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Thailand’s national security policies: Knowledge of the Deep South unrest

Punpipit Pipitpun

Abstract

This is a study of Thailand’s security policies towards unrest in the three Deep South border provinces of Patani, Yala and Narathiwat. This article will analyze and describe the causes of the conflict between the Thai government and separatist movement. It also explores concepts, strategies and approaches employed by the Thai government in policy implementation and their impact on the situation. The article will illustrate my interpretation for origin, ideology and strategy of the separatist movements in the history of conflict. The last part of this article will explain how the insurgent movement in the Deep South has affected, and continues to affect, life in these southern Thai provinces.

Keywords: Security policies, Deep South of Thailand, Islamic unrest

Introduction

Since January 2004, violence has plagued the three Muslim-dominated southern border provinces of Patani, Yala and Narathiwat in Thailand. The first string of violent acts was a well-coordinated operation in early January 2004, conducted by Muslim militants in Narathiwat province, who assaulted an army camp, killing four soldiers and seizing a large cache of weapons. The militants also set up numerous booby traps and blocked access to a key road, preventing pursuit by the Thai authorities. At around the same time, 18 schools were set alight.
and two unoccupied military facilities were also damaged that night. No organizations or groups claimed responsibility for these actions but there was considerable fear that a new phase of Islamic unrest was beginning to rage in the south.

These fears were supported by two further significant acts of violence in 2004. In late April 2004, a group of militants attempted an assault on security forces outposts, which led to Thai soldiers storming a mosque believed to be holding key militants. As a result, 32 militants were killed by the troops whilst other militants took refuge in the historic Krue-Se mosque. By the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in October, hundreds of protestors were arrested while holding a demonstration in front of the Tak Bai Police Station. Seventy-eight of the protestors died, while being transported to a Thai military camp. The majority died from suffocation after spending more than five hours being smothered by the bodies of other detainees (Jitpiromsri and McCargo, 2008). These fatalities furthered antagonized the Muslim resistance movement, strengthening their resolve to fight the Thai state in the Deep South.

Although there have not been any incidents on the same scale as the Krue-Se and Tak Bai events (McCargo, 2009b), the Islamic insurgency in the southern border provinces of Thailand has escalated significantly, both in numbers and intensity. Consequently, the violent situation in the south has become a significant problem that affects both the lives of local people and the government attempting to develop policies in these provinces.

There are a number of militant groups involved in violent acts throughout southern Thailand but none has claimed responsibility. Security officials in Thailand are strongly suspicious that the Barisan Revolusi Nasional—Coordinate (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Koordinasi), or BRN-C for short, through their armed forces the Runda Kumpulan Kecil (RKK), is responsible for most of these violent incidents. This group is believed to be involved in a number of brutal operations, including bombings and assassinations (McCargo, 2009a).

From 2004 to 2011, Thailand has had five prime ministers, all of whom devised a set of policy measures and implementation strategies to solve the problem. However, this paper will focus on three prime ministers, namely Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), General (ret.) Surayud Chulanont (2006-2008) and Abhisit Vejjajiva (2008-2011).
since the remaining two, namely the late Samak Sundaravej (January-September 2008) and Somchai Wongsawat (September-December 2008), were in power for a short period and did not develop any significant policy measures toward solving the unrest in the southern border provinces of Thailand. In general, although the three prime ministers’ policy measures, as well as implementation strategies, were different, their measures share two features: firstly, the allocation of resources to develop industrial projects in the region and, secondly, uncompromising adherence to the principle of the unitary state. Unfortunately, the measures of these different governments have not resulted in concrete steps to solve the problem.

Causes of conflict

The causes of the Deep South conflict can be divided into three main factors. The first factor is ideology. The insurgent ideology in the latest phase of the separatist movement is a complex mix of three elements: 1. the historical legacy of the kingdom of Patani, which provides legitimacy for resisting the Thai government; 2. affinities between the Malay-Muslim community in Southern Thailand and the Malays of the Peninsula Malaysia, which generated a sense of “otherness” between local Thai Buddhist and Thai-Malay Muslims; 3. Islam and the principle of jihad, which authorizes violence against government officers and the locals who support the Thai state (Phiphitthaphan, 2005a; Christie, 1996). In conjunction, these three elements motivate young insurgents to oppose the Thai government. This first element originated from the work of Tengku Mahmud Mahyiddeen, the leader of the Gabungan Melayu Patani Raya (GAMPAR; League of Malays of Great Patani) and is also associated with other aristocratic Malays keen to re-establish the kingdom of Patani and their authority over this region. The Malay identity and Islam have been employed to win cooperation and support from the local community of Malay Muslims.

The separatist ideology not only contains a sense of belonging to the past prosperous Patani kingdom, but also includes a refusal to recognize the mainstream version of Thai history (Fathy al-Fatani, 1994). There is an emphasis on the repeated division and disintegration of the territory, due to misinformation and constant reminding.
by separatist leaders who have particular political interests. The Thai government has failed to propagate an alternative version of the history (Mansurnoor, 2005). As a result, Muslims in the region have not assimilated themselves into the Thai Buddhist majority, a number of rebellions have been suppressed by the Thai government throughout history, and many religious leaders and nationalists have been imprisoned. Moreover, a large number of Malay Muslims from the South have immigrated to Malaysia, and transmigrated to Bangkok through parts of Thailand.

The second factor contributing to the violent situation in the southern provinces is socio-economic inequality and low standards of education. According to Aphornsuvan, there is a perception among Malay Muslims that their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic identities are threatened by the overbearing and insensitive Thai Buddhist state. In the region, the Islamic way of life comprises Malay and Yawi languages, inter-marriage with fellow Muslims in Malaysia, and religious education. Moreover, visits to Malaysia have reinforced a sense of Malay ethnicity among Thai Muslims (Aphornsuvan, 2007).

In addition, Jitpiromsri argues that Malay Muslims view themselves as second-class citizens due to the perceived state-sponsored threats to ethnic identity. They are politically marginalized by Bangkok, and are deprived of socio-economic benefits and denied access to educational and employment opportunities. Even though the Southern border provinces are not among the poorest in Thailand (some provinces in the north and northeastern have lower household incomes), there is high unemployment, especially among young Muslim males (Jitpiromsri, 2007: 89-111).

Jitpiromsri also commented that low standards of education in the region have produced only a few Malay Muslims assuming positions as local government officials as well as joining the local police. Therefore, these occupations are regularly taken by Buddhist Thais, who cannot properly communicate in the Malay language and have difficulty in understanding the identity, local values and mores. Ethno-religious factors may motivate the political struggle.

The third factor is inefficient governance and political injustices. Local governance in the south is dysfunctional because of allegedly corrupt and incompetent officials, often seen as interlopers with limited knowledge of the Yawi language and lacking in cultural under-
standing. As a result, local residents are frustrated with the government and their local officials in the area. The police, in particular, suffer from a negative reputation in the south, because of their alleged corrupt practices and for tendency to engage in unruly behavior with impunity (Phiphitthaphan, 2005b). Therefore, unless a conscious attempt is made to understand these grievances of the Malay-Muslim community and to implement appropriate policies, Muslim discontent is likely to continue and terrorism in southern Thailand will have implications for the rule of law (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Visualisation of the three elements at the root of the unrest in the south of Thailand (author’s interpretation).

(I) The core concepts:
(1) The historical legacy of the kingdom of Patani.
(2) The cultural significance of the Malay-Muslim community in Southern Thailand with the Malays of the Peninsula Malaysia.
(3) Islam and the principle of jihad.

(II) Socio-economic inequality and low standards of education

(III) Inefficient governance and political injustices

**Government policies: implementation and effect**

To understand Thai government policies towards the southern insurgency and violence, we have to understand government policy implementation in the past and its contribution to this issue. After the revolution of 1932, the Muslim communities in the three southern border provinces of Thailand faced difficulties in retaining their identity. The revolution was driven by the idea of people’s sovereignty and was based on concepts such as “nationhood” and “citizenship.” Subsequently, this led to attempts by the Thai government to establish the “Thai” nation, which comprised a national culture and an identity influenced by Buddhism and the concept of monarchy (Satha-Anand, 2007; Gilquin, 2005; Liow, 2004). In the lead-up to World War II,
the integration of other identities into this Thai identity saw new policies that combined policies of assimilation and an emphasis on centralized power in Bangkok (Phiphitthaphan, 2005a). Furthermore, this policy emphasized the transformation of Malay Muslims into Thai Muslims. While the Thai ultranationalist Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram was prime minister over 1938–1944, Islamic celebrations and religious holidays in the south were forbidden. Other aspects of Malay life, such as the wearing of traditional dress, were also curbed, while communication and teaching of the Yawi language, together with the practicing of Sharia law, were banned. In addition, Malay Muslims were encouraged to adopt Thai-sounding names. These measures dramatically raised dissatisfaction among the southern Muslim Malays (NRC, 2006). Not surprisingly, these assimilation policies were seen by Malay Muslims as an apparatus to threaten their cultural, religious and ethnic identity, resulting in Muslims strongly identifying themselves as “Malay” rather than “Thai.” This caused hatred and resentment among the local Malay-Muslims. Malay identity, and cultural differences in the southern border provinces, would not have been a problem or a cause of conflict had the assimilation policy toward Malay Muslim population not been implemented.

After Phibun’s return to power in 1948, the assimilation policy continued, prompting Haji Sulong, an Islamic scholar and representative of the local elites and Malay Muslim community at the time, to submit a series of political demands to the Thai government. These demands included self-government for the Deep South provinces, communication and education in the Malay language, preservation of Islamic identity, and the implementation of Sharia law. The central government rejected these proposals because a separatist ideology threatened state sovereignty (Aphornsuvan, 2007). To make matters worse, the authorities arrested Haji Sulong soon after. Satha-Anand argues that the detention of the Muslim activist led to several uprisings, as well as the renowned Dusan Nyor Rebellion in which numerous Muslim Malay protestors died (Satha-Anand, 2007: 11-34). The Thai government issued an Emergency Decree in the region. These incidents considerably increased calls for the southern provinces to secede from Thailand. Some even advocated joining British-ruled Malaya.

When separatist sentiment reemerged in far-Southern Thailand in the 1960s, the Thai government responded with military and socio-
economic policies. The goals of the counter-insurgency strategy of the central government were the elimination of prejudice, and improved relations between local people and government officers. However, there was another major political crisis in that period. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) became a significant movement in the north and northeast regions. The insurgent movement in the south was considered less threatening (Smith, 2004). Nevertheless, the administration of the southern border provinces in that period was a significant source of discontent among the Malays. The majority of government officers posted to this region were Buddhist Thais with a poor understanding of the Malay Muslim identity and with a weak grasp of the local language, coupled with a cynical attitude towards the locals (Phiphitthaphan, 2005b; Thomas, 1975). Even though in the 1960s central government attempted to initiate some policies to placate the Malay community, the perception continued that the religious beliefs of the people of Southern Thailand continued to be ignored by policy makers.

A broad consensus maintains that the southern insurgency is fundamentally a political dispute which requires a political solution. During the 1980s, the Thai government recognized this and changed its military response to a political one which eventually succeeded in defeating the insurgency. The mastermind behind this change of strategy was General Prem Tinsulanonda, an officer from Songkhla Province who served as prime minister from 1980 to 1988 (Phiphitthaphan, 2006). When General Prem Tinsulanonda began his first term as prime minister in March 1980, the government accepted Muslim identity and religious rights, proposed a general amnesty bill for insurgents, implemented an economic development scheme for the Deep South, and improved interagency cooperation and coordination (McCargo, 2009b). In the early 1980s, the Prem Tinsulanonda government controlled the situation in the South and also constructed a proper association with the Malay-Muslim elite by improving government functions in several aspects such as governance, security, and financial arrangements.

One of the key essentials in this program was the establishment of more efficient administrative apparatus. In 1981, the Prem government established the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) to resolve the violence (Kaewdaeng, 2005). The SBPAC
succeeded in improving the situation in southern Thailand over the next two decades. As a result, the locals enjoyed a relatively peaceful existence. Incidents such as bombings and assassinations decreased. The SBPAC performed effectively due to its access to crucial information about the separatist movement and the establishment of positive relationships with the locals.

The success of the SBPAC was also due to other factors. Firstly, its headquarters were established at a strategically important location in the center of the troubled area, the Yala province (Kaewdaeng, 2005). The perceptions and the decisions of this agency were different and were more effective than agencies that had operated at a distance. Local people had better access. Secondly, the SBPAC was effective in receiving complaints and resolving conflicts, partly because it had the power to remove corrupt and incompetent officials. Grievances were not only actively dealt with by the SBPAC but were also prosecuted in a court of law (Phiphitthaphan, 2006). Finally, SBPAC has good relations with local intellectuals and community elites who shared information. To improve interagency cooperation and intelligence-gathering network, the SBPAC joined with the security wing known as the Civilian-Police-Military Unit 43 (CPM-43), which was in charge of security in the region. In general, the SBPAC and the CPM-43 enjoyed a reputation as just and reasonable organizations.

Other factors contributed to a reduction in tension during this period. The Thai monarch implemented a number of developmental projects in the South, funded the building and preservation of mosques, and built a summer palace in Narathiwat Province. The democratization of Thai politics in the 1980s gave the Malay-Muslim community a voice in government and resulted in the armed forces’ withdrawal from politics in 1992. Malay Muslims had opportunities to enter the national political mainstream, especially through the Democrat Party and New Aspiration Party, which strengthened their position in the South by inducting a number of Malay-Muslim politicians.

In the 1990s, the elected government of prime minister Chuan Leekpai (Democratic Party) enacted a National Security Policy for the Deep South provinces, which was based on the concept of a “development as security.” As a result of border security collaborations between the Thai and Malaysian governments, unrest decreased considerably in the region (Rahimmula, 2003). Although the situation in the South
was “relatively calm” in the late 1990s, a number of observers assumed that the insurgency was “on hold,” waiting for suitable circumstances to reemerge.

Thaksin Shinawatra, who was prime minister from January 2001 until his removal by a military coup in September 2006, attempted to quell the turbulence in southern Thailand but provoked violent repercussions and stirred separatists into more violent operations aimed at government officers. Feelings of mutual mistrust between the Thai authorities and the Malay-Muslim communities deteriorated. The Thaksin government attempted to convince the public that the insurgent movement in the South had been eradicated, but the increase in violent acts under his tenure belied this claim.

Assassinations and bombings in 2001-2002 confirmed that separatist groups were still active, although Thaksin claimed that these incidents constituted nothing more than reprisals by criminal gangs and should not be attributed to separatists. After discussions between the Malaysian foreign minister, Syed Hamid Albar, and his Thai counterpart, Surakiart Sathirathai, it became clear that these attacks were the work of “terrorists and not bandits” (Smith, 2004). The Thai defense minister, Thammarak Issarangura, made a public statement almost immediately after incidents in January 2004, pointing out that the violent disturbances were far more than just petty crimes. These responses from members within the Thaksin government proved that there were political motivations behind these incidents, despite the initial denial. The government not only declared martial law in Patani, Yala, and Narathiwat, but Thaksin also dispatched 3,000 security forces under the command of Lieutenant General Phongsak Aekbansingha (commander of the Fourth Army). This was not a normal way to deal with outlaw groups or ordinary bandits.

The ouster of Thaksin on September 19, 2006, by an army-led bloodless coup was clearly a setback for democracy in Thailand and the wider Southeast Asian region. The coup raised expectations that the new regime might pursue a more effective and less hardline approach in the South. The coup leader and chairman of the Council for Democratic Reform (CDR), Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin, was a Thai Muslim (though not a Malay Muslim) who had voiced support for proposals by a National Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations, and had disagreed with the blacklisting of insurgent suspects but urged
dialogue with the militants.

In early October 2006, the Council for National Security (CNS) appointed retired Gen. Surayud Chulanont as interim prime minister. A number of observers expected his government to implement policies aimed at national reconciliation and a reduction in violence. However, Gen. Surayud's administration did not implement any significant changes. According to Deep South Watch (DSW) (Jitpiromsri, 2010), an independent monitoring group based at the Prince of Songkhla University’s Patani campus, the number of violent incidents (assassinations, arson and bomb attacks) rose dramatically after the coup (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Deaths and injuries in the Southern violence, 2004-9 (Jitpiromsri and McCargo, 2010: 161).

Consequently, in 2008, the violent situation in the southern border provinces was one of the major challenges to the short-term governments of three prime ministers. From his first day in office, Abhisit Vejjajiva and his cabinet was not only strongly committed to bringing peace to the southern border provinces but also placed the situation at the top of the national political agenda (Deep South Watch, 2009a). It adopted a conciliatory approach based on political strategies rather than military solutions, emphasizing cultural diversity and multiculturalism rather than assimilation. However, while the Abhisit
government declared that it had successfully tackled the southern issue (McCartan, 2009), Deep South Watch argued that violence increased during the government's term (Deep South Watch, 2009b).

Though his government continued to make efforts to arrange negotiations with insurgent groups and considered proposals to set up a new ministry to deal specifically with the three southern provinces (McCartan and Crispin, 2008), words were not matched with actions, according to the International Crisis Group (2010). Although Abhisit Vejjajiva stressed that his government's policies in the south included improvements in educational standards and justice procedures, security measures and development projects were on the rise. However, these policies were hampered by political conflict between Vejjajiva's Democrat Party and supporters of the former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, which led to protracted and violent demonstrations in Bangkok. For this reason, the government was unable to fulfil its potential in tackling the problems in the South. However, Vejjajiva remained confident that his government had the capability to effectively tackle the issue, in the absence of positive signs that violence in the southern provinces was abating.

Separatist movements: Origin, ideologies and strategies

There are several components and actors in the southern insurgency. Several insurgent organizations are still active in the South, whilst others have renounced violence. This section will describe and analyze the origin of the separatist movements in the South, their organizational ideologies and their goals.

Dissatisfaction with the Thai authorities is a key factor which has exacerbated the conflict in the Deep South. Historical conflicts and government policies helped forge a consciousness of identity, which became a source for separatist ambitions. In 1947, a separatist movement fighting for an independent Patani, the Gabungan Melayu Patani Raya (GAMPAR), or League of Malays of Great Patani, emerged as a crucial organization in the campaign for the unity of Malay communities in the southern border provinces. GAMPAR's objectives were to separate these provinces from Thailand for incorporation into the Federation of Malaya. Islam was of minor importance in its ideology (Che Man, 1990). Tengku Mahmud Mahyiddeen was the leader of
this group in association with other aristocratic Malays who had lost influence due to the imposition of central authority from Bangkok in the early part of the century (Satha-Anand, 1986). In the early stages of the resistance movement, the Thai authorities were intent on countering Malay national ideology. This resistance movement was comprised mainly of elites—Malays with royal connections and aristocratic lineage—rather than being a grassroots movement.

The resistance against Thai authority was most intense during the 1960s and 1970s, with more than sixty militant groups operating among the Malay communities. The main victims of this resistance were both government officials and the armed forces (McCargo, 2009b; Melvin, 2007). The Barisan Revolusi Nasionale (BRN - National Revolutionary Front) was formed by Ustaz Karim Hajji Hassan (Che Man, 1990). The BRN married its separatist doctrine with a socialist ideology, and cooperated with the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) on the other side of the border during the 1950s. The BRN was most active in the 1970s and early 1980s, but then split into BRN-Cordinate, BRN-Congress and BRN-Ulama (ICG, 2005). After the split, the goals of the groups did not change significantly. The BRN-Coordinate expanded and earned support through some Pondoks (traditional Islamic schools). The Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani (BNPP), which was formed in 1959 by Tengku Abdul Jalal (Pitsuwan, 1982), placed Islam at the center of its ideology and attempted to garner support from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and other Arab organizations. Violent clashes between insurgents and security forces became the norm in the Thailand’s southern border provinces following the establishment of this movement.

The Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) or Pertubohan Persatuan Pembebasan Patanim, formed by Tungku Bira Kotanil, emerged in the late 1960s as a rebel organization whose main agenda was to re-establish Patani as an wholly independent state. Islam was central to the PULO’s doctrine of “fight[ing] for the freedom of Patani and the emergence of an Islamic Republic” (Satha-Anand, 1986). The religion of “Islam” was used as a major ideology in PULO’s doctrine rather than the conception of “Malay” national identity. There was friction within the PULO organization, leading to the formation of “New PULO” in 1995 by A-rong Muleng and Haji Abdul
Rohman Bazo (Gunaratna et al., 2005). However, the aims of this splinter group were similar to those of the original organization. A strategic coalition between the BRN and PULO factions also emerged during this period (ICG, 2005). According to Storey (2010: 38),

> From the late 1950s onward, these groups and subsequent splinter groups waged a low-intensity insurgency against the Thai authorities, assassinating police and army personnel, civil servants and Thai Buddhist settlers, and bombing and torching state symbols, particularly schools that were perceived as tools of the Thai state designed to “brainwash” Malay Muslims and convert them into Buddhists.

Another newly-emerged group that has espoused a strong Islamic identity is the Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Patani (GMIP). Although all these militant separatist movements have secession from Thailand as their goal, their ideologies and philosophies along with their political motivations are significantly varied. In the last several years, these militant separatist organizations have forged an umbrella alliance named Bersatu (Unity) (Gunaratna et al., 2005). The confrontations between Thai officials and Muslim separatist movements remained throughout the 1960s and 1970s at a fairly high level of violence (Mahakanjana, 2006). There are two major strategies which were used by radical insurgents such as BRN-C and GMIP: first, to destroy unity and create a suspicious atmosphere between Buddhists and Muslims in the region, provoking Thai Buddhists to relocate away from the area; second, to deconstruct local government in the region and reconstruct it by their movement. Some observers argue that if these strategies are successful, independence may come to Patani. However, another group of observers believe that even if these strategies are successful, it will merely lead to the establishment of greater autonomy in Patani, rather than full independence.

**Impacts and Conclusion**

The violence in the south of Thailand has impacted the region in several ways. The fourth part of this paper will explore and analyzes
the impacts of the conflict locally and nationally. Since January 2004, the insurgents have been quite successful in targeting the Thai authorities, especially the police, army and other civilian government officials, including government school teachers. The militants have burned down local schools and assassinated teachers, not only because they are perceived as state symbols and unarmed targets, but also because of the pervasive suspicion that they are active participants in the alleged indoctrination of Malay-Muslim children on the issue of Thai authority. Thousands of children, both Thai Buddhist and Malay, in the southern border provinces have been affected by the violence. These children have been prevented from accessing good education and their academic development has been hampered by a lack of proper facilities (Jitpiromsri, 2010; see also HRW, 2007; HRW, 2010). Even where schoolchildren receive a good education, they lack the career opportunities available to Thai students in other provinces. Moreover, they are also easily persuaded to collaborate with the separatist movement or are paid to commit violent acts within their communities.

The education in the region has been severely disrupted by separatist insurgent activities, causing classes to be suspended and frequently disrupted. Approximately 1000 teachers have petitioned the Education Ministry for relocation to more secure areas and more than 40 percent have had their requests granted (Abdus Sabur, 2005). In addition, Abdus Sabur also notes that teachers, frequently the target for assassinations, require protection and are unwilling to visit their students in the community out of concern for their personal safety. Because of all these factors, economic incentives are not able to persuade teachers to work in the region.

Violent insurgency has caused damage to Thai governmental and economic infrastructure in the south, creating mistrust among Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims alike, causing high numbers of Buddhists to flee. Insurgents have also attempted to increase tension between the two communities by assassinating Buddhist monks and attacking Buddhist temples (McCargo, 2009b).

The economic system and infrastructure in the region has been severely affected by militant attacks. Even though the government has doubled the budget spent in the south, the implementation of infrastructure projects is problematic in such an unstable environment (Jitpiromsri, 2010). One of the government's critical missions is to
rebuild trust and mobilize local people to assist remedial projects and development schemes. The continued unrest is dissuading the business community from investing and working in Deep South provinces. This factor limits the prospects for economic growth and employment, contributing to a rise in poverty in the region (Jitpiromsri, 2007: 89-111). Furthermore, many of those killed are breadwinners, resulting in further hardship and deepening poverty. Children and widows, affected by the loss of husband and father respectively, require specialized assistance to help recover from such traumatic events.

In summary, since January 2004, the unrest has greatly affected government officials and civilians, Buddhists and Muslims. Economic development and investment in the region have been disrupted, and the local educational system has been severely disrupted. Many women have become widows and countless children are now orphans. They require counselling to overcome the trauma and suffering brought on by these events.

Even though no particular insurgent group has voiced any clear demands, a separation of the three southern provinces from Thai sovereignty, to establish an independent Islamic state, is believed to be their major goal. This is obviously opposed by the Thai state. Some have suggested that perhaps a less radical option can be found, with the Thai state granting wider autonomy to the Muslims in the area. However, observers believe that autonomy may eventually lead to demands for full independence (McCargo, 2010). Numerous scholars have proposed self-government models for the south (Jitpiromrsi and McCargo, 2008), but none has been implemented.

There is a belief that implementing these models may be a stepping stone to future demands for full independence. Some scholars maintain that if Thai authorities had considered granting autonomy to the three southern provinces in 2004, or even earlier, an escalation of violence might have been prevented. Alternatively, it has also been proposed that if autonomy had been granted and the violent insurgency continued, then the separatists may not have demanded full independence. However, central government’s response has not involved any discussion of autonomy or extraordinary governance. Unless the central government succeeds to win the hearts and minds of people by their strategy, this violent insurgency is likely to continue.
Endnotes

1 Director of the Deep South Watch and Center for the Study of Conflict and Cultural Diversity (CSCC).

2 The three prime ministers were: Samak Sundaravej (1935-2009), from January to September 2008; Somchai Wongsawat; and Abhisit Vejjajiva from late 2008 to the general elections in July 2011.

3 The Federation of Malaya comprised 11 states and existed from 1 February 1948 until 16 September 1963.

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