

Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand¹

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In the past couple of years, Thailand's three southernmost provinces have become a hotspot of ethnic insurgency. This article analyzes the insurgency from two perspectives. The first relates to the causes, contours, and involved groups of the conflict. The analysis will show that the roots of radicalism can be traced to several contentious religious, cultural, economic, and political causes such as cultural discrimination, relative economic deprivation, and political alienation. However, the drift toward militancy in the past years is mainly caused by recent shifts in the local and regional political environment of Thailand's deep South. The second perspective relates to the political consequences of the unrest. While it is highly unlikely that extremists will reach their separatist goal, insurgency and counter-insurgency contribute to the erosion of liberal democracy in Thailand. Immediate consequences of (counter)-insurgency such as the erosion of respect for human rights and other political rights and the deepening political divide in Thai society contribute to the emergence of an illiberal or semi-democratic political regime, characterized by the rise of a single political party and its all-powerful political leader to near-hegemonic power.

Keywords democracy, human rights, insurgency, Islam, terrorism, Thailand

Introduction

Since 2001, the security situation in Thailand's three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala has continuously deteriorated. Particularly since 2004, worries are deepening that the Muslim-Malay insurgency could make Thailand the next front in the war on terrorism in Southeast Asia. This raises a number of critical questions. First, in order to formulate an effective strategy for conflict resolution, a better understanding of the nature of the conflict, its root causes, involved parties, and the current dynamics of conflict development is urgently needed. What is the conflict about? Who are the parties involved? Why and for what do they fight? Second, what are the consequences of these developments for Thai democracy?

The principal objective of this paper is to discuss these two questions. In doing so, the analysis will proceed in five steps. To better understand the root causes of the conflict and the menace that the insurgency represents, section I outlines the

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historical roots of the conflict. Section II provides an outline of the current dynamics in the spiraling violence. Section III identifies causes for the latest outburst of violence. Section IV puts the local events into the context of national politics. The final section V provides tentative conclusions.

Historical Roots

Although Muslim communities live in almost all provinces of the Thai Kingdom, by far the greatest number of Muslims are of Malay ethnic origin. For the most part, Malay-Muslims live in the country's three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, but also in Satun, Songkhla, Trang, Krabi, and Phuket. A recent household survey conducted by the Thai government found that in Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani, over 76 percent of the population adhered to the Islamic faith.²

Thailand's Muslim-majority provinces have a long history of insurrection that traces its beginnings to the nineteenth century. Although the sovereign Muslim Kingdom of Patani³ was conquered by the King of Siam in 1786, legally, it became an integral part of the predominantly Buddhist Kingdom of Thailand only after the Anglo-Siamese treaties of 1904 and 1909 which recognized Siamese control over that territory.⁴ The Thai government divided the area into seven provinces which were governed by appointed bureaucrats under a centralized administrative structure, but still managed dissidence more or less by leaving the Muslims alone. This *laissez-faire* policy changed during and shortly after World War II, when political efforts to assimilate the southern population accelerated.⁵ After the ultranationalist regime of Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram came to power in 1938, it adopted a policy of forced assimilation of the various minority cultures in order to develop, in David Brown's words, "the mono-ethnic character of the state."⁶ Phibun immediately launched a campaign to eliminate the Malay-Muslim cultural identity for the sake of nationalism. This campaign assaulted the Malay-Muslim identity on all fronts, including the arenas of education, language, dress, and religious practices.

The next couple of decades were marked by continual secessionist violence in the southern provinces. Historical circumstances and government policies created a sense of identity which Islam enforced and which became also a source for irredentist ambitions. In 1947, this provoked the emergence of a separatist movement fighting for an independent Pattani, the *Gabungan Melayu Patani Raya* (League of Malays of Great Patani). Following the establishment of the *Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani* (BNPP) in 1959, violent clashes between insurgents and security forces became the norm in the southern provinces.⁷ At a low level of intensity, clashes between Muslim insurgents and Thai security forces continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

It was not until General Prem Tinsulanonda became prime minister in March 1980 that the government enacted any serious attempts to bring order to the reigning chaos. General Prem's government (1980–88) supported Muslim cultural rights and religious freedoms, offered the insurgents a general amnesty, and implemented an economic development plan for the South.⁸

When Prem declined to accept the prime ministership after the 1988 parliamentary elections, for the first time in over a decade the country had an elected member of parliament as prime minister. Though the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhaven was toppled in a military coup on 23 February 1991, the military proved unable to stop political liberalization. After the military failed to suppress mass protests in May 1992, transition to democracy took

place in September 1992.⁹ The transition to democracy offered the Malay-Muslims new opportunities for political participation including the emergence of political parties, such as the Democratic Party, in the South. Finally, in the 1990s, the democratic government of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (Democratic Party) formulated a *National Security Policy for the Southern Border Provinces*, based on a “development as security” approach.¹⁰ Along with improved border security cooperation between the Thai and Malaysian authorities (who in the past had turned a blind eye to the activities of Patani-insurgents on Malaysian soil), these developments contributed significantly to the decline of Muslim insurgency.¹¹ Pockets of resistance remained, but most observers agreed that the insurgency was “waning” and “relatively quiet” in the late 1990s.¹²

The Recent Drift Toward Militancy

Contrary to the image that international press coverage has created since 2001, the current wave of political violence in Thailand has not engulfed the entire South; it has been limited mostly to three southernmost provinces, Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani. These provinces are the hot spots of recent violence and insurgency, while the remaining provinces in the region have been relatively unaffected.

Government statistics and reports by various non-governmental sources show that violence has deepened dramatically in recent years. The latest outburst of violence started in 2001. A total of 1,975 violent incidents were recorded between 1993 and the end of November 2004. Twenty-one percent of these violent incidents occurred before 2001, and the other 79 percent took place from 2001 onwards.¹³ In 2001, Ministry of the Interior statistics showed 19 killed policemen and 50 insurgency-related incidents across the three most affected provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. In 2002, several police stations were attacked when the guerillas seized huge amounts of arms and ammunitions and killed some 50 police and soldiers in 75 incidents throughout the year. In 2003, official sources counted 119 incidents.¹⁴ In the first 11 months of 2004, however, 1,253 violent incidents occurred, that is 63 percent of the total between 1993 and 2004. Between January and November 10, 2004 alone, at least 573 people had been killed and another 524 people had been injured, including civilians, police, soldiers, and other government officials. Between January and mid-April 2005 alone, more than 50 deaths occurred.¹⁵

The simultaneous bombings of the airport, a hotel, and a grocery store in Hat Yai in early April 2005 raised fears that violence would spread beyond the three southernmost provinces. The assassination of Islamic school teachers in Pattani and Yala and rallies by members of ultra-nationalist groups such as the notorious right-wing *Village Scouts* in 2004 have added to the fears of human-rights groups and civil society activists that security forces and nationalist elements may open a Pandora’s box of nationalist backlash against what nationalist groups view as a threat to monarchy, Buddhism, and the nation. It also could lead to serious rifts between government, opposition parties, conservative powers around the throne, and factions of the military who all have different views and opinions about how to react best to the trouble in the South. Even though the government enforced martial law in Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani, which gives troops the right to make arrests without a court warrant, and more than 12,000 Royal Thai Army troops were reportedly deployed in the region, public order has continued to erode in 2004.¹⁶ The educational and judicial systems suffered from the instability. More than 1,200

teachers and education officials sought transfers out of the region and several provincial court judges have submitted requests for transfers out of the region following the killing of judges by Muslim separatists in 2004.¹⁷

Main Insurgency Factions

Both the scope and coordination of operations point to new dynamics within the traditionally factionalized and ineffectual separatist movement. Given contrary reports by intelligence and internal security forces in the South, it is difficult to report the internal characteristics of the groups behind the violence. No known rebel group has taken responsibility for the violence. However, it is clear that several factions remain the core actors in the insurgency and that there is no central control of the operations of insurgents (Table 1).¹⁸ These groups include BRN (*Barisan Revolusi Nasional*), GMIP (*Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Pattani*) and PULO (*Pattani United Liberation Organization*). Even though any account of these groups has to be taken with a grain of salt, it seems that the original PULO does not have much military power on the ground. BNP/BIPP is largely defunct and Bersatu—an umbrella organization attempting loose political coordination among separatist groups—is believed to have no direct military operations in Thailand. Of the three remaining factions, New PULO is believed to be the smallest. GMIP may have a wider area of operations, but the largest of the three main factions most certainly is BRN.¹⁹ The following overview gives a rough idea about the main insurgent factions that in one or the other way are thought to be relevant for the recent unrest.

Tactics

The recent insurgents have established a broad range of low-intensity, low-risk, and technically unsophisticated tactics. These acts include: arson, bombings, raids to seize arms, and attacks against state workers, law-enforcement personnel, local government officials, schoolteachers, and Buddhist monks.²⁰ However, suicide bombers, the weapon of choice of Islamist terrorists since the 1980s, have not emerged so far. Since 2004, militants have also adopted new bombing tactics. They have focused on government buildings and private residences of members of the Royal Thai Police and other representatives of the central government. The motorcycle bomb has been the preferred method in these attacks. While before mid-2004, the insurgents' attacks focused on civilian Buddhists, targeting has slowly shifted towards security force personnel.²¹

Although there is no evidence for a coordinated strategy among the various factions or that the insurgency has attempted to translate local grievances into a well-organized mass-based separatist movement, rising Muslim anger against the government and the security forces will help the cause of the insurgents by improving prospects for recruitment and trigger a movement in the future.

While the criminal nature of acts of insurgency in the South is widely accepted, most observers acknowledge the presence of political motives underlying the current insurgent activities. Apparently, insurgent groups operate in a grey zone of crime and delinquent sub-culture on the one hand, and ethnic or religious consciousness on the other. As insurgents rely to some extent on the same infrastructure as criminals, it is likely that criminal gangs, bandits, and drug traffickers have joined the Muslim insurgents in recent years.

Table 1. Main insurgent factions

Organization	Formed	Characteristics
BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional)	1960	Base of support lay mainly in the <i>ponohs</i> , today three separate wings: BRN Congress, the main military wing; BRN Coordinative Group, focusing on political agitation and urban sabotage; BRN Ulema, which coordinates a following among the Islamic clergy; largest and best organized faction
GMIP (Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Pattani)	1995	Formed by Afghan veterans as an off-shoot of the older Gerakan Mujahideen Pattani; urban group; close relations to KMM (Kumupulan Mujahideen Malay), its Malaysian counterpart
PULO (Pattani United Liberation Organisation)	1968	Active in guerilla operations until the early 1990s; secularist organization with presumably no military capability on the ground
New PULO	1995	Split as a dissent faction from PULO in 1995, but formed a tactical alliance with PULO two years later
BNPP/BIPP (Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Pattani–Pattani National Liberation Front/Barissan Islam Pembebasan Pattani–Pattani Islam Liberation Front)	1963	Drew support from both traditional aristocrats as well as from religious elites; its objective was neither mere autonomy nor integration of Patani with Malaysia but complete independence and the establishment of an Islamic State, <i>daral-Islam</i>
Bersatu (Barisan Kemerdekaan Pattani–United Front for the Independence of Pattani)	1989/97	Established in 1989, reinvigorated in 1997 as an umbrella organization for loose political coordination between PULO, New PULO, GMIP, and BRN

Source: Information collected by the author from various newspaper reports and personal conversation.

However, those who raise the question of whether the insurgents are “ordinary criminals” or “real” terrorists have missed the point. For many decades, Thailand has been a hub for Southeast Asia’s drug and arms trade, due to its weak legal system, corrupt political and judicial authorities, and a feeble regulatory financial system that have allowed a booming regional money laundering system, with the military itself involved in the black markets.²² Given the ubiquity of organized and petty crime, small-arms trade, smuggle and drug trade in the South, it would be naive to assume that criminals and terrorists can be clearly distinguished. Rather,

a more plausible assumption is that there is a broad grey zone of greed and grievance in which there is no clear threshold between “entrepreneurs of violence” and “warriors of convenience.” Furthermore, as reported in October 2003, intelligence sources have been in no doubt that some religious schools (*ponohs*) had lent themselves to paramilitary groups. Reportedly, young Islamic teachers from Islamic boarding schools serve as recruiting officers and field commanders for insurgency groups, particularly the BRN.²³

Another key unknown is the involvement of external groups. There is evidence of an *Al Qaeda* and *Jemaah Islamiyah* presence within Thailand. Some point to outside sources for providing training facilities, funds, motivation, and instigation to the Muslim insurgents in southern Thailand, for instance, Malaysian militants of the *Kumpulan Mujaheddin Malaysia* and groups with links to *Al Qaeda* in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Some groups are involved in arms-trade to Aceh, Mindanao, and Sri Lanka.²⁴ However, it would be a mistake to view longstanding grievance in the South as being subordinate to transnational terrorist groups in the region.²⁵ Although there is evidence of inspiration and assistance for the insurgents emanating from outside (particularly from South Asia), and some point to a “Malaysia connection” between the Thai insurgents and the *Parti Islam se-Malaysia* (PAS) in Malaysia,²⁶ there is no clear or confirmed evidence of any direct involvement of external groups in the insurgency.²⁷ Furthermore, in a number of court proceedings against alleged Thai-Malay insurgents, the government failed to provide convincing evidence for the suspects’ involvement with *Jemaah Islamiyah*.²⁸

Causes for the Recent Outburst of Violence

Ethno-religious violence in Thailand—as in most multi-ethnic societies—is not caused by a single factor but by multiple causes.²⁹ This analysis holds the view that “structural” factors (historical concerns, religious differences, and social and economic marginalization) resulted in local grievances and a latent crisis in inter-ethnic relations. The drift toward militancy, however, is caused by recent changes in the “enabling environment”³⁰ of insurgency in southern Thailand that are allowing insurgency to grow.

To some extent, the political articulation of ethnic consciousness in Pattani can be explained as a response to the economic, cultural, and political subordination of the Muslim communities as a consequence of “internal colonialism.”³¹ According to this view, Thailand is the paradigmatic case of internal colonialism in which the deepening economic disparities between the prime center (Bangkok) and the rural hinterland have resulted in economic underdevelopment of the South.³² Even though Thailand had an impressive record of economic growth between 1960 and 1997, the existing regional imbalances deepened during this period.³³ The available data show a high level of absolute and relative deprivation among the local population in the deep South. Even though the Northeast region is the poorest region,³⁴ measured against core indicators of economic development, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat are among the least developed provinces of the Kingdom.

Furthermore, the shift of government policies towards the promotion of development in the peripheral region failed to reduce regional economic disparities between the South and the Center. Although income levels increased in absolute numbers, the income gap between the South and the rest of the country has widened in the past couple of decades. In 1962, the average household income in the South was 120.7 percent

of the average household income for the whole Kingdom, while it was only 91.8 percent in 2000. Simultaneously, gross regional product was shrinking from 126.2 percent of the national average in 1960 to 68.7 percent in 1999 (Figure 1).³⁵

Economic deprivation is amplified by perceived political and cultural discrimination by the government in favor of the Buddhist majority. On the one hand, the constitution accords Muslims equal rights and opportunities. Muslims enjoy freedom of belief, symbolized by a network of religious institutions and organizations such as more than 5,000 mosques and several thousand religious schools in place. In government, parliament, party politics, and bureaucracy they are represented more or less according to their share of population. There is an active Malay-Muslim civil society movement, which promotes the rights of the Muslims in Thailand. In the 1980s and 1990s, some of its members became successful politicians, academics, government officials, and businessmen.³⁶

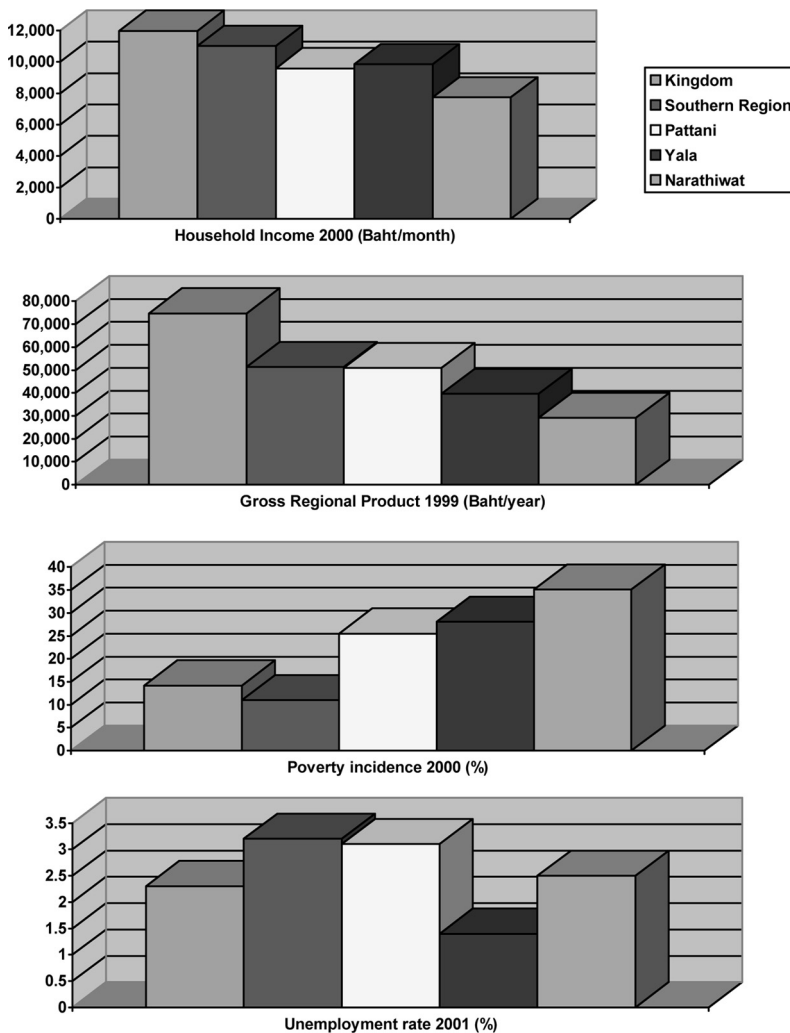


Figure 1. Regional economic indicators. Source: UNDP, *Thailand Human Development Report 2003* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2003).

On the other hand, many indicators point to a failed integration of the Muslims in the South. Although the government was in theory keen to increase the number of Muslims in the bureaucracy, in practice numerous obstacles ranging from educational attainment to demands for social conformity have limited such recruitment, especially in the higher grades of the civil service.³⁷ Individual success stories as those of former President of the National Assembly, Wan Muhammad Noor Matha, and former Foreign Minister of Thailand, Surin Pitsuwan, are exceptions.

The most politically salient manifestation of the economic, cultural, and political subordination of the South has been the intensification of the ethnic consciousness of the Malay-Muslims that has created the potential for political instability and ethnic violence. But the question remains why insurgents have been able to turn latent frustration into active resistance. Ethnic differences and relative socioeconomic deprivation are not sufficient to explain political violence. Political violence and extremism are never a mere extension of relative deprivation shared by an ethnic minority. Accordingly, it is not (relative) deprivation per se that leads to political violence, but transformations in the political and socioeconomic “enabling environment” that alter the opportunity structures of rebellion.

In fact, in the past couple of years, three different developments have resulted in such a change: (1) Islamization of the Muslim minorities’ identity in Thailand; (2) shifts in government policies after 2001; and (3) the low quality of the government’s conflict management.

The Growth of Islamism

The conventional wisdom holds that “Islam in Southeast Asia has always been defined by tolerance, moderation, and pluralism.”³⁸ Right or wrong, as almost everywhere in the Muslim world, the past two decades have seen a stronger emphasis of Islamic identity among Thai Muslims.³⁹ Thailand’s ethnic Malay-Muslims traditionally practice a moderate and syncretic variant of Islam. Over the past few decades, however, purist Salafi (and more specifically Wahhabi) teaching has been gaining ground—propelled by donations from charities and benefactors in the Middle East and fostering a greater orthodoxy in many of the increasing number of religious schools.⁴⁰

According to the Ministry of Education, there were more than 500 private Islamic schools in southern Thailand in 2004, covering more than 2,000 teachers and 25,000 students.⁴¹ While most are registered with the Ministry of Education, some are beyond official supervision. Funded by private donations and in many cases founded by teachers (*ustaz*) who themselves have done religious studies in Pakistan and the Middle East, some *ponoh* became breeding grounds for potential radical Muslims. Separately, according to Thai government sources, in the past 15 years, 2,500 Thai-Muslim students graduated from religious schools in Saudi Arabia and 2,500 more from various Islamic universities in the Middle East and South Asia.⁴²

Upon returning home, many of these young graduates became religious teachers in local communities, thereby contributing to the growth of more orthodox or radical versions of Islam, such as Wahhabi and fundamentalist Islam. Politically radical young *ustaz* and their students became protagonists of the movement of *Umna-ism* in southern Thailand. This resulted in an expanded pool of disaffected youth who became prime targets for recruitment by the extremists. Inspired by the noticeable expansion of both radical Islamism and the transnational activities of the

mushrooming number of radical Islamist organizations as well as by the Thai Government's assistance to the U.S. War on Terror after 2001, these radical young Muslims became a spearhead of Islamist revival in the South.⁴³

Shift in Government Policies

Although Malay-Muslims' Islamic identity is being manipulated by separatists, it is unlikely that appeals to religious consciousness alone are sufficient to get young people into the insurgency movement. Increasing Islamic awareness and the growing strength of Islamic fundamentalism among Thailand's ethnic Malays contributes to a more favorable social climate for Muslim insurgency in the South and improves the opportunities for insurgent groups to recruit followers. However, as a recent International Crisis Group interview suggests, "the emphasis of the ideological indoctrination" by the insurgents seems still to be on historical discrimination and politico-economic-cultural suppression and dispossession.⁴⁴

In this regard, some recent government policies are another critical factor, which fuels the empathy for separatist insurgency in southern Thailand. Not coincidentally, the insurgency problem in the South reemerged after the January 2001-elected Thai Rat Thai party-led government's decision in Summer 2001 to impose greater central control over a region traditionally dominated by the TRT's main opponent, the Democratic Party. Upon taking office in 2001, Prime Minister Thaksin announced his intention to make major changes in the Thai government's policy in the South. Given the pervasive bureaucratic bias in favor of the Democrats in the South, this step made sense for the new government to break up the control the Democratic Party exercised over the bureaucracy in the South due to the party's near-hegemonic dominance in the region (Figure 2). From the mid-1990s, the only seats not held by the Democrats were those of a group of Muslim MPs from the National Aspiration Party (which merged with TRT) in 2001, all from the border provinces.

Prime Minister Thaksin's program to have provincial governors and their staff operate more along the lines of successful companies did not take into account the unique cultural, religious, and violent nature of the South. It contributed to the erosion of patron-client relations among local elites and voters in the South and the Bangkok-based DP that served as a prime mechanism for the representation of southern interests in national politics.⁴⁵ Thus, it widened the intermediary gap between local voters and the government in Bangkok.

Another measure implemented in order to strengthen the new government's control over the region was the cabinet's decision in March 2002 to dismantle the once successful intelligence and suppression operations against separatist groups. Even though the weakness of intelligence has been a characteristic feature of the Kingdom's security apparatus for decades, inconsistencies in the handling of the crisis by the Thai Rat Thai administration undoubtedly aggravated the problem. Thailand's crisis in security services and intelligence has developed over time at various levels. The backdrop to specific institutional and operational failures is inter-agency rivalry between and organizational fragmentation of the Thai intelligence community along services and cabinet lines.

In addition, the security services in Thailand are plagued by endemic corruption and a long-standing rivalry between the Royal Thai Army (RTA) and the Royal Thai Police (RTP) over illegal business opportunities. Another problem is bureaucratic competition and lack of coordination among different services and ministries.⁴⁶

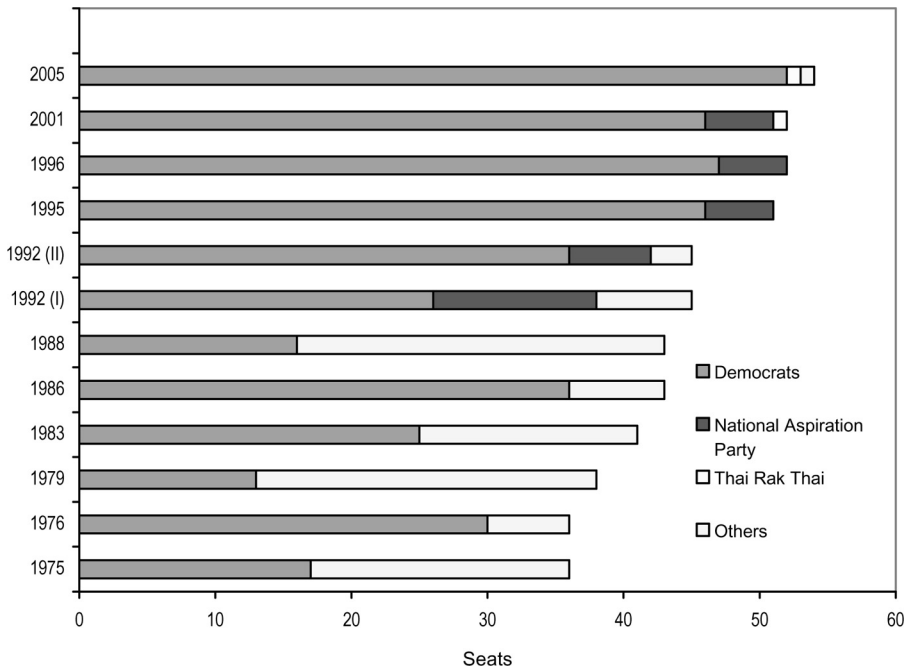


Figure 2. Elections in the South, 1975–2005. Source: Aurel Croissant and Daniel Pojar Jr., “Quo Vadis Thailand? Thai Politics After the 2005 Parliamentary Elections,” *Strategic Insight*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2005, <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Jun/croissantJun05.asp>

The intelligence situation in the southern provinces has long been murky. But the government’s decision in May 2002 to dissolve the Yala-based South Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) has been widely criticized as a mistake that deepened the problems of information gathering and information analysis. An inspectorate set up in 1981 attached to the Ministry of Interior, the SBPAC had served as an interface between Bangkok and local provincial administrations.

In 2002, the government also abolished an Army-run joint civilian-police-military border security office known as CMP-43, and handed security in the South over to the police forces.⁴⁷ One of the unintended consequences of these measures has been an emerging power vacuum. To make matters worse, the Prime Minister responded to the emerging security crisis by dividing responsibilities between the offices of three different ministries and reducing the Ministry of Defense to a revolving door.⁴⁸

After the government became aware that previous measures had failed to improve the situation, the line of command for states agencies working in the region was restructured several times. Subsequently, responsibilities were recentralized again. Deputy Prime Minister Gen (Rtd.) Chavalit Yongchaiyudh—the architect of victory over communist insurgents in the early 1980s—was given full authority to take charge of the situation. In early October 2004, however, Thaksin sidelined Chavalit again by picking up Deputy Supreme Commander General Sirichai Thayasiri as the new chairman of the Southern Border Provinces Peace-Building Command, an organization set up in April 2004 to act as a super-agency directing and coordinating the operations in the South.⁴⁹

Failed Management of the Crisis

Furthermore, the government's failure to notice early warning signals from the South exacerbated the crisis. Until the spring of 2004, the government had played down the possibility of a Muslim insurgency in the South, blaming bandits rather than separatists or terrorists for the region's violence.⁵⁰ Later, the government realized that the problem had become more serious than originally thought. However, the split in the government and military between hawks who wanted to send more troops and doves who supported a softer stance made it difficult for the cabinet to devise a cohesive approach to quell the violence. Conflict between the Prime Minister and his men in the military (particularly former Class 10 classmates of Thaksin Shinawatra at the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School) and Army Commander General Sonti Boonyaratglin (appointed in 2005 and granted extraordinary executive powers to combat the unrest) deepened. Thus, the government has vacillated between the two approaches and was unable to formulate a coherent response to the emerging crisis.

What has further angered local Muslims was Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's seeming insensitivity not only to the steadily deteriorating situation in the South, but particularly to the humanitarian tragedies of both the bloody incidents at the Krue Se-Mosque on April 28, 2004, and the following Tak Bai bloodshed of October 25, 2004. The security officials responsible for keeping the peace and tracking down culprits have also not shown sensitivity to Muslim feelings. Rather, cultural insensitivity and an increasing number of human rights violations committed by the police and the military have provoked both fear and anger and strengthened the cause of the insurgents. According to reports by Thai newspapers and the National Human Rights Commission, as many as 200 local Malay-Muslims had been carried away by local police and military or disappeared after the security forces had looked for them.⁵¹ Several other measures taken by the security forces, such as intrusions into the unregistered religion schools, the arrests of teachers, and the army's frequent search and arrest hunts have eroded the local people's will to cooperate with the security forces as well.

In addition, the government's decision in summer 2003 to dispatch Thai troops to Iraq and to consider the American proposal for allowing the use of Thai facilities such as Utapao Air Base to fight Islamic terrorism in Southeast Asia allegedly linked to Al Qaeda further created problems in the fragile relationship between the government and Muslims. The government's acceptance of U.S. demands was perceived by many Muslims not as compliance with the obligations of the Thai-U.S. Mutual Defense Agreement but rather as a consequence of the Prime Minister's personal interest in becoming a major U.S. ally in Southeast Asia. The outrage expressed by the radical Muslims against the United States, however, is shared by the moderate Muslim majority in southern Thailand, who began to fear that they could become the real target of the anti-terror war.

This fear was also fueled by two emergency decrees on anti-terrorism and money laundering which the government passed in the autumn of 2003. In view of the continuing climate of public fear and impunity of the security forces in the context of the violence in the South and the 2003 "war on drugs,"⁵² these new security regulations raised strong concerns in the Muslim-dominated South that the government's security policy would lead to a further deterioration of human rights and civil liberties in the South. Thai-Muslim community leaders mobilized more than 100,000 Muslims in a rally in Pattani, criticizing the regulations as being aimed at them.⁵³

The Democracy-Violence Nexus

As John Keane in a recently published essay on democracy and violence has stated, political violence “is the greatest enemy of democracy as we know it. Violence is anathema to its spirit and substance.”⁵⁴ Similarly, William Crotty reminds us that “democracy and terrorism represent the extremes of the political continuum.” However, while it is certainly true that “inclusive, representative democratic systems offer outlets to identify and address social and economic inequalities effectively enough to make terrorism as a political act moot and, when engaged in, largely ineffective,”⁵⁵ recent research also provides empirical evidence that terrorist groups appear even more frequently in democracies than in non-democratic regimes.⁵⁶ Whereas evidence of combating terrorism in Europe and Japan in the 1960s to 1980s suggests that fully established liberal democracies are impressively successful in containing political extremism, and in limiting its political damage,⁵⁷ terrorism in young, not yet firmly consolidated democracies can be pivotal in undermining the political regime by aggravating strains and weakening fault lines.⁵⁸ In several countries in the past, both terrorist violence and state repression lead two basic purposes of the state unfulfilled: security and integration. Citizen confidence declined as a consequence, whereas democratic instability increased, as Jennifer Holmes’s study on terrorism and democratic stability in Uruguay, Peru, and Spain suggests.⁵⁹

Thailand, whose current democratic polity is the result of a decades-long political struggle characterized by frequent alternation between authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes and whose latest transition from military regime to democracy took place in 1992, is a prime example of how the action-repression spiral of political terrorism and violence may undermine democracy. So far, the insurgency’s mode of armed struggle, which consists of a mix of terrorist and guerilla warfare methods, has been found highly effective in fulfilling its tactical goals.⁶⁰ Inter alia, the insurgents successfully publicized their cause, attracting attention from a broad audience both inside and outside Thailand; simultaneously, they imposed heavy losses in life and money on the Thai security forces and the local economy, particularly the tourism industry.⁶¹ Even more significant, the insurgency has also polarized the radicals on both sides and forced a governmental overreaction that serves to discredit it. In fact, the militarized approach by the Thai counter-insurgency authorities reveals a dramatic lack of profound understanding of the “psychology of violence” and the “tactics of calculated provocation”⁶² employed by the insurgents.

Counter-insurgency as practiced by the security force is not only counterproductive in dealing with the insurgency but it may also become a menace for democracy. At first sight, Muslim insurgency in the South does not appear to be having any noticeable impact on the stability of Thai democracy. In spite of initial wariness about disruptive actions from Muslim insurgents, the February 2005 general election proceeded without major incidents, particularly in the South, where voter turn-out was high.⁶³ The election brought a convincing victory for Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his *Thai Rak Thai* party (TRT), which gained seventy-five percent of the seats in the House of Representatives.⁶⁴

Upon closer inspection, however, the response of the government to the separatists’ threat contributes to the pronounced authoritarian shift in the character of Thai politics since the advent of the Thaksin government in 2001.⁶⁵ Government responses and counter-insurgency measures have not only claimed further lives and endangered the rights and freedoms of Malay-Muslims in the affected provinces, but the sudden reemergence of separatist activities in the South since 2004 may also provide a useful

foil to roll back many of the civil society and human rights initiatives introduced in Thai politics throughout the 1990s. With the dramatic increase in violence, the military and the security organizations have already regained a degree of legitimacy. Thai security forces, increasingly able to act with impunity, are engaged on a large scale in intimidation of citizens in the South. The steady erosion of human rights standards is accompanied by further restrictions on the freedom of press and excessive use of force by police against critics of Thaksin's policies.⁶⁶

Simultaneously, the expanding insurgency is also paralleled by a growing conflict in the government's security staff. The course of developments in the South has already made many ranking Thai military officials feel uneasy about the government policies, including promotion and key placement in the armed forces of those with family or TRT ties ahead of those whose turn at promotion was rightly due. Should the chasm between Thaksin and the veteran military officials continue to widen, this could have negative consequences for democratic stability.

Furthermore, the February 2005 general election has dramatically deepened the political divide between the southern region and the rest of the country. In the February poll, TRT lost all but one seat in the South it had controlled after the "Wada faction" of Deputy Prime Minister Wan Huamad Noor Matha from the New Aspiration Party had merged with TRT in 2001 and four Democrat MPs from the South defected to TRT in August 2004. The sharp drop in support for TRT and related party factions in the Muslim-dominated southern provinces indicate that a number of Malay voters in Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala became disillusioned with the Thaksin government and decided to cast a protest vote against it. That allowed the Democratic Party, despite losing the election, to strengthen its already powerful position in the South, which in turn deepens Thailand's political divide between the South and the rest.

Given the overwhelming support TRT and Thaksin gained from the majority of Thai voters, electoral incentives for a change in the government's heavy-handed counter-insurgency policy in the South towards non-military measures are weak. Indeed, recent suggestions such as the Prime Minister's ill-advised proposal to classify villages in Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala into different zones based on past records of violence and cooperation with authorities, which would have determined the amount of financial aid given by the government⁶⁷ and the enacting of a new security decree that allows for protection of members of the security forces from legal action when following orders and simultaneously gives the Prime Minister sweeping powers,⁶⁸ suggest that, under the camouflage of "fighting the unrest in the South," the Thaksin government may manipulate the mood of imminent uncertainty among the public to its own advantage.⁶⁹

Furthermore, as analysts point out, with TRT in firm control of the parliament, there is little that other parties can do to counterbalance TRT, even if all other parties unite in opposition.⁷⁰ Considering the Prime Minister's ambiguous record and policies of the past four years, the opposition's inability to control the government and the Prime Minister's disposition to exclude other political and social forces from public decision-making, fighting the insurgency may provide the necessary legitimacy for fortifying and institutionalizing his own political power, even at the expense of the liberal democratic substance of Thailand's polity.

Conclusions

Historically speaking, ethno-religious conflict in Thailand's southernmost provinces always included both periods of violent conflict and peaceful coexistence. However,

the Muslim minority only rebelled when the Muslims perceived their cultural identity as threatened by the Bangkok-based authorities. While several contentious religious, cultural, economic, and political issues lie at the root of the present day violence, this analysis has identified how the presence of socioeconomic and historical issues as well as more recent factors and developments changed the “enabling environment” for ethnic insurgents in south Thailand. This development promotes the transformation of an old, low-intensity conflict into a highly intense and increasingly violent conflict. This process of environmental change is crucial for the resurgence of Thai Muslim separatism.

Without a doubt, the grievances of Thai Muslims are local in nature. As in most other places in Southeast Asia,⁷¹ insurgency is ethnic-based domestic violence. A distinct connection with terrorist networks in the region or international networks of Islamist terror has not yet been demonstrated. Whereas the insurgency before 2001, however, has never been a serious match for the Thai government, government authorities and security forces face today new activities and a massive recruitment drive, and insurgents seem to be better organized and more effective than in the past.

A crucial difficulty in combating Muslim insurgency in the South is to convince the moderates that the internal dynamics of counter-insurgency will not put civil rights, the democratic process, or cultural rights at risk. Thailand’s own experience with the communist insurgency in the 1970s and early 1980s demonstrates that successful counter-insurgency is to a large extent economic and political, whereas military solutions are secondary at best. Furthermore, as many scholars warn, “the commitment to human rights needs to be at the forefront of any country’s counter-terrorist strategy.”⁷² A government that uses the same means and modes of violence as political extremists runs the risk of losing the struggle for moral authority and political legitimacy. A continuing tit-for-tat exchange that tends to exacerbate the conflict and take it further away from the possibility of a peaceful settlement of differences, as currently employed by the Thai government, hence “is not only morally abhorrent but politically disastrous.”⁷³

The main issue of conflict resolution is, therefore, if the political authorities in Bangkok can develop a new counter-insurgency strategy that combines measures focusing on stabilizing the security situation with measures that redress the political, cultural, and economic root causes of the problem. The Thaksin government, however, emphasizes the military response to the separatist movement. Therefore in the short-term, the overall assessment is pessimistic. In view of the recent downward spiral of violence and counter-violence, more unrest must be expected in the near future.

The conflict is further complicated because of the threat that unrest in the South may provoke a serious crisis in Thailand’s young democracy and could become a trigger that would push already visible tendencies of faltering democratic consolidation and erosion of democratic standards. Concerning the political dynamics of the unrest in the South and Thai politics since the advent of the Thaksin government in 2001, democracy may become the true structural victim of insurgency and counter-insurgency in Thailand.

Notes

1. This article was written in November 2005, that is before the military coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on 19 September 2006.
2. *The Nation*, September 27, 2004.

3. The English rendering of the name “Patani” is based on Malay spelling, while “Pattani” is based on the Thai spelling. In this article, Pattani is used when it refers to the region after 1909.

4. Andrew D. Forbes, “Thailand’s Muslim Minorities: Assimilation, Secession, or Coexistence?,” *Asian Survey* 22 (1982): 1056–1073.

5. Cf. W. K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6. David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 1994).

7. Chidchanok Rahimmula, “Peace Resolution: A Case Study of Separatists and Terrorist Movement in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand,” in S. Yunato et al., eds., *Militant Islamic Movements in Indonesia and Southeast Asia* (Jakarta: FES and The RIDEP Institute, 2003), 267–283, here p. 269.

8. Andrew Tan, “The ‘New’ Terrorism: How Southeast Asia Can Counter It,” in Uwe Johannsen et al., eds., *September 11 & Political Freedom: Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2003), 86–116, here p. 109; David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, “Southeast Asia and the War Against Terrorism: The Rise of Islamism and the Challenge to the Surveillance State,” in Johannsen et al., eds., *September 11*, 142–176, here p. 150.

9. Although one may argue that democracy as a system of government was introduced to Thailand in June 1932, when the military overthrew the absolute monarchy, and established a constitutional regime, most scholars agree that politics before 1988 was controlled by the military and civilian bureaucracy. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that the institutional minima of democracy were sufficiently established. For a good overview on democratic development in Thailand, see Chai-Anan Samudavanija, “Thailand: A Stable Semidemocracy,” in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, second edition (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 323–368.

10. Rahimmula, “Peace Resolution” (see note 7 above), 275.

11. Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 80.

12. Angel M. Rabasa, “Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists,” *Adelphi Paper* 358 (2003): 55; Tan, “The ‘New’ Terrorism,” (see note 8 above) 109.

13. Prince of Songkhla University’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, *One Decade and a Year of Violence in the Southern Border: Mysteries of the Problem and Solution* (Pattani, 2004; in Thai). See also International Crisis Group, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, Asia Report No. 98, 18 May 2005, 16.

14. Amnesty International, *Thailand: Memorandum on Human Rights Concerns*, AI Index: ASA 39/013/2004 (October 2004), 5; *The Australian*, October 30, 2004.

15. *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 01, 2005.

16. *The Strait Times Interactive*, September 25, 2004.

17. *Ibid.*; *The Nation*, September 2, 2004; *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 1, 2005.

18. *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, August 1, 2004.

19. *Ibid.*

20. B. Raman, *Terrorism in Thailand: Tech & Tactics Savvy*, South Asia Analysis Group Paper No. 1321, April 2005, <http://www.saag.org/papers14/paper1321.html>

21. *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 1, 2005.

22. Cf. *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, December 1, 2003, 30–31; David Capie, “Trading the Tools of Terror: Armed Groups and Light Weapons Proliferation in Southeast Asia,” in Paul J. Smith, ed., *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability* (Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 188–211.

23. *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, November 1, 2004.

24. Mark Manyin et al., *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*. CRS Report for Congress, updated October 5, 2004 (Washington, D.C.), 22–23; Joseph Chinyong Liow, “The Security Situation in Southern Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Domestic and International Dimension,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 27, no. 6 (2004): 531–548, here p. 534; Kumar Ramikrishna, “Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Ideological and Political Dimensions,” *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2004), 54–62, here p. 55.

25. Anthony L. Smith, "Trouble in Thailand's Muslim South: Separatism, not Global Terrorism," *Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies*, Newsletter, vol. 3, no. 10 (2004): 3.
26. RAND Corporation, *Muslim Separatist Movements in the Philippines and Thailand*. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1344/MR1344.ch9.pdf> (accessed 11 August 2005).
27. Raman, *Terrorism in Thailand* (see note 20 above); see also International Crisis Group, *Southern Thailand* (see note 13 above).
28. Personal communication with Commissioner Surasee Kosolnavin, The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, Bangkok, September 18, 2005.
29. For multiple causes of ethnic violence, see Earl Conteh-Morgan, *Collective Political Violence: An Introduction to the Theories and Cases of Violent Conflict* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Raymond C. Taras and Rajat Ganguly, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*, 2nd edition (New York: Longman, 2002); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Fred W. Riggs, "Globalization, Ethnic Diversity, and Nationalism: The Challenge for Democracies," *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 581 (2002); James D. Fearon and David. D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97 (2003).
30. I borrow the term "enabling environment" from Kumar Ramakrishna, "Countering Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: The Need to Confront the Functional and Ideological 'Enabling Environment,'" in Smith, ed., *Terrorism and Violence* (see note 22 above), 145–169.
31. Michael Hechter, *The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
32. Brown, *The State* (see note 6 above), 158–205.
33. Malcom Falkus, "Income Inequality and Uncertain Democracy in Thailand," in Ryoshin Miniemi et. al, eds., *Growth, Distribution and Political Change: Asia and the Wider World* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1999), 123.
34. Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Social Consequences of Economic Restructuring in Thailand," in ESCAP, ed., *Social Costs of Economic Restructuring in Asia and the Pacific*, Development Papers No. 15 (Bangkok: ESCAP, 1992), 533–567.
35. Calculations by the author based on statistics taken from UNDP, *Thailand* (2003) and Malcom Falkus, "Income Inequality and Uncertain Democracy in Thailand," in Ryoshin Miniemi (see note 33 above), ultimately on official data.
36. Preeda Prapertchob, "Islam and Civil Society in Thailand: The Role of NGOs," in Mitsuo Nakamura et. al, eds., *Islam & Civil Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2001), 105–106.
37. Duncan McCargo, *Southern Thai Politics: A Preliminary Overview*, Leeds School of Politics and International Studies Working Paper, <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/polis/research/pdf/wp3mccargo.pdf>, downloaded November 30, 2004.
38. Abuza, *Militant Islam* (see note 11 above), 1.
39. Suzaina Kadir, "Mapping Muslim Politics in Southeast Asia after September 11," *The Pacific Review*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2004).
40. Cf. Vincent J. H. Houben, "Southeast Asia and Islam," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 534 (2000): 149–170; Barry Desker, "Islam in Southeast Asia: The Challenge of Radical Interpretation," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 16 (2003): 415–428.
41. Numbers are taken from Kavi Chongkittavorn, "Thailand: International Terrorism and the Muslim South," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2004), 267–277.
42. *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 1, 2004 and November 1, 2004.
43. As violence increased, government pressure resulted in 214 *ponohs*, with an enrolment between 7,000 and 10,000 students, signing up with the Ministry of Education over the year. An estimated 50 other schools, however, have yet to comply (*The Nation*, October 7, 2004).
44. International Crisis Group, *Southern Thailand* (see note 13 above), 32.
45. Cf. Allen Hicken, "From Phitsanulok to Parliament: Multiple Parties in Pre-1997 Thailand," in Michael H. Nelson, ed., *Thailand's New Politics: KPI Yearbook 2001* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2002), 145–176.
46. Abuza, *Militant Islam*, (see note 11 above) 19, 236.
47. Rahimmulla, "Peace Resolution," (see note 7 above) 274; Syed Serajul Islam, "Ethno-Religious Violence and Political Conflict in Southern Thailand: Climax in the Early Twenty-First

Century,” in Aurel Croissant, Sascha Kneip, and Beate Martin, eds., *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2006), 37–70.

48. In 2004 alone, the portfolio was headed by three different ministers; see *The Nation*, October 7, 2004.

49. *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 1, 2004; *Bangkok Post*, September 29, 2004.

50. Cf. Kavi, “Thailand” (see note 41 above).

51. *The Nation*, January 5, 2004; *Bangkok Post*, August 1, 2004.

52. Responding to the deepening drug problem in Thai society, the government declared a “war on drugs” in February 2003. As a key smuggling route, Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala were among the provinces most heavily affected by the police operations. Later, the government reported that 2,245 people were killed during the three-month-long campaign; Amnesty International, *Thailand* (see note 14 above), 1; Human Rights Watch, *Thailand. Not Enough Graves: The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Violations of Human Rights*, Human Rights Watch report, vol. 16, no. 8, 2004.

53. Cf. Marco Buente, “Gewalt in Thailand Sueden. Ursachen und Wege zur Konfliktlösung,” *Suedostasien Aktuell*, no. 5 (2004): 447–465.

54. John Keane, *Violence and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

55. William Crotty, “Democratization and Political Terrorism,” in William Crotty, ed., *Democratic Development and Political Terrorism: The Global Perspective* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005), 3–16, here 8–9.

56. Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, “Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1994): 426.

57. Yehezkel Dror, “Challenge to the Democratic Capacity to Govern,” in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism, Legitimacy, and Power: The Consequences of Political Violence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 65–91, here 70–71.

58. Alberto Abadie, “Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism,” Harvard University and NBER, October 2004 (unpublished manuscript), 1; David C. Rapoport and Leonard Weinberg, “Introduction,” in Rapoport and Weinberg, eds., *The Democratic Experience and Political Violence* (London: Routledge 2000), 2–3.

59. Jennifer Holmes, *Terrorism and Democratic Stability* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2001).

60. A useful characterization of terrorism and guerilla warfare as modes of violent struggle is provided by Alex P. Schmid, “Frameworks for Conceptualizing Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2004): 197–225.

61. *The Nation*, February 23, 2005.

62. Ernest Evans, “The Mind of a Terrorist: How Terrorists See Strategy and Morality,” *World Affairs*, vol. 167, no. 4, 2005: 175–179, here p. 176.

63. *Bangkok Post*, February 20, 2005.

64. Cf. Aurel Croissant and Daniel Pojar Jr., “Quo Vadis Thailand? Thai Politics After the 2005 Parliamentary Elections,” *Strategic Insight*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2005, <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Jun/croissantJun05.asp>

65. See Duncan McCargo, “Democracy Under Stress in Thaksin’s Thailand,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2002); Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2005); Pongsudhirak Thitinan, “Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism,” *Southeast Asian Affairs 2003* (Singapore, ISEAS, 2003), 278–282; Panaspornprasit Chookiat, “Thailand: Politicized Thaksinization,” *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2004), 257–266.

66. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2005*, Country Summary: Thailand, January 2005, <http://hrw.org/wr2k5/pdf/thaila.pdf>.

67. Red villages would have received no development funds, villages zoned yellow some funding, and villages which were free of violence (green zones), would have received full financial aid. As a result of almost unanimous public criticism, the government finally gave up the idea.

68. Thailand Law Forum, “New Security Bill in Progress,” June 20, 2005, <http://www.thailawforum.com/news.html>; *The Nation*, May 12, 2005.

69. David Wright-Neville, “Losing the Democratic Moment? Southeast Asia and the War on Terror,” *Asia Research Centre Working Paper* No. 110, Perth: Murdoch University, October 2004, 3.

70. Paul Chambers, "Thailand's 2005 General Election," in Aurel Croissant and Beate Martin, eds., *Between Crisis and Consolidation: Elections and Democracy in Five Nations in Southeast Asia* (Münster: LitVerlag, 2005), 319.

71. Sheldon W. Simon, "Southeast Asia and the US War on Terrorism," *NBR Analysis* 13, no. 4 (June 2002): 37.

72. Abuza, *Militant Islam* (see note 11 above), 258.

73. Martha Crenshaw, "Introduction: Reflections on the Effects of Terrorism," in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism, Legitimacy, and Power. The Consequences of Political Violence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 1–38, here p. 33; see also Russell L. Ackoof and Johan P. Strümpfer, "Terrorism: A Systematic View," *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, vol. 20 (2003): 289.

Postscript

On 19 September 2006, Army units led by Army Commander-in-Chief Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratklin successfully staged a coup d'état against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. As of October 2006, Thailand is effectively governed by a military junta, styling itself the Council for Democratic Reform. Although the inability of the government to deal effectively with the unrest in the South was not the main reason for the power takeover it certainly contributed to the downfall of the government by alienating a segment of the military from the civilian leadership. In recent months, General Sonthi, who in 2005 had been given special executive powers to deal with the trouble in the South, had clashed several times with Thaksin over the Prime Minister's hard-fisted approach in the South.

Though the coup certainly is a setback for democracy in Thailand, it may eventually open a window of opportunity for conflict resolution. Coup leader General Sonthi is a Muslim and seems to have a deeper understanding of the situation. While it is unlikely that daily violence will stop soon, immediately after the coup, leaders of the southern insurgency, including the BRN Coordinate, made contact for a political dialogue, something the army chief had suggested to the Thaksin government for months. General Sonthi also suggested the possibility of reviving the dissolved SBPAC. This may reduce interagency rivalries and overlapping division of labour which continue to be the hallmark of the government's handling of the insurgency.