Thailand's Unknown War: Malay-Muslim Separatism, Political Opportunities and the Dynamics of Violent Resistance

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Abstract

This paper analyses the violent conflict between Malay-Muslim separatists and Thai security forces between 1959 and 2008 by examining contemporary developments of the Malay-Muslim separatist movement and corresponding government policies aimed at suppressing Malay resistance. The detailed analysis of violent resistance and counter-resistance strategies proves that political opportunities and constraints have a significant effect on violent resistance. This article argues that phases of "hard" policy on the south have the opposite intended effect, i.e. a mobilizing effect, on violent resistance, despite the relative openness of the Thai political system and political participation of Malay-Muslims in that system. Violence has decreased only when resistance groups have conscientiously changed strategies and/or resources have been limited, particularly during phases of "soft" government policy. Implications of these findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Introduction

For well over fifty years, Thailand's southernmost region has been the site of an armed separatist conflict perpetuated by members of the Malay-Muslim minority. Over the past decade in particular, this conflict has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis, the declaration of martial law in the region, the suspension of civil rights for Malay-Muslims, and human rights abuses as documented by international watchdog groups.[1] In addition, the Thai government's handling of this crisis has increased international political tensions between Thailand and many Muslim-majority states, both in Southeast Asia and in the Middle East, which claim that Malay-Muslims suffer from discriminatory state policies,

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[1] For example, see Human Rights Watch 2007 for a comprehensive analysis of human rights abuses on both sides.

cultural repression and police/military brutality. Since 2004, well over 3,500 combatants and civilians have been killed, and there continues to be a security presence of approximately 40,000 Thai army soldiers and policemen occupying the southernmost region. Because of the recent developments in Thai politics beginning in 2006, including massive protests against the government in Bangkok[2] and the constant turnover of elected officials, political efforts — at least, public efforts — to address the conflict and work towards a peaceful resolution have been almost nonexistent.

While there has been some focus in existing literature on the historical, economic, and political contexts of this conflict, there is a notable paucity of social science scholarship analyzing Malay-Muslim separatism as a social movement, particularly regarding the roles that political opportunitie*s* have played in the ever-evolving dynamics of resistance.[3] Therefore, this article will analyze the relationship between political opportunities (and conversely, political constraints) and the timing, form, and outcomes of Malay-Muslim resistance. As social movement theorist Mayer Zald contends, "we need to recognize both the conditions under which movements generally rise and decline, and the ways in which movements maximize their influence within a given context."[4] Therefore, in exploring the relationship between government policy and movement activity, this paper aims to specify the role of political opportunities and constraints on resistance action.

It has been emphasized in the literature that analyses need to move beyond "root causes" of the Malay-Muslim conflict.[5] While it is certainly preferable to avoid reiterating laundry lists of grievances or historical events that have been explored elsewhere, it is also important to note that the analysis of root causes is far from complete. Because Malay-Muslims have been marginalized in the literature on Thailand, many sources detailing key events and developments of Malay-Muslim resistance disagree on important facts, such as when resistance groups where formed and by whom, which groups are still active, and whether or not certain groups engage in violent activity. Another reason to avoid assumptions about root causes regards policy implications. For example, when former Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra (2001-06) identified poverty as the root

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[2] For more information on the protests in Bangkok by the People's Alliance for Democracy, see *BBC News* 2 December 2008.

[3] Zald 1996, 283, defines a social movement as a "sustained and self-conscious challenge to authorities or cultural codes by a field of actors (organizations and advocacy networks), some of whom employ extra-institutional means of influence," and it is under this definition that the Malay-Muslim resistance movement may be categorized as a social movement.

[4] Zald 1996, 277.

[5] Jitpriomsri and Sobhonvasu 2006.

cause of Malay-Muslim resistance, the government began to fund new projects aimed at increasing economic opportunities and financing in the region.[6] However, the prioritization of an economic root cause over all others had little to no overt effect on the high level of violence that resistance groups managed to sustain during this period; in addition, this economic development possibly aggravated southern tensions vis-à-vis the expansion of Thai infrastructure and financial influence within Malay territory.[7] This example highlights the need to look at policy responses, particularly how "hard" policies (including the implementation of a military "solution"), "soft" policies (including offers of amnesty, negotiations, and the establishment of mediating structures[8]) or a combination of the two have affected violent resistance.

This research relies on primary and secondary sources, particularly news articles from Thai and other media outlets, reports by international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group, and secondary historical, political and sociological analyses. Attempts to locate data on casualties, troop levels and other pertinent statistical information in Thai or English were unsuccessful, though this is to be expected in light of the Thai government's lack of transparency. However, based on the sources available to the author at this time, the application of social movement theory — particularly that of "political opportunities" as defined by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) — to this conflict provides useful and much needed insight into the trajectory of Malay-Muslim resistance from 1959 until 2008.

Political Opportunities and Formations of Resistance Groups

The existence of grievances by any given ethnic or religious group do not necessarily lead to collective mobilization; rebellion and violence are not "natural" or inevitable consequences of minority discontent, Muslim or otherwise.[9] However, the existence of grievances provides a necessary foundation for collective action. Several superb publications have focused on grievances, including Che Man (1990) on the colonization of Malay-Muslim territory by the Thai nation-state, Liow (2005) on the suppression of Islamic "pondok" school system, and Jitpiromsri and Sobhonvasu (2006) on economic

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[6] Ibid.

[7] See Human Rights Watch 2007, Jitpiromsri and Sobhonvasu 2006, and McCargo 2006 for casualty estimates since 2001. There is no official data on this, however, from the Thai government.

[8] Specific examples of mediating structures, or institutions that open a line of communication between local and national leaders and provide a forum for local citizens to express grievances, will be detailed in the following section.

[9] See Schwedler 2001 for an excellent discussion of Muslim identity and mobilization.

disparities between the periphery and the center. As highlighted by all of the aforementioned researchers, such grievances have created a lasting situation in which "the Muslims have been under constant pressure from different government integration policies… [but have also become] isolated from the mainstream of Thai social mobility and… underprivileged minorities."[10]

However, despite the extensive history of discrimination against and repression of Malay-Muslims by the Thai state since the formal annexation of their territory in 1902, Malays have not been the only minorities to face poverty, military confrontation and the threat of cultural assimilation. They have, however, been the only minority group to sustain armed resistance against the Thai state. Therefore, the application of political opportunity theory should account for, at least in part, variation in resistance action. While the term "political opportunity" — and equally as important, "political constraint" — should be used with care so as not to be overused or applied to any and all phenomena, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996a) posit that there is some consensus in what constitutes political opportunity. These dimensions include the relative openness or closure of the institutional political system; the stability or instability of a broad set of elite alignments that comprise or support a given party; the presence or absence of elite allies; and the state capacity and propensity for repression. Movements may exploit emerging system weaknesses, but may also "arise in the context of *contracting* political opportunities," thus making opportunities for themselves even while experiencing constraint and threat.[11]

Questions have been raised in recent literature on the conflict regarding the timing and form of collective action. For example, Jitpriomsri and Sobhonvasu remark,

> In 2004, violent incidents increased twenty-seven fold compared with the average rate of similar incidents during the previous decade. If identity politics—a consciousness of Patani's[12] glorious ancient kingdom, or the sense of Malay ethnic identity—are the main reasons behind the operations, the question remains: Why has violence surged now, and not earlier?[13]

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[10] Che Man 1990, 42.

[11] McAdam 1996b, 32; italics added for emphasis.

[12] *Patani* is the name of the Malay-Muslim kingdom that fought against the Siamese kingdom for autonomy before 1902; this is distinguished from *Pattani*, which is a modern province in the south. *Patani* is widely referenced by Malay-Muslims as the historical precedent for a new state.

[13] Jitpriomsri and Sobhonvasu 2006, 115.

Looking at grievances based in a collective Malay-Muslim understanding of history, or the development of their cultural identity as one that stands inherently opposed to Thai-Buddhism, may explain Malay-Muslim resistance to some degree. However, it does not account for *violent* resistance per se. While this discussion does not assume that policies by the Thai government are the *only* factors influencing the Malay-Muslim resistance movements, government policies do directly affect political constraints and opportunities, particularly because the Thai government is seen as the primary cause and target of resistance. Therefore, government policies and Malay armed resistance will be the focus of this discussion.

Dynamics of Contemporary Resistance

While this analysis begins generally around the year 1960, it should be noted that insurgents founded initiator resistance movements against Japanese occupation of Thailand in World War II. They did so expecting to be rewarded with irredentism[14] with the colony of Malaya, then under British control, where the majority of Malay-Muslims reside. One of Thailand's most notorious dictators, General Phibun,[15] brutally repressed the rebel groups and outlawed many Malay-Muslim cultural practices. During this time, Malay-Muslims were treated as cultural outlaws within the parameters of strict Thai-Buddhist nationalism. Many of the former fighters for irredentism, their appeals ignored by the British and the United Nations, organized new resistance organizations with the goal of establishing an independent Malay-Muslim state. Two separatist groups emerged during this time: the BNPP[16] was established in 1959 as an armed resistance movement for independence; the BRN[17], established in 1960, was less interested in armed warfare than in strengthening Malay-Muslim political leadership through local institutions, such as mosques and schools, or "pondoks." Later on, the PULO[18] emerged in 1968 with a plan to found a secular Malay state, rather than one with an Islamic blueprint as proposed by the BNPP

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[14] Irredentism is the desire for annexation of territories administered by another state on the grounds of common ethnicity or prior possession, real or perceived.

[15] Phibun (Thai officials are referred to in practice and in scholarship by their first names) also mandated that a Thai family name be necessary to obtain formal employment, and criminalized traditional Malay-Muslim clothing, language, and even some religious festivals. Gilquin (2005) also writes that security forces often forced Muslims to prostrate before Buddhist objects, which was not just a tactic of intimidation and humiliation, but also a forced worshiping of idols.

[16] BNPP stands for the *Barisan National Pembebasan Patani*.

[17] BRN stands for the *Barisan National of Patani*.

[18] PULO stands for the *Patani United Liberation Organization*; the name is inspired by and pays tribute to the Palestinian Liberation Organization, PLO.

and the BRN. The first major phase of insurgent activity, beginning around 1968 and peaking between 1970 and 1975, was met with a seven-year military campaign by the Thai state. This resulted in hundreds of armed clashes and insurgents killed, over 1,200 arrested, about 250 insurgent camps infiltrated, and thousands of weapons confiscated.[19] Despite the aggressive campaign, however, separatist organizations continued to operate and to escalate the conflict further; increased recruitment into armed resistance factions occurred during this period of military occupation. It has also been postulated that funds were channeled to resistance groups from Libya and extended pro-Patani student organizations in the Middle East, which may have increased the means and the legitimacy of the armed conflict.

In 1973, Thailand began a three-year democratic transition, though this period is also infamous for its civil unrest and harsh military backlash against student demonstrators in Bangkok. However, by 1975 Freedom House ratings showed improvements in both political freedom and civil liberties in Thailand.[20] However, the military campaign continued in the south. After five Malay-Muslim youths were allegedly killed by Thai soldiers in December of 1975, thousands demonstrated around the Patani Central Mosque for over one month, leading to clashes with security forces, 25 killed and dozens more wounded. It is possible that this demonstration, the largest of its kind until that time, was influenced by the belief that the new democratic government would respond to public protest. However, the frustrations of the Malay-Muslim populace went unaddressed by the Thai government, which was overwhelmed with its own elite fragmentation and general instability. Che Man (1990) states that separatist leaders interpreted the 1975 public revolt as *carte blanche* popular approval for their separatist cause. Therefore, "they decided not to devote their relatively weak resources to domestic mobilization," and instead focused on gaining international support and recognition.[21] Therefore, violent action decreased to a low but ever-present level after 1975.

The 1980s saw a new direction in the political treatment of the southern issue, though it should be stressed that violence on both sides continued intermittently throughout the next twenty years. In an effort to take a different approach to the conflict, the new Thai army general assigned to the southern conflict, Chavlit, instituted an alternative military strategy, including an amnesty agreement for Malay insurgents. During this time, an estimated 450 separatists accepted the

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[19] Che Man 1990, 101.

[20] Freedom House rates Thailand as "Not Free" in 1973 and "Partially Free" in 1975; *www.freedomhouse.org*.

[21] Ibid.

terms of this agreement. This shifting climate, marked by a more delicate handling of the southern issue and fragmentation within some resistance organizations, provided an opening for many low-status militants to lay down their arms. This coincided with an organizational restructuring of the BRN, which lost some mobilizing momentum during this transition after splitting into several factions under the heading, BRN-Coordinate (BRN-C).[22]

General Prem Tinsulanond also instituted a number of other notable reforms in the south during his tenure as Prime Minister (1980-88). He reversed the assimilationist policies of previous administrations by promoting economic development and—for the first time—cultural diversity. [23] Prem (originally from the southern Songkla province himself, with personal and political ties to the region) also established mediating structures with long-term goals. This initiative created the Southern Border Provincial Administration Committee (SBPAC), which gave local voices a forum to express their grievances, and provided opportunities for collaboration between local elites and federal politicos. Prem also created a special unit of security called the Civilian-Police-Military Task Force 43 (CPM 43), which became a "beacon for ideas of administrative justice, symbolizing the Thai state's sincerity and goodwill."[24] The means for Malay-Muslim leaders to form parties and participate in elections was promoted more than ever before by the national government, and Malay-Muslims increased their participation in two national political parties, the Democratic (Prem's party) and New Aspiration parties. Militants, undermined at this time by such policies, formed an umbrella organization, "Bersatu," with the intention of unifying and coordinating goals, actions and resources between the BRN-C, PULO and others.

Softer policies continued into the beginning of the next decade, including extensions of amnesty. During this time, the armed resistance factions suffered from a lack of sustainable revenue, internally and abroad, and the lull in violent activity continued. Signs of preliminary peace agreements emerged when BRN-C

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[22] Human Rights Watch claims that the BRN-C has dominated violent action since 2001. The armed wing of the BRN-C, the Patani Freedom Fighters (*Pejuang Kemerkdekaan Pantani*) supposedly also has links with the RKK (*Runda Kumpulan Kecil*), a smaller group often cited in the media as responsible for sabotaging infrastructure and murdering civilians. Because neither group claims responsibility for their actions, it is difficult to judge the BRC-C's or the RKK's influence, mobilizing momentum or disruptive power.

[23] There has never been an official discourse on multinationalism in Thailand, with assimilation viewed as a necessary "solution" to the "problem" of minorities. As Keyes (1987) states, "Buddhism was designated as one of the three pillars of Thai nationalism—the others being the Thai nation or people and the monarchy"; the traditions of Malay-Muslims and other indigenous minorities "became suspect both for perpetuating 'superstitions' and for contributing to a sense of regional or ethnic distinctiveness" (59).

[24] McCargo 2006, 44.

signed an accord with the military in 1992, pledging to change their primary goal from independence to autonomy in exchange for a number of provisions. However, opportunities for peace agreements were greatly constrained by the constant turnover of the Thai political leadership in the following months. The peace accord was declared null and void shortly thereafter because of a leadership change; clearly, the government lacked the ability and (and later, the will) to implement terms of compromise. The PULO and BRN-C responded by coordinating attacks, some on civilian targets. In 1997, Thailand experienced severe political and economic instability, including a massive financial crisis; again, amnesty was offered, and approximately 50 insurgents surrendered. While this chaotic time in Bangkok may have created a brief opening for resistance factions to increase violence, the government was undoubtedly too overwhelmed to allocate adequate attention or resources to the southern issue. In either case, the BRN-C and PULO were forced to reorganize due to their own elite cleavages and lack of resources, and little progress was made. For the remainder of the 1990s into the turn of the millennium, the frequency of violent incidents remained generally steady but relatively low.[25]

The structures that Prem had put in place as part of a soft policy in the south, with generally effective and long-term preventative goals, were under-appreciated until Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006) dismantled them during his tumultuous tenure as Prime Minster, upsetting a "carefully negotiated social contract… that had ensured relative peace for two decades."[26] Thaksin broke up Prem's power network, which managed the southern resistance issue through "tightly managed personal networks,"[27] and replaced Prem's army-based network with his own police-based network.[28] He also abolished the SPBAC and CPM 43 in 2002. Thaksin claimed that the southern conflict was nothing more than a low-intensity spurt of common banditry, which denied not just the resistance as a longstanding social movement, but its legacy as a formidable organized force with coordinated leadership and the ability to withstand, adapt and disrupt.

In addition, Thaksin's "War on Drugs" had particularly harsh consequences in the south. This hard-line policy gave the police tacit approval "to target selected locals for extrajudicial execution" under the guise of a drug war, resulting in extrajudicial arrests and murders, even of separatist informers.[29] For example, in October of 2003 in the Narathiwat province, three men disappeared who had been former separatists but were protected under the 1981 amnesty. More than twenty

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[25] See Jitpriomsri and Sobhonvasu 2006 for a statistical overview.
[26] McCargo 2006, 39.
[27] Ibid., 43.
[28] The longstanding rivalry between the two factions is discussed by McCargo 2006.
[29] Ibid., 53.

others disappeared between 2002 and 2003. By March of 2005, locals in Narathiwat complained that at least fifty people had disappeared under suspicious circumstances. The abrupt insertion of the Bangkok-based police force into the southern region exacerbated ethno-religious tensions, as they were unwilling to express sensitivity to local customs and religious etiquette. Due to the reasons stated above, between 2001 and 2003, Thaksin and his allies created ripe conditions for an increase in separatist violence.

The year 2004 saw a series of coordinated attacks by insurgent groups, popular protests, and a sharp rise in causalities. According to one source, the number of incidences jumped from 84 in 2003 to 1,843 in just one year.[30] In January of 2004, a series of coordinated attacks on an army depot in Narathiwat resulted in one or more insurgent groups obtaining hundreds of weapons and killing several Thai officers; 20 government schools were also burned. This resulted in Thaksin's declaration of martial law, which gave the police and military more power to treat the populace harshly without regard for civil rights. Another major incident took place at the Kru-Ze mosque, in which the army stormed the building, killing thirty-two men who had barricaded themselves inside. As Liow (2005) comments, "The sight of bloodstained floors and holy books in the … Mosque no doubt resonated with the Muslim population in the south and further fed resentment."[31] In addition, a number of extrajudicial killings were recorded that year, including an incident at Saba Yoi market, in which fifteen suspected insurgents were found with gunshot wounds in the back of the head. Similar reports and rumors have circulated frequently since then in the Thai media.

In October of 2004, the infamous Tak Bai incident occurred, in which protests outside of a police station in Narathiwat resulted in the shooting of several protestors and the arrests of over a thousand men. The stacking of bound prisoners in trucks led to the fatal suffocation of seventy-eight Malay-Muslim protestors during their transport to a military prison. This incident attracted strong criticism from neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia and international media attention. In the aftermath of Tak Bai, several prominent Muslims sent a request to King Bhumibol asking him to assist with the situation; the King himself had already warned Thaksin twice in 2004 to handle the southern conflict with care. Thaksin generally disregarded the King's requests, and viewed his landslide re-election in 2005 as a mandate to continue his hawkish approaches.

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[30] Jitpiromsri and Sobhonvasu 2006.

[31] Liow 2005, 38. In addition, the repair of this mosque by Thai-Buddhist soldiers and the subsequent opening of this sacred space for tourism were regarding as deeply offensive to many interviewed locals (see Tan-Mullins 2006, 147 and Satha-Anand 2005).

After receiving increased public criticism for his handling of the south, particularly from Prem, Thaksin created a National Reconciliation Council, but limited its power and ability to produce reports that might criticize his policies. As McCargo states, "national-level tensions between the competing networks of Thaksin and the palace [allied with Prem] provided a context and background for the renewed southern violence, creating a space in which other forces could emerge and operate."[32]

It was reported by several media sources in late 2006 that insurgent representatives from five different groups had met in secret over the past year with top Thai security officials in Langkawi, Malaysia, to develop a peace plan.[33] This conference, mediated by former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, proposed to re-establish the SBPAC, promote economic development in the region, recognize Malay-Muslims as a separate ethnic entity, and establish Patani-Malay as the official language of the region. Other stipulations called for the establishment of an independent tribunal to hold army officers accountable for human rights violations and to install another amnesty plan. However, these talks were indefinitely stalled over provisions of accountability and amnesty, and the government at the time denied any involvement with such talks. Not surprisingly, the momentum of violence was sustained at peaked levels.

Despite the bloodless coup that overthrew Thaksin in September of 2006, violence continued with assassinations and the targeting of any person or structure perceived as being aligned with the state. This has included the beheadings of Buddhist monks, the murdering of teachers, and the bombings of local institutions. It appeared that Thaksin's approaches in the south, at the very least, reinvigorated a full-force renewal of violence by the militant factions of the PULO, BRN-C and BRN, accompanied by a surge in terrorist tactics with long-term implications and sustainability. The interim Prime Minister, Surayud Chulanont, attempted to reverse the government's approach to the south by making an unprecedented public apology over the handling of the Tak Bai incident and dismissing charges against any remaining detainees. While the media reported that many families of the Tak Bai victims and Muslim leaders felt that the apology was genuine, the violence continued unabated.[34] Surayud did institute some parts of the Langkawi plan, such as the reopening of the SBPAC; however, there has been no further discussion regarding an amnesty or provisions for accountability.

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[32] McCargo 2006, 68.
[33] Bukhari 2006.
[34] *The Nation*, November 3, 2006.

With the restoration of the democratic process, the People's Power Party (PPP), closely allied with Thaksin's banned Thai Rak Thai party, won the majority of seats in the August, 2007 election, and appointed Samak Sundaravej as the Prime Minister in January, 2008. Debates about how to handle the southern issue created controversy and became enveloped in the new government's struggle to assert its authority. Samak made controversial public statements about the conflict, claiming that Malay-Muslim grievances over "injustice will never bring an end to the story. We have to say [that] the [injustice] issue is over, period." This tone reiterated Thaksin's denial of legitimate Malay grievances. It was also reported that Samak "expected 'the wound to be healed in three or four years'" without citing reasons as to why or how the conflict would be resolved without addressing issues of injustice.[35]

It was reported that Interior Minister Chalerm Yubamrung proposed a public hearing on a proposal to give the southernmost provinces a form of autonomy, but Samak distanced himself from the idea, stating that "it is just Mr. Chalerm's idea… He should not talk about it in public."[36] It was stated in other reports while some form of autonomy would be considered, the issue of full independence was being dropped once again.[37] Shortly thereafter, Chalerm was quoted in the media as having fully dropped the autonomy proposal for the south in order to avoid "creating disunity in the society," despite the obvious reality.[38] This prompted a rare response from PULO leader Lukman Lima, currently residing in exile in Sweden, who stated that "the worst-case scenario can still be avoided, but only if Mr. Samak and the military forces allow the people of Pattani to determine their own future… If, in a referendum sanctioned by Bangkok, Pattani chooses independence, there will be one less border in the world marked by endemic conflict."[39] However, such a referendum is unlikely to be approved by the current government, which is self-consciously avoiding "soft" policy.

Samak's PPP party was ousted after a series of controversial court rulings in September, 2008. The government has had three prime ministers since 2008 and March of 2009, and the ensuing disruptions have diverted attention away from the southern insurgency. The Thai government's current indecision and lack of a clear or alternative policy on the conflict has resulted in the continuation of Thaksin's hard policies, including martial law in the region and the presence of over 40,000 security personnel.

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[35] *Bangkok Post*, February 16, 2008.

[36] *Bangkok Post*, February 13, 2008.

[37] *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2008.

[38] *Bangkok Post*, February 15, 2008.

[39] *Al-Jazeera*, February 25, 2008. The term *Pattani* refers to the ancient Malay-Muslim kingdom of Patani, usually spelled in English with one "t".

Discussion

The fact that "insurgents can be expected to mobilize in response to and in a manner consistent with the very specific changes that grant them more leverage" allows for the examination of violent resistance in light of government policies.[40] While all of the motivating factors contributing to insurgent violence cannot be accounted for, an analysis of political opportunities and resistance action is an important and essential step. As the discussion of contemporary dynamics has shown, hard policies since World War II, despite their potentially constraining effects on resistance action, have been consistently met with an *increase* in violent resistance. The Thai government's policies and corresponding levels of Malay-Muslim violent resistance are documented in Figure 1. The symbols (+), (++) and (-) are used to signify periods of sustained violence, increased violence, or decreased violence (respectively) by Malay-Muslim separatist groups collectively.

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[40] McAdam McCarthy and Zald 1996a, 10.

Figure 1: Violent Resistance and Policies, 1959-2008

Phase	Central Government Policy on Southern Resistance	Movement Action
1959-69	**Hard policy**: Military campaign cultural assimilation	BNPP, BRN, PULO groups formed for separatist state Guerrilla action initiated against military and infrastructure (+)
1970-75	**Hard policy**: 7-year full-scale war	Armed campaigns rises to highest level since inception of groups (++)
1975-79	**Hard policy**: Cont. military presence	Resources drained: seek international support & funds; Decreased violence but sustained at lower levels; Popular uprisings, police brutality sustain separatist cause (+)
1980-93	**Soft policy**: Economic develop. Cultural diversity Mediating structures Amnesty	Hundreds accept amnesty Malays increase participation in allied political parties New organization Bersatu formed to coordinate activities BRN-C agrees to peace accord with military Low levels of violence, sporadic (-)
1994-96	**Hard policy**: Peace accord declared void Gov't "cracks down"	Increased violence in direct response to broken peace agreement; groups take advantage of Thai gov't instability (+)
1997-00	**Hard & soft policy**: Amnesty offered Con't punitiveness	Few accept amnesty Violent activity remains frequent (+)
2001-06	**Hard policy**: War on Drugs Denial of grievances Mediating structures dismantled Martial law Protestors killed Economic develop.	Violence increases against increased military presence Infrastructure and development projects targeted Any person seen as allied with the Thai state is targeted (++)
2006-08	**Hard Policy** State of emergency Martial law retained SBPAC reopened	Violence sustained; terrorist tactics sustained (++)

Several correlations between hard and soft policy and levels of violent resistance action are noted here. The first is that levels of violent resistance decreased under two general circumstances. The first occurred when soft policies, including offers of amnesty, were implemented. It should also be noted that insurgents have taken advantage of amnesty each and every time it has been offered, though with varying degrees of success. The second condition has occurred when key resistance groups implemented a conscious change in strategy, usually in an effort to consolidate limited resources, and experienced fragmentation/reorganization.

On the other hand, *constraining forces,* including military intervention and a decrease in civil liberties, have had a *mobilizing effect* on violent resistance. In fact, *violence has increased and/or been sustained without exception during phases of hard policy*, suggesting that such constraints only revamp the perceived need and legitimacy among Malays for armed resistance. Clearly, all groups, despite their ideological differences, see violent recourse as a logical reaction during phases of increased military/policy occupation and decreased civil rights.

Anecdotal evidence of this process has been highlighted in some Thai news outlets with interviews of former insurgents. One such interviewee was a former PULO leader named Yusouf Longpi, who resided in retirement as of 2002.[41] He stated that a major motivating factor in his decision to take up arms for independence was the abusive nature of policing in his community and his persecution for non-violent resistance. Yusouf received a secular education abroad in Pakistan with a degree in public administration, and returned to teach in a local school with many of his peers. This new generation of educated Malays, he said, "were determined to make changes." He began his resistance work by organizing local demonstrations for improved civil rights, but his work was deemed "pro-separatist," even though his focus at that time was not about succession. Yusouf was put on a blacklist by the Thai government, an action he perceived as a death-sentence, as many other blacklisted colleagues disappeared during this time.[42] He responded by fleeing to Malaysia and then returned eventually to lead a PULO unit. Yusouf stated that only government positions were

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[41] *The Nation*, April 3, 2002.

[42] The admitted existence of blacklists was reported in *The Nation*, April 26, 2006, which reported that "General Sonthi went as far as saying that the way individuals came to be listed was questionable and personal grudges might be the underlying motive... Reports about the lists surfaced in mid-2004 with each security agency, including the military and police, believed to have prepared its own version. The people on these lists were said to be targets of manhunts or summary executions by rogue officials."

attacked under his command, and never civilians; he later surrendered under the amnesty program of 1991 during the post-Prem lull in violence. This story exemplifies how armed mobilization became a logical recourse after the suppression of peaceful protest; it also illustrates how an amnesty arrangement swayed the commitment to armed resistance during a period of improved relations between the central government and the Malay-Muslims.

Interestingly, the correlation between hard policies and violent resistance remains strong despite the status of democracy in the central government (whether that status be restored democracy, transitioning from dictatorship to democracy, or dictatorship outright). Therefore, the relative openness or closure of the federal institutional political system has had virtually no effect on levels of violent resistance. What does matter is the presence of *local* mediating structures, which provide an open and relatively trusted line of communication between central and peripheral powers. The existence of effective local mediating structures also appears to have a greater negative impact on violence than the increased participation of Malay-Muslims in elected governance. As McAdam, McCarthy and Zald argue,

> The *successful* use of 'proper channels' would seem to depend upon control over precisely the kinds of conventional political resources— money, votes, influence with prominent others—that movement groups tend to lack. Lacking such resources, movements may have little choice but to use their ability to disrupt public order as a negative inducement to bargaining.[43]

In addition to a lack of political resources, fragmentation between elected Malay-Muslims in government and armed resistance factions is likely for several reasons. These reasons include the perceived corruption of political structures, the ineffectiveness of local and federal factions to devise and implement solutions on the southern issue, and the inability for Malay-Muslims to work with separatists while operating within the Thai government. Though it has also been documented that many Malay-Muslims have little or no faith in the candidates of alternative parties, they did vote overwhelmingly against Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party in 2005.[44] However, Malay-Muslim participation in voting is condemned by at least

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[43] McAdam McCarthy and Zald 1996a, 14. Italics added for emphasis.
[44] Tan-Mullins 2006, 147.

one separatist group, as exemplified by the bombing of a polling location in March, 2008.[45]

There is also evidence that militants condemn negotiating with the Thai government. As one member of the BRN-C reported to Human Rights Watch, "…the cause of our fight cannot, and will not, be compromised through any negotiations or any deals with the Thai state… We have learned from the past that negotiations would weaken our movement by making our members subject to compromise, cooptation and bribery."[46] On the other hand, some interviewed militants have expressed willingness to participate in negotiations and international mediation. For example, the *Bangkok Post* reported that a mediation meeting might have taken place in Geneva in the spring of 2008, possibly with the PULO and the BNPP.[47] However, the Thai government has not officially recognized these talks, nor have they been willing to discuss these negotiations in the media.

Despite the significant split in resistance leaders' views on negotiation and reconciliation, the fact that some resistance factions may be willing to compromise on issues of full separatism by agreeing instead to an autonomous status is a promising development. In fact, moderate groups may benefit from what McAdam, McCarthy and Zald dub the "radical flank effect," which describes "one effect that often follows from the presence of 'extremist' groups within the same movement as other more 'moderate' [social movement organizations]… In effect, the presence of extremists encourages funding support for the moderates as a way of undercutting the influence of the radicals."[48] However, in order for the moderate factions to work productively with the government, the central authority must first be at least *willing* to discern between terrorist insurgents, moderate separatists who might be willing to accept amnesty protection, and ordinary citizens who have no direct links to the terrorist insurgency.

In addition, the government must express willingness to compromise on more than just the reinstating of Prem's mediating structures (the SBPAC and CPM 43). In a state-of-emergency climate, in which basic civil rights are suspended in the name of fighting terrorism, constraints on public dissent have increased. Therefore, citizens are less likely to put themselves at risk by reporting grievances to the SBPAC; in addition, the social networks that the SBPAC and CPM 43 relied on in the past were severely disrupted during

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[45] Violence at a polling office was noted in Pathan and Harai, *Bangkok Post*, April 21, 2008. No group claimed responsibility for this action.

[46] Human Rights Watch 2007, 44.

[47] *Bangkok Post*, May 19, 2008.

[48] McAdam McCathy and Zald 1996a, 14.

Thaksin's term as Prime Minister. It cannot be expected that these mediating structures will operate with the same level of effectiveness during periods of escalated violence as they did during periods of relative peace. However, the historical correlation between hard policy and increased violent resistance highlights the critical need for soft, sustainable policy alternatives. These policies would need to — at the very minimum — provide Malay-Muslim citizens with legitimate outlets for grievances, dissent and input, offer an amnesty, and implement provisions for accountability and civil rights.

There are several related issues that should be explored in future research. The first is the recent transition by resistance groups from guerrilla warfare, primarily targeting security personnel and infrastructure, to terrorist tactics. This has coincided with the increased proliferation of a "radical Islamist ideology" since 2004.[49] Another topic of urgent importance for future study is that of *popular support* for the separatist movement, since popular approval of insurgent action cannot be assumed. The number of Muslim casualties has rivaled those of Buddhists since 2001, which is a striking feature of the new tactic. Any Malay-Muslim who does not explicitly condone the insurgent cause and methodology puts him or herself at risk for attack.[50] Since local religious leaders, unarmed civilians, women, children, and students have been targeted and murdered, it is extremely likely that popular support for armed resistance has shifted. According to one ethnographer, the anonymity of such attacks has also "caused intense confusion and frustration" in the general Malay-Muslim populace.[51]

It is suggested that future research also analyze how and why the dominant mobilizing ideology has shifted to a fundamentalist framework — one that justifies any and all violent action in pursuit of a righteous goal — and how this relates to political opportunities. If popular support for separatist violence has decreased due to the frequent and indiscriminate killings of local Muslims and the sabotage of local infrastructure, support for a moderate position will likely increase.[52] This could potentially provide a viable opening for moderate voices on both sides to propose new

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[49] Sugunnasil 2006, 119. We take "terrorism" to mean "organized violence against civilians in pursuit of a political objective" (Hassan 2007, 2).

[50] Human Rights Watch 2007; see page 93 for an example of literature distributed to villagers by the BRN-C.

[51] Tan-Mullins 2006, 149.

[52] See, for example, *Bangkok Post* articles "Insurgent Bomb Wounds Seven Children," March 17, 2008, and "School Builders Killed," April 24, 2008.

compromises and solutions. However, if this moderate voice is silenced by the separatists and either ignored or persecuted by the state, hard-line reactionary policies from the government will continue to be met with violent resistance — as the findings of this study submit — and will predictably propel this crisis into yet another decade.

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