

Thailand: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

The security situation in Thailand, in particular in the restive southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, began to deteriorate in December 2018, according to the International Crisis Group. In January 2019 alone, militants launched at least six separate attacks on educational, Buddhist, and law enforcement targets, as well as a hospital. On January 8, 2019, militants lynched a retired Buddhist teacher and, in a separate attack, bombed a teacher-protection unit, injuring a police officer and a 12-year-old girl. On January 10, attackers killed four volunteers of a Thai paramilitary force, which was assisting the Royal Thai Police, outside of a school. Thai authorities accused a Malay-Muslim secessionist faction, known as National Revolutionary Front (Barisan Revolusi Nasional, or BRN), of perpetrating the attacks. (Sources: [International Crisis Group](#) [1], [Human Rights Watch](#) [2], [Al-Jazeera](#) [3], [Voice of America](#) [4])

The latest attacks occurred as the ruling Thai military junta restarted negotiations with Mara Patani, an umbrella organization of Thailand's Muslim rebels in the country's south. The negotiations, hosted by neighboring Malaysia, officially began on January 4, 2019. The following month, Mara Patani announced it would suspend meetings until after Thailand's general election on March 24, 2019. The rebels noted that they were disappointed with the attitude of the junta's representative, General Udomchai Thammasaroraj, and requested a new negotiator. In a press conference, Udomchai said that the junta would be open to including all separatist groups in talks, including those engaged in violence, which was seen as a reference to the BRN. (Sources: [Straits Times](#) [5], [Bangkok Post](#) [6], [AsiaOne](#) [7])

Overview

Thailand, a Buddhist-majority country, is experiencing a decades-long ethno-religious separatist insurgency waged by Malay-Muslim rebels in the country's south. The unrest is located primarily in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, which belonged to the Malay-Muslim sultanate until Thailand (then called Siam), annexed the region in 1909. Since the insurgency erupted in 2004, separatist groups have carried out a number of violent attacks. These groups reportedly lack central leadership and subscribe to differing ideologies, however, militant Islamists are believed to constitute the majority of the rebels. As of January 2019, the separatist insurgency has killed approximately 7,000 people. At least 12,000 others have been wounded in the conflict, according to the latest estimate in September 2016. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [8], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [Associated Press](#) [10], [Caravan \(India\)](#) [11])

Terrorist groups including [al-Qaeda](#) [12], [Jemaah Islamiyah \(JI\)](#) [13], and [Hezbollah](#) [14] have reportedly operated inside Thailand using the country as a transit point and as a base for planning attacks. JI is believed to have planned the 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia, from safe houses in Thailand's capital city of Bangkok. In addition, Iranian agents have allegedly sought to attack Israeli diplomats on Thai soil. In recent years, a number of Thai citizens have reportedly accessed ISIS propaganda online, and have printed and sold pro-ISIS clothing items. Thai security adviser Panitan Wattanayagorn has said, however, that authorities have "no reason to believe [that Thailand is] a target [for ISIS]." There have been no reports of Thai citizens traveling abroad to fight with extremist groups. (Sources: [Atlantic](#) [15], [CS Monitor](#) [16], [Associated Press](#) [17], [Australian](#) [18], [Diplomat](#) [19])

Political turmoil in Thailand has made it difficult for Bangkok to forge a coherent and consistent strategy to combat extremism. Since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand's army has staged 11 coups, including the most recent coup in May 2014. The ruling military junta, led by Prayuth Chan-ocha, initially cited its opposition to a political settlement with the rebels that would concede autonomy to the southern provinces. However, in September 2016, the junta launched peace talks with the Mara Patani, an organization representing the insurgents. Successive Thai governments have been widely accused of using excessive force against the rebels while failing to address the root causes of Malay-Muslim discontent, which include political, economic, and cultural grievances. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [20], [RAND Corporation](#) [21], [Guardian](#) [22], [Diplomat](#) [23], [Khaosod English](#) [24])

Thailand has provided assistance to foreign powers in preventing or punishing extremist activity. After the September 11, 2001, attacks, Thailand allowed the United States to use Thai territory to interrogate terrorist suspects in the war against terror. Today, Thailand and the United States carry out joint military exercises. The Thai government also cooperates on counterterrorism efforts with Australia. In early 2016, the Thai government announced its intention to forge a new anti-terrorism pact with Australia in response to ISIS's efforts to claim a foothold in the Asia-Pacific region. (Sources: [Diplomat](#) [25], [RAND Corporation](#) [21])

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Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Thailand's Southern Insurgency

Muslim separatist groups in Thailand operate primarily in the south of the country as part of the ongoing insurgency. The conflict stems from demands for autonomy made by ethnic-Malay Muslims in the area, who cite political, economic, and cultural grievances. Many of the insurgents also claim to be waging jihad and call for the creation of an Islamic sultanate in the country's south. The violence is primarily concentrated in three southern provinces—Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat—though attacks by suspected Muslim separatists have occurred in other Thai provinces including Prachuap Khiri Khan and Phuket. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#) [26], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [Hot Spot: Asia and Oceania](#) [27], [International Business Times](#) [8], [Guardian](#) [28])

The conflict can be traced back to the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty, which delineated the border between Thailand and Malaysia. As part of the treaty, Thailand annexed the independent sultanate of Patani, which now constitutes Thailand's largely Muslim south. The Thai government spent much of the century attempting to assimilate Malay-Muslims into Thai Buddhist culture, fueling resentment among the Malay-Muslim community. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [29])

Low level separatist revolts simmered for half of a century between the 1940s and the 1990s. In January 2004, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra declared martial law in the southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. In April of that year, separatist rebels launched a string of attacks against Thai police and military installations in the south—culminating in a shootout between insurgents and police at the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani which left more than 30 insurgents dead. The situation further intensified that October after Thai security forces shot and killed seven Thai Muslims during protests in Narathiwat Province. Authorities detained 1,300 people following the protests, and 78 more individuals suffocated to death as they were transported to a military camp. In the subsequent years, insurgents carried out near-daily bombings and drive-by shootings throughout the country's south. In 2007, Thai authorities deployed 60,000 troops to the region. As of January 2019, the separatist insurgency has killed approximately 7,000 people. At least 12,000 others have been wounded in the conflict, according to the latest estimate in September 2016. Peace talks between the Thai government and the Mara Patani, the separatist umbrella group, have failed to bring about a resolution. (Sources: [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [29], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [Associated Press](#) [30], [Associated Press](#) [31], [Deutsche Welle](#) [26], [International Business Times](#) [8], [BBC News](#) [32], [Associated Press](#) [10], [Caravan \(India\)](#) [11])

The insurgency is believed to lack centralized leadership and organizational structure. "There is no single great insurgency, there are a multitude of tiny insurgencies," Songkhla Province Governor Grisada Boonrach told the *Atlantic* in 2013. Furthermore, the leadership and membership of these factions is so secretive that some fighters are not aware of which faction they belong to. The strongest of the insurgent factions is purportedly the National Revolutionary Front, (Barisan Revolusi Nasional, or BRN). Other prominent groups include the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), the Gerakan Mujahideen Islami Pattani (GMIP), and the Runda Kumpulan Kecil (RKK). (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [30], [Atlantic](#) [15], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [33])

The various rebel groups have been driven by differing ideologies including Islamism, ethno-nationalism, and communism. Today, most of the rebels are believed to be militant Islamists. Many fighters reportedly refer to themselves as *mujahideen* (holy warriors), and claim they are waging jihad against state authorities, whom they refer to as *kuffar* (nonbelievers). Because all insurgents are Malay-Muslim, "Islam provides a ready-made and common vocabulary for their struggle," according to USAID. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [8], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [RAND Corporation](#) [21], [USAID](#) [34], [Critical Asian Studies](#) [35])

In 2004, the Thai military estimated that there are at least 50 educational institutions in southern Thailand where professors recruited and trained students to fight in the insurgency. That same year, the government found a booklet titled *Berjihad di Patani* on the body of a Muslim insurgent who was shot dead during a standoff with police at the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani Province. The document called for jihad against the Thai government in advance of the establishment of an Islamic sultanate in the south of the country. Muslim rebel groups in the country have carried out shootings and beheadings, and have built and detonated IEDs. Targets have included government officials, monks, schools, and teachers and other symbols of the Thai state. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [8], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [RAND](#)

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[Corporation](#) [21], [USAID](#) [34], [BBC News](#) [36], [Critical Asian Studies](#) [35], [Hot Spot: Asia and Oceania](#) [27], [Sydney Morning Herald](#) [37])

The insurgency intensified with another string of bombings in March 2016. On March 10, insurgents detonated a remote bomb in Narathiwat Province, killing three soldiers and injuring two others. Three days later, 10 insurgents seized a hospital in Narathiwat and used it to launch attacks against a nearby army post, wounding seven military personnel. Later that month, at least 10 bombs were detonated in Pattani Province, leaving one civilian dead and 11 policemen injured. Suspected Muslim insurgents carried out another deadly spate of bombings in August 2016, targeting tourist locations in southern provinces including Prachuap Khiri Khan and Phuket. On August 11 and 12, 12 bombs were detonated throughout seven provinces, killing four Thai citizens and injuring more than 30 others. Citizens from Austria, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands were among the wounded. (Sources: [Anadolu Agency](#) [38], [Human Rights Watch](#) [39], [Reuters](#) [40], [Guardian](#) [28], [Wall Street Journal](#) [41], [Bangkok Post](#) [42], [Financial Times](#) [43])

Successive Thai governments have characterized the southern insurgency as a largely criminal force, but have at times recognized the rebellion's ethno-religious components. Since the spike in violence in 2004, Thai governments have acknowledged the rebels' jihadist ideology. In 2007, Thai Army General Watanachai Chaimuanwong spoke to Western media about the insurgents' goal to create a "pure" Islamic state in the south of the country. In 2011, the government also acknowledged the cultural and economic grievances driving the rebellion, conceding that the conflict was "connected to the feelings of social and economic injustice, poverty," and that southerners desired "a better understanding of local traditions, way of life, and culture." (Sources: [USAID](#) [34], [Agence France-Presse](#) [44], [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [45])

Still, the government regularly blames attacks reportedly perpetrated by southern insurgents on political rivals. In addition, the government has been careful to avoid labeling bomb attacks as terrorism so as to not disrupt the country's tourist industry. Following the August 2016 bombings, a police spokesman claimed that "Thailand doesn't have conflicts regarding religion, ethnicity, territory or minority groups." Nevertheless, the government has made some strides in confronting the insurgency's extremist and terrorist components, including by carrying out counter-radicalization programs for ethnic Malay-Muslims in the south. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [46], [U.S. Department of State](#) [47])

Global Terrorism

Global terrorist groups—such as al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI), and Hezbollah—have reportedly operated in Thailand. Both al-Qaeda and JI have purportedly used Thailand as a transit point and as a base for planning attacks, though little information is available on al-Qaeda's activities in the country. JI, an Indonesian-based jihadist group, is believed to have planned the 2002 Bali bombings from safe houses in Bangkok. JI's former leader, Riduan Isamuddin, a.k.a. Hambali, was captured near Bangkok in August 2003. Furthermore, Thai intelligence alleged that the 2007 New Year's Eve bombings in Bangkok may have been planned in part by JI. (Sources: [Melbourne Law School](#) [48], [Atlantic](#) [15], [CS Monitor](#) [16], [Associated Press](#) [17], [Australian](#) [18])

In January 2012, Thai authorities arrested Hezbollah member Hussein Atris at Bangkok's international airport. Atris had been hiding bomb-making materials—including nearly three tons of ammonium nitrate—in a warehouse southwest of the Thai capital. Authorities sentenced Atris to nearly three years in prison in September 2013, but released him in September 2014. The United States designated Atris as a terrorist in April 2015. He is believed to operate out of Lebanon. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [49], [Stratfor](#) [50], [U.S. Department of State](#) [51], [Jerusalem Post](#) [52])

Thai authorities have thwarted other Hezbollah-linked plots in Thailand. In April 2014, authorities arrested and detained two Hezbollah members who admitted to planning attacks on Israeli tourists in Bangkok. The two men, both Lebanese nationals, had planned to stage the attacks during the Jewish holiday of Passover. (Sources: [Haaretz](#) [53], [Al Arabiya](#) [54])

Bangkok-based analyst Shawn Crispin said in early 2016 that Thai insurgents have kept global terrorist groups at an "arm's length to avoid any conflation of their local grievances with anti-Western jihadist ideology." However, Thai insurgents may be inspired by or hold sympathies for such groups. In 2007, Army General Watanachai Chaimuanwong alleged that the nature of violent attacks in the south—including beheadings—indicated that the insurgents were inspired by international terrorist groups including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In the mid-2000s, a DVD circulating in the south reportedly featured a Malay-speaking preacher praising al-Qaeda and its founder, Osama bin Laden. (Sources: [Atlantic](#) [15], [Diplomat](#) [19], [CS Monitor](#) [16], [Agence France-Presse](#) [44], [Melbourne Law School](#) [48])

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Alleged Iranian Terrorism

In February 2012, Thai authorities arrested two Iranian nationals—identified as Saeid Moradi and Mohammad Kharzei—after they accidentally set off an explosion in their rented Bangkok home. Authorities alleged that the men had planned to assassinate Israeli diplomats in Bangkok by using “sticky bombs”—an explosive designed to magnetize to a target vehicle. Soon after the arrests, Malaysian authorities arrested another Iranian national, Masoud Sedaghatzadeh, after he crossed into Malaysia from Thailand and attempted to fly to Tehran. The Iranian government denied any role in the attacks. (Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [55])

ISIS

Thai authorities have reportedly monitored a number of Thai nationals who regularly access ISIS propaganda online—some of which is available in the Thai language. In addition, these supporters have reportedly printed and sold pro-ISIS clothing items. However, Thai security adviser Panitan Wattanayagorn has said that authorities have “no reason to believe [that Thailand is] a target [for ISIS].” In December 2015, Moscow warned the Thai government that 10 ISIS-linked Syrians had arrived in Thailand to target Russians. Those claims were later reported to be based on faulty intelligence provided to Russia by the United States. Thai security authorities have stressed there is no clear evidence of Thai citizens joining ISIS abroad. However, in November 2016, the government confirmed they were investigating Thais who had expressed support for ISIS-affiliated groups in Southeast Asia online, including via social media. (Sources: [Diplomat](#) [19], [BBC News](#) [56], [U.S. Department of State](#) [57])

Foreign Fighters

There is no evidence to suggest that Thais have traveled abroad to fight with extremist groups. This is noteworthy given the relatively high number of fighters traveling from nearby Indonesia and Malaysia. As of October 2017, 671 Indonesians had left the country to become foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, according to official government estimates. As of October 2017, 95 Malaysians had traveled abroad for the same reason. Both sets of government figures report that approximately 30 percent of those who traveled were women and children. (Sources: [Diplomat](#) [19], [U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime](#) [58])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

The majority of extremist-related attacks in Thailand have been perpetrated by separatist Muslim insurgents in the country’s south. Insurgents have carried out shootings and beheadings, and have built and detonated IEDs such as car and roadside bombs. They have also targeted government officials, monks, schools, and teachers as symbols of the Thai state. In August 2016, suspected separatist insurgents expanded their target range and bombed tourist sites throughout seven Thai provinces. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [8], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [Sydney Morning Herald](#) [37], [TIME](#) [59])

August 2016 Coordinated Bombings

On August 11 and 12, 2016, suspected Muslim insurgents carried out a series of bombings throughout seven Thai provinces, targeting tourist locations and killing four individuals. The targets included popular locations such as resort town Hua Hin in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, as well as Patong beach in Phuket Province. More than 30 people were wounded, including citizens of Austria, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. No group claimed responsibility, though authorities—ruling out international terrorism—said the attacks followed “a similar pattern used in the southern parts of the country.” Four days after the bombings, authorities issued arrest warrants for a number of southern insurgents in relation to the bombings. In late August, Thai police said that at least 20 people—most of them Muslim insurgents from the country’s south—were believed to be behind the bombings. The attacks came days after Thai citizens voted in favor of a constitution that gave more powers to the ruling military junta. The junta—which took over in a May 2014 coup—initially ruled out the possibility of peace talks with the separatist rebels. (Sources: [TIME](#) [59], [Financial Times](#) [43], [Bangkok Post](#) [60], [Wall Street Journal](#) [41], [Bangkok Post](#) [42], [Wall Street Journal](#) [61])

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August 2015 Erawan Shrine Bombing

On August 17, 2015, a bomb exploded at the Erawan Hindu Shrine near the Ratchaprasong Intersection in central Bangkok. The blast killed 20 people—nearly all of them foreigners—and injured 125 others. No group claimed responsibility, and a range of inconsistencies emerged in the authorities' statements. For example, the Thai government suggested that the bombers were human traffickers seeking to avenge a crackdown on their network. At another point, the government attributed the attack to the southern insurgents. The government also alleged that the bombers sought revenge for the July 2015 deportation of 109 Uighur asylum seekers back to China. (Sources: [Bangkok Post](#) [62], [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [63], [BBC News](#) [64])

In September 2015, Thai authorities arrested two main suspects, who reportedly confessed that they had carried out the Erawan Shrine bombing. But in February 2016, the men—identified as ethnic Uighurs from Xinjiang, China—pled not guilty to all charges related to the bombing. (Sources: [CNN](#) [65], [CNN](#) [66], [BBC News](#) [64])

- **May 22, 2017:**A “low-intensity” pipe-bomb explodes injuring 21 people at King Mongkut Hospital, a Thai military facility in Bangkok.
The attack coincides with the third anniversary of the military takeover of the National Council for Peace and Order. Sources: [Channel News Asia](#) [67], [Human Rights Watch](#) [68]
- **May 9, 2017:**Two bombs fitted inside cooking gas cylinders explode outside a Big C supermarket in Pattani, Pattani Province, injuring 80 people.
Moments before the attacks, the perpetrators tie up, brutally beat, and murder a canvas vendor, Nuson Khachornkham, with a gunshot to the neck, before stealing his truck to be used to deploy the first bomb. Sources: [Bangkok Post](#) [69], [Bangkok Post](#) [70]
- **August 23, 2016:**Two bombs explode near a hotel in the town of Pattani, Pattani Province, killing 2 people and injuring 30 others.
Thai police rule out links between these bombings and the string of bombings in mid-August. Sources: [Reuters](#) [71], [Reuters](#) [72]
- **August 11, 2016 - August 12, 2016:**Suspected separatist insurgents carry out 12 bombings across seven provinces throughout Thailand, targeting tourist areas and killing four Thai citizens.
More than 30 others are wounded, including citizens from Austria, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Authorities issue arrest warrants for a number of southern insurgents, and rule out any links to international terrorism. Thai police later announce that at least 20 individuals, many of them Muslim insurgents from Thailand's south, are believed to be behind the bombings. Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [41], [Bangkok Post](#) [42]
- **July 5, 2016:**A car bomb is detonated at a major checkpoint in Pattani Province, wounding two police officers.
Separatist insurgents are suspected. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [73], [TIME](#) [74]
- **March 31, 2016:**Suspected separatist insurgents detonate at least 10 bombs in Pattani Province, killing one civilian and wounding 11 policemen.
Source: [Reuters](#) [40]
- **March 13, 2016:**At least ten separatist insurgents seize a hospital in Narathiwat Province, using it to launch attacks against a nearby army post, wounding seven military personnel.
Source: [Human Rights Watch](#) [39]
- **March 10, 2016:**A remote bomb detonated by separatist insurgents kills three soldiers and injures two others in Narathiwat Province.
Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [38]
- **August 17, 2015:**A bomb explodes at the Erawan Hindu Shrine in Bangkok, killing 20 people and wounding 125 others.
Authorities hold two ethnic Uighur Chinese nationals responsible—though no motive is explicitly revealed. The two men plead not guilty in February 2016. Sources: [Bangkok Post](#) [62], [BBC News](#) [64]
- **April 11, 2015:**Suspected Muslim insurgents detonate a car bomb on the Thai resort island of Samui, wounding seven people including an Italian citizen.
Source: [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#) [75]
- **April 2014:**Thai authorities arrest and detain two Hezbollah members, who admit to having planned attacks on Israeli tourists in Bangkok.
Sources: [Haaretz](#) [53], [Al Arabiya](#) [54]
- **December 23, 2013:**Suspected separatist insurgents detonate three bombs in Sadao district, Songkhla Province, wounding 27 people.
Source: [Bangkok Post](#) [76]
- **February 13, 2013:**Nearly 60 separatist insurgents launch an attack on a Marine base in Narathiwat Province's Bacho district.
Marines thwart the attack, killing 16 insurgents. Source: [CS Monitor](#) [77]

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- **March 31, 2012:** Suspected separatist insurgents carry out a series of bombings in Yala and Songkhla Provinces in the south of the country. First, coordinated explosions in Yala kill 14 people and wound hundreds more. Soon after, an explosion in the basement of a hotel in Hat Yai, Songkhla Province, kills three people and injures over 400 others due to smoke inhalation. Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [78], [Hindustan Times](#) [79]
- **February 12, 2012:** A series of bombings in Bangkok injure five people. Thai authorities blame the bombings on Iranian agents, who they claim were attempting to assassinate Israeli diplomats. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [55]
- **January 2012:** Thai authorities arrest alleged Hezbollah agent Hussein Atris, and subsequently discover a large stockpile of bomb-making materials in a warehouse southwest of the Thai capital. Authorities accuse Atris of having links to Hezbollah, and sentence him to nearly three years in Thai jail in September 2013 for possessing explosive material. Sources: [New York Times](#) [49], [Stratfor](#) [50], [Jerusalem Post](#) [52]
- **June 14, 2007:** A bomb explodes at a soccer game in Yaring district, Pattani Province, seriously injuring five policemen. Authorities blame the attack on separatist insurgents. Source: [Associated Press](#) [31]
- **December 31, 2006 - January 1, 2007:** Nine bombs explode in Bangkok during New Year's celebrations, killing three people and injuring 40 others. No group claims responsibility, and authorities do not link the attack to the southern insurgency. Thai intelligence later alleges the bombings may have been planned in part by the Indonesia-based jihadist group Jemaah Islamiyah. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [17], [Australian](#) [18]
- **February 2007:** A wave of bombings in Thailand's south—targeting schools, bars, hotels, a power station, and car show rooms—kill seven people and wound at least 45 others. Muslim separatists are suspected. Source: [BBC News](#) [80]
- **October 2004:** Thai security forces shoot and kill seven Thai Muslim protesters. A further 78 Thai Muslims suffocate to death as they are transported to a military camp. In the following years, insurgents carry out near-daily bombings and drive-by shootings. Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [9], [Associated Press](#) [30], [Associated Press](#) [31], [USAID](#) [34]
- **April 2004:** Separatist insurgents carry out a string of attacks against Thai police and military installations in the southern provinces. More than 30 militants take cover at the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani, and are shot dead by police after a nine-hour standoff. Sources: [BBC News](#) [36], [USAID](#) [34]
- **January 2004:** The government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra declares martial law in the southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani due to mounting insurgent attacks. Sources: [BBC News](#) [32], [RAND Corporation](#) [21]
- **1940 - 1990:** Separatist insurgents carry out low-level violence in the country's south. Sources: [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [29], [East Asia Forum](#) [81]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Political unrest in Thailand has made it difficult for the government to develop and implement a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. The military has ruled the country for much of its history, while democratically-elected Prime Ministers have held office intermittently. The U.S. Department of State confirmed that Thailand did not have a national Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) action plan. However, Thailand's draft national counterterrorism strategy includes a CVE component, though its status is unclear. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [82], [RAND Corporation](#) [21], [U.S. Department of State](#) [83])

Democratically-elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra led the country between February 2001 and September 2006 before he was ousted by the military. In January 2004, in response to the mounting violence, Thaksin imposed martial law across Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat Provinces, enabling authorities to make arrests without a court warrant. In total, the Thaksin government deployed 24,000 security personnel—including from the Royal Thai Police (RTP) and the Royal Thai Army (RTA)—to the region. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [32], [RAND Corporation](#) [21])

In late 2004, Thailand's Sheikh ul Islamic office, the country's highest Islamic body, distributed 20,000 copies of a pamphlet titled *Clarifications on the Distortion of Islamic Teaching in Berjihad di Pattani* to religious schools and mosques throughout the country. The publication sought to counter the document *Berjihad di Pattani* (The Struggle of Pattani), which was produced by Malay-Muslim extremists and reportedly urged rebels to wage jihad in order to establish an Islamic sultanate in southern Thailand. The government believed that *Berjihad di Pattani* had directly inspired a string of attacks in April 2004. (Sources: [Hot Spot: Asia and Oceania](#) [27], [Critical Asian Studies](#) [35])

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Following Thaksin's 2006 ouster, successive military-backed regimes struggled to suppress the insurgency. In mid-2007, then-Army Commander in Chief Anupong Paochinda launched a military surge, resulting in a decline in violence in 2008. In August 2011, Thais democratically elected Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister. Yingluck—who led the country until May 2014 when she was deposed by the military—dismissed Thai officers who had been accused of human rights abuses against southern insurgents. She also launched negotiations with the rebels, though no agreement was reached. Yingluck's government was the first administration to acknowledge the political and cultural roots of the conflict, rather than treat the insurgency as a criminal enterprise. (Sources: [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [45], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [84], [Strategic Perspectives](#) [85], [International Crisis Group](#) [86])

Since Yingluck's May 2014 ouster, Thailand has been governed by a military junta under Prayuth Chan-ocha. The new junta immediately called off negotiations with rebels, but in December 2014, discussed with Malaysian authorities the option of Malaysian-brokered peace talks with the insurgents. In January 2015, Chan-ocha told the Thai media that any negotiations would depend on the willingness of the insurgents. Meanwhile, the junta distributed thousands of rifles to individuals in the south who had volunteered to fight against the insurgents. (Sources: [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [45], [Khaosod English](#) [24], [BBC News](#) [87])

Starting in 2015 through 2017, the Thai government's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC)—responsible for overseeing domestic security—continued to provide counter-extremism programs to Malay-Muslim communities in the south. The junta has also worked with Muslim leaders and non-governmental entities to promote moderate Islam, according to the U.S. Department of State. Negotiations between the junta and the separatist rebels, brokered by the Malaysian government, began in early September 2016. In 2016, the Ministry of Justice initiated a pilot program with the U.N. Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, which seeks to understand and moderate radicalization by assessing over 300 detainees linked to the southern insurgency. As of February 2019, after a three-year peace effort, the Malay-Muslim group Mara Patani announced it would suspend peace talks after tensions erupted with the Thai military junta's representative. Mara Patani representatives said they would restart talks following the country's general election and a change in Thai government representation. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [47], [Diplomat](#) [88], [U.S. Department of State](#) [57], [U.S. Department of State](#) [83], [Bangkok Post](#) [6], [AsiaOne](#) [7])

Successive Thai governments have been accused of carrying out human rights abuses against insurgents or suspected insurgents in the country's south. Under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), Thai authorities reportedly regularly carried out arbitrary arrests of suspected rebels. The military junta that has ruled Thailand since May 2014 continues to enforce restrictions on freedoms and allow Thai security forces to operate with impunity, including the alleged torture and unlawful killings of Malay-Muslims, according to Human Rights Watch. In its 2017 Human Rights Report, the U.S. Department of State highlighted the government forces continued excessive use of force, including harassment and abuse of criminal suspects, detainees, and prisoners; and arbitrary arrests and detention. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [89], [Human Rights Watch](#) [90], [U.S. Department of State](#) [91])

Legislation

In 2003, Thailand added new counterterrorism provisions to its Criminal Code to comply with [U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373](#) [92] (2001). The U.N. resolution, which was passed in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks, calls for suppressing financial support to terrorist organizations. Thailand's 2003 provisions defined terrorist-related offenses as any criminal offense that "[seeks to] threaten, or to compel the Thai Government, a foreign government, or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act which will cause serious damage or to cause disorder by creating widespread fear among the public." However, "most" Thai prosecutors have failed to prove the intent of terrorism, thus resulting in weaker convictions and deportations on lesser charges, according to the U.S. Department of State. (Sources: [United Nations](#) [93], [Asian Correspondent](#) [94], [U.S. Department of State](#) [47])

According to interviews conducted by the International Crisis Group and published in November 2017, the government has not drafted laws that specifically criminalize offenses related to foreign fighters, including providing material support for travel or recruitment. This is due in part to a possible negative impact on tourism, which indirectly contributes more than 20 percent to Thailand's GDP. (Source: [International Crisis Group](#) [95])

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Counter-Extremism Agencies

There are a number of Thai agencies responsible for preventing acts of violent extremism, including multiple government agencies responsible for developing and implementing counter-insurgency policies in the south. These include the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), the National Security Council (NSC), and the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC). The ISOC oversees internal domestic security at large, while the NSC oversees security and economic development policies in the south. The SBPAC coordinates civilian administration in the south, and has worked to forge closer ties between the government and restive southern communities. (Source: [USAID](#) [34])

While the Royal Thai Police (RTP), the Thai military, and the Department of Special Investigations are all tasked with counterterrorism responsibilities, the Crime Suppression Division (CSD) commando unit—a special operations unit of the RTP—oversees the country’s counterterrorism operations. Its members undergo “Naresuan 261” training, which includes military tactics such as weapons-handling and self-defense skills. In August 2018, the unit became responsible for providing security for the Thai royal family. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [47], [Bangkok Post](#) [96], [Bangkok Post](#) [97])

Combatting Terrorist Financing

Thailand participates in two intergovernmental organizations that seek to counter terrorist financing operations, including the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) and the Egmont Group. The APG is a regional group modeled after the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a separate intergovernmental organization that sets international standards regarding anti-terrorist financing measures. The APG was founded in Bangkok in 1997 and comprises 41 member states. It seeks to implement and carry out the FATF’s internationally accepted standards on anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing. In addition, Thailand’s Anti Money Laundering Office (AMLO) belongs to the Egmont Group, a network of national Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs). The Egmont Group “provide[s] a forum for FIUs around the world to improve cooperation in the fight against money laundering and the financing of terrorism,” according to the organization’s website. According to the latest AMLO annual report, the agency designated 26 persons in 2017 in connection with the commission or financing of terrorist acts. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [47], [FATF](#) [98], [APG](#) [99], [Egmont Group](#) [100], [Egmont Group](#) [101], [Thai Anti Money Laundering Office](#) [102])

On December 31, 2016, the Thai government enacted the Counter-Terrorism and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Financing (CTPF) Act. The CTPF replaced previous legislation known as Counterterrorist Financing (CTF) Act, which strengthened laundering laws and regulations to conform to international standards. According to the FATF, the new CTPF legislation establishes a mechanism that translates United Nations sanctions into domestic legal obligations by way of AMLO designations. The CTPF orders all domestic agencies to implement asset freezing obligations and prohibitions immediately in accordance with U.N. Security Council resolutions. In addition, the Act now includes weapons of mass destruction and proliferation financing as a criminal offense, in accordance with U.N. Security Council resolution 1540. (Source: [FATF](#) [103])

Throughout 2017, Thailand’s AMO, Ministry of Justice, RTP, and National Intelligence Agency engaged in regional workshops that helped develop investigative techniques, countering terrorism finance, and legislative reforms. The workshops focused on counterterrorism threats, including Hezbollah and ISIS. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [83])

International Counter-Extremism

The Thai government cooperates on counterterrorism measures with foreign governments including the United States and Australia. Thailand also participates in international counterterrorism efforts through a number of regional bodies, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the ASEAN Regional Forum. (Sources: [Sydney Morning Herald](#) [104], [Diplomat](#) [25], [CNN](#) [105], [Diplomat](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [106], [U.S. Department of State](#) [47])

Cooperation with the United States

In 2018, the U.S. State Department described Thailand as a “productive counterterrorism partner” in its annual country

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report for 2017. The United States has shared counterterrorism intelligence, as well as military facilities, with the Thai armed forces. In early 2002, Thai authorities reportedly allowed the United States to move Abu Zubaydah, al-Qaeda's then-chief of operations, to a Thai military base in order to question him. In 2003, Thai authorities captured Riduan Isamuddin, the operations chief of JI, and transferred him into U.S. custody. Isamuddin, also known as Hambali, was the suspected mastermind behind numerous terrorist attacks, including the October 2002 Bali bombings that killed more than 200 people. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [83], [U.S. Department of State](#) [47], [Sydney Morning Herald](#) [104], [Diplomat](#) [25], [CNN](#) [105], [Diplomat](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [106])

Today, Thailand carries out intelligence-sharing and joint military exercises with the United States. Thai law enforcement personnel with counterterrorism responsibilities receive training funded by the U.S. State Department and the Bangkok-based U.S.-Thai International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA). In 2017, the ILEA conducted courses on post-blast investigations, border interdictions, as well as financial investigation and other law enforcement tactics. The United States has also designed counterterrorism training programs for the Royal Thai Police. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [83], [Sydney Morning Herald](#) [104], [Diplomat](#) [25], [CNN](#) [105], [Diplomat](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [106])

Cooperation with Australia

Thailand began counterterrorism cooperation with Australia following the September 11, 2001, attacks. The countries strengthened their partnership further following the Bali bombings in October 2002. That month, Thailand and Australia entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperation in the fight against international terrorism. Under the MOU, the Thai and Australian governments agreed to share information and intelligence on international terrorist activities. (Sources: [Sydney Morning Herald](#) [104], [Commonwealth of Australia](#) [107])

In January 2016, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwa announced that the Thai government was working with Australia to forge a new counterterrorism pact to counter growing fears that ISIS is increasing operations in the Asia-Pacific region. Although Thai authorities stress that ISIS does not currently operate in their country, the Australian government fears that Thailand could be used as a transit point for Australians seeking to travel to the Middle East and join ISIS. (Source: [Diplomat](#) [25])

APEC and ASEAN, and the ASEAN Regional Forum

Thailand participates in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a regional body that supports economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region through security enhancement and economic cooperation, among other measures. The Thai government implements security-related measures laid out in APEC's Counter Terrorism Action Plans (CTAP), such as protecting international voyages and aviation, combatting the financing of terrorism, and promoting cyber-security. (Sources: [APEC](#) [108], [APEC](#) [109])

Thailand is a co-founder and member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a regional organization that promotes economic growth in the Southeast Asian countries. Soon after September 11, 2001, ASEAN released a Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism, in which the member states vowed to "Deepen cooperation among our front-line law enforcement agencies in combatting terrorism and sharing 'best practices.'" In 2013, all member states ratified the group's Convention on Counter-Terrorism, which seeks to prevent terrorist activities and deepen regional counterterrorism cooperation. More recently, in October 2015, ASEAN member states agreed to prioritize de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs for radicalized individuals. (Sources: [ASEAN](#) [110], [U.S. Department of State](#) [111], [ASEAN](#) [112], [U.S. Department of State](#) [47], [Benar News](#) [113])

Thailand also carries out counterterrorism efforts through the ASEAN Regional Forum, a group comprised of ASEAN member states as well as other Asian and African countries. The United States is also a member. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [47], [Library of Congress](#) [114])

On January 25, 2018, six Southeast Asian countries launched the Our Eyes Initiative (OEI), an intelligence sharing pact. The countries, which include Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore, will "explore ways to exchange strategic information on terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism." Under OEI, defense officials will convene twice a month to share information and develop an extremist database. (Source: [Channel News Asia](#) [115])

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Interpol

Thailand has been a member of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) since June 13, 1956. Starting in 2016, Thailand began to collect Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) data on commercial flights at all international airports. In May 2017, the RTP signed an agreement with Interpol to access the international policing agency's 16 databases, including one with Stolen and Lost Travel Documents. (Sources: [Interpol](#) [116], [U.S. Department of State](#) [83])

Counter-Extremism Conferences

In February 2016, Thailand's Foreign Affairs Division of the Royal Thai Police co-hosted a conference with INTERPOL in Chang Mai, Thailand. The meeting convened law enforcement agencies from 16 nations, and sought to address procedures for governmental data collection of extremist content on social media platforms. In August 2016, Thailand participated in an international counterterrorism conference in Bali, Indonesia, which focused on countering the cross-border movement of terrorists in the region. (Source: [Phil Star](#) [117], [Benar News](#) [113])

ISIS

Thailand does not participate in the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS. However, the government formally signaled its opposition to the terror group in September 2014 when ASEAN—of which Thailand is a member—released a statement expressing concern at the rise of violence committed by extremist organizations, including ISIS. The statement noted that “these groups not only pose a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, but also to all countries in Middle East, and if left unchecked, to the rest of the world.” (Sources: [Federation of American Scientists](#) [118], [Eagle News](#) [119])

The Thai government has actively monitored Thai nationals deemed vulnerable to jihadist propaganda online. Despite the potential sympathy for ISIS, however, Thai security adviser Panitan Wattanayagorn has said that “We have no reason to believe we are a target [for ISIS].” (Source: [Diplomat](#) [19])

Public Opinion

In December 2015, the government released the result of an opinion poll revealing that 99.3 percent of Thais are satisfied with the government's overall performance. However, polling carried out by the Asia Foundation in southern Thailand in 2010 found that 37 percent of southerners believe the main cause of the conflict is the failure of officials to understand the local population. (Sources: [Freedom House](#) [120], [Diplomat](#) [121], [Wall Street Journal](#) [122], [USAID](#) [34])

A 2013 Pew Poll found that 77 percent of Thai Muslims living in the five southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Satun, Songkhla, and Yala, support the implementation of sharia (Islamic law) in the Muslim-majority south. Of that 77 percent, the poll found that 51 percent favor stoning as a punishment for adultery, and 46 percent support corporal punishment for crimes such as theft. The Pew Poll also found that a minority—12 percent—of Malay-Muslims felt that there were hostilities between Muslims and Buddhists in Thailand. (Source: [Pew Poll](#) [123])