



# Towards a Negotiated “End State” for Peace in Southern Thailand

*Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat*



*RSIS Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical and contemporary issues. The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due credit to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email to Editor RSIS Commentary at [RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg).*

## Towards a Negotiated “End State” for Peace in Southern Thailand

By *Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat*

### SYNOPSIS

*For the first time in its conflict with the Thai state, the BRN unveiled its envisioned “end state”: self-government within Thailand. The proposal includes autonomy, power-sharing, and protection for Malay-Muslim identity, testing whether Bangkok is ready to explore a political solution. Serious engagement and an inclusive peace process could offer a pathway to sustainable peace.*

### COMMENTARY

On 8 December 2025, the Thai peace dialogue panel, led by General Somsak Rungsita, formally [met with representatives of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani](#) (BRN, Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front) for the first time since a one-year suspension of peace talks.

The meeting marked the first time since the launch of the peace dialogue process in 2013 that the BRN – a separatist group with the strongest military force – publicly outlined its desired political objective. The group called for the formation of “self-government”, implicitly indicating that it did not seek full independence for the southernmost region of Thailand. General Somsak described this development as [“the most constructive message he has heard”](#).

In a [public statement](#) released via YouTube on 11 December, the BRN outlined five key components of its proposed [framework of self-government](#):

- Power sharing and self-government in legislative, administrative, and judicial power, including the application of shariah in matters relevant to Muslims in the region.

- Governance structure aligned with the distinct cultural identity of the Patani people.
- Enactment of laws on self-government, including political authority over fiscal autonomy and regional legislation concerning the ethnicity, language, and culture of the Patani community.
- An education system that reflects the cultural identity of Malay Muslims, who form the majority of the Patani community; and
- Guarantee of protection for community livelihoods and access to social services in accordance with international human rights norms.

### **Territorial Autonomy: A Highly Sensitive Proposal**

The central question is whether the Thai government would be prepared to enter genuine negotiations with the BRN on alternative forms of self-government within the Thai constitution.

While the BRN's stated goal is to fight for independence, the Thai state, like many others, insists that its territorial integrity is non-negotiable. However, in many separatist conflicts, territorial autonomy has become a viable compromise, offering a way to reconcile these seemingly conflicting goals.

In the years following the resurgence of violence in Southern Thailand in 2004, advocating for autonomy was taboo and often seen as promoting separatism. Over time, academics and civil society organisations have proposed [alternative forms of self-government for the Deep South](#), helping to expand the debate on this contentious issue. Despite the gradually increasing space for discussion, the BRN's recent proposal for self-government, if taken seriously, would not be easy for the Thai government to accept.

Since the peace dialogue began, doubts have remained about whether the BRN members at the dialogue table genuinely represent those conducting armed operations on the ground. Although BRN representatives have stated that they implemented temporary cessation of violence in the past to demonstrate their ability to command and control fighters operating on the ground, the Thai government remains cautious about such a claim.

These concerns contributed to the delay in resuming peace talks during the government of Paetongtarn Shinawatra (August 2024–August 2025). Moving forward, reaching an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, along with systematic monitoring mechanism, could significantly enhance confidence in the peace process.

Such an arrangement would also serve to hold the BRN accountable for its actions and test whether its delegates at the negotiating table can guarantee compliance among fighters on the ground.

Demonstrating the government's serious commitment to the peace process could also strengthen moderate voices within the BRN. There are indications that the movement holds differing views regarding its ultimate political objective. A BRN

representative at the dialogue table told the author in February 2025 that the movement's military wing still aspires towards *merdeka* (independence), while the political wing is willing to negotiate.

The most effective way for the Thai government to tackle this internal issue is to show a genuine commitment to the peace dialogue and a willingness to address the grievances of minority Malay Muslims through meaningful political concessions. Such measures could help empower moderates within the movement.

In contrast, the lack of progress and the unclear direction of the peace dialogue in recent years have eroded confidence among some senior members of the BRN that the dialogue will produce tangible outcomes. This, in turn, inadvertently strengthens hardliners within the movement.

### **Next steps: Making Tangible Progress on the Peace Process**

What is most needed to move the peace dialogue process forward is strong and consistent political commitment from national leaders. With Thailand's prime ministerial vote scheduled for this Thursday (March 19), it is almost certain that Anutin Charnvirakul, leader of the conservative Bhumjaithai Party, will assume the premiership.

The new coalition is expected to be relatively stable, as it is less likely to encounter the kind of "lawfare" that has repeatedly disrupted previous governments led by parties aligned with former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Nevertheless, conservative constituencies may pose a significant challenge to the progress of the peace talks. Before and during the election campaigns, [Anutin had strongly emphasised nationalist rhetoric](#), particularly concerning the Thai-Cambodian border dispute. This could have implications for the Deep South, as the government might be seen as "treasonous", or risking Thailand's territorial integrity if it appears to concede to the BRN's demands.

The long-standing discourse that views autonomy as the [first step towards secession](#) could resurface and once again shape public debate. As a result, proposals relating to self-government may encounter strong resistance from conservative constituencies, including the military.

If Anutin aspires to leave a political legacy as the leader who resolved the two-decade-long conflict and brought about peace to the Deep South, he will need to demonstrate strong political will to advance an inclusive peace process and a readiness to make political concessions. Although the political environment might offer him the opportunity to do so, what remains crucial is the political will and moral courage to pursue such a course.

---

*Dr Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat, PhD, is a lecturer at the Institute for Peace Studies, Prince of Songkla University (Hat Yai Campus), Thailand. She was a Visiting Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), from 2-6 March 2026.*

---

**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore**  
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

*Please share this publication with your friends. They can subscribe to RSIS publications by scanning the QR Code below.*

