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VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND INSURGENCY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND: A RISK ASSESSMENT

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Democracy and Governance and Peace and Security in Asia and the Middle East

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The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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ACRONYMS

AME/TS	Bureau for Asia and the Middle East/Technical Services
BRN	Barisan Revolusi Nasional
BRN-C	Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
GAM	Free Aceh Movement
GMIP	Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Pattani
ICG	International Crisis Group
ISA	Internal Security Act
ISOC	Internal Security Operations Command
JI	Jamaah Islamiyah
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MSI	Management Systems International
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSC	National Security Council
PTP	Pheu Thai Party
PULO	Pattani United Liberation Organization
RDCS	Regional Development Cooperation Strategy
RDMA	Regional Development Mission for Asia
RKK	Runda Kumpulan Kecil
SBPAC	Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre
TAF	The Asia Foundation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VBIED	Vehicle-born improvised explosive devices
VCDs	Video compact discs
VEI	Violent Extremism and Insurgency

MAP



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is one of a series of assessments of Violent Extremism and Insurgency (VEI) in Asia and the Middle East prepared for USAID by Management Systems International (MSI). These assessments have been commissioned by USAID/AME/TS to help inform USAID Missions on the current and prospective risk of VEI as they prepare their CDCS. It is also intended to help operationalize USAID's VEI policy as articulated in *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles in Practice*. In keeping with other VEI assessments, this is essentially a literature review – it does not pretend to offer original insights or analysis. It is based exclusively on published analyses and draws primarily but not exclusively on English language sources. Significantly, it also draws on a major and very timely new analysis of the conflict in the South and donor responses to it being finalized by the Asia Foundation.¹

Background

The Deep South has always been marginal to Thailand's political economy and national identity. With few natural resource endowments, a small population, and situated at Thailand's southernmost extremity, the Deep South has held a peripheral status since its incorporation into the Kingdom of Siam in 1909. The Deep South has even been an afterthought to twentieth-century nation-building efforts in Thailand, with assimilation policies aimed primarily at incorporating the Chinese minority and additionally at promoting loyalty to the state in the more populous North and North-East (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 7).

To better incorporate the Deep South into the Thai national state, governments over time have used a mix of assimilation, cooptation and concessions to Malay Muslim culture. But according to McCargo, the area “has never been properly incorporated culturally or psychologically into predominantly Buddhist Thailand. Bangkok has largely pursued a policy of assimilation and standardization, making few concessions to the distinctive history and character of the region” (McCargo 2008, pg 2). Efforts to promote assimilation into a uniform central Thai model have been repeatedly challenged in the Deep South.

Like most long-running or recurring conflicts, the conflict in the Deep South is multi-causal and layered. For some, the insurgency is animated by a history of Pattani greatness followed by a century of domination by the Thai state. Many Malay Muslims in southern Thailand feel that the highly centralized Thai state has not accommodated their distinctive identity or granted them adequate control over their affairs. Although there is general agreement that the drivers of the conflict aren't primarily socio-economic, it seems likely that socio-economic inequality contributes to the sense of alienation some Malay Muslims feel towards the Thai state. Traditional Islamic beliefs and practices are in flux, and militants use Islam for instrumental purposes (such as legitimization and mobilization). Although the conflict isn't essentially religious in nature, the close association of the Thai state and monarchy with increasingly assertive *sangha* (Buddhist clergy) fuels inter-religious suspicion and hostility. There is almost certainly a link between insurgency and criminality, but to date the violence is driven more by grievances and political goals than by criminal goals.

The conflict today

The movement casts its cause as self-determination, a struggle to liberate Pattani from Thai rule and establish an independent Islamic state. According to ICG, recruitment appeals emphasize a history of Siamese conquest and oppression. The struggle is couched in religious terms as a jihad that is an obligation for

¹ The Asia Foundation report is still a draft; therefore excerpts of it included in this assessment may differ from subsequent versions of the Foundation's report.

Muslims to support. The religious justifications are linked to a local Malay ethnic identity, which serves to underscore differences with Thais, Sino-Thais and non-local Muslims (ICG 2012, pg 3).

The movement does not intend to prevail in a military contest, however, but uses violence to undermine the state, provoke repression and gain cooperation from Malay Muslim villagers. Militants strive to win cooperation, or at least acquiescence, from Malay Muslims, in part by calibrating the use of violence, selectively targeting those who cooperate with the state and blaming security forces for insurgent attacks that displease locals. They actively target civilians. According to ICG, the past two years show that militants are growing bolder and more capable. The increasing sophistication of attacks is making those who watch the conflict take notice. Militants are also becoming more aggressive in their targeting (ICG 2012, pg 5.) Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence. The insurgents have deliberately attacked “soft targets”—farmers, houseworkers, teachers, students, religious leaders, monks, civil servants, or persons with vague or tenuous affiliation with the security forces or counter-insurgency efforts.

More Muslims than Buddhists have been killed. Muslims are less likely to be targeted, but more likely to be killed when they are. They are more often victims of assassination, whereas Buddhists are usually the targets for less discriminate bomb attacks.

While there are a number of identifiable grievances, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the broader population of Malay Muslims in the South feel aggrieved and – more importantly – the extent to which this translates into support for militancy.

Government responses

Generally speaking, Bangkok’s strategies for the Deep South reflect classical ideas of counter-insurgency as a contest for support from the local population, based on provision of security, material welfare and effective administration. Key elements of the government’s counter-insurgency strategy include: 1) the deployment of armed forces and the formation of local militia, 2) enhanced intelligence operations, 3) the imposition of a legal regime that enhances the state’s power to detain and interrogate suspected insurgents, 4) periodic changes to the way the South is administered, 5) the use of development projects and cultural concessions to “win hearts and minds.”

Over time, successive Thai governments have attempted to broker peace talks, allocated large budgets to a series of development programs in the Deep South, offered partial amnesties to some insurgents, modified security tactics and repeatedly restructured their coordinating institutions. A number of minor concessions and policy shifts have been adopted and government bodies have repeatedly tried to reach out to Malay Muslims through socio-economic development programs and some policy adaptations. While many of these initiatives recognize the specific circumstances of the Deep South and make efforts to address some root causes of violence, according to the Asia Foundation, they confront two main problems. First, they are often poorly executed, with high levels of corruption and misdirected resources. Second, when seen from a wider perspective they present a façade of action while the predominantly security-focused approach continues and no major policy changes take place (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 39).

On February 28, 2013 the Thai government agreed to enter into negotiations with a major rebel group. The agreement between Paradorn Pattanathabutr, secretary general of Thailand’s National Security Council, and Hassan Taib, a leader of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), was signed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The talks appear to have the backing of the Malaysian government, which has sought to project an image of regional peacemaker in recent years.

Prospects

The contours of a political resolution to the conflict in southern Thailand have long been in the public domain, but Bangkok has been unable to commit to a comprehensive and decisive approach (ICG 2012, pg i). Many senior officials remain hostile to any proposal that smacks of autonomy, but taboos that have long inhibited creative thinking on the South are breaking down. The protracted insurgency and political turmoil of recent years have exposed the inadequacy of existing political arrangements. Stakeholders on all sides are beginning to discuss alternatives more openly. The NSC policy for the southernmost provinces is a clear indication that new possibilities are on the table. Continuing political polarization is a formidable challenge to developing and executing fresh approaches, but the status quo is untenable in the long term (ICG 2012, pg 18).

The hurdles to serious consideration of autonomy are numerous and include: 1) the factionalism and drift that currently characterize Thai politics; 2) constitutional provisions relating to the unitary state; 3) resistance from bureaucratic and political establishments; the absence of influential champions and a widespread unwillingness to discuss the issue; 4) a prevailing assumption that decentralization is sufficient; and 5) the lack of legitimacy and coherent political demands by the militants.

What role for the USG and USAID?

Thailand is a key U.S. security ally in Asia and an important economic partner. Thailand largely “graduated” from being a recipient of foreign aid by the early 1990s and today Thailand is relatively prosperous middle income country. To the extent that it still has “development challenges,” the solutions have to do more with the adoption and implementation of the right policies and less with overcoming resource constraints. With regard to the conflict in the Deep South, successive Thai governments, citing sovereignty concerns and the risk that international involvement will bolster the legitimacy of insurgent groups, have sought to minimize the involvement of foreign governments, aid agencies and non-governmental actors.

Given (a) the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship to both countries and (b) the Thai government’s lack of receptivity to foreign involvement in the Deep South, the opportunities for USAID involvement in the South appear limited. Moreover, given the Thai government’s reluctance to date to consider meaningful changes in the way the Deep South is governed, it is important to ask if USAID or any other donor can contribute to conflict resolution in a meaningful way. We will return to this question below.

However, a case can be made for the USG being concerned with the situation in the Deep South and being engaged to the extent that the Thai government allows. At least three USG interests/objectives in the Deep South can be identified. These are:

- ***To prevent prospective humanitarian crises and human rights abuses*** – in the case of the latter, abuses that could be perpetrated by both the State and the militants, in the event of greater communal violence.
- ***To prevent the rise of Violent Islamist Extremism in the Deep South.*** Currently the risk of this does not appear high, but this could change in the future.
- ***To contribute to the strengthening of democracy in Thailand*** by both improving the position of Thailand’s Malay Muslim minority and reducing the military’s involvement in politics and governance.

The review of analyses contained in this assessment suggests the following conclusions: First, while the continuing conflict in the Deep South does not represent a serious threat to Thailand’s political and economic development, it does undermine democracy and human rights in Thailand, reinforces the influence of the military, and creates an environment that could be conducive to greater Islamist extremism in the future.

Second, given the conditions in the Deep South and the prevailing policy and attitudes of the Thai government, there is only limited potential for donors to contribute to conflict resolution in a meaningful way. Third, given the Thai government's aversion to foreign involvement in the conflict as well as the importance of other aspects of the US-Thailand relationship, the room for USG/USAID involvement currently is limited. As a result of this, any effort to address the conflict needs to be very strategic and very carefully designed and implemented.

Despite these significant limitations, a case can be made for small USG/USAID investments in the event that either the human rights situation in the South deteriorates significantly or the Thai government makes a serious commitment to achieving a negotiated political settlement. If limited USG involvement is warranted in the event of worst case or best case scenarios, it is important for that engagement to adhere to the following three approaches:

- ***First, the USG must ensure that its involvement does no harm.*** To ensure this, the USG needs to maintain a highly nuanced understanding of the drivers, actors and unintended and often difficult-to-discern consequences of any USG interventions. The USG needs to ensure that the lens through which it views the conflict isn't excessively influenced by Thai (as distinct from Malay Muslim) perceptions and values. Moreover, Malay Muslims in the South are not a monolithic community. Any programming needs to avoid further deepening divisions among them. Finally, there needs to be flexibility to adjust programming in response to changes that may occur in the program environment.
- ***Second, whatever the type of USG involvement, it needs to be supported both at the political level and through the US military's close relationship with the Thai military.*** Indeed, potentially the greatest impact the USG could have on the conflict is to support efforts to encourage senior Thai officials and military officers to think in new ways about the solutions to the conflict. This could include familiarizing Thai officials and officers with models of peace processes and political solutions adopted by other countries.
- ***Third, USAID needs to have a realistic understanding of what sorts of donor interventions have the potential to have positive impact in the Deep South.*** This is discussed in greater detail in Section VII. But a key point is that resolving the conflict requires a political solution, supported by other forms of assistance. Absent a political solution, small-scale, community-based projects are unlikely to have much impact on the conflict.

It is outside the scope of this assessment to provide detailed programming recommendations. But two related points can be made: First, if the Asia Foundation's analysis is correct, then community-level peace-building efforts may have a positive impact on community development, but they are unlikely to contribute to conflict resolution in any meaningful way. Second, it is the author's view that programming intended to contribute to finding a solution to the conflict (as opposed to addressing the negative consequences of the conflict) has to address the political context and political actors – at both the local and national levels. To this end, examples of the sorts of things that could be undertaken by USAID include:

- Support additional public opinion surveying in the Deep South. Regular and more fine-grained data on Southern attitudes about the insurgents, the government and the possible solutions can be a useful tool for conflict resolution efforts.
- Support efforts by politicians, business and religious leaders, academics and NGOs at the national level and in the South to generate and discuss solutions to the conflict.
- Provide conflict resolution training and information (such as on models for peace processes and autonomy) for decision makers in the National Security Council (NSC) and Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC). Perhaps similar training and information could be provided to the Thai military through mil-to-mil channels.
- Support leadership training, including on conflict resolution, for established and emerging Malay Muslim leaders.

- Support the efforts of human rights and legal aid groups in both Bangkok and the South to monitor and redress human rights violations.
- Support the efforts of Thai organizations in both Bangkok and the South to monitor, analyze and report on the conflict.

Summary Assessment of VEI in Thailand

Key factors	Assessment	Explanatory note
1. Current level of VEI activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negligible extremist activity - Continuing insurgency in Deep South involving Muslim Thais seeking greater self-determination. 	The insurgency is essentially ethno-nationalist in nature. But because it pits Malay Muslims against the predominantly Buddhist Thai state, it has a sectarian dimension to it.
2. Overall capacity of state and society to respond to VEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State capacity is moderate/mixed. - Capacity in the South has been weakened by conflict and the political cooptation of local leaders. 	The Thai state has significant human and financial resources. The challenges it faces are in the realm of politics and policy change.
3. Likely trajectory of VEI over next 3-5 years	Absent a political solution, the insurgency is likely to continue, though with a fluctuating level of violence. It may also become more sectarian in nature.	The trajectory will depend on both the government's willingness to devolve some political authority and on the willingness and ability of the insurgent groups to negotiate coherently.
4. Nature of the threat posed by VEI	The insurgency retards social cohesion and economic growth in the South. More broadly, it undermines democracy and human rights by privileging Thailand's national security apparatus.	
5. Implication for USAID (or "Development response")	The solution to the insurgency lies in the realm of politics and governance, not development. If USAID is going to invest resources in the South, these should focus on protecting human rights and/or building local and national constituencies for a political settlement.	

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is one of a series of assessments of Violent Extremism and Insurgency (VEI) in Asia and the Middle East being prepared for USAID by Management Systems International (MSI). These assessments have been commissioned by USAID/AME/TS to help inform USAID Missions on the current and prospective risk of VEI as they prepare their Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). It is also intended to help operationalize USAID's policy on VEI as articulated in *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles in Practice* (USAID, September 2011).

The focus of this paper is on the recurring insurgency in Southern Thailand (also known as the Deep South), which, in its current iteration, pits the Thai state against a shadowy network of Malay Muslim militant groups seeking some form of self-determination. This conflict has been ongoing for over a decade and at times has been the most lethal internal conflict in Asia. Between January 2004 and November 2012, violent incidents in the southernmost provinces of Thailand killed 5,473 people and injured 9,693. The region has seen daily violent attacks on a consistent basis over the past 9 years, including assassinations, bombings, roadside attacks, arson attacks, and occasional attacks on military installations. Despite the long running and virulent nature of the conflict, there has been relatively little international attention paid to it, in part because of the Thai government's desire to discourage foreign attention and involvement.

Although this paper was initiated with USAID/RDMA's Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCCS) in mind, recent events in Thailand give it added salience. On February 28, 2013 the Thai government and a leader of one of the militant groups announced that negotiations, facilitated by the Malaysian government, would be held beginning in mid-March. This announcement came after a spate of bombings by insurgents in southern Thailand and a failed attack on a Thai military base in mid-February that left 16 insurgents dead.

Unlike other VEI assessments done in this series, this is a somewhat modified assessment, and in some ways is more like a conflict assessment. The insurgency in Southern Thailand is generally viewed as an ethno-national struggle for some form of self-determination (independence or autonomy), similar to the struggle of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao or the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia. While the insurgents in Southern Thailand are Muslim, and Islamic teachings and beliefs inform and animate their actions, their goal is principally political in nature – namely independence from the Thai state, which they view as essentially foreign and repressive. For this reason, collectively they are best understood as a fairly classic – though particularly violent – armed separatist movement rather than as Islamist extremists waging global or regional jihad.

It is also important to recognize at the outset that while the Thai state generally respects freedom of religion, the state privileges Buddhism, the monarchy is closely associated with Buddhism, and some 94% of Thais are Buddhist. The state also is highly centralized, and the state's response to the insurgency has been driven principally by the military and/or by officials formerly in the military. The combination of these characteristics has made it difficult for successive Thai governments to develop effective responses to the Malay Muslim insurgency.

This assessment differs from other assessments in two other ways. First, from the outset, the staff of USAID/RDMA has taken an active interest in the exercise and provided useful information and insights. Second, thanks to fortuitous scheduling, the author was able to solicit the views of USAID/RDMA and the US Embassy staff during two recent visits to Bangkok.

However, in keeping with other VEI assessments, this is essentially a literature review/desk study – it does not pretend to offer original insights or analysis. It is based exclusively on published analyses and draws primarily but not exclusively on English language sources. In particular, it draws heavily on the analysis of the

International Crisis Group (ICG), Duncan McCargo, Joseph Chinyong Liow and the small number of other analysts who have followed developments in the Deep South. Significantly, it also draws on a major and very timely new analysis of the conflict in the South and donor responses to it being finalized by the Asia Foundation.²

The goal of the author has been to review the existing published literature on the conflict and synthesize and succinctly present the analysis that is most insightful, topical and potentially relevant to USAID programming. Rather than undertaking the time consuming exercise of rewriting what others have already written, the author incorporates significant portions of other analysis directly into this report. Rather than footnoting every source, citations for sources – and especially for other people’s analysis or recommendations – are included in the text.

Section II provides a brief overview of the conflict. Section III reviews the drivers. Section IV describes the insurgents and Section V outlines government responses. Section VI explores the way forward and Section VII outlines implications for USAID.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT

This section provides a brief overview of the key features of the conflict, including the distinctive geography, culture and history of the Deep South.

A. Situating the “Deep South”: Geographically distant, culturally distinct and economically marginal

The conflict in the Deep South has been largely confined to the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala and four south-eastern districts of Songkhla province: Chana, Na Thawi, Saba Yoi and Thepa. This region of roughly 13,500 sq km is home to 1.8 million Thai citizens. Close to 80% of the population are Muslims who speak Malay as their first language, and the remainder are almost entirely Thai or Sino-Thai Buddhists. While Malay Muslims are a considerable majority in this area, they make up only 2.9% of the country’s total population.

There is considerable variety among the population outside the main division between Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists. Contrast can be drawn between traditional elites, more assimilated urban middle-class residents, and rural farming and fishing communities. The insurgency appeals to a minority of Malay Muslims from a range of economic backgrounds, demonstrating the appeal of the movement across boundaries of class or occupation. Thai Buddhists in the Deep South also include some rural farming communities as well as wealthier urban residents. A large and predominantly Buddhist Chinese population lives in the main towns and especially in Yala province (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 23).

Pattani was an ancient Malay kingdom and a center of Islamic learning and culture in Southeast Asia. Malay Muslims in Thailand are very proud of an identity that they consider highly distinctive, as Malays, as Muslims, and as people of Pattani.

The northern states of Malaysia are seen to share historical, cultural and linguistic links with the provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani.³ There are currently believed to be up to 200,000 people who hold dual

² The Asia Foundation report is still a draft; therefore excerpts of it included in this assessment may differ from subsequent versions of the Foundation’s report.

³ Indeed, so intimate was the relationship that in the embryonic stages of separatism in the immediate post-World War Two years the Malay feudal elite of Pattani sought to pressure Britain to incorporate the region into British Malaya, citing their opposition to Bangkok’s collaboration with the Japanese during the war.

citizenship (Thai and Malaysian), and several tens of thousands cross the Thai–Malaysia border daily as part of regular economic activity in that borderland area. In addition, many have relatives living across the border. Clearly, from this perspective, the Thai–Malaysian border is in many respects an artificial one, but one which nevertheless has significant implications for the southern Thai conflict. Its existence continues to provide a vantage that reinforces local perceptions of identity among southern Thais in a climate that sees the central Bangkok government trying to enforce the centrality of ‘Thainess’ in the southern provinces (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 76). As a result, as Duncan McCargo observes, “Pattani identity has an ambiguous relationship with the modern nation-state and with notions of citizenship” (McCargo 2008, pg 4).

For most Malays, “to be Malay is to be Muslim.” For Malay Muslims in Thailand, Islam is an intrinsically important identity marker. Although Thailand is 94% Buddhist, there are significant Muslim populations – Malay and non-Malay – in Bangkok and elsewhere. In Thailand, as elsewhere, the last several decades have been a time of religious ferment for Muslims. According to Joseph Chinyong Liow:

In Thailand, the influence that transnational Islamic networks have enjoyed has led to the creation of a rich constellation of Muslim cultures, identities, and local networks throughout the country. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Muslim-majority southern provinces. While often portrayed as possessing a monolithic Malay-Muslim identity in contradistinction to the Thai-Buddhist majority across the country, what often escapes scholarly attention is the fact that the terrain of Muslim thought and practice in the south resembles more a kaleidoscope of variegated religio-cultural identities. (Liow 2011, pg 1420)

Although the Deep South is poorer than central Thailand, only Pattani ranks in the bottom half of all provinces in household income (ICG 2012, pg 1). Finally, the Deep South has long been regarded as a region prone to violence and crime, a situation exacerbated by the Thai State’s long-term term habit of sending the worst officials to work in the area. Drug use and trafficking is seen a major problem within communities, as it is across most other parts of Thailand (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 26).

B. A mixed record of assimilation and cooptation

The Deep South has always been marginal to Thailand’s political economy and national identity. With few natural resource endowments, a small population, and situated at Thailand’s southernmost extremity, the Deep South has held a peripheral status since its incorporation into the Kingdom of Siam in 1909. The Deep South has even been an afterthought to twentieth-century nation-building efforts in Thailand, with assimilation policies aimed primarily at incorporating the Chinese minority and additionally at promoting loyalty to the state in the more populous North and North-East (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 7).

To better incorporate the Deep South into the Thai national state, governments over time have used a mix of assimilation, cooptation and concessions to Malay Muslim culture. But according to McCargo, the area “has never been properly incorporated culturally or psychologically into predominantly Buddhist Thailand. Bangkok has largely pursued a policy of assimilation and standardization, making few concessions to the distinctive history and character of the region (McCargo 2008, pg 2). Efforts to promote assimilation into a uniform central Thai model have been repeatedly challenged in the Deep South.

Radical separatist elements began waging a guerrilla war against the Thai state in the 1960s; fighting was most virulent during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The most important groups behind the fighting included Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) and the BRN. By 1980 as many as a thousand insurgents were carrying out regular attacks in the South and had even staged bombings in Bangkok.

The Prem government (1980-88) successfully reigned in the violence, granting amnesties to former militants and setting up new security and governance arrangements in the area, coordinated by the SBPAC. Prem’s policy was to coopt the Malay-Muslim elite through a combination of political privileges and development funds, much of these brokered by the army. According to McCargo, “[t]he monarchy worked largely through

a network of Buddhist government officials and Fourth Army officers, most of whom supported the Democratic Party, along with a group of Muslim leaders who threw in their lot with the Thai state (McCargo 2008, pg 9).

Though far from perfect, these policies were broadly effective in muting the violence for around two decades. However, while monarchical aspects of government were often less apparent in the rest of Thailand, in Malay Muslim majority provinces, the paternalistic hand of royalism was ever present (McCargo 2008, pg 14). Moreover, according to McCargo, “successive Thai governments failed to move beyond securing the allegiance of elites: as the Malay Muslim elites gradually became alienated from their own communities, so the Thai state lost legitimacy and moral authority in the deep south” (McCargo 2008, pg 14).

The state’s efforts to control Islamic education have been a central aspect of the troubled relationship between Bangkok and Malay Muslims. According to ICG, “many Malay Muslims view state schools as a vehicle to inculcate “Thai-ness,” while the government sees Islamic schools as a tool for Malay nationalist indoctrination” (ICG 2009, pg 2).

Educational institutions in the predominantly Muslim South are extremely diverse and, before the violence surged in 2004, were inconsistently regulated. Various types of educational institutions emerged in the region, representing attempts to reconcile religious and secular knowledge. While religious knowledge is seen as essential to Muslim identity, secular education provides the qualifications needed to get a job. Government subsidies to private Islamic schools, as part of policies to urge the introduction of secular education into Islamic schools, have provided an incentive for their rapid expansion with thousands of students. There is now a substantial student body of more than 100,000 students in the Deep South’s Islamic school system... By providing substantial funding for private Islamic schools, government policies have inadvertently contributed to the greater separation of Muslim and Buddhist students, which only helps radicalization efforts (ICG 2009, pg 2).

C. Resurgent violence

The renewal of violence dates back to late 2001/early 2002. During Thaksin’s first term (2001-5), the security situation deteriorated sharply. From December 2001 onwards, the militants resumed regular and sophisticated attacks on security forces, including a series of large-scale raids on police posts (McCargo 2008, pg xi). This has been attributed to a shift from military to police leadership in the South. In May 2002, Thaksin dissolved the SBPAC and transferred responsibility for security to the police. In January 2004, martial law was declared in the three insurgent southernmost Muslim-majority provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. In July 2005, martial law was changed to a state of emergency, giving the Thai government even greater power in the South.

In April 2004, insurgents mounted a string of coordinated attacks against police and military outposts in Pattani, Yala and Songkhla. In the province of Pattani, rather than scattering into the nearby villages and jungles for refuge after perpetrating their attack, a unit of 32 militants retreated to the historic Krue Se Mosque. A tense nine-hour standoff between them and Thai security forces followed and culminated in a full-scale attack on the mosque that resulted in the killing of all 32 militants and one civilian (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 63).

Similar heavy-handedness was displayed in Tak Bai, Narathiwat, in October 2004 when a tempest of protest and harsh reprisals eventuated following the incarceration of several local defense volunteers, who had initially gone to a police station to report the loss of their handguns. In response to the build-up of a crowd of several thousand, troops fired live rounds into the unarmed crowd, killing six protesters. The fact that the incident took place during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan further fuelled the tense atmosphere. After the crowd was dispersed, more than a hundred suspected provocateurs were arrested, beaten, and piled — in prone positions — one on top of another into military trucks for a four-hour drive to an army camp in

Pattani for questioning. By the time the trucks arrived at their destination, 78 of the protestors had suffocated to death (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 66).

Repressive state actions, particularly the series of brutal missteps by the first Thaksin government, allowed militants to discredit moderate leaders and claim moral legitimacy for violent struggle. The militants forged a new form of exclusive mobilization structure and engaged in a propaganda struggle to justify their increasingly rapacious anti-civilian violence (McCargo 2008, pgs 11-12). Large numbers of teachers and school staff were killed. Government schools and teachers have often been targets of attacks because Muslim insurgents think they undermine ethno-religious identity by instilling Thai nationalist sentiments in Malay Muslim children (ICG 2009, pg 5).

In September 2006, Thaksin was removed from office by a military coup. In October 2006, the new Prime Minister, retired General Surayud Chulanond, reestablished the SBPAC by executive order. Staffed largely by interior ministry officials, it was under the ISOC, and its director reported to the Fourth Army Region commander. Subordination to ISOC was an impediment to its efforts to build local trust. Security operations beginning in mid-2007 reduced the number of militant attacks. Monthly incidents dropped to a low of 48 in October 2008, but climbed again thereafter, tending to fluctuate between 50 and 100 per month.

D. The conflict today: Entering a new phase?

During the first six months of 2012, violent incidents declined from an average of almost three per day in 2011 to fewer than two and half per day, but casualties increased. In the first ten months of 2012, there were 1,647 casualties, surpassing the 2011 total of 1,464.

How much of this violence is directly attributable to separatist militancy is a topic of debate; common criminality and extrajudicial killings by state (or state-backed) forces account for some portion. Motivations for participation in violence are diverse; the conflict is conducive to pursuit of myriad personal, commercial and political interests. Most attacks and killings take place with no claims of responsibility, but the political implication of many incidents is clear (ICG 2012, pg 4).

According to ICG, the past two years show that militants are growing bolder and more capable. The increasing sophistication of attacks is making those who watch the conflict take notice. There is a trend toward an increase in vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), as well as coordinated bombings involving several devices. Large bombs of 50kg or greater are becoming more frequent, raising questions about the efficacy of security operations that remain unable to detect such devices as they are assembled, transported and deployed. Militants are also becoming more aggressive in their targeting (ICG 2012, pg 5).

Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence. The insurgents have deliberately attacked “soft targets”—farmers, houseworkers, teachers, students, religious leaders, monks, civil servants, or persons with vague or tenuous affiliation with the security forces or counter-insurgency efforts. From January 2004 to November 2012, civilians not employed by the state accounted for 49.8 % of casualties, followed by soldiers (16 %), insurgents (10 %), and sub-district chiefs (*kamnan*), village chiefs and assistant village chiefs (3.3 %) (ICG 2012, pg 4).

More Muslims than Buddhists have been killed. Muslims are less likely to be targeted, but more likely to be killed when they are. They are more often victims of assassination, whereas Buddhists are usually the targets for less discriminate bomb attacks.

Variable local political dynamics affect levels of conflict. The prevalence of violent incidents varies even between neighboring villages. Significant factors include the prevalence of criminal networks and local politics. Research shows that villages with stronger and more unified local leadership tend to be more able to control levels of violence than villages where authority is contested between different factions or political parties. Vote-buying and competition for potentially lucrative posts as elected village head and sub-district

chief have led to a breakdown of community structures in many localities, decreasing local capacities to prevent violence (The Asia Foundation, pg 23).

Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra has not been vocal on the Deep South. Her chief accomplishment has been to sustain the *modus vivendi* between Thaksin and his establishment opponents by maintaining an imperturbable public persona, steering clear of contentious issues and placating senior army officers. She has adhered to precedent by insisting that government policies in the South embody the king's advice to "understand, access and develop" local communities (ICG 2012, pg 2).

On February 13, 2013 some 60 armed insurgents attacked a military base in Narathiwat province, near the border with Malaysia. However, soldiers at the base had been tipped off in advance of the attack, and as a result 16 militants were killed—the biggest single loss of life since 2004. On February 25 insurgents launched a series of smaller reprisal attacks.

On February 28, 2013 the Thai government agreed to enter into negotiations with a major rebel group. The agreement between Paradorn Pattanathabutr, secretary general of Thailand's National Security Council, and Hassan Taib, a leader of the BRN, was signed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The talks appear to have the backing of the Malaysian government, which has sought to project an image of regional peacemaker in recent years.

III. THE DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

Like most long-running or recurring conflicts, the conflict in the Deep South is multi-causal and layered. This section reviews the various issues and dynamics thought to drive the insurgency. While there are a number of identifiable grievances, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the broader population of Malay Muslims in the South feel aggrieved and – more importantly – the extent to which this translates into support for militancy.

A. Historical grievances

For some, the insurgency is animated by a history of Pattani greatness followed by a century of domination by the Thai state.

The insurgency is inspired and motivated by pride in the "glorious past" of Pattani and a "history of oppression" under Thai rule. The three southern provinces roughly correspond with the former Malay sultanate of Pattani, which was known as a center for Muslim learning and culture. During the 18th and 19th centuries Pattani paid tribute to the Kingdom of Siam yet was largely self-governing. However, early in the 20th century this area was forcibly incorporated into the Thai state.

This incorporation was done at great cost to Pattani identity and autonomy. According to Liow and Pathan:

Most would agree that a major watershed period was the turn of the twentieth century, which marked the beginning of sustained efforts on the part of the royal Siamese court and, later, several nationalist and military administrations that succeeded it, to institute measures that sought to assimilate the southern provinces and their long tradition of stressing particularistic aspects of local (primarily cultural and religious) identity into the wider Thai geopolitical body. These included: proscription of the use of the Malay language in both its written and oral form; restriction of various cultural and religious practices such as the implementation of *shari'a* (Islamic law) among the predominantly Muslim Malay community; and, perhaps the most controversial of all, various attempts by Bangkok-based authorities to regulate and police the tradition of independent Islamic schools that also served

as the politico-cultural epicentre for Malays residing in southern Thailand. (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 2)

B. Socio economic inequality

Although there is general agreement that the drivers of the conflict aren't primarily socio-economic, it seems likely that socio-economic inequality contributes to the sense of alienation some Malay Muslims feel towards the Thai state.

Even though over time government assimilation policies have become more lenient and poverty has decreased markedly, Malay Muslims in the Deep South continue to be on average less affluent and less healthy than their Thai Buddhist neighbors (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 2).

In absolute terms, Malay Muslims have shared some of the economic benefits of Thailand's rapid development and modernization. Yet they remain worse off on average than other groups that provide an immediate comparison. On average, Malay Muslims are more rural and poorer than Thai Buddhists in the Deep South or in neighboring Songkhla, a wealthier and predominantly Thai-Buddhist province. Survey results show an income gap between Buddhists and Muslims in the Deep South. Over twice as many Muslims as Buddhists reported that they were sometimes unable to purchase food; by contrast, over twice as many Buddhists as Muslims reported that they were able to afford necessities as well as durable goods (The Asia Foundation 2013, pgs 15-17).

These inequalities have grown over time. Over the 25 years preceding the escalation of violence in 2004, provincial GDP per capita in the three provinces of the Deep South declined by around 20 % relative to the overall national average. The comparisons made between ethnic groups in the Deep South are significant given the area's history and its difficult relationship with the Buddhist-majority Thai State.

Language barriers continue to play a dominant role in contributing to discomfort of interacting with the State and emerge as the main reason why people in the conflict area do not feel comfortable interacting with civil servants. The preference for Malay dialect may be waning among younger people who can speak Thai more fluently than older generations, but it remains a barrier (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 19).

C. Nation-building, Thai-style

Many Malay Muslims in southern Thailand feel that the highly centralized Thai state has not accommodated their distinctive identity or granted them adequate control over their affairs.

Centralized government. The Thai state remains highly centralized by regional or global standards. Bangkok's population is some 20-30 times larger than the next largest city, and the capital (along with its surrounding provinces) dominate the national economy. A strong, centrally controlled state bureaucracy has traditionally held significant power alongside the military and royal institutions. Civil servants, including teachers, have traditionally been appointed from Bangkok and rotated around the provinces in order to maintain central control. Thailand is divided into 77 small provinces, with no regional administrative bodies of any significant strength except perhaps the municipal government of Bangkok (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 14).

Over time, gradual democratization and administrative reforms have challenged the authority of traditional elite institutions. At the national level, political parties and elected politicians have gained power. Decentralization measures include elected local representatives in villages, sub-district authorities and provincial parliaments. The 1997 and 2007 Constitutions defined the transfer of some responsibilities from the central to local levels of government as well as mandating local participation mechanisms and public consultation.

These constitutionally mandated changes have not translated into reality in many local areas as political commitment weakened and the legacy of a centralized state continued. For instance, between 2001 and 2006, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra strengthened the role of appointed provincial governors, sidelining locally elected provincial councils. Under what still remains a hierarchical structure, government officials continue to exert authority over those lower down the chain.

Like the rest of Thailand, the southern border provinces are administered mainly by officials dispatched from the distant capital. Broadly speaking, there are significant numbers of Malay Muslims in the lower echelons of government service, and very few in key decision-making positions in the agencies where such representation really matters: the Interior Ministry, the police and the army (McCargo 2008, pg 17).

Democratic mechanisms are also centralized, with all parties having to register nationally. Elected representatives from the Deep South have not been able to influence significantly government policies for the area and have often lost local credibility in the process. According to McCargo, elected Malay Muslim politicians had little freedom of maneuver, since real control of local government in Thailand remained firmly in the hands of the Interior Ministry. In the eyes of many Malay Muslims, “decentralization” amounted to yet another legitimacy scam perpetuated by the Thai state (McCargo 2008, pg 18).

Religious education. The ability to worship and carry out Islamic religious practices has not been an issue in Thailand, but other grievances, both past and present, have overlapped with Muslim Malays’ minority status. Chief among these has been the status and quality of Islamic education in the South, including the status and curriculum of Islamic schools; the recognition of educational degrees obtained at Islamic institutions abroad; and the language of instruction/use in both state-run and private Islamic schools and in the workplace (Amnesty International 2011, pg 6).

For the Thai state, the *pondok* system, as the stronghold of Malay linguistic, cultural and religious identity, was one of the greatest barriers to the implementation of an assimilation policy (McCargo 2008, pg 38). Following the upsurge in violence of January 2004, the Islamic education system in the southern border provinces became a focus of intensive state scrutiny (McCargo 2008 pg 39).

In the Deep South, most children at the primary school level attend government schools. However, at the secondary level, a majority of Malay Muslim parents in the Deep South prefer to send their children to Islamic private schools rather than to state secondary schools. By the time they reach secondary school, over two-thirds of Malay Muslim students attend Islamic private schools rather than government schools. Islamic private schools, a legacy of the traditional *pondok* school, receive government subsidies and follow curricula that allow for extensive religious education. Low secular standards (particularly in the Thai language) mean that many Islamic private school students struggle to gain jobs or successfully graduate from universities (The Asia Foundation 2013, pgs 15-17).

Abuses by the Thai State. Mistreatment of Malay Muslims by the Thaksin government – notably at Krue Se and Tak Bai – has reinforced the narrative of oppressive Siamese rulers for the current generation. According to ICG, both incidents are powerful propaganda tools that further incite Muslims to fight the Buddhist Thai state. The deputy commander of the 4th army region covering the Deep South admitted some 80 % of arrested fighters confessed that they joined the movement because they were angered by these two incidents. The arrest or killing of a family member is a strong motivator for recruits. The harassment of those whose names made it onto a blacklist for association with the two incidents also drives new members towards the movement (ICG 2009, pg 12).

Some *ustadz* (religious teachers) play VCDs about the Tak Bai and Krue Se incidents to start discussions about injustices experienced by Malay Muslims. They recount recent cases of alleged torture and those religious teachers killed by security forces. While they do link the trouble in the Deep South to the plight of oppressed Muslims elsewhere, this seems incidental and is not used as a clarion call by local recruiters (ICG 2009, pg 12).

As described below, in response to the insurgency, the Thai government has imposed special laws to enable Thai security forces to more effectively combat the insurgency. These legal instruments give the authorities wide-ranging powers to arbitrarily interrogate, detain, and otherwise restrict the rights and liberties of Thai citizens. These laws, coupled with the impunity granted to security officials, are a major grievance in the Deep South. They contribute to insurgent recruitment efforts and the continuation of the overall cycle of violence.

A crisis of political legitimacy? According to McCargo, explanations pointing to socio-economic grievances fail to explain the resurgence of violence at a time of relative economic prosperity. He asserts that the conflict is rooted in Thailand's "persistent failure to establish legitimate participatory rule" in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat (McCargo 2008, pg x). Moderate leaders in the Deep South were captured by the Thai state, thereby losing their own credentials and legitimacy. In particular, the SBPAC, by coopting leading Malay Muslims, also sapped their legitimacy at a time when the gulf between ordinary villagers and the Malay elite was expanding, opening up new space for rekindled militant recruitment in the 1990s (McCargo 2008, pgs 6-9). According to McCargo, "Where Malay Muslims have turned to militancy, it has been because Thai rule no longer appears legitimate, and because their own leaders have experienced a parallel loss of spiritual, moral and political authority" (McCargo 2008, pg 19).

The lack – or loss – of political legitimacy McCargo identifies probably is a view shared by most militants, but it may be less widely or strongly held by the majority of Malay Muslims in the South. The Asia Foundation's 2010 survey of public opinion in the Deep South found that Southerners were not especially alienated from the government and in some respects were more positive than Thais surveyed nation-wide. For example:

- 75% of Southerners said they were satisfied with government -- up from 53% in 2009.
- 75% of Southerners (compared to 70% nationally) said they were satisfied with how democracy works in Thailand.
- However, 61% of Southerners (compared to 55% nationally) did not think government cares very much about their views. Corruption was viewed as a problem.
- Courts were seen as having high integrity, both nationally and in the South. But 49% of Southerners also thought there always or usually are different standards of justice applied to Malays.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, Southerners expressed less trust in the police and army than northerners.
- 37% of southerners believed the main cause of the conflict is the failure of officials to understand the local population. Only 17% believed separatism is the main issue. 56% believed that local self-government would help end the conflict, which is consistent with national views on the benefit of decentralization. A high percentage wanted more use of local languages.

D. The role of Islam

Traditional Islamic beliefs and practices are in flux – and militants use Islam for instrumental purposes (such as legitimization and mobilization).

Change and contestation. Muslims in Thailand have not been isolated from the ferment and change that has characterized the Muslim world in recent decades. From the 1960s the Muslim communities of southern Thailand were affected by an international revival of Islam that was stimulated to a significant degree by international events such as the Iranian revolution and the conflict in Afghanistan during the 1980s, but also reflecting social, economic and political developments within the Muslim world. This resurgence was generally not political in Thailand, but was rather characterized by growing piety, manifested in observance of Islamic practices, a return to traditional forms of dress (especially for women) and a more overt employment of religious symbols and language (Melvin 2007, pg 21).

According to Joseph Chinyon Liow:

The influence that transnational Islamic networks have enjoyed has led to the creation of a rich constellation of Muslim cultures, identities, and local networks throughout the country. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Muslim-majority southern provinces. While often portrayed as possessing a monolithic Malay-Muslim identity in contradistinction to the Thai-Buddhist majority across the country, what often escapes scholarly attention is the fact that the terrain of Muslim thought and practice in the south resembles more a kaleidoscope of variegated religio-cultural identities. (Liow 2011, pg 1420)

The majority of Malay Muslims in southern Thailand subscribe to the traditional Sunni school of Shafi'i, known locally as the "Old Generation" (*kana kbao* in Thai and *kaum tua* in Malay). Mystical Sufi traditions have also been long practiced in the area. Salafis are considered the "New Generation" (*kana mai* in Thai and *kaum muda* in Malay). Salafi followers are significantly fewer than Shafi'i and they are seen as challenging the authority of traditional Muslim leaders because of their attempt to reform traditional Islamic education to take away folk elements deemed un-Islamic and reorient them towards scripturalism (ICG 2009, pg 16).

According to Liow, greater pluralism and contestation have become the hallmarks of Islam in Thailand:

The past two decades have witnessed a proliferation of new sources of religious authority and legitimacy in Muslim Thailand, along with new interpretations of religious ideas and norms about how to be a 'good Muslim,' particularly in the southern provinces. Moreover, these processes of Islamization, underpinned by local and transnational economies, are taking the form of new Islamic groupings and alignments that not only serve religious functions but are also transforming social and cultural mores and institutions. As a consequence of this phenomenon, the authority of the traditional religious monopoly in southern Thailand is being negotiated and contested, even as conceptions of religious thought and practice are being re-shaped by a confluence of modern and transnational forces. At the same time, we need to take cognizance of the fact that these new ideas are in many respects also being resisted and localized by commissars and adherents of 'local' Islam, thereby adding to the dynamism of the socio-religious terrain. (Liow 2011, pg 1386)

State responses to Islam. The contemporary Thai state has been respectful of the right of Muslims to practice their religion while also trying to manage and minimize the elements of Islam that don't fit in well with Thai notions of the nation-state. One result of this is that Thailand lacks a credible and institutionalized religious authority that can command wide support in the South. The *Chularajamontri* is the state-designated superior authority on issues pertaining to Islam. He has the authority to administer all Islamic affairs in the nation and to provide the government agencies with instructions as to Islamic affairs. The current *Chularajamontri*, Mr. Aziz Pitakkumphol, is a native of Songkhla, and in May 2010 became the first southern resident to have taken up the position of *Chularajamontri*. But according to Melvin, the institution of the *Chularajamontri* lacks broad based legitimacy among the Malay Muslims (Melvin 2007, pg 39). It is seen by many as a tool of the Bangkok government to control and suppress believers in the Deep South.

According to McCargo:

Islam in the Deep South since the 1960s, and especially since the 1980s, is largely a tale of Thai successes in undermining the traditional system of Islamic education – through converting *pondoks* (Islamic boarding schools) into private Islamic schools that offer standard Thai curriculum – and refining mechanisms for controlling *imams* and provincial Islamic councils ... The upsurge in violence reflects fragmented, weak, and insecure Islamic institutions in the deep south, but is not primarily animated by religious tensions or grievances. (McCargo 2008, pg 19)

Islam and insurgency. Islamic revival and ferment, in Thailand and globally, has contributed to the intensity and longevity of the insurgency. According to Melvin:

Islamic revival did assist the insurgency. First, the strengthening of popular association with and interest in Islam allowed the insurgents to draw on religious symbols and images to claim legitimacy and gain support for their campaigns. Second, the revival helped to challenge traditional structures of authority in the Malay Muslim community, with the result that there was no effective and coordinated opposition from the clerical establishment to the insurgents' claims to take their authority from Islam. (Melvin 2007, pg 21)

ICG has observed that Islam is used instrumentally to mobilize recruits rather than representing a significant causal factor in its own right (ICG 2009, pg 10). The militants' essentially ethno-nationalist agenda is expressed in religious terms as a holy jihad against Buddhist infidels. Malay Muslims in southern Thailand make no distinction between their ethnic and religious identity: for them, to be Malay is to be a Muslim. As the insurgents are exclusively Malay-Muslim, Islam provides a ready-made and common vocabulary for their struggle. Recruiters persuade Malay Muslims to wage "jihad" against Buddhist Thai "infidels", or *kafir*, a term used to refer to government officials, Buddhist villagers and monks. Muslims perceived by insurgents to be traitors to their own religion, such as those working for or lending support to the *kafir* government, are called *munafik*, literally "hypocrites." An insurgent defector said *munafik* should be killed even before *kafir* because they are like "enemies under the blanket" (ICG 2009, pgs 13-14).

Local or transnational Islam? The consensus view held by most analysts is that Islamic militancy in the Deep South is not linked to any significant degree to Islamist extremist groups outside of Thailand. In 2008 McCargo asserted:

Radicalization has taken place largely in response to specific setbacks, declines and defeats, often associated with challenges to religious authority and identity...Islam is viewed as a rhetorical resource selectively invoked by militant groups in the Thai South rather than the source of their core motivation...[it is] an insurgency, not a jihad. (McCargo 2008, pg x)

In 2009 the ICG largely dismissed the notion that the insurgency in Southern Thailand was connected to regional or global jihad:

There is no evidence from the curricula of indoctrination classes to support the belief that the struggle in southern Thailand is connected with the global jihadi movement. On the contrary, the agenda and targets of violence are overwhelmingly local and the local brands of Islam are antithetical to the puritanical Salafism that drives groups such as al-Qaeda. Despite the ideological difference, the conflict in southern Thailand has been used in Malaysia and Indonesia as a rallying point to call for jihadists to wage *jihad* in the nearest "oppressed" land. To what extent it has inspired jihadists to join the struggle remains uncertain. Equally, the movement in southern Thailand is not isolated from its region and is influenced by events in neighbouring countries. The scope and nature of such links is unclear. (ICG 2009, pg 10)

More recently, Liow, writing in 2011, observed:

Despite spending more than 6 years searching for evidence, neither Thai security and intelligence nor the terrorism analyst community have thus far been able to confirm Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) activity in the south. What is clear, nonetheless, is that the climate of violence in southern Thailand differs considerably from other JI theatres. There is a distinct disinterest in Western targets, which has been and remains a trademark of global jihadi terrorist activity ... Further to that, there have not been any suicide attacks, another trademark of JI and other jihadi terrorist organizations ... While al-Qaeda affiliates in Iraq and elsewhere (including JI) proudly claim responsibility for acts of violence and make public calls to *jihad*, the perpetrators of violence in southern Thailand remain conspicuous in their silence. (Liow 2011, pg 1418):

E. The role of Buddhism

Although the conflict isn't essentially religious in nature, the close association of the Thai state and monarchy with increasingly assertive sangha fuels inter-religious suspicion and hostility.

Writing in 2007, Melvin wisely cautioned that:

... an exclusive focus on Islam—and, indeed, on the Malay Muslim community—does not give a full understanding of the political and conflict dynamics that are operating across the South and in Thailand more broadly. Just as Islam has been changing in southern Thailand, so, too, have Buddhism and the Thai community. This has been an important factor in the conflict in the Pattani region. (pg 26)

His analysis is worth quoting at length:

The symbiosis between Buddhism and the Thai state has been felt particularly acutely in the South, where monks have frequently been instrumental in efforts to assimilate the Malay Muslims, notably through education. These initiatives have included several under royal patronage ...

In recent years Buddhism in Thailand has faced new pressures and this is reported to have promoted 'growing religious intolerance in Thai society—especially towards religious minorities, notably Muslims and Christians' ... There was strong opposition from the *sangha* to the proposed establishment of a national committee of religion in 2005. The *sangha* and conservative Buddhists feared that such a committee would put other religions on an equal footing with Buddhism and thus weaken its dominant position in Thailand. While this Buddhist intolerance initially focused on Christians it soon came to include the Muslim community as well. The strongest criticism of the June 2006 report on violence in the southern border provinces drawn up by the National Reconciliation Commission, notably the recommendations for greater religious pluralism, also came from the *sangha*. Strong pressure in 2007 by the Buddhist establishment to have Buddhism recognized as the state religion appears to have further accentuated the religious dimensions of the Pattani conflict.

The growing hostility between sections of the Buddhist establishment and Islamist elements in recent decades has also been matched by a polarization between the Thais and the Malay Muslims in the Pattani region. As a result, many common elements of southern culture—interfaith marriages, conversions between Buddhism and Islam, similar beliefs in spirits and ancestors (which were often more important than canonical rules), and mixed rituals—have been replaced by separate cultural practices. These changes suggest that causes of the conflict can be found in both communities in the Pattani region, rather than just in an increasingly violent Islamism. (Melvin 2007, pgs 26-27)

F. Criminality

There is almost certainly a link between insurgency and criminality, but to date the violence is driven more by grievances and political goals than by criminal goals.

As is commonly seen in insurgencies motivated primarily by state-society tensions, violence often becomes entwined with other issues at the local level. Some insurgents are closely connected to criminal elements, while security forces have enlisted and armed local volunteers. Yet these factors remain secondary to the main ethnic fault-lines and associated motivations for violence (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 2).

Officials and villagers alike recognize criminal enterprises, especially drug trafficking and oil smuggling, as serious problems for the region. There is little consensus about how much criminal violence is related to the insurgency and what role the illicit economy may play in militant funding (ICG 2012, pg 4). According to

ICG, “While some government officials believe that the movement may have ties to drug or contraband smuggling rings, particularly for fundraising, such links are not at the core of the movement” (2009, pg 18).

Many people in the conflict area view the causes of violence as stemming primarily from drugs, crime and economic problems, with more ideological motivations also significant. Respondents may have been influenced by the fear of openly discussing more sensitive issues of politics and identity associated with the violence. Nonetheless, these views describe the everyday experiences of many in the Deep South who see incidents that affect their daily lives and relate them to local problems rather than the wider context. In many places both insurgents and security forces are involved in criminal activity. However, this does not necessarily reflect the motivations of senior insurgent leaders (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 26).

G. Public opinion

Insurgents’ views do not necessarily represent the wider population.

While many Malay Muslims demonstrate some sympathy for the insurgents’ general aims, they also typically have a nuanced view of the Thai State. According to the Asia Foundation, a high proportion of Malay Muslims operate more comfortably within mainstream Thai society than insurgent leaders would like. Almost all young, and many middle-aged, Malay Muslims in the Far South speak Thai, and a significant number of local people are educated to a high level in the Far South itself or at universities elsewhere in Thailand. Malay Muslims (and to a lesser extent Thai Buddhists) in the Deep South typically negotiate different cultural spheres and spaces without necessarily finding it challenging or contradictory, for example speaking central Thai in formal environments and switching to local Malay dialect at home (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 22-23).

Malay Muslims are not necessarily more suspicious of the State than others. Perception survey data show that a similar proportion of people in the conflict area and outside it – slightly over 50% in both cases – agree that the government is concerned with what happens in their communities. When dividing by religion, far more Muslims (57%) than Buddhists (47%) agree with the same statement. These findings show that the attitudes of insurgents are not fully representative of the wider population (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 23).

Attitudes about justice appear to be bifurcated. On the one hand, the Asia Foundation survey found that the large majority of Malay Muslims view the Thai court system positively. However, 49% of Southerners thought there always or usually are different standards of justice applied to Malays. This might be the result of the draconian laws used by the security apparatus to detain and arrest suspected insurgents.

It is important to distinguish between a small number of insurgents and the wider population. A polarized vision of opposing groups masks a more blurred everyday reality. Our findings indicate that many residents of the Deep South are in practice caught between the military and insurgents on the ground and have mixed feelings rather than a purely negative view of the Thai state. Most southern Muslims remain largely loyal citizens even in difficult circumstances (The Asia Foundation 2103, pg 77).

IV. THE INSURGENTS

Insurgents, reportedly numbering over 9,400 leaders, operatives, and supporters as of February 2010, carry out the vast majority of fatal attacks in the South. According to ICG, “Bangkok faces a determined, capable and ruthless opponent” (ICG 2012, pg 2).

According to Liow and Pathan there are three concurrent generations of insurgents involved in the southern Thai conflict. These three groups are:

- 1) an old guard consisting of insurgents who were most active in the 1970s and 1980s, but who had then receded into the background only to resurface in recent years as self-proclaimed 'leaders' of the insurgency,
- 2) a new, younger generation who were mostly indoctrinated and recruited during the conflict's 'lull' period of the 1990s and are today the frontline combatants in the insurgency, and
- 3) a coterie of '*pemimpin*' — present-day operational commanders who were themselves rank and file combatants in the earlier periods of insurgencies (i.e., the 1970s and 1980s).

The tactical and strategic dynamics of the insurgency are very much a function of the evolving relationship between these three cohorts. While no one can deny the role of the old guard and their connection to the current generation of insurgents, the extent to which these elders possess significant weight to exercise influence over their successors and dictate the trajectory of the struggle, or play an instrumental role in indoctrination and radicalization processes, remains unclear, even if one would expect them to have some measure or other of influence (in their capacity as 'elders') over the broad ideology of self-determination. Tellingly, insurgents operating on the ground today make clear that while they respect the old guard, there was no pressing need to look to them for leadership, inspiration and justification to take up arms against the Thai state. Moreover, old-guard insurgents themselves admitted as much — that the tenor of the conflict was very much beyond their control (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 11).

Goals and strategy. The movement casts its cause as self-determination, a struggle to liberate Pattani from Thai rule and establish an independent Islamic state. According to ICG, recruitment appeals emphasize a history of Siamese conquest and oppression. The struggle is couched in religious terms as a jihad that is an obligation for Muslims to support. The religious justifications are linked to a local Malay ethnic identity, which serves to underscore differences with Thais, Sino-Thais and non-local Muslims (ICG 2012, pg 3).

The movement does not intend to prevail in a military contest, however, but uses violence to undermine the state, provoke repression and gain cooperation from Malay Muslim villagers. Militants strive to win cooperation, or at least acquiescence, from Malay Muslims, in part by calibrating the use of violence, selectively targeting those who cooperate with the state and blaming security forces for insurgent attacks that displease locals. They actively target civilians (ICG 2012, pg 3).

According to Liow and Pathan, the goal of targeting of civilians is "to undermine the credibility of the state as a purveyor of security and to sow the seeds of sectarian conflict:

The point to stress here is that, unlike past practice, the breeding of sectarian tension at the level of grass roots appears to be a discernible tactical objective on the part of the current generation of insurgents. Indeed, arguably the most sobering feature of the insurgency today, and one that distinguishes it from what took place previously, is the brutal nature of some of the ongoing violence. From the perspective of separatist leaders of the older generation, the level of brutality that the current generation is engaged in has been described as a 'source of embarrassment'. (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 31)

Echoing this, Sunai Phasuk, senior researcher on Thailand at Human Rights Watch, recently observed, "We are seeing a greater radicalization of the insurgency...They don't want the presence of anyone in the region apart from ethnic Malays and this they've made clear with public announcements" (CNN Online, February 19, 2013).

Leadership and organization. The militants' unwillingness to assert an organizational identity, claim direct responsibility for attacks or issue formal demands has fostered uncertainty about their aims and strategy. Though it is opaque in many respects, understanding of the movement is becoming slightly clearer.

The Thai military maintains that the Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate (BRN-C) is the main insurgent organization, though security officers acknowledge that a variety of armed groups operate in the region.

Alongside the BRN-C, two lesser separatist groups, the PULO and the Pattani Islamic Mujahidin Movement (Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Pattani, GMIP), are reported to be active, as well as a number of smaller groups (Melvin 2007, pg 9). It appears that several factions are working together in a loose coalition. An alternative conception is of a formless movement comprised of autonomous cells operating without centralized command (ICG 2012, pg 2).

The BRN-C appears to function as the lead organization. The BRN-C was at the forefront of the revival of the separatist movement during the 1990s and it played a crucial role in reorienting this movement towards a more Islamist character. Thai security forces believe that [the BRN-C] consists of bodies that correspond to the state bureaucracy: regional, provincial, district, and subdistrict, with a strong presence in about 30% of the villages in the relevant provinces (Amnesty International 2011, pg 7).

Amnesty International goes on to say:

[The BRN-C] is divided into three branches of 600-1,000 fighters, who in turn are split among hundreds of village-based units of six fighters each, known as *Runda Kumpulan Kecil* (RKK) and a much smaller number of commando teams (*jum'ae*). The RKK are grouped in larger units generally resembling common military structure, while the commando teams, containing jungle, rapid attack, bomb, and medical units, deploy where they are needed. Many villages have been either persuaded or terrorized into co-operating with them; refusing to cooperate with the authorities; informing for them; guarding hostages; preventing officials from entering; and mobilizing protesters. (Amnesty International 2011, pg 7)

Local operatives work clandestinely and typically reside within their communities across the Deep South, while the location and identity of senior leaders remain largely unknown. Insurgent command structures are complex, with some factions identifiable and many operations planned at the local level. Cells also regularly respond to instructions from higher-level leaders who have repeatedly shown their ability to execute coordinated attacks involving units across the Deep South (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 6).

Recruitment. Indoctrination, recruitment and radicalization are carried out systematically across different parts of the Malay Muslim community over several years in preparation for violent acts.

Schools are particularly important as recruiting grounds because they have been the battleground for the clash of cultures and ideologies fuelling the conflict. Influential teachers with access to students have the opportunity to closely observe, identify and separate those with promise. They hide this process by using extracurricular activities as cover. Once confident they have the right people, the recruits are administered an oath of allegiance before receiving further indoctrination. Then, in a series of irregular boot camps lasting months or even years, their part-time training intensifies. Beginning with religious guidance from familiar teachers, they are then passed to anonymous drill instructors to be physically prepared and taught military skills ahead of assignment to a small unit (ICG 2009, pg 6).

The recruitment process follows a pattern similar to jihadi organizations elsewhere in Southeast Asia, with selection, separation, oath-taking, indoctrination and military training. The difference is that recruiters in this conflict appeal to Malay nationalism and the oppression of Malay Muslims by Buddhist Thai rulers rather than invoking a universal Islamic state or a global war against the “international Zionist-Christian alliance” (ICG 2009, pg 6).

Generational splits. Like the state, the insurgent movement is not a monolithic institution. *Jum'ae* hold diverse views and motivations. According to the Asia Foundation, villagers in the Deep South identify different tendencies within the insurgent movement. More senior and experienced cadres tend to have a reputation for stronger nationalist and religious motivations while younger lower-ranking combatants are more closely associated with local criminal networks (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 25).

According to Sunai Phasuk, of Human Rights Watch, "What we are seeing is a transfer of power within the insurgency from an older generation, which favors negotiation, to a younger radicalized generation who see negotiation as an act of betrayal to the ideology of separatism ... There is now a split in the leadership" (CNN Online, February 19, 2013).

V. GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Since the start of violence in the Deep South, there have been five prime ministers in power, a military coup, and violent protest in Bangkok that resulted in 90 deaths and 2,000 injuries (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 7). The intractable power struggle between supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, deposed in a 2006 coup d'état, and his opponents in the army, bureaucracy and palace has overshadowed the conflict in the South. Civilian officials there and in Bangkok have been hamstrung by the need to respect military prerogatives and have searched in vain for a formula that can tamp down the violence without committing to political reforms (ICG 2012, pg i).

Over time, successive Thai governments have attempted to broker peace talks, allocated large budgets to a series of development programs in the Deep South, offered partial amnesties to some insurgents, modified security tactics and repeatedly restructured their coordinating institutions. A number of minor concessions and policy shifts have been adopted and government bodies have repeatedly tried to reach out to Malay Muslims through socio-economic development programs. Examples include removing entrance requirements from universities for local students, building community centers, funding grassroots media initiatives, and increasing local recruitment into some government agencies such as the health service. Grants have been provided to many local NGOs for activities ranging from income generation to youth exchanges with other parts of Thailand (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 39).

While many of these initiatives recognize the specific circumstances of the Deep South and make efforts to address some root causes of violence, according to the Asia Foundation, they confront two main problems. First, they are often poorly executed, with high levels of corruption and misdirected resources. Second, when seen from a wider perspective they present a façade of action while the predominantly security-focused approach continues and no major policy changes take place (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 39).

A. Managing the “Southern problem”

Generally speaking, Bangkok's strategies for the Deep South reflect classical ideas of counter-insurgency as a contest for support from the local population, based on provision of security, material welfare and effective administration (ICG 2012, pg 8). Key elements of the government's counter-insurgency strategy include: 1) the deployment of armed forces and the formation of local militia, 2) enhanced intelligence operations, 3) the imposition of a legal regime that enhances the state's power to detain and interrogate suspected insurgents, 4) periodic changes to the way the South is administered, 5) the use of development projects and cultural concessions to “win hearts and minds.”

Bangkok has spent 180 billion baht (\$5.8 billion) over the past nine years on counter-insurgency, most of it administered by the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). Some civilian officials express concern that large budgets associated with this sphere serve as an incentive for maintenance of the military's pre-eminence in the region (ICG 2012, pg 9).

The militarization of the South.

According to ICG, there are some 41,000 professional security forces in the region, including 24,000 troops and 17,000 police. Paramilitary forces include 18,000 volunteer rangers (*thaban phran*) and 7,000 *Or Sor*

(Volunteer Defence Corps). Almost 85,000 civilians organized as volunteer militias augment these forces. (ICG 2012, pg 12)

A shortfall in police is a longstanding problem that contributes to reliance on army troops and paramilitaries. In September 2012, then-Deputy Prime Minister (for security affairs) Yutthasak Sasiphrapa reported a deficit of 4,000-5,000 officers. According to ICG, this stems from misplaced priorities in Bangkok and army domination of ISOC, which is in charge of the security response. It is exacerbated by regulations allowing officers with good records and the rank of police sub-lieutenant and above to request transfer from the region. Officers in the region say police are at 65% of the numbers needed to deal with the insurgency. According to ICG, many in the Malay-Muslim community view the pervasive army and paramilitary presence as an affront and evidence that the state treats them unjustly (ICG 2012, pg 12).

The search for an administrative solution to the southern problem.

Remediation of administrative shortcomings is a perennial feature of Bangkok's responses to the southern problem. Over three decades, nine special government agencies have been established to resolve that problem, each intended as a mechanism for better coordination across existing agencies (ICG 2012, pg 15).

The NSC, ISOC and the SBPAC are the main agencies responsible for devising and implementing policy in the region. The prime minister formally leads each of these but in practice exercises little direct oversight. Inter-agency and political rivalries are rife.

The ISOC, with roots in the Cold War-era anti-communist struggle, is responsible for security within the Kingdom. The 2008 Internal Security Act grants it broad authority to identify and counter an array of internal-security threats. The prime minister commands ISOC, lending a veneer of civilian control, but the military dominates its board. The ISOC is staffed mainly by officials seconded from the military, police and civilian agencies. Since 2007, military operations in the Deep South have come under the jurisdiction of the Region Four Forward Command, led by the Fourth Army Region commander.

SBPAC oversees civilian administration in the five southernmost provinces. Established in 1981, it coordinates civilian agencies, monitors policy implementation and trains and disciplines officials posted to the region. The SBPAC not only played an instrumental role in fostering closer relations and mutual trust between the local community, security forces and government officials, it served a critical intelligence function as well. Dismantled by Thaksin in 2002 and then re-established in 2006, but under the ISOC. Under Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, the SBPAC was removed from the ISOC chain of command, granted greater authority and provided a separate budget. A Southern Border Provinces Development Strategy Committee, chaired by the prime minister, was created to vet strategy and budgets for development programs in the region. In April 2011, Panu Uthairat, a career interior ministry official and former governor of Pattani, became its first secretary-general, equivalent to a ministry permanent secretary.

The NSC is responsible for planning security policy. Article Four of the 2010 Southern Border Provinces Administration Act gives it authority to draft security and development policy for the Deep South. Its policy is the state's master plan: by law, it guides the activities of ministries and agencies with responsibilities in the region and is intended to provide continuity should the government change.

According to ICG, several factors inhibit the effectiveness of this internal security apparatus:

First, the relationship between military and civilian authority is especially fraught, given the army's self-proclaimed role as guardian of the monarchy and its overt political role. Elected leaders, whatever their party affiliation, have been preoccupied with political survival, which has meant appeasing the army ...

Second, the persistence of a patrimonial political order – a highly centralised state, an extensive bureaucracy superimposed on shifting patronage networks and a moralizing elite distrustful of

participatory politics – distorts policy design and implementation. Problems in the political order are commonly explained as arising from personal moral failings or faulty administrative structures, rather than from aspects of the political order itself. Removing immoral individuals and rectifying administration are the preferred remedies. Reforms, therefore, tend to be procedural rather than substantive.

Third, traditional bureaucratic rivalries are also at play. The quest for a perfect bureaucratic structure is a preoccupation for Bangkok officials, who often blame policy failures on a lack of unity among agencies. With respect to the Deep South, the issue appeared to be settled by the passage of the 2010 Southern Border Provinces Administration Act, but some senior security officials have sought to roll back the enhanced authority it provides. It is emblematic of wider problems within the Thai bureaucracy that the NSC does not always command the respect of the military and line ministries, whose officials tend to regard its policies as recommendations rather than binding directives. (ICG 2012, pg 9)

B. The legal framework

The increase in violence has prompted the imposition of a draconian legal regime that almost certainly creates new grievances.

The insurgency has prompted the Thai government to suspend normal legal processes and rights in the South and impose special laws intended to enable security forces to more effectively combat the insurgency. These legal instruments give the authorities wide-ranging powers to arbitrarily interrogate, detain, and otherwise restrict the rights and liberties of Thai citizens. As noted above, these laws, coupled with the impunity granted to security officials, are a major grievance in the Deep South.

The Internal Security Act (ISA) established ISOC and gives the government the power to respond to alleged threats to national security by restricting fundamental rights (Department of State 2011). On February 18 the Yingluck government resolved to enforce the ISA in the southern border provinces instead of the Emergency Decree. Considered less strong, the ISA has Section 21, which makes it easier for the wrongdoers to turn themselves in and for the government to negotiate with them. The use of the ISA this time is deemed in accordance with the government's policy that focuses on talks in a peaceful manner.

The *Emergency Decree* was declared in effect in the South in July 2005. The Emergency Decree gives blanket powers to state actors to resolve the State of Emergency, including by making arrests for up to 30 days without charges, censoring the press, restricting movement and using armed force. The decree also provides security forces broad immunity from prosecution. The Emergency Decree provides the government greater powers than the ISA and therefore takes precedence (Department of State 2011, pg 13).

Martial law was imposed in 2004 and remains in effect in Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala provinces, giving a wide range of powers to security forces. It allows for detention without charge up to seven days without court or government agency approval. In some cases suspects have been held first under martial law for seven days and then detained for an additional 30 days under the Emergency Decree (Department of State 2011, pg 15).

According to Amnesty international, Thai authorities have arrested over 5,000 people, many of whom were then arbitrarily detained, and in many cases, subjected systematically to torture. The government has also resorted to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions (Amnesty International 2011, pg 5).

C. Development initiatives

The government has repeatedly committed extra funds above ordinary budget allocations for both military and civil purposes in the Deep South since the increase in violence in 2004. Initiatives have been supported by central ministries and by the SBPAC.

“Understand, reach out and develop”

Understandably, the Thai government prefers to emphasize its efforts to address the causes of the insurgency rather than its efforts to suppress it. According to the government:

Since the southern unrest is connected to the feelings of social and economic injustice, poverty, and a desire to see more respect for and a better understanding of local traditions, way of life, and culture, the government recognizes this root cause, and has therefore taken a development-led approach, under the philosophy based on His Majesty the King’s advice to “understand, reach out, and develop.”

According to the government, the “understanding” means to seek to understand history, the cause of violence, and the successes and failures in tackling the problems. “Reaching out” involves efforts to win the hearts of local people and learn their feelings and thoughts. “Development” means the proper way of developing in order to cope with the problems with greater efficiency and effectiveness. “Without understanding and reaching out, people will not be able to carry out development properly.” (Government of Thailand 2011)

Development Projects

The principle objectives of extra government spending have been to win over the local population through ‘hearts and minds’ initiatives and improved economic opportunities. The Thai Government’s support for development initiatives has primarily been designed to encourage trust in the state, and reduce support for insurgents. With massive levels of government funding going to the conflict area, this funding has satisfied state institutions interested in expanding their budgets and given the impression of a responsive state while deflecting from the need for more fundamental political change. Justified as part of efforts to build popular confidence in the state, these initiatives may have brought some material improvements yet are barely distinguishable in their form and intent from military campaigns to ‘win hearts and minds’. Indeed, many development projects in the Deep South are implemented by the military (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 31).

The Southern Border Provinces Development Strategy Committee approved an Action Plan for the Development of Southern Border Provinces, 2012-2014. The Action Plan consists of six major work plans involving 268 projects. The first work plan seeks to raise local income and improve local residents’ quality of the life at the village level. The second work plan seeks to ensure justice, public safety, and security of life and property. The third one calls for the development of human quality, a multi-cultural society, and social service standards. The fourth work plan involves economic and investment rehabilitation. In the fifth work plan, economic linkages will be developed with neighboring countries, while the sixth work plan seeks to improve related regulations and enhance management efficiency (Government of Thailand 2011).

A special economic package of 68.7 billion baht (about two billion US dollars) was allocated for the three-year development plan for the five southern provinces to support and promote tourism, fishing, rubber production, palm oil production, and the halal food industry. A target has been set to increase income for poor families from less than 64,000 baht a year in 2009 to at least 120,000 baht a year by 2012. The production base in the southern border provinces will be widened to generate more income and employment, so that local residents do not have to rely heavily on rubber production and fishing, the main occupations there (Government of Thailand 2011).

The Thai government, via SBPAC, initiated its own version of community-based development, the Panom project, (or the Quality of Life Development project) in 2011. Aimed to cover all 2,248 villages in the Deep South, the project's total budget was 523,769,500 Baht or \$17,561,991 U.S. dollars. This indicates how large the government's expenditure on community-based projects is compared to the extremely small international aid (The Asia Foundation 2013, pg 57).

D. Countering Islamist Extremism

Neither the Thai state, with its Buddhist underpinnings, nor official Islamic institutions have been able to offer a credible alternative to counter the use of Islam to bolster militancy.

To deter Malay Muslims from joining the movement, the government has made interventions in ideological debates to delegitimize the insurgents' acts. The Sheik ul Islamic Office, Thailand's highest official Islamic body, published 200,000 copies of a Thai-language book *Clarifications on the Distortion of Islamic Teaching in Berjihad di Pattani* to counter *Berjihad di Pattani*. *Clarifications* criticizes the insurgents' nationalist ideas as "rigid", arguing nationalistic sentiments contradict the universality of Islam, which aims to bring peace to the world and not independence for a particular ethnic group. It is unclear how many Malay Muslims have read the publication since it was published only in Thai and not in local Jawi script. According to ICG, such cultural insensitivity only erodes the weak legitimacy of the *Sheik ul Islamic* Office, already seen as a tool of the Bangkok government to control and suppress believers in the Deep South (ICG 2009, pg 17).

Attempts by the Thai authorities to counter radicalization by promoting the idea of a model 'moderate' Muslim citizen have failed because, in the words of one observer, 'no one wants to be seen as a "Muslim Uncle Tom."' According to Melvin, the government may simply have to accept that finding representatives of the Islamic community who have genuine local support and legitimacy will involve working with Islamists whose views do not reflect traditional notions in Bangkok about what makes a moderate and loyal Muslim (Melvin 2007, pg 39).

E. Negotiations

Past efforts to engage in negotiations have been unable to overcome representational and substantive challenges.

Dialogue has been going on in various forms since at least 2005. Some of the first acknowledged dialogue meetings took place under Malaysian auspices, when former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad convened meetings on the island of Langkawi, in which Thai officials, including the then head of the National Security Council, took part. Mahathir's proposals were ignored by the Thaksin Shinawatra government, at the time preoccupied with a domestic political crisis which culminated in the 2006 military coup. Since then, there have been several other dialogue processes. These have included the 2008 Bogor meetings brokered by the Indonesian government, ongoing initiatives by two European agencies which peaked during the 2009-2011 Abhisit Vejjajiva government, plus moves by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and personal diplomacy initiated by self-exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra (McCargo 2013).

According to McCargo, all these attempts at dialogue have been afflicted by the same problems. The first is: who speaks for the Thais? The Thai state is far from a unitary actor: the Southern conflict is under the jurisdiction of several competing groups and agencies. There is intense distrust between elected politicians and these competing bureaucratic entities; any dialogue process 'owned' by one partner is likely to be quietly disowned by the others (McCargo 2013).

A second problem is simply: dialogue about what? Successive Thai governments have tried to deny the political nature of the militant cause, waffling endlessly about drugs, smuggling and criminality, and have been unwilling to talk seriously or consistently about autonomy or other forms of decentralization. Given the serial

insincerity of the government side – Thai security officials often see 'dialogue' primarily as a means of identifying and neutralizing militant leaders – why should any militants engage in substantive discussions (McCargo 2013)?

A third problem is: who can speak for the militants? Despite persistent attempts by the Thai authorities to portray the militants as a cohesive top-down organization known as 'BRN-Coordinate', in which a small group of leaders have substantial command and control over local cells, many analysts believe that the *juwae* (fighters) are very decentralized, have connections and allegiances to a range of groups and older-generation leaders, and cannot readily be corralled into a ceasefire or a shared set of proposals. Successive dialogues have generally involved self-proclaimed separatist leaders based in Malaysia or elsewhere, many of whom are at best tangentially connected to the current *juwae* (McCargo 2013).

In terms of their political demands, BRN and its respective component wings have historically taken the uncompromising position — requiring nothing short of independence for the Malay homeland of Pattani before they agree to terminate their struggle. Indeed, the staunch commitment of BRN-C to this tradition explains, at least in part, its proximity to the *juwae*. That being said, the BRN-C's hitherto resolute stance has wavered somewhat in recent years under the influence of the more pragmatic PULO. Elements within BRN-C circles are now talking about the use of dialogue with the Thai Government as a necessary supplement to violence in order to achieve its political ends, with these ends themselves diluted from independence to some form of autonomy and local governance (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 88).

Between PULO and BRN-C, an understanding was reached that fostered a joint commitment to the search for a political process on the part of the insurgency with the signing of a *Resolusi Persefahaman* (Memorandum of Understanding) on 5 January 2010 by representatives of the two groups. This was a significant shift given the fact that BRN-C had refused to take part in either the Langkawi or Bogor peace talks. For BRN-C it was critical that, in the context of this understanding with PULO, the latter would be the main face at the dialogue table, with only a marginal, if any, BRN-C presence. This was to allow them to reassure the *juwae* who were still reticent about dialogue. Meanwhile, PULO would also be able to dissociate itself from the violence on the ground and hence have a freer hand to position itself as the 'political wing' of the insurgency (Liow and Pathan 2010, pg 89).

VI. THE WAY FORWARD

According to ICG, “Deployment of some 60,000 security forces, special security laws and billions of dollars have not achieved any appreciable decline in casualties or curbed the movement.” (ICG, 2012, pg i) Given this reality, it appears there may be a growing recognition among at least some Thai policymakers of the need for a new approach. However, their willingness and ability to depart from past approaches may be severely constrained by long-held and deeply-entrenched views of the South as well as by the general reluctance of the Thai political elite to take risks during a highly uncertain time in Thai politics. This section briefly describes some of the key issues going forward.

A. The Yingluck Administration

For the first time since taking office in 2011, Prime Minister Yingluck appears to be making the South a top priority.

The PTP-led government appears more amenable to novel ideas and has the advantage of a semblance of political stability. But to maintain that stability, Yingluck's administration must be mindful of military preferences. It is also encumbered by Thaksin, who has been criticized for disrupting the existing dialogue process with his cavalier approach. With Yingluck apparently uninvolved in the details of Southern policy, some PTP officials have pushed for decentralization, elected governors, use of Malay language in schools and

such symbolic measures as use of local Malay on road signs and in public buildings. But these proposals have been disjointed, readily abandoned and reprised according to shifting circumstances (ICG 2012, pg 18).

A three-year NSC policy for the southernmost provinces, approved in 2012, offers a progressive conflict resolution vision. The policy lists nine objectives, some familiar from the previous NSC policy, including restoration of trust between government and people, promotion of sustainable development that accords with local identities and recognition of the value of cultural diversity. But it breaks new ground by acknowledging the political dimension of the violence and support for dialogue with insurgents is codified in Section 8 of the NSC policy. It provides an official stamp of approval for peacebuilding, peace dialogue and decentralization (ICG 2012, pg 10).

According to ICG, many in the affected area have welcomed the NSC policy. It signals a fresh attitude from some officials within the bureaucracy and renewed high-level attention to the problem. Civil society organizations have interpreted it as encouragement for their efforts to generate new thinking on decentralization and peace dialogue. The test will be the extent to which it guides official agendas and their implementation. There are concerns that conservative elements in the bureaucracy will resist enacting its more progressive provisions (ICG 2012, pg 10).

B. Dialogue

Under Section 8 of the NSC policy dialogue with ideologically-motivated militants is made government policy. Section 8 also seeks to encourage dialogue about political decentralization “based on pluralism ...under the spirit of the Constitution of Thailand [and] internationally accepted principles.” According to ICG, “These are unprecedented policy positions that offer a basis for a more ambitious and far-reaching approach to resolving the problems in the Deep South” (ICG 2012, pg 10).

Viewed through the lens of the NSC policy, the negotiations to be initiated in March between the government and BRN leader Hassan Taib can be viewed as a tangible result of the new policy. Moreover, according to McCargo, the direct involvement of serving prime ministers from both Thailand and Malaysia is a striking development, suggesting a greater level of executive commitment (McCargo 2013).

But McCargo cautions that in other respects, the dialogue looks ominously like previous attempts:

There is little evidence that the Thai military is on board; Army commander General Prayuth Chanocha has sounded distinctly skeptical. There is no clear signal that a political solution might be on the table. Perhaps most seriously, there no obvious reason to believe that Hassan Taib, the lone BRN 'leader' who signed the agreement, has the standing, connections or authority to negotiate, let alone to deliver, any sort of settlement. Hassan's failure to bring along any other militants is disappointing. (McCargo 2013)

Don Pathan has raised similar doubts about the stature and authority of Hassan Taib:

Sources in other separatist movements, including BRN factions not affiliated with Hassan, as well as Thai and Malaysian security officials, said Hassan does not have any major influence with the militants on the ground. These sources said they are aware of many other separatist leaders whose credentials are considered much better than Hassan's because they have demonstrated they have solid command and control on the ground. However, they will not come to the negotiating table because the Thai government refuses to grant them immunity, the sources said. Since these leaders refuse to come to the table, Thailand had to settle for someone who was available - and that someone was Hassan, Thai and Malaysian officials said. (*The Nation*, March 1, 2013)

C. Education and language policies

New initiatives to address education and language issues are necessary but not sufficient. Moreover, they can quickly become tangled up in contending notions of national identity and unity.

The NRC report proposed making Pattani Malay an ‘additional working language’ in the region and outlines ideas to bring the Islamic and state school systems closer together, including through the introduction of bilingual and mother-tongue education. According to Melvin:

While the traditional *pondok* schools remains central to Malay Muslim identity and lifestyle in southern Thailand, they are struggling to make themselves relevant in the context of the social, political and economic changes taking place in the region. Much could be achieved by transforming these schools from symbols of resistance to institutions that help Malay Muslims to advance within Thai society, and this would best be done through a constructive dialogue with the Malay Muslim community. This dialogue should be complemented by reforms in the state education sector in the region, including the training and recruitment of more local teachers. (Melvin 2007, pg 38)

D. Toward a political solution

Growing support for the notion – though perhaps not the substance -- of a political solution.

According to the Asia Foundation:

It is likely that a sustainable end to conflict in the Deep South will require greater willingness among key national political actors to accept changes to how the area is governed...With insurgent leaders showing more desire to expand local authority in the Deep South than to participate in Bangkok-centered politics, some form of autonomy or increased devolution is likely to be necessary.” (Asia Foundation 2013, pg 3)

The contours of a political resolution to the conflict in southern Thailand have long been in the public domain, but Bangkok has been unable to commit to a comprehensive and decisive approach (ICG 2012, pg i). Many senior officials remain hostile to any proposal that smacks of autonomy, but taboos that have long inhibited creative thinking on the South are breaking down. The protracted insurgency and political turmoil of recent years have exposed the inadequacy of existing political arrangements. Stakeholders on all sides are beginning to discuss alternatives more openly. The NSC policy for the southernmost provinces is a clear indication that new possibilities are on the table. Continuing political polarization is a formidable challenge to developing and executing fresh approaches, but the status quo is untenable in the long term (ICG 2012 pg 18).

The Thai state’s historical opposition to autonomy may be weakening, but only very slowly.

Successive Thai governments – as well as the 2006 NRC report – have refused to consider some form of autonomy for the Deep South.⁴ But according to McCargo and Srisompob:

“There is growing evidence that senior Thais are beginning to “think the unthinkable” in relation to the far south. Elder statesman and former royal physician Dr Prawase Wasi — the architect of the liberal 1997 Constitution — has hinted as much publicly. Then Interior Minister Chalerm Yubamrung openly expressed

⁴ The NRC report identified injustice – not the desire for greater self-determination -- as a principal driver of conflict in the South. Consistent with this analysis, it made lengthy recommendations for how the national government could improve the justice system in the South. It did not make a single recommendation supporting political decentralization or autonomy. In the English version of the report, the phrase “local government” is used just twice and the phrase “provincial government” is entirely absent.

his support for autonomy in February 2008, only to be quickly silenced. Chalerm's views were echoed by former Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in November 2009. Behind closed doors, many leading figures now agree; former coup-period Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont is said to be sympathetic to exploring such alternatives (Srisompob and McCargo 2010, pg 175).

In 2009 Prime Minister Abhisit said it might be possible to consider some form of special decentralization for the south. According to McCargo: "Whatever his personal views on the autonomy issue, Abhisit had to tread carefully because of his government's reliance on support from the military, conservative bureaucrats and other elements of the monarchical network" (McCargo 2010, pg 280).

Srisompob Jitpiromsri and his research team from Prince of Songkhla University have published compromise proposals for a Ministry of the South, suggesting the creation of a new administrative structure without entering the dangerous terrain of autonomy or special zones. The difficulty is how to mainstream such discussions and gain wider acceptance for some form of decentralization proposals, both from the public and from the security sector (Srisompob and McCargo 2010, pg 175).

In a potentially significant departure from the past, Section 8 of the 2012-2014 National Security Policy for the Southern Border Provinces seeks to encourage dialogue about political decentralization "based on pluralism...under the spirit of the Constitution of Thailand [and] internationally accepted principles." (ICG, 2012, pg 10)

In sum, the hurdles to serious consideration of autonomy are numerous and include: 1) the factionalism and drift that currently characterizes Thai politics; 2) constitutional provisions relating to the unitary state; 3) resistance from bureaucratic and political establishments; the absence of influential champions and a widespread unwillingness to discuss the issue; 4) a prevailing assumption that decentralization is sufficient; and 5) the lack of legitimacy and coherent political demands by the militants.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR USAID

Thailand is a key U.S. security ally in Asia and an important economic partner. In 2003, the United States designated Thailand a Major Non-NATO Ally. As part of their mutual defense cooperation, Thailand and the United States have developed a vigorous joint military exercise program, which engages all the services of each nation and averages 40 joint exercises per year. Thailand contributed troops and support for U.S. military operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq and Thailand's airfields and ports play a particularly important role in U.S. global military strategy. Thailand and the United States have longstanding cooperation in international law enforcement efforts. The United States is Thailand's third-largest bilateral trading partner, after Japan and China, with total trade valued at more than \$35 billion in 2011. The United States is also one of the largest investors in Thailand, bringing in more than \$466 million in net foreign direct investment in 2011.

Thanks to rapid economic growth and relative political stability, Thailand largely "graduated" from being a recipient of foreign aid by the early 1990s. Today Thailand is relatively prosperous middle income country – to the extent that it still has "development challenges," the solutions have to do more with the adoption and implementation of the right policies and less with overcoming resource constraints. With regard to the conflict in the Deep South, successive Thai governments, citing sovereignty concerns and the risk that international involvement will bolster the legitimacy of insurgent groups, have sought to minimize the involvement of foreign governments, aid agencies and non-governmental actors.

A. US interests in the South

Given both (a) the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship to both countries and (b) the Thai government's lack of receptivity to foreign involvement in the Deep South, the opportunities for USAID involvement in the Deep South appear limited. Moreover, given the Thai government's reluctance to date to consider meaningful changes in the way the South is governed, it is important to ask if USAID or any other donor can contribute to conflict resolution in a meaningful way. We will return to this question below.

That said, a case can be made for the USG being concerned with the situation in the Deep South and being engaged to the extent that the Thai government allows. There are or should be at least three USG interests/objectives in the Deep South. These are:

- ***To prevent prospective humanitarian crises and human rights abuses*** – in the case of the latter, abuses that could be perpetrated by both the State and the militants, in the event of greater communal violence.
- ***To prevent the rise of Violent Islamist Extremism in the Deep South.*** Currently the risk of this does not appear high, but this could change in the future.
- ***To contribute to the strengthening of democracy in Thailand by both improving the position of Thailand's Malay Muslim minority and reducing the military's involvement in politics and governance.***

These interests warrant a modest USG investment – but only if either the situation in the Deep South deteriorates (and therefore abuses and suffering increase) or if negotiations between the government and the insurgents create an opportunity to resolve the conflict (in which case some highly strategic and timely assistance could be useful).

If limited USG involvement is warranted in the event of worst case or best case scenarios, it is important for that engagement to adhere to the following three approaches:

- ***First, the USG must ensure that its involvement does no harm.*** To ensure this, the USG needs to maintain a highly nuanced understanding of the drivers, actors and unintended and often difficult-to-discern consequences of any USG interventions. The USG needs to ensure that the lens through which it views the conflict isn't excessively influenced by Thai (as distinct from Malay Muslim) perceptions and values. Moreover, Malay Muslims in the South are not a monolithic community. Any programming needs to avoid further deepening divisions among them. Finally, there needs to be flexibility to be able to adjust programming in response to changes in the program environment.
- ***Second, whatever the type of USG involvement, it needs to be supported both at the political level and through the US military's close relationship with the Thai military.*** Indeed, potentially the greatest impact the USG could have on the conflict is to support efforts to encourage senior Thai officials and military officers to think in new ways about the solutions to the conflict. This could include familiarizing Thai officials and officers with models of peace processes and political solutions adopted by other countries.
- ***Third, USAID needs to have a realistic understanding of what sorts of donor interventions have the potential to have positive impact in the Deep South.*** The Asia Foundation is in the process of assessing the effectiveness of donor programs intended to contribute to reducing or ending the conflict in the Deep South. The Foundation's findings are not encouraging. Some of the key ones are outlined in the following section.

B. Donor effectiveness

The Asia Foundation's 2013 assessment highlights the limited impact donor-funded projects have had on the conflict in the South given the huge gulf between the Thai state and the insurgents. The most important of the Foundation's initial findings include:

- “In the absence of a peace process or significant transformation on the part of the government or insurgent leaders, development projects designed to build confidence in the state are unlikely to have a major impact.” (pg 31)
- “In a middle-income environment with relatively comprehensive government provision of basic services, inhabitants are already well accustomed to a wide range of interventions, policies and projects. Further development schemes aimed at confidence-building are unlikely to stand out and are still less likely to change local conflict dynamics or significantly shift residents’ overall views, even if they are successfully implemented.” (pg 31)
- “Socio-economic development initiatives or economic stimulus packages are unlikely on their own to fundamentally change the dynamic of violence and may continue to act as a justification for the government to avoid undertaking more significant reforms. Added injections of funds have a record of exacerbating local tensions that contribute to overall levels of violence.” (pg 35)
- “Thai government and NGO initiatives set up to support communities in the Deep South in response to the violence have often concentrated on improving relations between Buddhists and Muslims. Well-intentioned as these efforts may be, they fit a conservative discourse of national unity and harmony that does not necessarily address the main problems at the local level. Malay Muslim groups concerned over community harmony and social cohesion do not generally emphasize inter-group relationships at all, stressing instead the need to build collaboration within predominantly Muslim local leadership. By doing so, the aim is to build community capacity to resist local causes of violence, whether stemming from insurgents or government-affiliated bodies.” (pg 28)
- “Our findings generally confirm that community-based development projects, while potentially contributing to developmental outcomes, have low prospects for transforming the conflict in the Deep South, largely due to the disconnect with wider state-minority conflict. If the intended transformative outcome is to address inter-elite contestation or inter-communal contestation, through strengthening institutions, then the existing evidence, which is of a limited timeframe of about three years, is relatively weak in showing that this approach has had any noticeable levels of positive outcomes.” (pg 58)

In addition to these findings, it is worth considering several assertions made by Duncan McCargo. These are: 1) Socioeconomic grievances are not at the root of the militant activity, and so development projects will do little to curtail the violence; 2) Although triggered largely by state repression, the conflict is not essentially about “justice,” and easing state repression will not itself end the conflict. The repression of 2003 to 2004 provides a continuing reservoir of moral legitimacy for the militants; and 3) Without competent and effective security forces, a resolution is not likely to be achieved.

C. Implications for USAID

These VEI assessments are supposed to address the question of whether or not addressing VEI should be a strategic priority in USAID CDCS in the subject country. This review of analysis contained in this report suggests the following conclusions: First, while the continuing conflict in the Deep South does not represent a serious threat to Thailand’s political and economic development, it does undermine democracy and human rights in Thailand, reinforces the influence of the military, and creates an environment that could be conducive to greater Islamist extremism in the future. Second, given the conditions in the Deep South and the prevailing policy and attitudes of the Thai government, there is only limited potential for donors to contribute to conflict resolution in a meaningful way. Third, given the Thai government’s aversion to foreign involvement in the conflict as well as the importance of other aspects of the US-Thailand relationship, the room for USG/USAID involvement currently is limited. As a result of this, any effort to address the conflict needs to be very strategic and very carefully designed and implemented. Finally, despite these significant limitations, a case can be made for small USG/USAID investments in the event that either the human rights

situation in the South deteriorates significantly or the Thai government makes a serious commitment to achieving a negotiated political settlement.

It is outside the scope of this assessment to provide detailed programming recommendations. But two points can be made: First, if the Asia Foundation's analysis is correct, then community-level peace-building efforts may have a positive impact on community development, but they are unlikely to contribute to conflict resolution in any meaningful way. Second, it is the author's view that programming intended to contribute to finding a solution to the conflict (as opposed to addressing the negative consequences of the conflict) has to address the political context and political actors – at both the local and national levels. To this end, examples of the sorts of things that could be undertaken by USAID include:

- Support additional public opinion surveying in the Deep South. Regular and more fine-grained data on Southern attitudes about the insurgents, the government and the possible solutions can be a useful tool for conflict resolution efforts.
- Support efforts by politicians, business and religious leaders, academics and NGOs at the national level and in the South to generate and discuss solutions to the conflict.
- Provide conflict resolution training and information (such as on models for peace processes and autonomy) for decision-makers in the NSC and SBPAC. Perhaps similar training and information could be provided to the Thai military through mil-to-mil channels.
- Support leadership training, including on conflict resolution, for established and emerging Malay Muslim leaders.
- Support the efforts of human rights and legal aid groups in both Bangkok and the South to monitor and redress human rights violations.
- Support the efforts of Thai organizations in both Bangkok and the South to monitor, analyze and report on the conflict.

Finally, as the USG and USAID contemplate what, if anything, should be done in the future, it would be beneficial to the decision making process to have additional information on the following:

- What are the attitudes of the Malay Muslim population in the Deep South regarding a solution to the conflict? Are these changing?
- Who are legitimate Muslim Malay leaders and what are their perceptions and aspirations?
- What channels for meaningful Malay Muslim political participation currently exist and how can they be strengthened?
- What are current attitudes in the Thai military regarding solutions to the insurgency? Are these changing?
- To what extent and in what ways is the conflict fuelled by illicit economic activities such as the drug trade, trafficking and smuggling?⁵

⁵ For an example of recent work on this issue in Mindanao, see *Out of the Shadows: Violent Conflict and the Real Economy of Mindanao*, Lara and Schoofs, editors. International Alert 2013.

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