.²⁸

The apparent concessions by each side reflected in the General Principles will not be popular with some in both camps, who see dialogue as a pointless, if not dangerous, endeavour (see Section IV below). On 31 March, the first day of the latest round of dialogue, gunmen wounded Ahmadsukri Ladeh, a religious teacher (*ustaz*) and younger brother of BRN dialogue delegate in Muang district, Yala province.²⁹ As usual, no one claimed responsibility for the attack. The range of plausible culprits, including state-backed vigilantes and disaffected militants, indicates that dialogue has staunch opponents on both sides.

III. Interplay of Dialogue and Violence

Overt the last two years, the dialogue between BRN and Bangkok has affected the conflict in Thailand's deep south, but not in a straightforward way. Thai security forces, apparently indifferent to the talks, have steadily pressed BRN with sweeps and raids that are killing more and more suspected militants. BRN attenuated its

²⁵ Neither side signed the General Principles, which were instead signed by the international expert observers. The two sides exchanged letters endorsing the General Principles. "Thailand, southern rebels agree to 40-day Ramadan peace initiative", Benar News, 1 April 2022.

²⁶ The Thai delegation thus far has refused to sign any document together with BRN for fear of lending legitimacy and legal standing to the rebel organisation.

²⁷ Statement, The Peace Dialogue Panel, 2 April 2022.

²⁸ Press release, BRN Peace Negotiation Secretariat, 1 April 2022.

²⁹ Ahmadsukri Ladeh is the brother of Muhammad Muriz Ladeh, aka Abdul Aziz Jabal, of BRN's dialogue delegation.

operations in light of the dialogue and the COVID-19 pandemic, eschewing large, indiscriminate attacks. But it kept up small-scale ambushes on security forces, apparently to avenge their slain comrades; 2021 witnessed a steep increase in violent incidents over the preceding year and the first annual rise (9 per cent) in casualties since 2012.³⁰

The pattern of the past two years emerged shortly after the January 2020 meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Thai security forces continued operations against BRN, killing five militants in Narathiwat province in February and another four in Yala in early March. On 17 March, in what was widely interpreted as retaliation, militants detonated a car bomb in front of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre in Yala, wounding 25 people.³¹ On 3 April, BRN issued a written statement declaring a unilateral “cessation of activities” “for as long as BRN is not attacked by Thai government personnel” to facilitate efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.³² It was an unprecedented announcement. But Thai authorities did not reciprocate, responding only by saying security forces would continue to enforce the law.³³

The sequence of events that followed the unilateral BRN ceasefire further illustrated the pattern. On 30 April, a ranger task force raided a house in Pattani's Nong Chik district where, authorities said, militants were planning an attack. Security forces killed three militants, reportedly without first seeking their surrender.³⁴ Unusually, BRN responded with a video the same day and a press release on 1 May, acknowledging that the raid “led to the martyrdom and loss of three BRN fighters” and slamming the Thai authorities' failure to “respect the hardships” facing locals during the pandemic.³⁵ On 3 May, militants killed two rangers at a checkpoint in Saiburi district, Pattani, in apparent reprisal for the Nong Chik raid. Notably, BRN did not rescind its declaration of a “cessation of activities”, but militants continued to respond to what they saw as provocative security operations.

Security forces' “cordon-and-search” operations resulting in the death of militant suspects have intensified over recent years. During these raids, security forces surround an area or building where suspects are hiding and call upon them to surrender, sometimes enlisting their parents and local religious leaders to attempt to persuade them. Rather than give themselves up, militants are increasingly fighting to the death.

³⁰ In 2021, IED attacks increased 17.4 per cent over 2020 and shootings increased 174 per cent, from 34 to 94 incidents. The percentage of militant attacks targeting civilians also declined modestly, from 65 per cent in 2020 to 57 per cent in 2021. “ชายแดนใต้/ปาตานี 2547-2564: ก้าวเข้าปีที่สิบเก้า สันติภาพจะเดินหน้าไปถึงไหนในปี 2565?” [Southern border/Patani 2004-2021: Entering the nineteenth year, how will far will peace advance in 2022?], Deep South Watch, 10 January 2022; Crisis Group correspondence, Deep South Watch staff, 11 April 2022.

³¹ This incident was a “double tap” attack, with a small IED explosion preceding the car bomb by roughly ten minutes.

³² “Declaration of BRN's Response to COVID-19”, Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front, 3 April 2020. BRN later stated that the “cessation of activities” was “in accordance with the call by UN Secretary-General António Guterres” for a global ceasefire on humanitarian grounds as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. “Announcement of the Information Bureau of the BRN Negotiation Secretariat,” video, 15 February 2021.

³³ Pimuk Rakkanam and Mariyam Ahmad, “BRN rebels declare ceasefire in Thai deep south over COVID-19”, Benar News, 4 April 2020.

³⁴ Anthony Davis, “Covid-19 moment of truth for peace in Thailand”, *Asia Times*, 27 May 2020.

³⁵ “BRN condemns the actions of the Thai military during the COVID-19 Crisis”, press release, Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front, 1 May 2020.

According to a civil society activist, 57 militant suspects have been killed in this manner since January 2019, seven of them between 1 January and mid-February 2022.³⁶ Explanations for this new phenomenon vary. Some point to the closure of the Malaysian border due to the pandemic, which deprived fighters of easy access to their de facto safe haven. Rather than depositing weapons in hidden caches after attacks, as fighters used to do, many are also keeping small arms for defence. Some believe that militants may prefer death to submitting to a justice system that they distrust.

Authorities maintain that they are following the principle of escalation “from soft to hard measures” in enforcing the law, shooting only as a last resort.³⁷ But it is often difficult to ascertain “who shot first” in these encounters and many Malay-Muslims perceive some of these militant deaths to be the result of excessive force, if not de facto extrajudicial killings, a practice known in Thai as *wisaman kattagam*.³⁸ Many also see militants’ resistance as self-defence.³⁹ According to an observer, “It doesn’t look like law enforcement. It looks like hunting”.⁴⁰

Many Malay-Muslims regard militants killed in these encounters as martyrs (*shahid*) killed in a jihad to defend their kin and co-religionists.⁴¹ Their funerals have become political events, often attracting hundreds of people. In some cases, young men rendered military-style salutes to the dead and crowds of mourners have shouted “*merdeka*” or “independence” in addition to the traditional “*takbir*”, the Arabic term for the phrase “*Allahu akbar!*” or “God is the greatest!”⁴² These events are live-streamed and otherwise shared on social media, allowing people throughout the region to tune in.⁴³ While crowds have convened for militant funerals in the past, it is novel for villagers to publicly declare an aspiration for independence. An activist said these calls were triggered in part by the Thai military’s refusal to reciprocate BRN’s COVID-19 ceasefire.⁴⁴ Expressions of approval for *shahid* may thus reflect opposition to the Thai state more than popular support for BRN.⁴⁵ The insurgent movement nonetheless

³⁶ Document supplied to Crisis Group by Malay-Muslim journalist, 17 February 2022.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Lt Gen Thira Daewa, deputy director, Internal Security Operations Command Region 4 Forward Command, Yala, 4 March 2022.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Artef Sohko, president, The Patani, Pattani, 24 February 2022.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist academic, Pattani, February 2022.

⁴¹ The Arabic root of “jihad” refers to striving in God’s service. Malay-Muslim insurgents in Thailand pursue an irredentist or “nation-oriented” jihad, ie, a fight with non-Muslims for a particular territory. Their struggle should not be confused with the transnational jihadism espoused by Salafi-jihadist groups. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°291, *Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace*, 8 November 2017, pp. 1-2.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022.

⁴³ One such funeral in February 2022 reportedly attracted some 2,000 mourners while 16,000 more viewed a livestream of the event. Crisis Group interview, Dr. Mukhtar Abdulkarim, director, INSANI, Pattani, 15 February 2022.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Chu Ya, chairman, Patani Institute for Development and Education, Pattani, 25 February 2022.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Dr. Mukhtar Abdulkarim, director, INSANI, Pattani, 15 February 2022; *ustaz* (Islamic religious teacher), Pattani, 16 February 2022; Chu Ya, chairman, Patani Institute for Development and Education, Pattani, 25 February 2022.

benefits from these events, which stir up nationalist and religious fervour and facilitate recruitment.⁴⁶

IV. Temporising on Talks

The overarching weakness of the dialogue process is dissonance between political and military wings on each side of the table. This discord reflects ambivalence in each camp about seeking peace through political solutions and raises questions about the subordination of both sides' armed forces to their political leadership.

A lack of unity on the Thai side threatens progress in the dialogue, raising doubts about how invested the government is in reaching a negotiated settlement. Few question the National Security Council's sincerity in pursuing talks, but many see the dialogue as a façade designed mainly for foreign eyes, behind which the Thai government may continue with suppressive tactics.⁴⁷ Thai civilian officials themselves lament that military operations are not conducive to the peace process and damage efforts to build mutual trust.⁴⁸ According to an observer, "For the Thais, it's still about 'talking and shooting'".⁴⁹

Another indicator of dissonance on the Thai side is the persistent conviction within the senior officer corps that BRN's strategy rests on using NGOs to help elevate the fighting to a "non-international armed conflict" as defined in international law.⁵⁰ The officers believe that such a designation, in turn, would provide a pretext for foreign intervention in southernmost Thai provinces, perhaps under UN auspices, leading to a referendum and finally partition.⁵¹ BRN's calls for greater foreign involvement and adherence to international standards in the dialogue excite suspicions among Thai officers that the group sees internationalisation as part of its revolutionary strategy.⁵² The National Security Council, along with a university political science

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Anchana Heemmina, Duay Jai Group, Pattani, 24 February 2022; Abdulqahhar Hayiawang, president of Muslim Attorney Centre, Pattani, February 2022; Crisis Group telephone interview, Che Muda, member of BRN delegation, February 2022.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Dr. Mukthar Abdulkarim, director, INSANI, Pattani, 15 February 2022; *ustaz*, Pattani, 16 February 2022; Chaiyong Maneerungskul, journalist, Hat Yai, 18 February 2022.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, security official, Pattani, 25 February 2022.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, researcher, Pattani, February 2022.

⁵⁰ "Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions specifically applies in the case of conflicts 'not of an international character'. This means armed conflicts between governments and organized armed groups, or those that take place among such groups themselves. Although Common Article 3 does not define 'armed conflict', it is characterised by a minimum level of intensity and duration as well as a minimum level of organisation, including a chain of command, among parties to the conflict". "Increasing Respect for International Humanitarian Law in Non-International Armed Conflicts", International Committee of the Red Cross, February 2008, p. 7.

⁵¹ Those who harbour such fears point to the example of Timor Leste, which voted for independence from Indonesia in a UN-organised referendum in 1999.

⁵² See Crisis Group Report, *Giving Substance to Form*, op. cit., p. 7. Crisis Group interviews, military officers, Bangkok, Pattani, Yala, 2019, 2020, 2022. According to one advocate of this view, former imperialist powers are intervening in Thailand in order to contain China. "ไชยวงศ์ มณีพิทักษ์, 'ยุทธการ 3 ขา' ของ บ็อบาร์เอ็นน่าพา 'ฝรั่งหัวแดง' ปรึบที่ชายแดนใต้", *ผู้จัดการออนไลน์*, 25 ก.พ. 2563 [Chaiyong Manipileuk, "BRN's '3 pronged battle plan', suddenly bringing 'red-headed foreigners' to the southern border", *Manager Online*, 25 February 2020].

department, studied this phenomenon and concluded that such concerns were groundless and counterproductive, but that has had little evident impact on the officers' thinking.⁵³

Consonant with the fear of internationalisation is the stance of some military officials that "dialogue" is better carried out with rebels in Thailand than with leaders in exile. But these officials view "dialogue" essentially as an effort to persuade militants to surrender under the Bring the People Home program, a package of amnesty and government assistance assembled for that purpose in 2012.⁵⁴ They say Malay-Muslims should seek redress for any political grievances through existing administrative structures, especially local councils and other elected bodies, which holds little appeal for BRN and its supporters.⁵⁵

The personal views of senior military officers would not necessarily be consequential if the Thai military were accountable to popularly elected civilian leaders. The Thai army has staged two coups since 2006. After the second, in 2014, it governed the country for five years, and the coup leaders subsequently retained power behind the scenes after a 2019 general election under their bespoke constitution.⁵⁶ Some people in the deep south are pessimistic that a negotiated resolution is possible without nationwide democratic reform and a readiness to devolve genuine political authority from Bangkok to regions and provinces.⁵⁷ A member of the BRN delegation suggested that a comprehensive agreement would have to wait until the Thai military was subordinate to democratically elected civilian leadership.⁵⁸

Similarly, a split between BRN's political and military wings is a source of potential problems in the dialogue. BRN's armed wing consented to the political wing's talks with the Thai government, but until the latest round was not prepared to participate directly because it is sceptical of Bangkok's sincerity and the dialogue's structure.⁵⁹ In this regard, the presence of a military wing representative at the last round of talks is potentially an important development, but according to an informed observer, should talks fail, the armed wing will keep fighting. "The ideology and the forces are still there", he noted.⁶⁰

BRN is also divided and ambivalent about its political strategy. The secretive group has evolved over the past decade, becoming relatively more open and communicative. But it remains an underground, revolutionary organisation that uses violence for political ends. It is not clear that members and supporters have relinquished their

⁵³ Unpublished, undated report on file with Crisis Group.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group Briefing, *No Traction*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Muslim analyst, Pattani, 17 February 2022; Suwara Kaewnuy, academic and secretary of Sor Lor 3, Pattani, February 2022; Lt Gen Thira Daewa, deputy director, Internal Security Operations Command Region 4 Forward Command, Yala, 4 March 2022.

⁵⁶ See Crisis Group Asia Reports N°s263, *Thailand: A Coup Ordained?*, 3 December 2014; 274, *Thailand's Lengthening Roadmap to Elections*, 10 December 2015; and 309, *COVID-19 and a Possible Political Reckoning in Thailand*, 4 August 2020.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, *ustaz*, Pattani, 16 February 2022; Ahmad Omar Chapakia, vice rector of Fathoni University, Pattani, 25 February 2022.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group correspondence, BRN member, March 2022.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Abdulrohman Molo, academic, Hat Yai, 18 February 2022; senior BRN member, February 2022; civilian security official, Pattani, 25 February 2022; Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Abdulrohman Molo, academic, Hat Yai, 18 February 2022.

maximalist goal of full-fledged independence, even if some leaders concede that autonomy or special administration may be a necessary waypoint. Beyond the broad strokes of Islamic law and independence, BRN leaders have, however, not publicly advocated a detailed plan for the region's future, leading many to conclude that they may not have a clear vision of the type of governance they wish to exercise.⁶¹

Another possible complication is that leaders of other Malay-Muslim separatist fronts are not included in the peace dialogue.⁶² Their absence is not an immediate threat to the talks, as they do not control consequential numbers of fighters on the ground, but some may have the capacity to play spoiler if their exclusion persists.⁶³

V. Advancing the Framework

The three-part framework for dialogue agreed at the January 2022 meeting in Kuala Lumpur offers the opportunity for substantive discussions to finally gain momentum. Progress on reducing violence and public consultations is a pre-condition for any meaningful discussions of potential political solutions to the conflict to take place. This section weighs prospects for headway on these two issues and suggests ways to strengthen the dialogue process as a whole.

A. Public Consultation

A broad consensus holds that it is imperative for the people of Patani to have a say in any political arrangements aimed at resolving the conflict. A durable resolution and positive peace are unlikely without popular participation, as any holdout rebels would likely continue to exploit the public's discontent with an agreement that does not reflect its aspirations. A Thai official explained, "We need to involve other stakeholders in the dialogue, not just BRN. ... [P]ublic consultation is the *real* dialogue".⁶⁴ The details of mechanisms for public consultation, including whether the two parties would hold discussions with civil society jointly or in parallel, remain to be worked out.

People in the southernmost provinces who follow the dialogue welcome the prospect of being heard via public consultations but worry about how these might work in practice. Apart from the fact that many Malay-Muslims distrust the central government, the dialogue seems distant from people's immediate economic concerns,

⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, *ustaz*, Pattani, 16 February 2022; Abdulrohman Molo, academic, Hat Yai, 18 February 2022.

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, Buddhist peace activist, Yala, February 2022. Dr. Abu Hafez Al-Hakim, Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani (Islamic Liberation Front of Patani), comments in Wacana Damai Selatan Thailand, webinar, 26 January 2022.

⁶³ Crisis Group telephone interview, Kasturi Mahkota, president, Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), 25 February 2022. A double bombing on 15 March killed a civilian and wounded three explosive ordinance disposal officers in Saiburi district, Pattani. Kasturi said a PULO unit carried out the attack and said, "The talks are not inclusive enough and it is going too fast". "Thai government says Ramadan bombings won't derail peace talks with rebels", Reuters, 17 April 2022.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, Thai security official, Bangkok, 1 March 2022.

especially given the impact of the pandemic.⁶⁵ More broadly, there is little confidence in the region that a rigid top-down Thai bureaucracy that values hierarchy and order – its basic structure little changed in more than a century – has the inclination to embrace grassroots sentiments and bring about change. The post-coup government's military pedigree is an extra obstacle in the eyes of many locals. Consultation must also proceed without alienating the Buddhist minority in the region. Another challenge lies in soliciting popular views on political alternatives that the state may construe as seditious.

A state mechanism for public consultation already exists, established by prime ministerial order in 2014 when Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha revamped Thailand's dialogue structure, but it offers meagre grounds for optimism in its ability to accurately reflect locals' perceptions and aspirations.⁶⁶ On paper, the Area-based Inter-agency Coordination Working Group is meant to support the peace dialogue by facilitating discussions between the government and civil society.⁶⁷ Known by its Thai acronym Sor Lor 3, the committee's membership is, however, comprised mainly of individuals aligned with the state. Both Muslims and Buddhists tend to regard it as biased and serving the interests of the status quo.⁶⁸ One of the committee's secretaries confided, "Every time I present our proposals, I always stress that these are the proposals from Sor Lor 3, not from the entire local people, because Sor Lor 3 is not the representative of the whole community".⁶⁹ "These dialogues are not for building peace, but only for spending the government budget", added a BRN member.⁷⁰

Devising a mechanism for consultations between BRN and local people will be even more challenging. If BRN's local supporters do not back the talks, there is little chance they will succeed. As BRN's political wing has become increasingly visible over the past decade, there is a growing appetite in the deep south to hear directly from its representatives.⁷¹ So far, the group has however remained overly secretive; even some sympathisers criticise its communications strategy.⁷² Among the Buddhist minority, there is widespread concern about what the future will hold should the region accede to some sort of autonomous status.⁷³ At the same time, according to a

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022; Buddhist village head, Pattani, 16 February 2022; Anchana Heemmina, Duay Jai Group, Pattani, 24 February 2022; Abdulqahhar Hayiawang, president, Muslim Attorney Centre, Pattani, February 2022.

⁶⁶ คำสั่งสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรีที่ 230/2557 เรื่อง การจัดตั้งกลไก ขับเคลื่อนกระบวนการพูดคุย เพื่อสันติสุขจังหวัด ชายแดนภาคใต้ [Prime Minister's Office Order 230/2014, "Establishment of a Mechanism for Peace Dialogue for the Southern Border Provinces"], p. 3.

⁶⁷ In Thai, คณะประสานงานระดับพื้นที่ 3 (สล.3).

⁶⁸ Sor Lor 3 is chaired by the Fourth Army Area commander and run by his deputy. In fact, civilian participation in the committee has grown over the years, with military officers now accounting for roughly 20 per cent of members. Crisis Group interview, Suwara Kaewnuy, academic and secretary of Sor Lor 3, Pattani, February 2022. A committee member said, "[Sor Lor 3] comes from the state, but not all representatives agree with the state. Representatives have different motivations for joining". Crisis Group interview, Buddhist village head, Pattani, 16 February 2022.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Suwara Kaewnuy, academic and secretary of Sor Lor 3, Pattani, February 2022.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, senior BRN member, February 2022. Some, including Sor Lor 3 members, also see it as a vehicle for state patronage through disbursal of stipends.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, *ustaz*, Pattani, 16 February 2022; Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, Malay-Muslim activist, Yala, February 2022.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022.

Buddhist village head, local people also need to be exposed to the ideas of “those who think differently from the state”, as the Thai government officially refers to insurgents. Ideally, in her view, such meetings would take place in person because “people are more polite when meeting face to face”.⁷⁴

But establishing a parallel mechanism for BRN to engage in public consultation presents obvious problems, starting with the legal status and security of its members on Thai soil. A BRN member said a Thai stipulation that only members without arrest warrants could participate was “not acceptable” and rejected the Thai proviso that there be no foreign monitoring of the public consultations.⁷⁵ A senior Thai military officer asserted that BRN could hold public seminars in the south, but it is not clear that this position represents settled policy.⁷⁶ The Thai authorities’ track record on protecting free speech and entertaining dissenting views invites scepticism.⁷⁷ The government must provide greater assurances that it will protect the civil rights of local participants in public consultations. According to a Muslim civil rights activist, “Even if a mechanism for public consultation is set up, there will be questions about the safety of those who speak out”.⁷⁸

Whatever shape public consultation takes, independence and inclusivity should be the watchwords. To ensure independence, some involved in the talks wish to see a process led by a respected but disinterested Thai elder, from the ranks of politicians or civil society figures.⁷⁹ Given the fissures in Thai society and politics, finding such a person will be a tall order, but it is worth trying. In the interest of inclusivity, the consultation mechanism should encourage women’s participation. In that regard, the Thai government’s January appointment of Rachada Dhnadirek, a government spokesperson, as a special representative on the southern border provinces with a brief to promote women’s engagement with the peace process, is a welcome development.⁸⁰ BRN should contemplate doing the same, though it will be important for both sides to demonstrate such appointments are not mere tokenism.

B. *Reduction in Violence*

The success of public consultation depends in part on success in reducing the level of violence. The Thai delegation has been anxious for the dialogue to deliver results on that front. The latest round of talks resulted in unilateral commitments from both Thailand and BRN to reduce military operations from 3 April to 14 May, a period which encompasses the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Beyond the axiomatic desirability of less violence, this initiative would, if successful, demonstrate BRN’s

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist village head, Pattani, 16 February 2022.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, senior BRN member, February 2022.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Lt Gen Thira Daewa, deputy director, Internal Security Operations Command Region 4 Forward Command, Yala, 4 March 2022.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Abdulqahhar Hayiawang, president of Muslim Attorney Centre, Pattani, February 2022. “Thailand: Deepening Repression of Rights”, Human Rights Watch, 13 January 2022. According to the U.S. non-profit organisation Freedom House, Thailand slipped into the “not free” category in 2021. “Thailand” entry in “Freedom in the World 2021”. See also Crisis Group Report, *COVID-19 and a Possible Political Reckoning in Thailand*, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Anchana Heemmina, Duay Jai Group, Pattani, 24 February 2022.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Thai security official, Bangkok, 1 March 2022.

⁸⁰ “New envoy to join peace talks”, *Bangkok Post*, 25 January 2022.

unity of command, produce a tangible outcome from the talks and improve the conditions for public consultations.

But the Ramadan Peace Initiative is best understood as a unilateral reduction of hostilities on each side rather than a negotiated ceasefire. Apart from the fact that the two sides did not make a joint announcement, there seem to be discrepancies as to what exactly the cessation of hostilities implies. General Wanlop, the Thai lead negotiator, explained that the Thai side has committed to scale back cordon-and-search operations and that a hotline with BRN has been established to address any violent incidents.⁸¹ The BRN post-meeting press release, however, states that both sides agreed to “stop all military operations” from 3 April to 14 May.⁸² There are also no special provisions for monitoring, which BRN’s delegation had earlier called for. Nor did the Thai side agree to lift its special security laws for the southern region, a measure that BRN had earlier sought as a correlate to a ceasefire.⁸³

Most importantly, neither the Thai nor BRN delegations exercise complete control over their respective armed forces, but rather must request their cooperation.⁸⁴ BRN has demonstrated effective control over its rank and file in Thailand in the past, but it is possible that the General Principles’ affirmation of a resolution under the Thai constitution may shake some fighters’ commitment to suspending attacks. Moreover, the pattern of Thai cordon-and-search operations suggests the possibility of militants acting in what they would perceive as self-defence. For this reason, a meaningful reduction in violence is unlikely if the Thai side does not completely halt such operations. It would be useful for senior government officials to clarify and publicly endorse specific measures its delegation has committed to in order to reduce violence – and make sure the military honours the pledge. Without such backing at the highest levels of government, a successful ceasefire is far from assured given that the Thai dialogue delegation cannot dictate the disposition and operations of security forces.

Civilian security officials maintain that coordination between the dialogue team and military has never been better.⁸⁵ That is encouraging, but the army is not under

⁸¹ Thailand appointed Major General Woradech Decharaksa, commander of the 5th Infantry Brigade, as the contact person for the joint committee on reduction of violence. Thailand agreed to remove wanted posters from public spaces and invited BRN members to return to the region to observe Ramadan, but offered no official immunity. Interview with Gen Wanlop Rugsanoah, “เจาะลึก... การพูดคุยสันติภาพไทย-BRN” [In-depth... Thai-BRN peace talks], The Pen (Facebook), video, 5 April 2022.

⁸² Press release, BRN Peace Negotiation Secretariat, 1 April 2022.

⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, Malay-Muslim activist, Yala, February 2022; Thai security official, Bangkok, 1 March 2022. Three special security laws are imposed in all or part of the southernmost provinces, including martial law, the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations of 2005 and the Internal Security Act of 2008 (ISA). The emergency decree took effect on 19 July 2005 in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala and has been renewed by the cabinet every three months since. Section 17 of the emergency decree grants law enforcement officers immunity from prosecution for any action committed in the line of duty. Martial law allows authorities to detain suspects up to seven days without charges. Combined with the emergency decree, it permits them to extend the detention period to 37 days. In 2021, the emergency decree was lifted in seven districts: Mae Lan and Mai Kaen in Pattani; Betong and Kabang in Yala; and Sungai Kolok, Sukhirin, Si Sakhon and Waeng in Narathiwat. The ISA is imposed in these districts, as well as Chana, Na Thawi, Saba Yoi and Thepha districts, Songkhla province. “Seven districts excluded from emergency decree enforcement in the Deep South”, Office of the Prime Minister, 4 June 2021.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist activist, Yala, 15 February 2022.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, security officials, Bangkok, Pattani, February, March 2022.

civilian control in any meaningful sense and the Fourth Army Area commander has enjoyed a largely free hand in the southern border region. Moreover, special laws give the security forces great latitude in how they operate in the southernmost provinces. General Wanlop reportedly pressed the army for a reduction in security operations in advance of the latest round of talks.⁸⁶ Army officers, meanwhile, have defended the use of force, maintaining that they do not initiate violence.⁸⁷

Under these circumstances, the reciprocal pledge to reduce violence, enacted without effective monitoring or sufficient preparation, risks a repeat of the failed 2013 Ramadan Peace Initiative. At the time, Malaysia pushed the parties to assent to a 40-day voluntary reduction in violence; neither Thai nor BRN representatives were present at the announcement of this “common understanding”. There was little trust between the parties and no monitoring mechanism in place. A series of murders took place, indicating an apparent effort to sabotage the ceasefire, which unravelled after a one-week lull.⁸⁸ There is cause for concern that this pattern could be repeated.⁸⁹

C. *Sustaining Momentum*

Progress in the peace dialogue depends on the persistence and ingenuity of its advocates on all sides to seek headway in the face of unfavourable circumstances and active resistance.

BRN's leaders should undertake the necessary internal deliberations to bridge the gap between military and political wings so that decisions taken at the dialogue table are honoured on the ground. There is little that outsiders can do to speed up this process, but international NGOs should continue their capacity-building efforts.⁹⁰ Publicly articulating a clear political vision and binding itself to commitments could bolster BRN's political identity and encourage group cohesion. Implicit in this step is accountability for such commitments, which makes it challenging and potentially risky, but it is the least that can be expected of those who aspire to govern. BRN will also have to placate the leaders of other separatist fronts.

On the Thai side, advocates of dialogue do not have the luxury of waiting for the advent of a more progressive government or reform of civil-military relations. As an immediate step to fortify the peace process, the government should provide the National Security Council with resources to staff a full-time peace dialogue secretariat. As it stands, the Council borrows staffers for the dialogue team from other units,

⁸⁶ General Wanlop is not without means in cajoling the army. He is a protégé of Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan, a retired army chief who remains influential among the officer corps.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Abdulrohman Molo, academic, Hat Yai, 18 February 2022; Thai security official, Bangkok, 1 March 2022; Lt Gen Thira Daewa, deputy director, Internal Security Operations Command Region 4 Forward Command, Yala, 4 March 2022.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group Report, *Dialogue in Doubt*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁸⁹ On 5 April, a Malay-Muslim man was shot and killed in Mae Kaen district, Pattani. Authorities announced that the killing was related to drug trafficking. “ประเดิมหยุดยิงรวมถูอน BRN โปสดีไวรัฐ –แม่ทัพน้อยได้กลับ” [BRN posts protest at start of Ramadan ceasefire – corps commander responds], *Isra News*, 6 April 2022. Early on 9 April, an Islamic teacher was shot and killed in Nong Chik district, Pattani.

⁹⁰ In early 2020, BRN representatives signed the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict following engagement with Geneva Call, a non-government organisation, on international humanitarian law. “Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani commits to greater protection of children”, Geneva Call, 19 March 2020.

with dialogue added to their list of duties.⁹¹ Vocal backing for dialogue from the prime minister and his cabinet would build greater confidence in the process and could help assuage the fears of some in the security establishment that dialogue is a pretext for violations of Thai sovereignty. Likewise, the prime minister should publicly endorse measures that the dialogue panel may recommend in pursuit of a reduction in violence.

As dialogue facilitator, Malaysia occupies an ambiguous position. Its participation is vital given that BRN leaders and Patani fighters use it as a refuge. Since 2013, however, BRN and Thai officials alike have expressed reservations about Kuala Lumpur's performance as facilitator. Thailand is concerned that Malaysia – in playing host to BRN – is not impartial. A Thai official said the facilitator sometimes “forgets” the agreement between Thailand and BRN that it stay out of discussions of substantive issues.⁹² For its part, BRN resents Malaysia's pressure to adhere to its guidance at the formal negotiating table and forgo more flexible back-channel talks with Thai officials.⁹³ According to a Patani-Malay journalist, “Some older fighters think Malaysia goes too far and controls too much. They're out for their national interest”.⁹⁴ Considering reputational costs that may accrue from the present approach, Malaysia's leaders may wish to reassess facilitation procedures and personnel.

Kuala Lumpur should, in particular, assent to the back-channel talks as a complement to the official peace dialogue. One purpose of informal closed-door talks is for the contending parties to do the difficult work of building rapport and identifying common interests without the added burden of grandstanding for constituents, which works against the very aims of dialogue. According to Che Muda of BRN's delegation, “BRN regards [the back channel] as lubricant for the formal process”.⁹⁵ Malaysia has made clear its displeasure with the informal contacts, but the back channel has demonstrated its utility not least by smoothing the way for BRN to return to the negotiating table and generating ideas for discussion. All parties should facilitate efforts toward more frequent and frank discussions between Bangkok and BRN, even if outside formal plenary sessions.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Thai security official, Bangkok, March 2022.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, Thai security official, Bangkok, March 2020.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, senior BRN member, February 2022.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Malay-Muslim journalist, Pattani, February 2022.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, February 2022.

VI. Conclusion

Achieving a negotiated settlement to the conflict in southernmost Thailand will be time-consuming and difficult. The challenges are daunting, with important blocs on both sides of the table unsure that they have more to gain from negotiations than from sustaining the fight. That calculus is likely to change only slowly, but progress in the talks can help. The negotiating teams have hard work ahead in devising effective, inclusive mechanisms for public consultation and reducing violence. They should anticipate setbacks and not let these be fatal to dialogue. At this stage, it is important to keep the process going, with all parties bearing in mind their obligation to bring an end to almost two decades of deadly violence.

Bangkok/Brussels, 19 April 2022

Appendix A: Map of Thailand



International Crisis Group/KO/Sept 2016. Based on UN map no. 3853 Rev. 2 (July 2009).

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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