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**Integration and separatism.
A sociopolitical study of the Thai government policy to the
Muslim South**

Introduction

Southern Thailand has a Muslim population with a 200 year history of separatism and evolving relations with the central government. This paper refers to Southern Thailand as the five provinces of Songkhala, Satun, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat which borders Malaysia. Approximately 80% of the Malay-Muslim or "Thai-Muslim" minority live in the southern provinces. Nationwide, there are nearly 4 million Muslims of the 62 million Thai population. (Please note that the term "Malay-Muslim" and "Thai-Muslim" will be used interchangeably throughout the paper. Thai-Muslim is the term used officially by the Thai government to lessen ethnic differentiation.)

Thai-Muslims have a strong, distinctive ethnic identity that is tied to their Malay ethnicity, Malay language, and Islamic faith. Language is a point of contention as it is a symbol and identification of religion. While an estimated 99% of Muslims speak Thai, Malay is the mother tongue for 75% of them (Yegar, 131; VIC, 2). Furthermore, in the 14th century, the five border provinces belonged to the Malay-Muslim Pattani Kingdom, which was considered as the *cradle of Islam* in Southeast Asia (Bonura, 15). Most of the separatist tensions appear in Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and to a lesser extent, Satun. Songkhala has a lower concentration of Malay-Muslims, which then acts as a geographical buffer between Satun and the other three provinces. Another point of contention is socio-economic disparity, which is a characteristic of internally colonized states and tends to heighten regional tensions. Since its incorporation into Thailand in the late 1800s, the Southern region has resisted *Thai-ization*, which intensified in the 1940s and culminated in separatist movements that peaked from 1970 to 1975. The centralization of education has been a constant sore point for the past 60 years since it involves a standard, compulsory curriculum taught in Thai. Since the 1980s,

the situation has began to change when the Thai government replaced repressive assimilation strategies with more accommodating ones that began to address grievances and appropriating the separatist cause. Policies became even more ethnically sensitive in the 1990s as they started to follow a more laissez faire approach. Since 2000, the government has been trying to cater to the South as reflected in economic packages, increased representation, and the current decentralization plan. The program has not been entirely successful in squelching Southern sporadic violence, which reared its head in late 2001. Violence has been associated with the rise of post 9/11 radical Islamic fundamentalism and is linked closely to local criminal gangs, separatists, and police-military rivalry. The government originally downplayed this violence, which has reached new levels of tension and sophistication since January 2004. Sporadic violence has escalated into regular violence on a daily basis and the April 28th massacre of over 100 militant Islamists.

At present, the South is in its second crisis. Violence is attributed to local separatists with speculation of regional and international terrorist links. It has mainly been limited to the three provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala. As of April 1st, exactly who the terrorists are remains unclear. The terrorists have claimed over 60 lives since January ranging from innocent civilians to Buddhist monks to policemen, who have been the most common assassination targets. Notably, the separatists within the Thai-Muslim ethnicity represent only a minority of the group while the majority is much more moderate.

The critical issue at stake is not the separatists themselves but the government approach to the situation which places the state performance, credibility, and legitimacy on trial. Tensions between the government and local villagers worsened initially due to Prime Minister (PM) Thaksin Shinawatra's heavy-handed approach which heightened local fear and distrust. In response, the government is now possibly shifting its stance to take on a more reconciliatory rather than retaliatory stance. The resolution to the Southern crisis will redefine the state-minority relationship, hopefully for the better.

Historical Background of the Conflict

It is important for an understanding of ethnic relations in Pattani to point out that the presence of Muslims in the southern provinces of Thailand is not due to migration, but to a long process of political annexation. In the 14th

century the area was a Malay state known as Pattani. However, at some point in the 14th century, Thai rulers began to exact tribute from the region, and a nominal king-vassal relationship developed that was perpetuated through the 18th century. This suzerainty was largely symbolic and neither the Thai political system nor Thai culture was imposed on Pattani. This situation changed in the 19th century during administrative reorganization of the Thai state *...Although the Malay population in Pattani became a part of the Thai nation, they remain a self-conscious ethnic minority that is culturally distinctive...*" (White & Prachuabmoh, 8-9).

Under absolute authoritarianism, the vassalage system in Siam, or pre-modern Thailand, from the 13th to 19th centuries was the most optimal scenario balancing strong state strength with a large degree of ambiguity. Power was concentrated at the center in king of Siam. The Thai monarchy ruled over a weak state in a weak, un-integrated society. In concentric circles, the king's power over a vassal was proportional to the physical distance of the tributary state from the capital. Thus, the Pattani vassal had little power relative to Siam, and Siam had very little power in Pattani. Institutional presence was minimal. The institution between the vassal and the king was the tributary system. The king promised security and protection to the vassal in return for loyalty, assistance, and tributary gifts of both monetary and symbolic value, such as gold and silver ornamental trees called the *bunga mas dan perak* (Steinberg, 65; Yegar, 74). For a weak state, indirect rule was the optimal solution.

The vassalage system was maintained by coercion. Both the center's and the periphery's primary interest was security. The legitimacy of Siam was based on force and the promise of security. However, if Siam showed any sign of weakness, then Pattani would try to rebel and secede. Trust between the two parties was minimal. Vassals who submitted to more than one lord were called *two-headed birds* (Steinberg, 65). Minority identity played no role in the center-periphery relation seeing that the Siamese did not intervene in Pattani's internal affairs. On account of the high political freedom within Pattani, the vassalage system had a high degree of *ambiguity* in the center-periphery relation. Security was the sole minority interest that Siam was responsible for. Pattani looked after all other interests. Both the state's and the minority's interests were acknowledged by the other and fulfilled. Thus, the vassalage system, in its simplicity, was successful and long-lived.

South in Nationalist Thailand

Thailand in the 1930s through to the 1950s was in the process of intense modernization characterized by the rise of Thai nationalism and military leaders. The two most prominent and influential leaders of the period were Prime Minister (PM) General Phibul Songkhram (1938—1944, 1948 - 1957) and PM Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958—1963). Notably, there was a brief, more liberal interlude in 1945 to 1947 with the civilian PM Pridi Phanomyong which made only a little more progress than the military regimes. In overview, the South was heavily repressed throughout the forties and sixties culminating in the radical insurgency of the seventies.

Dissent in the South grew in the late 1930s and early 1940s with Phibul's nationalist, dictatorial policies and goals of social engineering. Prior to Phibul, southern dissent was dealt with by benign neglect. During his rule, Phibul constructed the Thai national identity using new symbols, such as a new national anthem and the new country name of *Thailand*. The whole Thai populace was forced to wear hats in imitation of the West. In Southern Thailand, he banned Islamic dress and Islamic law and enforced the compulsory, attendance of Thai-language schools in his bid to create the modern, unified nation of Thailand.

The Muslim community balked. New, rising religious leaders were educated in Islamic schools in India and the Middle East. They called for either 1) the reassignment to British Malaya, or 2) the creation of a semi-independent state within Thailand. In 1945, the Thai-Muslims petitioned the British to negotiate their incorporation into Malaya. Although the Thai-Muslims and the British came to a *gentlemen's agreement*, the British did not call for the separation of Southern Thailand into Malaya because of pressure from the United States, who 1) sought to maintain some stability in the region, 2) did not want to detract from the Thai government's legitimacy, and 3) saw Phibul as a staunch, anti-communist leader. The failure of the petition was the beginning of militant separatism in 1946. On August 1947, Haji Sulong Tomina, the Muslim leader, futilely delivered an ultimatum to the government. Riots broke out in 1947 and were put down by three regiments and gunboats. Approximately 2,000 to 6,000 Muslims fled across into Malaya. In January 1948, Phibul arrested and later purportedly killed Tomina. Insurgency, violence, and repression increased after the arrests, and in September 1948, Phibul declared a State of Emergency in Satun, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat contesting communism (Pasuk&Baker, 270-1; Yegar, 102-5).

Sarit, who overthrew Phibul in 1957, was even more ambitious and repressive the previous regime. He set out to attain a higher degree of national integration for national security. He renewed efforts to integrate Muslim tradition leadership into the bureaucracy. He brought *pondoks* or Islamic schools under the control of the Ministry of Interior and continued compulsory, centralized education, which the Muslims continued to resist. He forced the *pondoks*, which taught only Malay and Islam, to include Thai and other parts of the required state curriculum. *Sarit wanted to penetrate all the social and cultural institutions of the community since the real purpose of the government's societal and economic development in the area was actually to weaken the social values and cultural institutions of the Malay Muslim community. The reaction it engendered was a violent one* (Yegar, 129).

Moshe Yegar summarizes the critical flaw of government policies as follows: *Thai governments attempted to encourage a sense of Thai identity among Muslims—meaning that they were Thai in every respect, except religion. It was an approach that seemed logical from Bangkok's viewpoint, and in line with the theoretical legal view, but in fact stemmed from the misunderstanding of the nature of Islam. For Muslims, Islam is not merely a religion but an entire identity—both religious and secular* (Yegar, 130).

The state system under Phibul and Sarit were absolute military regimes, even if under the guise of a constitutional democracy. Thus, state strength was absolute and public participation negligible. A national identity was imposed on the public without choice. The few Thai-Muslims that were made Members of Parliament had little voice and were arrested when they expressed dissent. The Thai-Muslims resisted integration and centralization, but some centralized institutional mechanisms were laid down, especially under the more liberal Pridi. The institutional presence binding the South to the center was minimal and ineffective.

The center-periphery relation from the 1930s to the 1950s is labeled as integrated, because of the suffocating proximity of the state to the minority maintained through coercion. The five provinces were a part of Thailand whether they willed it or not. Any resistance was successfully squashed by the state. However, as the totality of the relation had 1) little basis of legitimacy beyond international recognition and 2) no ambiguity which resulted in the hardening of minority identity, the relationship was doomed to fail, causing the minorities to seek active, militant separation in the 1960s.

An example of a failed, forced assimilation and integration policy of the period is the Patronage of Islam Act of May 1945 under Pridi. This piece of legislation was an attempt to integrate the *ulama*, or religious scholars and

leaders, into the government bureaucracy. It established the position of *Chularajamontri* as the spiritual leader of all Thai-Muslims and as the *chief functionary of the Islamic religious system* similar to the head of the Buddhist *Sangha*. The *Chularajamontri* was appointed by the king and served as an advisor to the government in all Muslim affairs. He was the head of the ten-member Central Islamic Committee, which was under the Ministry of Interior and also established by the Patronage of Islam Act. Additional laws were passed in 1947 and 1949 that required each mosque to have a Mosque Council as the basic organization unit of the Muslim community and to voluntarily register with the government, subject to the *Chularajamontri* (Yegar, 95-96).

The *Chularajamontri* was ineffective because of the government's insensitivities to Thai-Muslims and the lack of trust. Thai-Muslims were suspicious of the government's intentions. The centralization effort was seen as government interference in religious affairs. A Muslim from Bangkok, not the South, always filled the position. So, locals continued to turn to local religious authorities instead of the *Chularajamontri.* External reasons for failure were a growing political consciousness from the rising nationalist movements in Indonesia and Malaya, and the hope of British intervention and petition on their behalf (Yegar, 97).

In regards to the role of identity, the government attempted to force assimilation and failed. The more the state tried to impose a national identity on the South, the more the South resisted. This repelling action of the two entities leads to separatism. Any linkage between the state and province was coercive. Concessions from the government to the minorities were superficial, such as financing the constructions of mosques (Yegar, 105). There was no trust between the government and minorities, as reflected in the failure of the *Chularajamontri*, discussed below. The state did not acknowledge the minority's interest and needs. Thus, it had no performance legitimacy in the eyes of the Thai-Muslims. Government legitimacy came from international backing, as seen in the failure of the petition to the British. Forced integration cannot be called successful, because even when implemented, it is not fully accepted by the minority. However, forced integration may be considered as a necessity in the initial stages of integration to establish state authority and to secure a territory under the sovereignty of the nation.

Thailand in Internal Rebellion

The 1960s was marked by continued and increased violence, which peaked in the timeframe of 1970 to 1975. The irredentism of the forties and

fifties became aggravated into separatism in the sixties. Phibul and Sarit both followed nationalistic agendas with a heavy hand and successfully eliminated the moderate Muslim leadership under their terms. With their passing, so did the concentration of power and the effectiveness of leadership (Pasuk&Baker, 292). Radicalism rose, not only in the form of militant Islamic separatists but also communists. Dissidents easily acquired arms from a porous border. The Thai government tried to eliminate the insurgents, Islamic and communist alike, using the US Army Doctrine from the Vietnam War of *Firepower, Cordon, and Search* (VIC, 12).

There were three main insurgent groups were founded in that era and are still operative today. An Indian-educated aristocrat, with strong connections to insurgent movements in the Middle East, founded the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) in 1967. It *grew to be one of the most influential and militant secessionist organizations, mainly because of the material support from Libya and Syria and ideological support from Malaysia and Saudi Arabia* (Carment, 8). The smaller Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) was founded by a dissident *pondok* in Narithiwat in 1960. The BRN and several other groups embraced Islamic socialism and were tied to both the Malaysian Communist Party (MCP) and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) (Pasuk&Baker, 292).

The state system in the 1960s and 1970s similarly as previously was absolutely authoritarian. The government was primarily led by military regimes. State strength was absolute if weak. Public participation by minorities within the government was nonexistent. Institution presence was minimal and ineffective. Thus, the center-periphery relation is categorized as separating. This is comes as no surprise considering that separatism was a result of failed policies of integration. The government also did not change the direction of their policies but only pursued them with greater intensity. An example of the government policies' coercion and failure is the relocation policy of the 1960s. The policy enacted by Sarit was a *territorial invasion (of Thai-Buddhists into Southern Thailand) aimed at changing the ethnic balance in the region* (Yegar, 125). Each Thai-Buddhist family would be granted seven to ten acres of land, which was scarce in the South. The policy began in 1961. By 1969, 160,000 Buddhists had moved into the area. An encroachment upon minority interest, the integration policy stirred up grievances among the Thai-Muslims and incited them against the state.

Socio-economic disparity between Muslims and Buddhists within the region and between Bangkok and the South also accounted for the weak center-periphery link. In the 1960s, 72% of Thai-Muslims were sustenance or small farmers, who combined rice, fruit, and rubber tree cultivation on small

areas of land and did coastal fishing. In contrast, Thai-Buddhists and Sino-Thais owned the tin mines and large rubber plantations. The income level, the livelihoods, and the way of life of the Muslims and Buddhists were blatantly different (Yegar, 126).

The failure of government policy is seen throughout the four center-periphery relation factors. First, in the role of identity, the state failed in its attempt at forced assimilation, as explained above. Second, in terms of state-provincial linkages, the tie between the center and periphery was coercive. Any other institutional tie, such as the government agricultural development programs from 1964 to 1974, failed from the lack of trust (Yegar, 126). Thai-Buddhist government officials often could not speak Malay and held a superior attitude above Muslims. Muslims, and Hindus, were regarded as alien and are still called *khaek*, which translates into guest or visitor. Thai-Muslim government officials were seen as turncoats. The locals complained about harassment, arrest on false charges, and corruption. Third, on the large part, the state not only disregarded minority interests but far worse, encroached upon them. (This statement brushes aside the government's half-hearted attempt at addressing some issues, such as the agricultural development programs.) If the state merely ignored minority interests, the minority could have looked after their own interests as in the vassalage system. However, by invading into minority interests, such as land which is tied to livelihood, minorities are moved to defend their interests. If they cannot defend their interests thought the state system, which is the case in an absolute authoritarian regime, then insurgence becomes the alternative method to voicing their interests. This leads to the fourth factor, the denial of state legitimacy by minorities.

The 80's. Appropriating Minorities

Violence continued throughout the 1980s, but the government shifted its stance towards radicals with PM General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980—1988). He issued two Prime Ministerial Orders or *naiyobai* 66/2523 and 65/2525, which sought to accommodate the insurgents and to close the socio-economic gap that gave radicals both grievance and cause through development. The eighties and nineties could be characterized as one of accommodation, assimilation and integration. In addition to the economic focus, the military played a big social and political role through the centralized Administrative Center for Southern Border Provinces under the Ministry of Interior. The state's overall strategy was called *Tai Rom Yen*, which translates into *the South under a cool shade*.

The policy of undermining the ideology and cause as opposed to killing the ideologists took place under Prem. Prior to becoming prime minister in 1980, he successfully applied these methods against the communists in the northeast Thailand in the mid 1970s. His assistant Han Leenanond from October 1981 to September 1983 later applied the same tactics in the South. The Royal Thai Army adopted both the insurgents' tactics and a socialist-tinged platform. Surrendering insurgents were granted amnesty and then rehabilitated. Not only reinstated to full citizenship rights, they were also given a plot of land. Economic disparity and corruption were identified as the grievance of the insurgents. This policy of taking the cause out from under the dissidents were formalized in *naiyobai* 66/2523, *The Policy to Win Over Communists* in 1980, and *naiyobai* 65/2525, the *Plan for the Political Offensive* (VIC, 12).

The government's political strategies are best seen in the Ministry of Interior's Administrative Center for Southern Border Provinces (SBPAC). It was one level higher than provincial governorship and was responsible for the overall administration of the five southern provinces. *Additionally, the Center was well known throughout the South for being able to listen to complaints from southern Muslims concerning corrupt or inept Thai Government officials and was believed to be able to order the transfer any civilian senior government or military official within 24 hours if the complaints were proven to be accurate* (VIC, 16).

Another strategic institution was the Civilian-Police-Military Taskforce 43 (CPM 43) under the Internal Suppression Operations Command (ISOC), which coordinated various different elements of the Thai government and military, from the provincial governors to the border police, military intelligence, and regular Thai army, air force, and navy when needed. *(It) maintained several very large and effective agent networks, which were tied into many of the Muslim and criminal communities located throughout the region*. Notably, the Army had direct funding from the monarchy for the Royal Projects for humanitarian projects, such as the construction of schools, dams, and infrastructure (VIC, 16).

The state system from the 1980s until today can be categorized as a developmental authoritarian system. While it may be argued that the Phibul and Sarit governments were also developmental, those regimes were focused on building a modern nation-state and economy, which concentrated primarily on urban centers and not the provinces. In addition to the broader developmental outlook, the period from the 1980s onwards is termed developmental authoritarianism as the state system took a progressively liberal and democratic turn.

State strength becomes increasingly balanced with public participation. Civilian governments gained more strength in opposition to military regimes. Beginning with a brief experiment in democracy during the mid-1970s, civilian democratic political institutions slowly gained greater authority, culminating in 1988 when Chatichai Choonavan—leader of the Thai Nation Party - assumed office as the country's first democratically elected prime minister in more than a decade (VIC, 21).

Although the Thai-Muslims were still seeking separation, the state began to subdue the movement by appropriating minority interests and grievances. So, while the center-periphery relation is classified as separating it was simultaneously strengthening. In terms of the role of identity, the state began to recognize the sanctity of the Thai-Muslim identity. The policy of forced assimilation was abandoned. The state began to recognize minority needs and interests which gave the state greater legitimacy. The royal projects were particularly effective. The rise of democracy also gave provincial political leaders a greater stake in Thailand. Finally, state-provincial linkages were cemented by institutions, such as the Administrative Center for Southern Border Provinces. While the government policies still retained some coercion in order to prevent and crackdown on insurgents, it was much more accommodating which began the building of trust between the state and minorities.

The Lull of the South

The 1990s were relatively peaceful in Southern Thailand as the accommodating policies of the 1980s took effect. Minority needs were addressed more attentively. Thai-Muslims were granted more political and cultural freedom. The separatist groups were literally split by internal division and competition—the New PULO branched off from the PULO in 1997. Thai and Malaysian authorities formally increased cooperation against terrorist groups on both sides of the border in 1991, which solved the irredentist problem and pulled the operating base out from under the secessionist groups (Carment, 16). Although violence still occurred sporadically in the form of bombings and kidnappings, the 1990s were so relatively calm that many observers speculated that Thai-Muslim separatism had finally ended. As stated by Carlos Bonura Jr., *in the past five years (from 2002), popular support for Muslim separatism has waned past a point at which separatism could be considered a credible and sustainable option for Muslim political elites*. Instead, Thai-Muslim elites had the option of working through the

state system using representative democracy as Thailand progressed towards a stronger, more liberal democracy. Thai policy was no longer integration through assimilation but through inclusion.

The state system in the 1990s became progressively liberal and democratic. After the May 1992 riots, military coups are no longer an *acceptable alternative to elections* (Compton, 175). Looking at the three factors of the state system, while state strength remained strong, it also became increasingly checked and balanced by public participation and democratic institutions. Thai-Muslims also became more involved in the state system gaining more representation in both the Cabinet and Parliament.

As competition among political parties for votes placed greater importance on provincial votes, Thai-Muslims gained more influence in the government, which has taken care to give Thai-Muslims some political representation. They play a role in the contest for state power through political parties, particularly the Democratic Party and the *Wahdah*. The secular Democratic Party (DP) courted Southern Thailand. A prominent DP leader was Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, who was the first Muslim Minister of Foreign Affairs serving from 1992 to 2001. The *Wahdah* or Unity is a Thai-Muslim political faction formed in 1988. It then aligned with the National Aspiration Party (NAP-established 1990), which was merged with Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party in January 2002. Currently, the leader of the *Wahdah* and the deputy leader of the NAP is Wan Muhammad Nor Matha. He was the recent Minister of the Interior until March 10th, 2004. He is also the first Muslim Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the National Assembly. The *Wahdah* is an example of Robert Dahl's *mutual security*, in which minorities *believe that whatever the results from the democratic process will, in the long run, serve their interests better than an intransigence that risks the breakdown of democracy* (Diamond, 122).

Although the minorities were coming closer in proximity to the state, the center-periphery relation was still ambiguous. The degree of ambiguity came from the haze of uncertainty surrounding the relationship. Minority identity was allowed more space to express itself. State coercion was present primarily for monitoring purposes. Yet, separatism still simmered with sporadic eruptions of violence. While Thai-Muslims were willing to work with the state through the democratic process, such cooperation was not guaranteed.

The policy of inclusion not assimilation is seen as follows: First, in the role of identity, the government recognized the sanctity of Islamic identity. Thai-Muslims could officially express their Muslim identity using Islamic names and wearing the *hijab* or headdress in government institutions and

identity cards (Carment, 14). Second, state-provincial linkages were prima-
rily political and economic ties forged through Parliamentary representation
as discussed above and economic development programs which enveloped
the South into the national economy. In 1989, Bangkok formulated another
economic plan called *Hardpan Barau* or New Hope intended to develop
tourism, the southern seaboards, and a coastal industrial zone (Carment, 14).
Coercive bonds became less apparent as the military took on a more super-
visory and monitoring function in contrast to its previous openly insurgency-
suppression role. The trust between the state and minority grew stronger.
Third, the state acknowledged the most pressing issues of minority interests,
such as economic development and freedom to express their identity. Fourth,
by addressing the minority interests, the increasingly democratic state
gained more legitimacy. Except for the few but troublesome separatists, both
the state and Muslim minority appears to be willing to work with each other
through an accepted democratic process. In overall, *dissent* and resistance
still shape political discourse on political and social conditions in the region
as do claims to cultural difference and autonomy. The difference lies in more
open and potentially democratic means of expression that recently (have)
been made available" (Bonura, 17).

Resurgence of the South in Contemporary Thailand

The Nation newspaper characterized Southern Thailand as the *South on
Fire*. It has progressed from a comfortably warm simmer in early 2000 to
full-blown, boiling point in 2004. Under the developmental authoritarian
regime, the ideal scenario may be considered as pre-crisis Southern Thailand
in early 2000s before police repression, when there was sufficient ambigui-
ty combined with the government attempts to meet Muslim needs, such as
supporting Islamic banking and the *hamas* (food prepared according to
Islamic requirements) export industry. Separatism was declared dead in the
late 1990s. However, crisis erupted in January 2004 with the resurgence of
separatism. As a pivotal point in Southern Thai history, the crisis gives rise
to the opportunity to progress more towards a liberal democracy and to the
more remote possibility of regressing into full blown separatism.

The trigger event was the January 4th, 2004 raid of an army camp in
which an estimated force of 100 to 150 separatists stole 364 weapons with-
in a 20-minute operation (Davis 2/13/04). The raid was carefully planned
with simultaneous diversions and delay tactics. Twenty government schools
were burned. Martial law was declared and 3,000 troops were deployed to

Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala. Martial law has been a heavily contested issue. Deputy PM Chaturon Chaisaeng will submit a proposal to gradually lift the martial law in pacified areas (Ruangdit). The Thai military estimate that there are about 70,000 local sympathizers whom amount to 3 to 5% of the southern population, and approximately 500 active separatists who hope to increase their numbers to 3,000 (Ehrlich). Regional and international terrorist links are likely but speculative.

Other major attacks have been 1) the March 18th simultaneous bombing of 39 government targets, primarily deserted police booths, government offices, and several homes of state officials, 2) the March 27th karaoke bombing at Sungai Golok, a Malaysian tourist area, the first soft, civilian target; 3) the March 30th quarry raid in which enough explosives "to blow up a whole town" were stolen (Gearing), and 4) the failed April 28th coordinated attack on 11 police stations and security checkpoints resulting in the massacre of 108 assailants, mostly teenagers, by security forces who were tipped off by locals. Of the 108, 30 were killed in a stand-off in a mosque with what has been deemed as unnecessarily excessive force (Macan-Marker). Daily killings are gun or machete, motorcycle drive-by assassinations of primarily police officials, but also consist of local villagers, either the suspected informant or the innocent frog catcher, and three Buddhist monks, who were hacked to death in an attempt to sow religious tensions. The separatists have also sabotaged fruit orchards in Yala owned by Buddhists causing damage of over 3 million baht in an attempt to hurt the economy and again cause religious friction (BKK Post, 4/8/04). While there is not much religious strife, 24 Buddhist temples have been abandoned since the February killings of the monks (BKK Post, 3/23/04). Excluding the April 28th violence, the death toll as of this beginning April was over 60 deaths counting from this January.

Current issues are the disappearances of locals; the March 12th abduction of high-profile lawyer Somchai Neelaphajit; the accusations and arrest warrants for two Muslim Members of Parliament (MP) and a Muslim senator; the call to lift martial law; government policy toward *pondoks*; the 12 billion baht (300 million dollars) development plan; cabinet, military, and army reshuffles; and the government's possible turn around and softening in policy towards the South. These issues will be discussed in greater depth as this section unfolds.

The resurgence of separatism can be attributed to four factors; 1) local socio-economic conditions were never fully rectified, 2) an underestimation of the separatists, 3) domestic aggravation by police-military rivalry and oppressive treatment by the police; and 4) international influences from the

rise of radical Islam. Deputy PM Chaturon Chaisang broke down the factors contributing to violence in the South as 50% *troubles … caused by state authorities*, especially military-police rivalry; 25% separatist activities; and 25% internal problems (BKK Post, 4/9/04). First, although socio-economic factors had improved, they were not completely corrected. The three southern provinces compose 60% of the poor people in the South in which Narathiwat had the highest number of poor. There is still a high income disparity between the center and periphery. The average monthly household income per capita in 2002 was 28,239 Baht for Bangkok in contrast to 2,224 Baht in the Narathiwat. Unemployment in the three provinces has increased from 1.9% in 1998 to 2.3% in 2003. (NSO, Phanayangoor) Low levels of education result in what the government calls *disaffected youth*, who are susceptible to separatist propaganda. Many locals still do not speak Thai as reported by government officials who found it an impediment in gaining villagers' cooperation. Muslims still feel that they are treated unfairly and discriminated by the government. The language barrier, income disparity, and the discrimination only heighten the feeling of alienation.

Second, the government underestimated the capabilities of the separatists dismissing them as bandits. As a result, the two crucial institutions of the army-run CPM-43 and the SBPAC were dissolved in 2001 and mid-2002, respectively, when the separatist threat was deemed dead. They were also dismantled because of PM Police Colonel Thaksin's effort to consolidate power and gain control over the traditionally Democratic Party-controlled South. The elimination of CPM-43 placed intelligence in disarray. SBPAC served as an *interface between Bangkok and local provincial administrations while acting as a watchdog on errant officialdom and liaising with local communities*. The dissolution of these two agencies left the control of the South to the police (Davis 3/1/04).

This led to the third factor of domestic aggravation by a police-run South. The police became associated with corruption and oppression on account of their heavy-handed style. Since the crisis, locals fear of the police and abduction have only increased. As stated in the Nation newspaper, *Villages trust the Army more than the police and had only asked that the role of the police be reduced….Local residents have accused the police of abducting local Muslim leaders, along with other suspects, for questioning. They say they show very little respect for the local culture or basic human rights* (Saardsorn & Hansara). The assassinations of the police are done in retaliation for torture and abductions of Muslims in an *eye-for-an-eye* approach. The army's loss of control is also attributed to a *bruising inter-*

agency rivalry with the police. Speculation has attributed some of the assassinations over the past year to the army. (Davis 3/1/04)

The police and martial law have become associated with human rights abuses, primarily with the *disappearances* of suspected terrorists, often locals, and that of a vocal lawyer. Regarding disappearances, locals estimate that over 100 people have disappeared. The Central Islamic Committee of Thailand estimates that 40 to 50 people are missing. The government estimates are at 25 people. Villagers live in the fear of being abducted. The lawyer Somchai Neelahphaijit was *abducted by rogue policemen*, as called by the government, in the middle of a case defending five suspects in the January raid who had been subject to torture. He was campaigning to put together a 50,000 signatures petition calling for the lifting of martial law. He had also accused the army of being behind the January raid in a conspiracy plot. He is now thought to be dead, especially after Deputy PM General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh made a remark hinting at the lawyer's death. The disappearance is under investigation with high pressure from the public, who has rallied to the support of Somchai. The case has also placed a lot of domestic and some international pressure on the government regarding human rights violation and its treatment of the South. The 60th session of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva voiced concerns over the martial law and Somchai's disappearance. The recent massacre has received much domestic and international criticism, has worsened state-minority relations, and has brought violence and oppression in the South to a whole new level.

The fourth factor is the rise of radical Islam and related international influences. The sense of the global Islamic community is strengthened with the media attention on Islam since 9-11. Thailand's alliance with the U.S. on the war on terrorism and the Thai troops in Iraq may have also spurred the local insurgents to act. Southern Thailand is one of the spots in Southeast Asia seen as a 'theatre of support and logistics' for terrorists (Nation, 5/1/04). A possible group responsible for the attacks is the Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Pattani, which has links to Malaysia's Kampulan Mujahideen Malaysia, Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiya, and Al-Qā'ida consisting of Thai-Muslim veterans who fought in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. IN addition to the PULO, another suspect organization is the Pasaka (Ghosh). The easy border-crossings into and over 30,000 dual-citizenships with Malaysia are conducive for ties with Malaysian-based terrorists (Davis 3/1/04, Gearing, Ruangdit). As for who the separatists actually are is currently still a mystery, even to the locals themselves.

Despite the mystery surrounding the insurgents, the critical and primary issue at stake is not the separatists but how the government responds to cri-

sis, as its actions will redefine the state-minority relationship. In addition to the violence, the fear and distrust of the government has placed the state performance, credibility, and legitimacy in the spotlight. The government's initial, retaliatory response to the South has proved ineffectively aggravating and controversial. Not taking into account the recent massacre, after mid-March, the government appeared to have turned around its policies taking a more reconciliatory stance, partly in response to public pressure.

The government's reconciliatory stance can be seen in leadership changes and the 12 billion baht development plan. On March 10th, the Minister of Interior was reshuffled from Deputy PM Wan Muhamad Noor Matha to Bhokin Bhalakula. For his inability to resolve the crisis, Wan Noor was relieved of his responsibility of the South, which was transferred to Deputy PM Chaturon Chaisang, who has a liberal image given his student activism with communist guerillas in the 1970s. The Minister of Defense also changed hands from hard-line Deputy PM General Thamarak Isarangura to General Chetta Thanajaro, who is a more conciliatory figure given his involvement in settling the communist insurgency in the South under the *Tai Rom Yen* initiative of the 1980s. After the March 18th bombings, the police and army leadership for the South was also reassigned. Police Chief General Sant Sarutanont was replaced with Sunthorn Saikwan, and the 4th (Southern Region) Army Chief Lieutenant General Pongsak Ekbannsing was replaced with Phisarn Wattanawongkiri, who has a more *gentle* reputation and served in the South from 1973 to 1994. At the lower level, policemen who were controversial in police repression have been and will continue to be reassigned out of the South. (BKK Post 3/20/04, Ruangdit)

Chaturon had submitted a seven-point plan on April 5th that called for a 180-degree policy shift away from violence. The proposal included a reduced police presence, an immediate halting to abductions, the lifting of martial law, an amnesty for alleged Muslim separatists, support for *pondoks*, and in general, a greater inclusion of Muslims in Thai society. Notably, one of the policies that successfully calmed the communist guerilla movements in the 1970s was the amnesty as it allows for individuals to be accepted back and included in society. While the plan has received support from senior political figures, both the police and the prime ministers initially balked at it. The police were appeased with the striking out the terms of *abduction and murder*; however, Thaksin still seems to have backed away from the plan. As of April 27th, he has told Chaturon to rewrite sections of the plan for *fine-tuning* (Nation, 4/27/04). While the "peace-plan" seems to be in limbo, it is still a positive indicator highlighting the evaluation of state policies and the

increased support and attention towards the need of greater inclusion of Muslims in Thai society (BKK Post 4/6/04 & 4/9/04, Srivalo&Pinyora, Srivalo&Hunsara, Saengpassa&Pathan).

The 12 billion baht development plan has also been shelved until the South has calmed (Nation 3/31/04). The development plan was initially received poorly, because it was considered as money flung in the face to buy loyalty without taking into account what villagers actually needed and wanted. The plan was to take place over a period of two to three years during which the estimated average annual income would grow from the current 40,000 to 50,000 baht to 60,000 baht. The public became fed up with the condescending "Bangkok-knows-best" attitude and successfully voiced their dissent. The plan will be redrawn to include local participation to meet their needs once security is reestablished.

The critical issue at stake is not the separatists themselves but the government approach to the situation, which places the state performance, credibility, and legitimacy on trial. Tensions between the government and local villagers worsened initially due to Thaksin's heavy-handed approach, which heightened local fear and distrust. The general public's attitude has also shifted from viewing the *troublemakers* as rogue bandits to the state. In response, the government is now debating over taking on a more reconciliatory rather than retaliatory stance. The resolution to the Southern crisis will redefine the state-minority relationship, hopefully for the better.

The current state system is developmental authoritarianism with a struggling shift towards liberal democracy. As the state tries to strengthen and consolidate its power, the public has begun to resist with some success. It may be said that change does not happen without a challenge to the status quo. With the current challenge, the distribution of power and strength between the state and minorities is undergoing a change in balance of state strength, societal strength, and institutional strength.

Although state strength is trying to increase with Thaksin's consolidation of power, the prime minister's move is countered by the public strength. Some of Thaksin's policies may even be seen as predatory, and the public has moved in to defend its interests. Thaksin, the former richest man in the country, is best characterized as an "absolutist capitalist with a populist platform." His actions have shown a consolidation of power using a populist slant.

Examples of authoritarian tendencies are the TRT party's consolidation of power, the decentralization policy through *CEO-ification*, the war on drugs, the temple land bill, and now the oppression in the South. The TRT has become a seeming monolith through party mergers and alliances. The

latest attempt to consolidate power is the plan to appoint village heads instead of using the democratic voting system. Thai senators have accused a survey showing a 93% popular support for the appointment system as fabricated by the Ministry of Interior (Treerutkuarkul).

Thaksin's pet project was the decentralization or *CEO-ification* of Thailand encompassing the five southern provinces. In an official government statement, *Southern border provinces of Thailand will be developed in the chief executive officer (CEO) style. ... Under this form of administration, provincial governors will be turned into CEOs with greater authority to handle local affairs, provincial budgeting, development strategies, and local problems such as corruption, drugs, and poverty.* The focus on Southern decentralization is "*internal integration.*" To engage the public, *the guidelines for the application of the CEO style in the administration of southern border provinces call for the establishment of a provincial committee from the civic sector* (BOI, 7/8/02). In a talented maneuver, the decentralization tightens integration as the governor's directly report to the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Interior.

The public tolerated authoritarianism as long as it worked in their interests. However, once the state infringes on individual interests, the public voices its discontent. Although the illiberal *war on drugs* of 2003 was criticized internationally and in the national press, it was domestically approved as an effective means to rid Thailand of drug lords. Thus, the drug war would *benefit* public interests in spite of the 2,000 plus death toll. Human right groups have accused the government of encouraging extra-judicial killing (BBC 4/16/03).

Once the state seems to have turned predatory, the public begins to balk. Societal strength begins to manifest itself in defense of its rights. Buddhist organizations are campaigning against a temple land bill, which essentially infringes on property rights and ownership. The bill allows the state to develop temple property without the consent of monastic administrators, the monks who reside in them. (BKK Post 4/10/04) The overwhelming public support and call for justice over the Somchai case is another example. An interesting point is that the concerns over the state oppression in the South were voiced once it was apparent that the heavy-handed state policies were contributing to the violence more blatantly than the separatists themselves, though they should not be discounted. Thai-Muslims protested to the disappearances and the disrespectful raids on the *pondoks* and arrests of Islamic teachers. Relations deteriorated to the point that Islamic leaders threatened to refuse to cooperate with the government in February (Kazmin). Regarding the accusation of the Muslim MPs and senator, the *Wahdah* threatened to end

its alliance with the TRT (Nation, 3/26/04). The state has also lost a lot of its credibility with its *chicken-eating* campaign and cover-up of the avian flu, which has killed at least eight people. While societal strength has increased along with state strength, the importance of institutional strength has also been highlighted with the more active role of the Islamic Committee, the re-establishment of the SBPAC, if under a different name, and the role of the military and police.

Notably, the pre-crisis situation prior to the dissolution of the SBPAC and CPM-43 was the *optimal scenario* of the three scenarios under developmental authoritarianism, because state institutions have finally developed enough to actively address the specific needs of its populace, including minorities. Identity conflicts are often a result when social forces mobilize faster than the supporting institutions can develop as the construction of institutions requires a much lengthier time. As democracy in Thailand deepened, specific minority needs can be addressed, such as Islamic banking.

The Islamic Bank of Thailand Act B.E. 2545 (2002) served both the Thai-Muslim minority and the national, financial interests. Islamic banking pulled Muslim savings literally out from under the mattresses. It allowed Thaksin to 1) inject savings that were dormant and outside the Thai financial system and/or invested in neighboring foreign banks, and 2) attract significant investments from the Middle East. In September 2002, Krung Thai Bank stated that Muslim deposits were about 40 billion baht, that it could attract 7 billion baht from the South alone, and that Bahrain oil tycoons expressed an interest to invest 400 million dollars in bank joint ventures (Boonchote).

Given the high degree of state strength, Thailand is categorized as a developmental authoritarian regime. However, it is a democratizing one moving towards constitutional liberalism. The current crisis is leading to the redefinition of state-minority relations as both state strength and societal strength increase in a rebalancing act.

As hypothesized, the closer the proximity of the state and minority, the greater is the impulse for both to repel from each other as identities and relations become subject to reevaluation. In other words, as two parties interact more and come to better know the other party and thus themselves seeing that people often define themselves relative to another, conflicts are bound to rise. Regarding Southern Thailand, integration increased for the worse through police coercion giving ground to separatists as the second-class citizen status of Thai-Muslims were rubbed in their face. Despite the separatist activities, the current center-periphery relation is classified as integrating, because 1) the majority of the Southern Thai populace wants to remain as

Thai citizens, and 2) the increased cooperation and more reconciliatory stance points to more integration with a greater degree of ambiguity in the form of political space with the resolution of the crisis. The integrating center-periphery relation is analyzed looking at the four factors the role of identity, state-provincial linkages, state legitimacy, and state acknowledgement of minority interests.

Looking at the role of identity, identities have been hardened through 1) the blatant injustice, such as the torture and abductions, inflicted by the security forces in the South; 2) the commodification of culture; and 3) the attention on global Islamic extremism. This section will not discuss the first and third factors. Looking at commodification of culture, the Malay ethnic identity has been reinforced through government promotions of tourism and local industry resulting in the "commodification" of culture. (Johnson) With the global recession, domestic tourism has been successfully boosted overweighing foreign tourism and relies on the selling of local cultures. The economy in the South is mainly based on rubber and increasingly palm oil. Thaksin hopes to add a new export good, *hamas*, or food prepared according to Islamic requirements. (Johnson) Thus, while the government is encouraging development to close the sore economic disparity and for the good of the national economy, it is also reinforcing a separate ethnic identity. *Hamas* factories have also been targets of violence as a product of the state thereby becoming an official target. The question remains as to whether the current resurgence of local identity can be appropriated by the inclusionary nature of the integration and the remaining three factors.

In the crisis resolution debate, *pondoks* and education are central issues given their critical role in identity formation. The *pondoks* are playing a greater role in education. Formerly, children would be sent to government primary school and later to *pondoks* for secondary school. However, the current trend is to send children to *pondoks* starting at kindergarten. Since these *pondoks* are private and often poor, they receive external funding and thus co-opted by outside influences. The government has filed reports of *pondoks* "brainwashing" students with separatist propaganda. There has been a trend towards more orthodoxy with Wahabi teaching. Some students do not study in Thailand but in Malaysia. There are currently 400 *pondoks*. As of February, 127 of these schools were unregistered with the government, which later delivered an ultimatum to register. During the crackdown on *pondoks*, the schools were searched and teachers arrested which gave voice to local protest over the disrespect to their religious institutions. Muslim community leaders threatened to refuse cooperation with the government until the issue was smoothed over by the king. The government is currently

revising its education policy to accommodate the needs of Muslims in government schools and standardize the *pondok* curriculum while maintaining the integrity of the Islamic teachings. (Bunnag, Davis 3/1/04, Horstmann)

The crisis has highlighted weaknesses in the state-provincial linkages. While the decentralization policies should bring the state and provinces closer, kinks in communication still need to be smoothed out as highlighted by the February communication near-breakdown between the government and Muslim community leaders given the government's disrespect of the villagers' civil liberties. However, the channel of communication is still open as seen in Chaturon's survey of the South, which was conducted without the intrusive, condescending manner. The need for government officials that can speak Malay and for villagers to learn Thai was also highlighted through the interactions between the officials and villagers. There is little trust between the two parties, which weakens the state-provincial linkage. The Nation refers to Southern Thailand as a "frustrated community whose mistrust of state agencies has reached one of its lowest points in recent history" (Saengpassa & Pathan).

The state's legitimacy has been weakened by the government's present credibility crisis from its avian flu cover-up and human rights violations. Minorities have voiced their discontent through both protests and the withdrawal of their cooperation. The state has also felt the pressure from the general public and the media. In order to resolve the Southern crisis and regain its performance legitimacy, the government appears to be trying to acknowledge and address the minority' needs more. This may be seen in the Cabinet reshuffle, Chaturon's seven points, the new policy for the *pondoks*, and the plan to tailor the development package to the local's and not the state's needs. The state has come to partially recognize the need for greater political space and freedom. Now, it has to implement them.

Possible dangers are 1) a reversion to increased authoritarianism if a successful Thaksin regains credibility and legitimacy which empowers him to return to his authoritarian tendencies, and 2) external influences from international terrorist organizations. Hopefully, the betterment of conditions in Southern Thailand would be able to win over the hearts of the estimated 70,000 sympathizers. Notably, the massacre does not help. Separatism may not be completely eliminated in the short to medium timeframe; however, it can be minimized.

The government needs to increase the integration of the state and minority by allowing minorities to have political space. Coercion, while a necessary tool of the state, should not be used abusively or flagrantly. Nonetheless, it must be present to maintain the integrity of the state. To coer-

cively force tighter integration would be a disaster, as demonstrated in the failure of Phibul's and Sarit's integration policies and police oppression under Thaksin. To effectively increase integration, the state should use democratic methods as a tool for integration.

Conclusion

The minority question exists in most pluralistic societies. Simply put, the question is, *What does a state do with a minority group?* This issue is further complicated with regards to ethnic minorities. As stated by Larry Diamond, *Ethnic cleavages do not die. They cannot be extinguished through repression or assimilation; however, they can be managed so that they do not threaten civil peace, and people of different groups are able to coexist tranquilly while maintaining their ethnic identities* (Diamond, 121).

The conceptual answer is that a country must find the optimal balance between state strength and degree of ambiguity in the state-minority relationship. The answer is not complete integration or control as many nations attempt to achieve. Even if complete integration is achieved, the moment is only temporary as the close proximity of two distinct identities repels each other. In addition to the impermanence of the integration situation, minorities as a social force are unpredictable and dynamic. Some ambiguity is required for a stable and sustainable level of consolidation. It gives political space to minorities to 1) express their identities without the hardening of identity and 2) satisfy their needs and interests where the state cannot which promotes a content minority. A strong state closes this political space. Thus, the stronger the state, the more the ambiguity is required to counterbalance this closure. Ambiguity acts as a cushion or a buffer between conflicting identities.

The practical answer is a much more difficult one. First, the scenarios are not static as the state system, minority, and center-periphery relation continuously evolve. Second, reality is unpredictable. It is virtually impossible to plan and precisely hit a targeted scenario mark on the matrix. The consolidation matrix may not work as a concrete tool but it serves as a conceptual guide for state-minority consolidation. It is a memento that minority strength may be balanced with state strength in a sustainable equilibrium through an optimal amount of ambiguity.

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