

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE SEPARATIST MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTHERN BORDER PROVINCES OF THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This Undergraduate thesis tried to discuss about conflict resolution in the case of southern Thailand which are Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, known as an escalating and brutal conflict and long history of insurgency, the crisis has been conducted primarily on the basis of Malay ethnic nationalism with religion and politics as an additional factors. The violence has already had important political consequences in the failure of Prime Minister Thaksin's government. The government tries to solve the problem and lunched a strategy based on increased public participation, economic development, apologizing for the past misdeeds of the security services, ending the blacklisting of Muslim and opens a dialogue with insurgents, but the violence remains. In this research, the writer use an extensive of relevant published materials such as books, journals, reports, newsletters, official website and other sources o a wide variety of topics related with the subject of the topic.

Keywords: *Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Conflict resolution. Malay ethnic*

Introduction

In this world's history, there have been many stories about separatism, such as the Soviet Union (which after its collapse in 1985 split into 15 states), Pakistan (in 1971 into Bangladesh and The Islamic Republic of Pakistan), Czechoslovakia (into Czech Republic and Slovakia), Indonesia with East Timor, the Philippine with Mindanao and Thailand with its Pattani movement. Separatism emerged for several reasons; among other are different ideology, disappointment, provocation and rejection. What was so interesting in the case of separatism were the dynamics of the conflict and politics circles. The case of southern Thailand, where in three provinces collectively known as Pattani an escalating and brutal conflict has claimed over 2000 lives since 2004. The violence has already had important political consequences in the failure of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government.

As is so often the case, the origins and motives of the Pattani insurgency defy any simple explanation. Political, social and economic tensions some linked with the Thaksin government's drive for economic liberalization are certainly present, as witnessed by the fact that officials, monks and teachers as well as government security forces have been among the targets of attack. The violence in Pattani also seems to reflect a resurgence of long-standing separatist sentiments and a rejection of the centralized Thai state, which motivated earlier conflict in the same region, particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s. However, on this occasion there is also clear evidence of the influence of Islamist groups and perhaps of the same type of jihadist ideologies as have motivated the choice of terrorist tactics and indiscriminate violence in other, better-known ongoing conflicts. Another parallel with the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, among others, is that the approaches chosen by the official authorities have not always been well judged to contain the violence. The Thaksin government's espousal of many tenets of the US-led 'global war on terrorism' may have helped to destabilize conditions in the Patani region in the first place, and the increasing use of local militia against the rebels seen in recent months is hardly likely to soothe inflamed religious feelings.¹

The southern Thai province of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat has become a hot-spot for insurgency against the Thai security forces. It was a combination of religious – sentiment (primordial) conflict and politics – interest (constructivist) conflict.² This has become very obvious since January 2004 when killings

¹ Seagped, 2007, Retrace history of Pattani, Bangkok, p.8-9.

² Surwandono, "*Dinamika konflik dan negosiasi (studi: ketidakefektifan implementasi Fianl Peace Agreement Dalam Menyelesaikan konflik di Mindanao)*" "research report. Social political science Faculty, University Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, October 2007.

against security personnel and civilians have become a daily affair. The people have become victims of the insurgency including both Thai Buddhist and some Thai Muslims. This includes school teachers, government servants, farmers and Buddhist monks. Despite various attempts by various people to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem, there has been no sign to put a stop to the killings. In fact, the situations in the three provinces have been happening for a long time. In addition, the situations in the three provinces have also affected the lifestyles of people there. Due to their lifestyle has changed because of the continuing situation. So people in that area are scared to get out from their homes after 6 pm which means that they should be in their homes before 6 pm otherwise they may not guarantee that they will be safe.

However to overcome the problems, and for peacekeeping, the Thai government would have to develop a clear policy on this very sticky issue of negotiating with the separatists. Neighboring countries, namely Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and other potential facilitators/mediators, could potentially be given a role in the peace process. Essentially, Thailand would have to give these countries, as well as other potential mediators, the mandate to mediate or at least facilitate.

Research Question

Based on the background and the understanding of the background problem's above, the research question is formulated as follows.

Why do separatist movements still happen in the southern border provinces of Thailand?

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the mechanism or device, this paper will apply the theory of Secession. There are four broad categories: economic, cultural, political, and other facilitating factors.

The Economics of Secession

- Separatist regions are usually believed to be different from the rest of the country in terms of wealth, physical or human capital, or natural resources endowment. Discriminatory economic policies from the central state vis-à-vis its regions may also affect the costs and benefits of allegiance or exit. If it has its own resources, however, it is more likely to be aggressive about

(unpublished)

autonomy. Bookman (1992:46) also argues that low “trade dependency” between a region and the center improves the chances of regional viability and increases the bargaining power of the region.

Cultural Determinants

- Cultural pluralism within a country will increase the number of secessionist claims. And the size of the ethnic group may matter for separatism. This is consistent with Gorenburg’s (2001) theory that the density of social ties within a region matters in shaping its separatist outlook, as this would be at least in part a function of ethnic homogeneity.

Political of succession

- Fearon and Laitin (1999) suggest that the weakening of the state will lower the costs of secession, increasing the probability that secessionist movements will occur in failed states. Political transitions often make states vulnerable and can create climates that foster separatist movements (Laitin 2001). Saideman (1998) notes, for example, that periods of democratization and economic transition lead to intensified ethnic identities and security dilemmas which ultimately “drive” secessionism. Gail Lapidus (1998:11) also suggests that glasnost and democratization under Gorbachev “brought issues of identity to the forefront” in the Soviet Union. Gurr and Pitsch (2003:238), however, suggest that transition regimes that share features of democracy and autocracy may be better able than pure democracies to “contain violent ethnopolitical conflict.” And the decentralization can reduce separatism as groups satisfy themselves of autonomy.

The factors that caused the separatist movement and violence

Separatist violence in southern Thailand centers on the activities of the Malay Muslim population in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, which historically constituted part of the former Kingdom of Pattani. Since January 2004, a Malay-Muslim-based insurgency has engulfed the three southernmost provinces in Thailand. More than 4,500 people have been killed and over 9,000 wounded, making it the most lethal conflict in Southeast Asia. Now in its 8th year, the insurgency has settled into a low-level stalemate. Violence is down significantly from its mid-2007 peak, but it has been steadily climbing since 2008. On average, 32 people are being killed and 58 wounded every month. Any government of Thailand still cannot solve the situation

in the 3 provinces of southern Thailand or fail in solving problem. This is because the situation happens every day and the violence is increasing. Why the situation is still the same and what is the role of the Thai government actually? Maybe the government never takes serious action in solving problem or they are irrespective of solution. Sometimes the best solutions might be to migrate the military in 3 provinces and let the leader of each province govern their own province which refers to an Islamic solution.

The demand of Haji Sulong (the government at that time does not accept)

The seven demands, which essentially were a request to re-establish an autonomous region for the Muslim South, were:

1. The appointment of a person with full powers to govern the four provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun. This person must have the power to fire, suspend or replace all local civil servants. This person must be a native of one of the four provinces and must be elected by the inhabitants of the four provinces.
2. 80 per cent of all civil servants in the four provinces must be Muslim.
3. The Malay language must be an official language alongside the Thai language
4. The teaching in primary schools must be done in Malay
5. Muslim laws must be recognized and implemented under the aegis of an Islamic court, separated from the civil court where the *qadhi* (Muslim judge) is seating as an assistant.
6. All taxes and incomes collected in the four provinces must be used locally.
7. The establishment of a Muslim affairs bureau with full powers to manage Muslims affairs under the authority of the governor mentioned in the first point.

****For additional information, Haji Sulong and some of his compatriots were arrested by the Songkam government and jailed for three and a half years. Haji Sulong was released in 1952, but disappeared under mysterious circumstances in 1954. The popular belief related by histories of Haji Sulong, and a rallying point for Malay Muslim grievances, is that Haji Sulong was drowned by Thai police.³**

³ Ibid., 9.

Obstacles to peace

There remain important obstacles to opening a productive dialogue with the Pattani insurgents and thus to negotiating a durable peace. One of these is the structure of the insurgency. While the Thai authorities have, to date, rejected the idea of third party mediation in the conflict, it may be that only an independent outside agent can draw the diverse range of insurgent groups together so that they can enter a political process. Another issue of particular significance is the role of the Thai military. The Thai security services and their actions in the region remain one of the main sources of grievance. It may therefore be difficult, at least initially, to persuade the insurgents to negotiate directly with the army. Moreover, in order to address such grievances, any durable peace will probably require considerable reform of the Thai security services and independent investigations of their role in human rights violations and into allegations of corruption and complicity with criminality in the border region. As the National Reconciliation Commission report makes clear, peace will only be achievable in the long term through the creation of a Thai nation that accepts ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity and takes action to overcome discrimination.

The governance of Thailand's Muslim community also needs to be reconsidered. With the interpretation of Islam being contested in the country, Thailand lacks a credible and institutionalized religious authority that can command wide support in the South. The institution of the *chularajamontri* lacks broad based legitimacy among the Malay Muslims, putting it in a weak position to resist the radicalization being promoted by Salafist groups. Attempts by the Thai authorities to counter radicalization by promoting the idea of a model 'moderate' Muslim citizen are failing because, in the words of one observer, 'no one wants to be seen as a "Muslim Uncle Tom"'. The government may simply have to accept that finding representatives of the Islamic community who have genuine local support and legitimacy will involve working with Islamists whose views do not reflect traditional notions in Bangkok about what makes a moderate and loyal Muslim. Given the inherent difficulties in launching a peace process in southern Thailand and the even greater challenge of reaching agreement on the changes and compromises that are likely to be required from all sides if a permanent solution is to be found, third-party negotiation still seems to have a far greater chance of success than the current military-led initiatives. The experience of the Aceh peace agreement, at least in terms of the involvement of outside negotiators—the Crisis Management Initiative led by former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari with the subsequent engagement of the European Union and members of the

Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to carry out the tasks of the Aceh Monitoring Mission—points to one possible approach. It is to be hoped that the Thai Government will come to accept that it needs to open the door to international mediation.⁴

Socio-economic, religion and cultural conditions

The provinces of south Thailand are primarily rural with only about 12 percent living in urban areas. Most Malays are agriculturists, growing rice, fruit, vegetable and rubber. Although rice is the staple food, the local economy is not based on wet-rice agriculture. The southern provinces depend on rubber and fruit orchards and fishing. When the world price for rubber and tin declined in the 1970s, some Pattani Malays went to work in Malaysia and even to the Middle East. Most Pattani Muslims are self-employed either as farmers or fishermen and some work as laborers. They also work in rice field in Malaysia, during the harvesting seasons. Many also depend on sea fishing. Unfortunately, both farming and fishing are seasonal types of occupations. In addition, the fishing industry has been threatened by large-scale fishing businesses that have developed recently. The southern portion of Thailand is also rich in minerals, such as tin, gold, wolfram, manganese, and natural gas. Yet, the economy in this region is struggling and poor in comparison to the rest of the country. As a result the Pattani lead a below or average kind of life. Refer to National Statistical Office of Thailand, the income per month (THB) of people of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat it's about 4,183 Bath, 5,700 Bath, and 3,251 Bath, but in other part of Thailand such as Bangkok 11,829 Bath, Phuket 10,837 Bath, and Nothaburi 11,952 Bath etc.

Discrimination, intimidation and injustices

The Malay politician was also distrusted since once they are in the parliamentary seat or provincial, they would be in the end, absorbed into the main stream Thai society of *Ekkalak Thai* (Thai identity), acting and behaving as though they never known their areas and neighbors before. This may also be true as of a saying in the Malay proverb “Lupa daratan”. The Paatani's are a nation without total representation in the social, economy, education and political mobilization process. It is therefore no doubt that Islam and ethnic identity was seen to be the due cause to many of the marginalization, injustices and mistreatment acted upon the people of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat or the

⁴ Neil J. Melvin 2009, *Conflict in southern Thailand: Islamism, violence and the state in the Pattani insurgency*, SIPRI, Sweden.p.38-39

Southerners.

The ban on the usage of Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Pattani also known as Yawee or Yawi in schools, in offices and government agencies, still struck an obstruction to the good faith for the Malays. For example the spelling of names, place and identification must adhere to the Thai words, and vocabulary. Haji Ahmad bin Ismail would be spelt Hayee Mat Samae, Adbul Rahman Yusof would then sound Abdun Lohman Yusoh and corruption of place was evidently clear. The Narathiwat was Thai corruption of the Malay province of Menara, Channak was Chenak, Satun, Setul, Tanyong Mah, Tanjong Emas and Yala formerly Jala. This and many others attested to the insensitiveness of the Thai to the Malay identity and local culture.

Conclusion

The southern Thai province of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat have become hot-spot for insurgency against the Thai security forces. It was a combination of religious – sentiment (primordial) conflict and politics – interest (constructivist) conflict. This has become very obvious since January 2004 when killings against security personnel and civilians have become a daily affair. The people have become victim of the insurgency including both Thai Buddhist and some Thai Muslims. This includes school teachers, government servants, farmers and Buddhist monks. Despite various attempts by various people to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem, there has been no sign to stop the killings. As is so often the case, the origins and motives of the Pattani insurgency defy any simple explanation. Political, social and economic tensions some linked with the Thaksin government's drive for economic liberalization are certainly present, as witnessed by the fact that officials, monks and teachers as well as government security forces have been among the targets of attack. The violence in Pattani also seems to reflect a resurgence of long-standing separatist sentiments and a rejection of the centralized Thai state, which motivated earlier conflict in the same region, particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s.

As the seven demands of Haji Sulong in 1947, on behalf of the Malay-Muslim population of the South to a commission sent by Bangkok to investigate the complains of Malay Muslim about the abuses of power by local government officials.⁷ The petition made clear that its intention was not to violate the Siamese constitution but to create better conditions of living for the Malay Muslims. But unfortunately after his demands he was drowned by Thai police. Because he was the enemy of the state, the government assumed

Haji Sulong a threat to national security.

There are many firebrands in the southern border provinces but there are only two that still have power which are PULO (Pattani United Liberation Organization), and BRN (National Revolutionary Front). Those have a broader target list and are more violent in their attacks than their predecessors. Their aim is to destabilize the state security apparatus and split southern villagers from the government trust. The reaction of the state to the resurgence of violence was to careen away from proven methods of settling resurgence in Pattani. Instead of responding with an increase in security cooperation and attempting to settle the root of the conflict the Thaksin Shinawatra government responded by disbanding CPM-34 and the SBPAC and moving paramilitary rangers into the south. The Thaksin government's espousal of many tenets of the US-led 'global war on terrorism' may have helped to destabilize conditions in the Pattani region in the first place, and the increasing use of local militia against the rebels seen in recent months is hardly likely to soothe inflamed religious feelings. On July 19th 2005 the government imposed The Executive decree on public administration in emergency situations (or Emergency Decree). This law was written in order to replace martial law, the Emergency Decree, actually very similar to the martial law in terms of content. The main difference was that it did not carry the same stigma as the martial law in the eyes of the international community. The following of two major incidents – the Krue Se mosque massacre in April 2004 and the Tak Bai massacre in October 2004, these two major incidents have been guilty of sin of Thaksin that people still find hard to erase from their memory. Thaksin was the root of all evils in the South. The new Prime Minister Surayud struck a new tone, apologizing for past misdeeds of the security services, ending the blacklisting of Muslims, and opening a dialogue with insurgents. Grievances over language, education and justice for past abuses linger. The sound is good but after his statement he did nothing to achieve peace, a lot of talk but no action. The Pattani insurgency is getting better, Abhsit pledged to reclaim the policy on the Southern insurgency from the hands of the military, by allowing the SBPAC to operate independently from ISOC. He used the old ambiguous cold war expression "Politics leading the military" to label his policy. Abhsit could not fully implement his pledges because his fragile government badly needed the support of the military in light of the Red and Yellow shirt's political challenges. As with previous governments, Abhsit's administration has never had an official policy of negotiating with Southern insurgents. But there have been, at least since 2005, unofficial contacts between representatives of the Thai State and leaders of some militant organizations, as

for instance, the talks mediated by former Malaysian Prime minister Mahathir Mohammad on Langkawi Island. The negotiations are the best way to reach a goal without violence in Southern Thailand, there are many groups considered as separatists, so the government needs to negotiate with all groups, not just focus on particular groups.

Currently the situation in Southern Thailand, shows that the government is starting to repair some of the damage done by the previous government especially in the period of Thaksin, the government is trying to help the victims of the Tak-Bai and Kre-se insurgency. On the other hand the government is attempting to solve the problems but it seems the situation is getting worse and returning to the starting point that Thai state should solve by heart, not by money (budget).

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