

# **RECRUITING MILITANTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>II. EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN THAILAND</b> .....	<b>2</b>
A. <i>PONOH</i> AND PRIVATE ISLAMIC SCHOOLS .....	2
B. <i>TADIKA</i> .....	4
C. GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS .....	5
<b>III. RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF INSURGENTS IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
A. SELECTION, SEPARATION AND REINFORCEMENT.....	6
B. OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.....	8
C. INDOCTRINATION, INITIATION, PHYSICAL FITNESS AND MILITARY TRAINING.....	8
<b>IV. IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS</b> .....	<b>10</b>
A. THE “GLORIOUS” PATANI SULTANATE .....	10
B. OPPRESSION BY THE THAI STATE.....	12
C. “JIHAD” STRUGGLE.....	13
<b>V. STRUCTURE OF INSURGENT OPERATIONS</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>VI. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
A. MAP OF THAILAND .....	21
B. MAP OF THAILAND’S SOUTHERN PROVINCES.....	22
C. ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP .....	23
D. CRISIS GROUP REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS ON ASIA SINCE 2006 .....	24
E. CRISIS GROUP BOARD OF TRUSTEES.....	27

## RECRUITING MILITANTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While Thai leaders are preoccupied with turmoil in Bangkok, the insurgency in the South continues to recruit young Malay Muslims, especially from private Islamic schools. These institutions are central to maintenance of Malay Muslim identity, and many students are receptive to the call to take up arms against the state. This is not a struggle in solidarity with global jihad, rather an ethno-nationalist insurgency with its own version of history aimed at reclaiming what was once the independent sultanate of Patani. Human rights abuses by the Thai government and security forces have only fuelled this secessionist fervour, and policies that centralise power in the capital have undermined a regional political solution. Changing these policies and practices is essential as the government tries to respond to the insurgents' grievances in order to bring long-lasting peace to the region.

The Islamic schools in which pious young Muslims are recruited and radicalised are generally the larger, more modern and better-equipped institutions in a complex educational system that ranges from secular state school to traditional Muslim boarding schools (*ponoh*). The classroom is the point of first contact. Recruiters invite those who seem promising – devout Muslims of good character who are moved by a history of oppression, mistreatment and the idea of armed jihad – to join extracurricular indoctrination programs in mosques or disguised as football training. As recruits are drawn into the movement, they take an oath of allegiance followed by physical and military training before being assigned to different roles in village-level operations.

Islamic schools are not the only place where young Malay Muslims are radicalised, nor should all such schools be stigmatised as militant breeding grounds. Even in schools where insurgents are active, not all school administrators, teachers and students may be aware of what is happening, let alone consent to it. But these schools are rich in opportunities for recruiters. Religious young males – the natural foot soldiers of the insurgency – are found in academies numbering thousands of students. These crowds provide natural

cover, especially for a movement that draws heavily upon teachers to do its covert recruitment.

The Thai security forces and some independent analysts believe that the insurgency is largely under the leadership of the National Revolutionary Front-Coordinate (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate, BRN-C). It uses a classic clandestine cell network, in which rank-and-file members have no knowledge of the organisation beyond their immediate operational cluster. It also appears to be highly decentralised, with local units having a degree of autonomy to choose targets and carry out political campaigns. This structure has allowed it to remain active despite crackdowns by security forces.

Policymakers should be cautious of quick fixes to what is a highly complex conflict. This struggle, nominally between a Thai Buddhist state and a Malay Muslim insurgency, targets civilians of all religions. More than 3,400 people have been killed since the violence surged in 2004. There are more dead Muslim victims than Buddhists, and many of the slain Muslims were marked as “traitors” to Islam. Insurgents draw on local culture to invoke traditional oaths to discipline their own ranks, though such practices alienate them from the religious purists attached to the global jihad. Ancient charms and spells are applied to protect fighters from harm, co-existing with YouTube videos and propaganda circulated on VCDs. Despite the leap into cyberspace, the insurgency has, for the most part, restricted itself to the geographic boundaries of the three southernmost border provinces.

As earlier Crisis Group reports have stressed, the movement shows little influence of Salafi jihadism, the ideology followed by al-Qaeda and the Indonesia-based regional jihadi group Jemaah Islamiyah. Some insurgents follow a mystical variant of Shafi'i Islam and are actively hostile to the puritanism of what they term “Wahhabis”. Although a few Malaysians have been arrested in southern Thailand for trying to join the struggle, there is no evidence of significant involvement of foreign jihadi groups. While politically distinct, the movement uses the language of Islam and jihad to

frame its struggle, as such words resonate with its membership and the constituencies it seeks to sway.

Even as the political battle between the government and supporters of ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra – in itself violent – plays out in the capital, Thailand needs to address the political grievances that have long fuelled resentment: the disregard for Malay ethnic identity and language, the lack of accountability for human rights abuses, and the under-representation of Malay Muslims in local political and government structures. Without such measures, harsh suppression and attempts at instilling Thai nationalism in Malay Muslim radicals through re-education will only generate more anger that will in turn ensure a steady flow of recruits committed to an enduring struggle.

**Bangkok/Brussels, 22 June 2009**

## RECRUITING MILITANTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

### I. INTRODUCTION

Thailand's political crisis has diverted attention from the violent insurgency in the country's Deep South, but the problem will not go away by ignoring it.<sup>1</sup> Understanding who gets recruited, by whom and how is more important than ever: while a crackdown that began in June 2007 managed for eighteen months to reduce the violence, the trend since January 2009 has been upward. Driven by appeals to Malay nationalism that is at odds with Buddhist-dominated Thai national history and reinforced by a collective sense of injustice, the insurgency continues to find new members, especially in private Islamic schools.<sup>2</sup>

The history of the so-called "glorious" past of Patani sultanate is the foundation upon which the violent movement has been built. Fresh abuses by the state then steer potential fighters towards recruiters. While nationalist in character, the insurgency draws on the common Islamic vocabulary of its members to describe its struggle, for example, calling it a "jihad" by Malay Muslims against Buddhist Thai "infidels". Despite defining it in these terms, since 2004 the violence has killed more Muslims than Buddhists.

Much of the recruitment and indoctrination has been carried out by clandestine operatives of the National

Revolutionary Front-Coordinate (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate, BRN-C) organised around mutually anonymous cells. BRN-C is one of three factions of the original BRN, founded by a headmaster of an Islamic school in 1963 in response to the forced registration of *ponoh* and imposition of a secular curriculum. Many Malay Muslims saw this as an attempt to obliterate their ethnic and religious identity.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s, it split into three: BRN-Ulama, BRN-Congress and BRN-Coordinate.<sup>4</sup>

The BRN-C is believed to be the largest and most active today. It uses elementary Islamic schools (*tadika*), *ponoh* and private Islamic schools to recruit the foot soldiers that sustain the insurgency, although it has never openly articulated its political objectives. In absence of a public political leadership, it is unclear whether calls for independence might be an opening claim that could, after negotiation, be accommodated by greater autonomy within Thailand.

Other organisations with less influence that have similar goals include the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), founded in 1968, whose leaders live abroad and carry out political rather than military activities. The Patani Islamic Liberation Front (Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani, BIPP) and Patani Islamic Mujahidin Group (Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani, GMIP) have existed under these names since 1986 and 1995 respectively. Their roles in the current insurgency seem minimal.

A prolonged political conflict between establishment forces and ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has diverted Bangkok's attention from the insurgency since early 2008. The lack of a stable administration since Thaksin's removal from power in a September 2006 coup has made it difficult for the government to formulate or implement policies aimed at improving conditions in the Deep South. In 2008, the government led by the People Power Party – a Thaksin front

<sup>1</sup>The "Deep South" is widely used to refer to Thailand's southernmost region. Most of the area – Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and some parts of Songkhla province – used to be a sultanate of Patani, annexed in 1902. Note that there is an inconsistency in the spelling of "Patani" and "Pattani" when referring to the old sultanate. This report uses "Patani" to refer to the old kingdom. "Pattani" is consistently used for the name of the modern Thai province.

<sup>2</sup>Previous Crisis Group reports on Thailand's southern insurgency include: Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°80, *Thailand: Political Turmoil and the Southern Insurgency*, 28 August 2008; Crisis Group Asia Report N°140, *Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries*, 23 October 2007; Crisis Group Asia Report N°129, *Southern Thailand: The Impact of the Coup*, 15 March 2007; Crisis Group Asia Report N°105, *Thailand's Emergency Decree: No Solution*, 18 November 2005; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°98, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, 18 May 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Crisis Group Report, *Southern Thailand: The Impact of the Coup*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of the Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Oxford, 1990), p. 99.

– was preoccupied with the struggle for its own survival amid massive anti-government demonstrations and mostly left management of the conflict to the military.

The Democrat-led government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, in power since December 2008, has pledged to take back policymaking from the army. It set out new policy guidelines for the conflict, calling it a problem of security, education, justice and development.<sup>5</sup> A cabinet committee of ministers and senior officials responsible for the South was formed. The government vowed to revamp the civilian-led Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) with new laws to give it greater authority as well as to review draconian regulations.

Despite these sound measures, there have been few changes on the ground. The Abhisit government's legitimacy remains under serious challenge from often violent mass protests by Thaksin supporters. Its reliance on the military to suppress these protests and cement its grip on power has weakened its resolve to pursue new policies in the South.

This report is based on extensive interviews conducted between November 2007 and March 2009 with religious teachers and students involved in underground activities as well as with security officials. Given the sensitivity of the interviews with those involved in the insurgency, most interviewees' names have been withheld.<sup>6</sup>

## II. EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Schools are particularly important as recruiting grounds because they have been the battleground for the clash of cultures and ideologies fuelling the conflict. 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.

Educational institutions in the predominantly Muslim South are extremely diverse and, before the violence surged in 2004, were inconsistently regulated.<sup>7</sup> 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, a bigger pool of potential recruits for the estimated 1,800 to 3,000 fighters.<sup>8</sup> 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 radicalisation efforts.

### A. *PONOH* AND PRIVATE ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

Islamic education in southern Thailand has traditionally been centred on community-supported *ponoh*.<sup>9</sup> These

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<sup>5</sup>The summary of the government's policies is based on a press conference by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva at the office of the Internal Security Operations Command's Fourth Region in Pattani on 17 January 2009 and a conference on "How to End Southern Crisis" on 30 March 2009 in Bangkok, where Abhisit gave the closing remarks.

<sup>6</sup>Military information used in this report is drawn from interrogations conducted by soldiers and police officers. Crisis Group is aware of the biases and preconceptions of such data and every effort has been made to cross-check intelligence reports but independent verification is sometimes difficult.

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<sup>7</sup>2004 is widely referred to as the beginning of the latest wave of violent insurgency, marked by the army depot raid on 4 January. However, there had been several major attacks prior to that year which were likely to be part of the same movement. According to the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), there were at least three weapon robberies between 2002 and 2003: 33 weapons were stolen from a military base in Yala's Bannang Sata district on 20 June 2002; nineteen weapons in Yala's Than To district and thirteen weapons in Narathiwat's Sukirin district on 28 April. DSI document made available to Crisis Group.

<sup>8</sup>This is based on the police's estimate and a document found at a house of an *ustadz* believed to be a key BRN-C leader. See detailed discussion in section V. As for the number of students in various types of Islamic schools, see footnote 17.

<sup>9</sup>*Ponoh* is a local version of the Malay word *pondok*, which is derived from an Arabic word *funduk* meaning inn, hotel. See Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, "Educational Change For Building Peace In Southern Border Provinces of Thailand",

life-long education centres are boarding schools built from bamboo huts. Muslims of all ages use a group learning system known as *halaqah*, sitting in a circle around a teacher (*tok guru*), to receive instruction mostly in the local Malay dialect. *Tok guru* lack a degree in the modern sense and *ponoh* have neither a grading system nor examination process. Free of charge, most teachers earn their living from other jobs such as rubber tapping.<sup>10</sup>

The government views the *ponoh* as an obstacle for integrating Malay Muslims into society because they lack a secular curriculum and do not use Thai.<sup>11</sup> Since the 1960s, it has tried to introduce courses in Thai into *ponoh*, providing financial support, and teachers for secular subjects. The objective was to cultivate loyalty to the state. These schools offered certificates upon graduation, which could be used in seeking employment. The government later threatened to close *ponoh* that did not register by 1971 and forbid new ones to open.<sup>12</sup>

These policies met with resistance as these government-supplied teachers were the first non-believers admitted into these community institutions. An added humiliation was their use of a “foreign” language to teach young Malay Muslims and prohibition of Malay as means of instruction. In reaction, more parents began to send their children abroad, particularly to the Middle East, for Islamic education.<sup>13</sup> From 1971 until 2004, when the current round of violence erupted, no new *ponoh* were registered, although many continued to emerge without official approval.<sup>14</sup>

*Ponoh* were more effectively modernised and expanded by a 1982 law that created *roanrean aekkachon son*

*sassana Islam* (private Islamic schools).<sup>15</sup> These new schools with their up-to-date approaches to teaching and organisation provided a stark contrast to traditional institutions. Lessons were taught in modern multi-storey concrete buildings rather than simple elevated wooden houses. They flourished because they were often profit-oriented and attracted government subsidies per student.<sup>16</sup> While the numbers of students in community-supported *ponoh* could number as few as a dozen, many state-subsidised private Islamic schools had thousands of students.

The larger student bodies attracted the nascent insurgency’s attention as these represented large pools of potential recruits.<sup>17</sup> There was also safety in numbers in such large institutions, as it was more difficult for school administrators to monitor students and teachers in and outside classrooms. They were staffed by dozens of younger *ustadz*, some educated in the Middle

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<sup>15</sup>The 1982 Private Schools Act covered private Islamic schools, offering both secular and religious curricula, under Section 15(1) of the 1982 Act, while Section 15(2) covered *ponoh* teaching only a religious curriculum.

<sup>16</sup>Private Islamic schools operated by non-profit foundations (and charging no tuition fee) receive per year a grant of between 10,556 baht (\$300) and 12,947 baht (\$367) for each student, while fee-paying schools receive 60 per cent of these amounts. ศรีศักร วัลลิโภดม, *เราก็คือปอนาะ*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 61 [Srisak Walliphodom, *We Are Ponoh*, op. cit., p. 61]; and Crisis Group interview, Anan Saro, education ministry official in Pattani, Pattani, 11 December 2008. Students who take only religious subjects attract a far lower grant, while *ponoh* – both those registered under Section 15(2) and those designated as *ponoh* institutes after 2004 – receive a subsidy for religious teachers of between 4,000 and 8,000 baht (\$113 to \$227) per month, depending on the number of students. In addition, *ponoh* – but not private Islamic schools – get an additional monthly grant of 1,000 baht (\$28) for operational costs.

<sup>17</sup>In 2007, there were 136 private Islamic schools and *ponoh* registered in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat educating 91,982 students, while 15,071 students were studying in 249 *ponoh* institutes. อิบราฮีม นรงศรีรักษาเขต, “การศึกษาในดินแดนมลายู”, ใน รายงานโครงการประชุมทางวิชาการเรื่องมลายูกับรัฐไทยในมิติประวัติศาสตร์และอารยธรรมกับการสร้างความเป็นธรรม (ปีคานี: 2551), หน้า 195, 201 [Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, “Education in Melayu Land” in *Report on An Academic Conference on Melayu and Thai State in Aspect of History, Civilization and Justice* (Pattani, 2008), pp. 195, 201.] คณะอนุกรรมการศึกษาวิถีทางการพัฒนาเพื่อความมั่นคงของมนุษย์ คณะกรรมการอิสระเพื่อความสมานฉันท์แห่งชาติ, *ความขัดแย้งระหว่างการพัฒนา กับสภาพสังคมใน 3 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้* (กรุงเทพฯ: 2550), หน้า 51 [National Reconciliation Commission’s Sub-committee on Studying Development Paths that Enhance Human Security, “Conflicts in Development and Social Conditions in the Three Southern Border Provinces” (Bangkok, 2007), p. 51]. The number of private Islamic schools offering primary education has increased in recent years, taking more students away from government schools.

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in Imtiyaz Yusuf and Lars Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok, 2006), p. 134.

<sup>10</sup> ศรีศักร วัลลิโภดม, *เราก็คือปอนาะ*, (กรุงเทพฯ: 2550), หน้า. 51 [Srisak Walliphodom, *We Are Ponoh* (Bangkok, 2007), p. 51].

<sup>11</sup> Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand* (Bangkok, 1985), p. 188. Also see discussion of the Thai state’s attempt to use education as part of assimilation policies in Crisis Group Reports, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency Not Jihad*, op. cit., pp.7-8; and *Southern Thailand: The Impact of the Coup*, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> In that year, 426 *ponoh* were registered and transformed into “private schools for Islamic education”. ศรีศักร วัลลิโภดม, *เราก็คือปอนาะ*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 60-61 [Srisak Walliphodom, *We Are Ponoh*, op. cit., pp. 60-61].

<sup>13</sup> Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca and London, 2008), p. 39.

East and other Muslim countries. In contrast, *ponoh* were single-handedly run by *tok guru*, many of whom were elderly and educated locally.

Authorities view private Islamic schools as breeding grounds for militants. Sapae-ing Baso, the former headmaster of the 6,000-strong Thammawittaya Mulnithi School in the city of Yala, fled in 2004 as security forces prepared to arrest him on charges of being a key BRN-C leader. Several teachers from this school have been killed in incidents related to the insurgency, although the forces responsible for these deaths are not always clear. In 2005, eight *ustadz*, most teaching there, were prosecuted for insurrection after an investigation by the Department of Special Investigation.<sup>18</sup> The trial was halted in early 2007 by then Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont as a gesture of reconciliation after he visited the school and said the post-coup interim government had torn up its “blacklist” of insurgents.<sup>19</sup> The eight were granted bail and fled. Two were later killed in clashes with security forces.<sup>20</sup>

Samphan Wittaya, located in the “red zone”<sup>21</sup> area of Narathiwat’s Cho-Airong district, was another school that security forces believed was an insurgent stronghold. Masae Useng, a former *ustadz* from this school, was thought to also be a BRN-C leader. A seven-step plan found at his house in May 2003 is often cited as a blueprint of the insurgents’ political strategy to separate Patani from Thailand. Two other private Islamic schools – Jihad Wittaya and Islam Burapha – were closed in 2005 and 2007 respectively after security forces raided them, claiming to find incriminating evidence, including copies of the seven-step plan.<sup>22</sup>

## B. TADIKA

*Tadika* provide elementary Islamic education for Muslim children as a supplement to government elementary schools.<sup>23</sup> They are mostly run by communities and are often attached to mosques. There was no standard curriculum used in *tadika* until after 2004. Teachers, most of whom graduated from private Islamic schools, or *ponoh*, in the area had a great deal of freedom to design their own curriculum with no supervision from the state or any central Islamic body. Some teachers, locally known as *che’gu*, used this opening to teach a curriculum that emphasised pride in Patani history and instilled a sense of Malay nationalism.

Most Muslim children go to state schools for primary education because private Islamic schools, which have both secular and Islamic curricula, generally offer only secondary education. Although in recent years some government schools have increased the hours devoted to Islamic subjects, the average is only two hours per week.<sup>24</sup> *Tadika* fill this gap by providing Islamic education after school hours or during the weekend for children at kindergarten to primary level. The local Malay dialect and standard Malay are the languages of instruction. Across the Deep South, *tadika* help reinforce Malay identity. In 2007, there were 1,343 registered *tadika* with 3,924 teachers and 136,768 students.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interview, Thawee Sodsong, director-general of the DSI, Bangkok, 7 January 2009.

<sup>19</sup> “Blacklists of suspects scrapped”, *The Nation*, 9 November 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interview, Thawee Sodsong, director-general of the DSI, 7 January 2009. The suspects who were killed were Waeyusoh Waedueramae and Hama Jehteh. Security forces believe Waeyusoh was a key military commander. Six others are still at large.

<sup>21</sup> The Thai military uses the term “red zone” to refer to known militant strongholds or where their influence is strong.

<sup>22</sup> สำเร็จ ศรีพร้าข, ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate กับการก่อความไม่สงบในพื้นที่ 3 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้และ 4 อำเภอของจังหวัดสงขลาในช่วงปี 2547-ปัจจุบัน (2550) และแนวความคิดในการยุติสถานการณ์ (กรุงเทพฯ: วิทยาลัยป้องกันราชอาณาจักร, 2551), หน้า 60 [Samret Srirai, *BRN-Coordinate and Violence in the Three Southern Border Province and Four Districts in Songkhla between 2004-2007 and Strategies to End Violence* (Bangkok, 2008), p. 60].

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<sup>23</sup> *Tadika* is an abbreviation of a Malay phrase *taman didikan kanak-kanak* meaning, literally, kindergarten – but this translation gives a misleading impression: these institutions take older children, up to elementary school level.

<sup>24</sup> Government schools in the Deep South are allowed to provide Islamic subjects for up to fourteen hours a week. This policy is an attempt to reduce the burden of young Muslims who have to study at *tadika* outside school hours. Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, “Educational Change For Building Peace In Southern Border Provinces of Thailand”, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 194.



Security forces are concerned about the lack of control over *tadika* curriculum.<sup>26</sup> They believe children are taught to be proud of their Patani homeland at the expense of Thai nationalism. This extends to inculcating them with a resentment of Thai “oppression”, providing an ideological basis for recruitment into the secessionist movement later on.<sup>27</sup> They also attract added suspicion because of the organisations and people linked to them. The military believes that insurgents use *tadika* foundations as fronts to funnel teachers and students into militant groups.<sup>28</sup>

### C. GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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. Since 2004, more than 290 public schools have been torched and at least 111 public school teachers and education officials killed.<sup>29</sup>

Malay Muslims view formal state education with wariness because it often contains rituals or culture that they consider un-Islamic. It is common for Thai government schools to have students collectively recite Buddhist prayers in the morning. Even *wai*, a Thai way of greeting or showing respect by putting one’s palms together at chest level, is considered by some Malay Muslims to be alien to their culture. Non-Muslim Thais commonly show respect for the royal family by *krab*

– kneeling down and putting one’s palms together at the forehead before bending down – while Muslims reserve such displays of respect for God.

A sizeable number of Malay Muslims study in state schools at primary level, though less than 4 per cent move onto government secondary education.<sup>30</sup> The rejection of state schools by Muslim parents is a result of the rapid expansion of private Islamic schools encouraged by a substantial increase in the government subsidy since 1994. This division of the community means that Muslim students have less chance to interact with those of different religions, particularly Buddhists – who constitute about 90 per cent of Thailand’s population but are a minority in that region.<sup>31</sup> The educational system reinforces the ethnic divide, promoting a cycle of further exclusion and separation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Tadika* normally receive financial support from local communities. Following the upsurge of violence, the government started to look into *tadika* and began to provide some grants through mosques in 2005, using a similar scheme as for *ponoh* (see footnote 15). The supervision of *tadika* was also transferred from the interior to the education ministry in the same year. คณะอนุกรรมการศึกษาวิถีทางการพัฒนาเพื่อความมั่นคงของมนุษย์ คณะกรรมการอิสระเพื่อความสมานฉันท์แห่งชาติ, *ความขัดแย้งระหว่างการพัฒนา กับสภาพสังคมใน 3 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 104-105 [National Reconciliation Commission’s Sub-committee on Studying Development Paths that Enhance Human Security, “Conflicts in Development and Social Conditions in the Three Southern Border Provinces”, op. cit., pp. 104-105].

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Maj. Gen. Samret Srirai, deputy commander of the 4th Army Region, Pattani, 13 January 2009; religious teachers and students, November-December 2007 and March 2008.

<sup>28</sup> See สุภลักษณ์ กาญจนขุนดี และ ดอน ปาตาน, *สันติภาพในเปลวเพลิง* (กรุงเทพฯ: 2547) หน้า 163-164 [Supalak Ganjanakhundee and Don Pathan, *Peace in Flame* (Bangkok, 2004), pp. 163-164].

<sup>29</sup> “รวีเอ็ม 16 ดับครูที่บั่นนังสตา 5 ไฟได้สังเวชแล้ว 111 ศพ”, ศูนย์ข่าวภาคใต้ สถาบันอิสรา, 19 พฤษภาคม 2552 [“M-16 assault rifle claims life of teacher in Bannang Sata, 111 teachers killed in five years of southern violence” Isra News Agency, southern desk, 19 May 2009].

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<sup>30</sup> In 2004, there were 179,756 students studying at 807 state primary schools and only 5,841 students studying at 31 state secondary schools. อิบราฮีม นรงค์รักษาเขต, “การศึกษาในดินแดนมลายู”, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 202 [Ibrahem Narongraksakhet, “Education in Melayu Land”, op. cit., p. 202].

<sup>31</sup> The government has attempted to win back students from private Islamic schools by launching a pilot project to have a dual secular-religious curriculum similar to those of private Islamic schools. However, it is difficult for the government to persuade Malay Muslim parents that government schools can provide an equally good Islamic education. One consideration for Malay Muslim parents is that Islamic subjects are taught in the Thai language in government schools, unlike in private Islamic schools that use Malay. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahem Narongraksakhet, lecturer at Prince of Songkhla University at Pattani’s College of Islamic Studies, 15 January 2009.

<sup>32</sup> See David Camroux and Don Pathan, “Borders of/on the Mind, Borders in the Jungle: Islamic Insurgency and Ethno-Religious Irredentism in Southern Thailand” in Nikki Slocum-Bradley (ed.), *Promoting Conflict or Peace through Identity* (Oxon, 2008), p. 96.

### III. RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF INSURGENTS IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

The recruitment process follows a pattern similar to jihadi organisations elsewhere in South East 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”. 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.

#### A. SELECTION, SEPARATION AND REINFORCEMENT

Religious classrooms are where *ustadz* working for the clandestine movement can search for potential new recruits. Those regarded as hard-working, reliable and courageous are approached. Contrary to past government assertions, those associated with drugs, gangs or other criminal activities are shunned as they are thought to be unreliable and could bring harm to the movement.<sup>33</sup> Religious, community or youth leaders can also provide the first introductions outside the schoolhouse.<sup>34</sup>

In teaching of Islamic history, it is not uncommon for *ustadz* to describe the “glorious past” of the Patani sultanate before its annexation in 1902 by Siam (Thailand’s old name). The period since then is framed as a struggle of the Patani people against the Buddhist kingdom with an emphasis often being placed on the alleged cruelty of its rulers towards the minority Malay

Muslims. The incidents cited include Dusun-nyor<sup>35</sup>, Koto Bridge, Pattani central mosque,<sup>36</sup> Krue Se,<sup>37</sup> Tak Bai,<sup>38</sup> and disappearances, particularly under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006).<sup>39</sup>

*Ustadz* ask those students showing emotion or enthusiasm to join special programs outside school hours, often in mosques. These extracurricular activities are the first step of the reinforcement and indoctrination process that is still, at this stage, carried out surreptitiously. Potential recruits are initially unaware that they have been singled out by the movement.<sup>40</sup>

Special religious lessons, educational trips or sports teams provide the opportunity for an *ustadz* working for

<sup>35</sup> Dusun-nyor is a name of a sub-district in Narathiwat’s Rangae district where a violent incident took place in April 1948. There are several accounts of the incident. All agree some 1,000 Malay Muslim villagers clashed with police, resulting in the death of about 30 police officers. Official accounts say 30 to 100 Malay Muslims were killed, while villagers’ accounts estimate between 400 and 600. The official history considers it a planned rebellion against the government, while Malay Muslim academics describe it as a sudden uprising. See ชัยวัฒน์ สถาอานันท์, *ความรุนแรงกับการจัดการ “ความจริง”: ปัตตานีในรอบกึ่งศตวรรษ* (กรุงเทพฯ: 2551), หน้า 118-125 [Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Violence and “Truth” Management: Patani in Half a Century* (Bangkok, 2008), pp. 118-125].

<sup>36</sup> The killings in Saiburi and in front of the central mosque of Pattani are related. On 29 November 1975, the marines took six Malay Muslims to Koto Bridge in Pattani’s Saiburi district, stabbing and beating five to death. The sixth person, a boy, pretended to be dead and survived. The slaughter sparked a protest in front of Pattani provincial hall in early December, calling for the withdrawal of soldiers from the area and compensation for victims’ families. Unidentified assailants – whom protesters believed were officials – threw grenades into the protest site, killing thirteen protesters and injuring 40 others. The rally then moved to the central mosque of Pattani, and grew to about 70,000 protesters. See อารีฟีน บินจิ, อ.ลอมแมน, ซูฮัยมีย์ อิสมาแอล, *ปัตตานี ... ประวัติศาสตร์และการเมืองในโลกมลายู* (สงขลา: 2550) หน้า 380-387 [Arifin Binji, O-la-omaen, Suhaimi Ismael, *Patani ... History and Politics in Melayu World* (Songkhla, 2007), pp. 380-387].

<sup>37</sup> 106 Muslims died in clashes with security forces in eleven locations on 28 April 2004, of whom 31 were killed when security forces stormed the Krue Se Mosque in Pattani. It was popularly referred as the Krue Se incident, although the mosque was only one of eleven locations where violence took place.

<sup>38</sup> On 25 October 2004, some 1,300 protesters were arrested in Narathiwat’s Tak Bai district. They were stacked in military trucks and transported to a military camp in the next province, Pattani. After several hours’ driving, 78 died of suffocation and injuries. In addition, seven protesters were shot dead at the protest site.

<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, October 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Narathiwat, November 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interview, Islamic teacher, Pattani, December 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Pattani, October 2007.

the movement to hone his message through supplemental religious teachings, mostly conducted in mosques after evening prayer. The common narrative used revolves around the Patani sultanate's "glorious past", Thailand's "unjust" rule and recent mistreatment of Malay Muslims by state officials. Sometimes, such pitches extend to the plight of "oppressed" Muslims around the world.<sup>41</sup>

Each group of students, ranging from five to fifteen people, is led by a team leader known as a *naqeeb*, who is normally appointed by an *ayah* (village-level leader). In order to cover up their activities, some *naqeeb* may disguise themselves as coach or captain of a football team.

I didn't realise that that course was to indoctrinate me about the struggle. I joined because I wanted to be the best football player. During the day we played football, in the evening we prayed in the mosque like ordinary Muslims. After completing prayers, we stayed on for one to two hours to listen to a lecture on religion and the current situation in the three provinces.<sup>42</sup>

For example, nineteen football players from the Susoh village team were killed after being involved in a battle in Songkhla's Saba Yoi district, which was part of the coordinated attacks against security forces on 28 April 2004. Among the dead militants was the 31-year-old team captain Sakariya Haskajae. Neighbours described him as being "reserved, good-mannered and a devout Muslim".<sup>43</sup> After the incident, the Thai authorities were initially perplexed as to why football players in such numbers attacked security forces. Some said they were all on drugs.<sup>44</sup>

The period of reinforcement before a person is recruited varies from months to a few years. An ex-pupil from the Islam Burapha school – an alleged breeding ground for insurgents closed down by the authorities – said he took special religious lessons for six months before taking an oath of allegiance to join the movement.<sup>45</sup> Without their knowledge, potential recruits' mettle is being tested in the classroom and on the football field.

They cannot join the movement until they have unwittingly proved their faith, obedience and loyalty.<sup>46</sup>

When finally asked to join a "group", students are not told whether it is part of a larger organisation.<sup>47</sup> The insurgency's nomenclature emphasises homeland (Patani) and religion (Islam) with known examples such as Gerakan Pejuang Patani (Patani Fighters Movement), Pemuda Pembebasan Patani (Youth for the Liberation of Patani), Perjuangan Islam Patani (Patani Islamic Struggle) or Pemuda Gerakan Patani (Youth of the Patani Movement). "The Heart of Revolution for Youth", an unpublished book found by the military and believed to be read by insurgents, places the role of such a naming system in the context of overall movement secrecy.

In order to wage a revolution, we don't have to know who our leaders are because that could mean to reveal a secret to our enemy. We only have to be firm in our love and loyalty for our land, race, language, culture and Islamic faith. That is the goal for our revolution. It starts from one or two and secretly divides into several groups.<sup>48</sup>

Multi-generational support for the struggle shows that recruitment started long before the 2004 resurgence. There was active engagement of teenagers as young as thirteen years old more than a decade ago.<sup>49</sup> Enlistment of those under eighteen by a non-state armed group also raises the issue of the use of child soldiers in this conflict and the illegality of such practices under international law.<sup>50</sup> While worried about children caught in the crossfire, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and

<sup>41</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, October 2007.

<sup>43</sup> See กุมิบุตร, *106 ศพ ความตายมีชีวิต* (กรุงเทพฯ: 2547), หน้า 75-85 [Bumibutra, *106 dead bodies: Lives of the Death* (Bangkok, 2004), pp. 75-85].

<sup>44</sup> "Thai Muslim soccer team turned militant overnight", Reuters, 30 April 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Narathiwat, November 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group interview, Islamic teacher, Pattani, December 2007.

<sup>47</sup> None of some 40 students interviewed were told if the group they joined was affiliated to the BRN-C or other known secessionist groups.

<sup>48</sup> The book was seized from Jihad Wittaya, the private Islamic school closed by the authorities in 2005. Crisis Group obtained the Thai translation of the book from military sources. The English translation is Crisis Group's own. For more details see section IV.A below.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Malay Muslims have been recruited into the movement at a very young age. The optional protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Thailand acceded in February 2006, states that the recruitment or use in hostilities of persons under the age of eighteen by non-state armed groups is prohibited "under any circumstances". States party are required to take steps to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups at any time, whether or not an armed conflict exists. See Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Briefing Paper: Child Recruitment and Use in Southern Thailand", December 2008, p. 23.

Armed Conflict does not list this conflict as a country of concern.

The movement's recruitment would not be effective without the patient work of teachers, who are respected figures in the community and have legitimate access to students. Teenagers idolise their teachers, making a request to join the struggle from a trusted teacher almost irresistible.<sup>51</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that before attempting to bring students into its fold there is first a methodical effort to incorporate teachers into the movement's structure. In some cases, support is cultivated through the provision of financial support to allow teachers to study overseas before returning to provide religious instruction in schools. One *ustadz* received seed funding from BRN to start a five-year degree in Islamic law in Saudi Arabia. Scholarships from the university and the Saudi government allowed him to complete it. Upon his return, he took a job in teaching at a private Islamic school, secretly working for the movement.<sup>52</sup> Another *ustadz* was recruited by PULO, which provided guidance through its "overseas education bureau" for him to study at a Sudanese university.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, not all *ustadz* approve of the recruitment tactics. Underground activities are carried out in some schools without the knowledge of those in charge. In others administrators have been known to give their tacit support. The infiltration can be deep with the majority of teachers in one institution sympathetic to the secessionist movement, and some active within it. Support may be seen as a tradition, handed down through successive generations of teachers and principals.<sup>54</sup> With sympathisers prevalent throughout the educational system, those who disagree with such involvement fear to silence them. Some do try in class and in private to discourage students from becoming involved. They find it difficult to make this case as support for the movement can be found at all levels, including dormitory supervisors.<sup>55</sup>

## B. OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

New recruits swear allegiance to the movement in a ceremony known as *supoh*.<sup>56</sup> Long before adulthood, they can take this compulsory oath on the Koran to an organisation whose name they do not truly know. If given any explanation, they are joining the Patani struggle as fighters. The location for oath-taking need not be a mosque and varies depending on the *ustadz* or *naqeeb* responsible for the initial indoctrination process. Oath-taking is an important rite of passage before the new recruits can advance to physical and then military training.<sup>57</sup> Whatever the phrasing, the key message remains the same – quitting the movement has severe consequences.

In the name of God, the Almighty, and Compassionate we will be loyal and obedient to our leader and the organisation for the sake of the Malay and Muslim people. If I violate the rules established by the organisation, my blood may be shed (*halal darah*).<sup>58</sup>

This ritual is important for keeping confidentiality and to enforce obedience. Those breaking the pledge and seeking to leave the movement are given two warnings. If they do not return, they can be executed.<sup>59</sup> The *supoh* is a powerful cultural tool to maintain secrecy. In order to gather information from suspected insurgents under interrogation, security officials have felt it necessary to ask imams to carry out a ceremony to undo the *supoh* so that the detainees, feeling the spell was broken, would dare to speak out.

## C. INDOCTRINATION, INITIATION, PHYSICAL FITNESS AND MILITARY TRAINING

After the *supoh* ceremony, new recruits embark on a period of part-time specialised indoctrination, initiation and training that can be stretched out over a number of years. It has up to five distinct levels or graduated phases leading to becoming an active fighter in the movement, and, for the best, membership of elite

<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Narathiwat, November 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>56</sup> *Supoh* is a local version of a standard Malay word *sumpah*, meaning "oath". In Indonesia, many radical organisations, including Jemaah Islamiyah, Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid and Hizb ut-Tahrir, teach that members of a community (*jama'ah*) led by an imam must take an oath (*bai'ah*, from the Arabic) of loyalty to the imam.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interview, Islamic teacher, Pattani, October 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interview, a religious teacher, Pattani, 11 January 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group interviews, students and religious teachers, December 2007 and January 2008.

“commando” units. The seven-step plan found at Masae Useng’s house said the BRN-C had set a goal to produce 3,000 fighters. Police estimate active insurgents at about 1,800.<sup>60</sup>

First, there is a dormant period for new members when they are left alone to be sure they will not inform the authorities about the clandestine activities. If they pass this test, the Thai military believes they then begin the first part of their formal training, including additional religious instruction, particularly on jihad, which can last six months to a year. At this time, recruits are told that if they die during this “holy struggle”, they will go to heaven to be with God and have all their sins forgiven. If they are injured, they will only be punished for half of their sins.<sup>61</sup>

Second, they are tested for “bravery and mental strength” over a further three- to six-month period. During this time, the new recruits are initiated into the movement’s activities by distributing leaflets or conducting minor acts of sabotage such as spray-painting road signs, torching public phone booths, stealing mobile phones or laying metal spikes on roads.<sup>62</sup>

Third, physical conditioning is conducted by anonymous trainers, who are active members in the movement’s military wing. Carried out at night to avoid the authorities’ attention, school compounds or other public spaces such as beaches and football fields are used as venues. Trainees do push-ups, sit-ups, jogging and other physical exercises.<sup>63</sup> To end each session, trainees step their right leg forward, lift their right fist and shout “Patani Merdeka” (Free Patani).<sup>64</sup> The training is conducted once or twice a week for six months to a year.<sup>65</sup>

Fourth, physically fit recruits then graduate to military training, which the security forces call the “RKK”

course.<sup>66</sup> Gathering in secluded places, sometimes in hilly “red zone” areas, they are once again drilled by anonymous fighters, some of whom apparently learnt to use weapons during their two years of compulsory military service.<sup>67</sup> They try to avoid detection by practicing by night using only wooden batons or plastic weapons. They rehearse ambushes and other battle tactics.<sup>68</sup>

Fifth, the best recruits advance to a “commando” training using real weapons, once again switching locations and nameless trainers, some of whom are former soldiers in the Royal Thai Army.<sup>69</sup>

The length of time at each level seems to be flexible. Basic “RKK” military training can be for six-hour sessions, two days a week, lasting six to eight months; for others up to four-hour classes, twice a week for eight to ten months.<sup>70</sup> No longer just training for sport, these routines integrate combative cadences of “*mati syurga, hidup Berjaya, bumi Patani dimerdeka*” (dead, heaven; alive, victorious; freedom for the land of Patani).<sup>71</sup> Those who graduate from the training become fighters divided into an odd-numbered group of no more than fifteen. One military unit is normally a mixture of newly-trained fighters from different areas who are not supposed to know their peers outside their group. Knowledge of other units is entrusted only to each squad leader.<sup>72</sup>

The military’s information suggests that the “RKK” has a more intensive curriculum conducted day and night over four weeks covering Patani history, bomb-making, weapons usage and self-defence tactics. The end result is the formation of a six-member RKK unit based in a village. Those who receive the most advanced military training are tasked to become roving “commandos”. Those on the verge of operations fast on

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, Police Lt. Gen. Adul Saengsingkaew, assistant police commissioner-general and commander of the Police Forward Command, Yala, 26 January 2009.

<sup>61</sup> สำเร็จ ศรีหราช, *ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 87 [Samret Srirai, *The BRN-Coordinate*, op. cit., p. 87].

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Islamic teachers and students, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, November 2007 and January 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Military interrogation deposition, a commando involved in physical and military training at Jihad Wittaya School, undated.

<sup>65</sup> สำเร็จ ศรีหราช, *ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 88 [Samret Srirai, *The BRN-Coordinate*, op. cit., p. 88]; and Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, January 2008.

<sup>66</sup> RKK stands in Malay for Runda Kumpulan Kecil, literally a small patrol unit. The acronym is widely used by the Thai military to refer to the insurgents’ military wing and also its military training program that the military claims they learnt from Indonesia.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, January 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Pattani, October 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interviews, religious teachers, Pattani and Yala, January-February 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Yala, March 2008. In fact, the standard jihadi slogan used around the world is usually translated from the Arabic into Malay as “*Hidup mulia atau mati syahid*” – live well or die a martyr. *Mati syurga* makes no sense grammatically.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, a fighter later killed in a clash with the military, Yala, 26 September 2007.

Mondays and Thursdays as well as meditating and reading the Koran for 30 days to boost their fighting spirit. After a brief apprenticeship supporting other assaults, the units are tasked to conduct their own acts of arson, bombing or assassination.<sup>73</sup>

The military training is considered most prestigious, and those who do not meet the grade do not receive it.<sup>74</sup> For those rejected for frontline service, there are secondary roles in the organisation, such as psychological warfare, economic/logistical support and recruitment. Those under eighteen are mostly assigned to undertake non-military functions such as spying, scattering nails, spraying “Free Patani” graffiti and arson.<sup>75</sup> Women also are largely given non-military tasks such as gathering intelligence,<sup>76</sup> finding potential recruits and indoctrinating female students.<sup>77</sup>

#### IV. IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The secessionist movement is inspired and motivated by pride in the “glorious past” of Patani and a “history of oppression” under Thai rule. This essentially ethno-nationalist agenda is expressed in religious terms as a holy jihad against Buddhist infidels. Islam is used instrumentally to mobilise recruits rather than representing a significant causal factor in its own right. 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.

##### A. THE “GLORIOUS” PATANI SULTANATE

The grand narrative of Patani history shared among Malay Muslims in southern Thailand is the story of a once prosperous sultanate invaded and colonised by oppressive Buddhist rulers. It is reproduced with great uniformity in oral lessons, struggle publications, nationalist songs and even under interrogation.

Patani was an independent sultanate before it was conquered by Siam and later annexed in 1902, as Bangkok consolidated power and began nation-building.<sup>78</sup> Over time, administrative reforms unseated Patani rulers and replaced them with Thai-speaking officials who reported directly to the centre. For most of the twentieth century, relations between Bangkok and the Deep South were characterised by harsh assimilation policies and resistance. In homemade curricula, each

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interview, Police Maj. Wassayos Krachangwong, an officer at the police interrogation centre, Yala, 26 January 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Yala, February 2008.

<sup>78</sup> For scholarly works on Patani history, see กรองชัย หัตถกา, *ประวัติศาสตร์ปัตตานี สมัยอาณาจักรโบราณถึงการปกครอง 7 หัวเมือง* (ปัตตานี: 2548) [Krongchai Hattha, *The History of Patani: From the Ancient Sultanate to the Seven Provincial Administration* (Pattani, 2005)]. Two important works written from the point of view sympathetic to the Malay Muslims are David K. Wyatt and A. Teeuw (eds), *Hikayat Patani: the Story of Patani* (The Hague, 1970) and Ibrahim Syukri (pseudonym), *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani* [trans. by Conner Bailey and John N. Miksic] (Athens, Ohio, 1985).

*ustadz* uses his own language to combine this history and “Malay-ness” into a potent nationalist mix that can sway impressionable students.<sup>79</sup> This local narrative of oppression and resistance to those in the capital sets Malay Muslims at odds with Thai “national” history.<sup>80</sup> Such accounts provide them with a sense of pride and inspiration. They also alienate Malay Muslims from the rest of the country and incite hatred against the Buddhist Thai government. By fostering feelings of anger, students are taught to detest the military, police and government officials. From here, it is only a short step to discussing how to “liberate Patani”.<sup>81</sup>

The dual themes of Patani’s “glorious past” and “oppression” by Thai rulers also resonate in “The Heart of Revolution for Youth”, a book found after the raid of the Jihad Wittaya private Islamic school in Pattani in 2005. Its introduction states the book is the collective property of the movement and can be recalled anytime. It exhorts those in its possession not to rewrite, revise, add to or publicise it. They should neither let it fall into the hands of enemies nor lend it to others. The book describes how the Patani kingdom was established before Sukhothai, the first capital of Thailand in its official history. Its account of this ancient history is brief compared to the space devoted to the “oppression” by Thai rulers and their attempt to “obliterate” the Malay race and Islam in the modern period.

In the land which has been inherited from our ancestors, our land is crying and calling and waiting for independence and fraternity. We must be conscious of our motherland, which is now under the rule of inhumane imperialist Siam. We have been treated as second-class citizens or like children of slaves. The laws of Siam are benefiting it, but oppress and weaken us. Any laws said to be democratic are actually intended to erase the ethnic Malays and Patani.<sup>82</sup>

Central to the efforts to “obliterate” the Malay race, in the militants’ views, was the introduction of Thai language into *ponoh* and the ban on the use of Malay in all government offices.<sup>83</sup> It also underlined the perceived deterioration of Malay Muslim society in the Deep South.

The illness that we are facing is that our race is now weak and deteriorating. Such illness is a result of us having our way of life controlled in material and moral terms. In this situation, it is necessary that we take responsibility for our race. Our racial consciousness will prompt us to fight for the independence of our race and nation.<sup>84</sup>

The cornerstone of any nationalist struggle is its song and the dual themes again resound from the Malay-language lyrics of the “Patani National Anthem”:

Patani is our country  
The land covered in noble blood  
The land of Patani is our sacred heritage  
The homeland of the Malay people.  
A sovereign land since ancient times  
Red, white, black, crescent moon, yellow star  
is our flag.  
Now is the time to defend it  
And rule our land, sea and sky  
No other nation can rule us,  
According to international law  
Young men and women will work together  
With strength, bravery and fighting spirit  
To confront what we face  
We will resist with four million strong  
There is no power that we fear,  
Peace and prosperity are our goal  
We will be bloodied but unbowed  
Because this is our duty to religion and nation  
Remember that prayer is our weapon  
With strong faith and Almighty God  
God will protect us  
From all disasters  
The prayer of peace is our guide

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, October 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Islam, Education and Reform in Southern Thailand: Tradition and Transformation* (Singapore, 2009), p. 110.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Pattani, February 2008.

<sup>82</sup> “The Heart of Revolution for Youth”, unpublished document obtained by Crisis Group from the military, undated, p. 1. The book contains ten chapters, covering issues of preparation for youth to join the movement, Patani and Malay consciousness, revolution to liberate Patani, jihad and rules on relationships with non-Muslims. The document was originally written in Jawi script, the old Malay script widely used in the Deep South which was also used in Ma-

laysia before the written language was romanised. It was translated into Thai by the military. The English translation was done by Crisis Group.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. The ban on the use of Malay in all government offices was implemented during the period when Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram launched the *Ratthaniyom*, or “Cultural Mandates” policy between 1939 and 1942, as part of his nationalist policy. It resulted in Malay Muslims being barred from wearing sarongs, using Malay names or speaking Malay, and the imposition of Buddhist practices. See Ibrahim Syukri, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani*, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

<sup>84</sup> “The Heart of Revolution for Youth”, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

Forward to glory, independence,  
Independence!<sup>85</sup>

Exaggerated forms of the same nationalist histories are repeated under interrogation.

The Patani state used to belong to the Malays. They fought with the Siamese state and were defeated. They were taken to Bangkok to dig the Sansaeb canal. Siamese soldiers cut their Achilles tendons, making them endure suffering. Besides, they seized two cannons belonging to the Patani state and shipped them to Bangkok.<sup>86</sup> One of the ships reached the destination safely, but another one capsized. It is our duty to unite and fight to take back our Patani state by waging a war against the Siamese government.<sup>87</sup>

## B. OPPRESSION BY THE THAI STATE

Mistreatment of Malay Muslims by the Thaksin government – notably at Krue Se and Tak Bai – has only reinforced the narrative of oppressive Siamese rulers for the current generation.<sup>88</sup> 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 per cent of arrested fighters confessed that they joined the movement because they were angered by these two incidents.<sup>89</sup> The arrest or killing of a family member is a strong motivator for recruits.

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<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group translation from Malay into English. The lyric of the “Patani national anthem” was obtained from an *ustadz* in the Deep South. The song can also be found online: “Lagu kebangsaan Patani (animation)”, video, YouTube, 22 April 2008, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhacZM5n4NQ&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhacZM5n4NQ&feature=related). Several “propaganda songs” about the struggle of Patani people are also available on YouTube.

<sup>86</sup> The seizure of the two cannons is a recorded incident. The cannon lost in the sea is called “Sri Nakari” and the other is “Maha Rani Patani”, now located in front of the Thai defence ministry in Bangkok. See ครองชัย หัตถา, *ประวัติศาสตร์ปัตตานีสมัยอาณาจักรโบราณถึงการปกครอง 7 หัวเมือง*, อ่างแก้ว, หน้า 74 [Krongchai Hattha, *The History of Patani: From the Ancient Sultanate to the Seven Provincial Administrations*, op. cit., p. 74].

<sup>87</sup> Interrogation deposition of a commando in Narathiwat, undated. A similar story about Malay Muslims being taken to dig a canal in Bangkok and having their Achilles tendons cut was told to Yaser Muso, a Thai student who was indoctrinated in Indonesia. See สำเร็จ ศรีหราช, *ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate*, อ่างแก้ว, หน้า 54 [Samret Srirai, *The BRN-Coordinate*, op. cit., p. 54].

<sup>88</sup> For details of Krue Se and Tak Bai incidents, refer to footnotes 37 and 38.

<sup>89</sup> สำเร็จ ศรีหราช, *ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate*, อ่างแก้ว, หน้า 118 [Samret Srirai, *The BRN-Coordinate*, op. cit., p. 118]. The author is the deputy commander of the 4th army region.

The harassment of those whose names made it onto a blacklist for association with the two incidents also drives new members towards the movement.<sup>90</sup>

Some *ustadz* 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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

However, Tak Bai and Krue Se attracted the attention of Muslims outside southern Thailand, including two Malaysian would-be jihadists. When arrested in Narathiwat’s Sungai Golok district in June 2008, both volunteers cited their anger with these cases as the motivation to cross the border to help their “oppressed” Muslim brothers wage jihad. Later charged with insurrection, seventeen-year-old Omar Hanif Shamsul Kamar said he was inspired by a VCD on Tak Bai. His associate, 23-year-old Muhammad Fadly bin Zainal Abidin, told Crisis Group proximity also played a part in their decision.

I wanted to help Muslims and was interested to wage a jihad in Thailand because it is the nearest destination (and the) Thai government kills so many Muslims. I was told that children playing football were shot and rubber tappers were killed. I want to come and help them.<sup>93</sup>

Footage of the Tak Bai incident was rapidly reproduced and disseminated, including in Malaysia, Indo-

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<sup>90</sup> Crisis Group interview, Islamic teacher, November 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Pattani, January 2008.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Narathiwat, November 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Omar Hanif Shamsul Kamar, child and juvenile detention centre, Narathiwat, 25 August 2008 and Muhammad Fadly bin Zainal Abidin, Narathiwat prison, Narathiwat, 26 August 2008. Fadly was a student at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, the alma mater of prominent JI members Noordin M. Top and the late Dr Azhari Husein. He said he received one month’s physical training in Malaysia before coming to southern Thailand. Hanif said he had been recruited by a Malaysian man from Kelantan. The two Malaysians, together with their leaders, Malaysian *ustadz* “Muhammad” and a South Asian man called Omar, crossed the border in late May 2008 and rented a house in Narathiwat’s Sungai Golok, where they carried out physical and military training. They tried unsuccessfully to attack security forces with knives. Fadly and Hanif were arrested on 28 June 2008, as they attempted to steal a motorcycle; the other two escaped. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Thailand: Political Turmoil and the Southern Insurgency*, op. cit., p. 5.



nesia, and on YouTube, causing Thai authorities so much concern that they threatened to prosecute distributors for posing a threat to national security.<sup>94</sup> In a VCD seen by Crisis Group, a simply-made documentary film compares Tak Bai with Indonesia's Aceh, with narration in Indonesian.

Cases of human rights violations such as torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings – real or perceived – have been effective recruiting tools. It is not uncommon for an active member of the movement to have been tortured by security forces or a member of their family to have suffered such ill-treatment.<sup>95</sup> Records collected by Muslim lawyers suggest that the use of torture has increased since June 2007, when the army began a systematic sweeping operation to hunt down suspected insurgents. The independent Muslim Attorney Centre received 74 reports of torture of detainees between June 2007 and April 2008.<sup>96</sup> One of the most serious cases was Imam Yapa Kaseng, who was beaten to death in a military camp in Narathiwat's Rue So district in March 2008.<sup>97</sup> Army Commander Gen. Anupong Paochinda was so alarmed that he instructed his soldiers not to injure or kill any Muslims during interrogations at military camps. Such acts, he said, might provide justification for “intervention” by the United Nations or the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.<sup>98</sup> Cases of torture appear to have reduced somewhat after the imam's death.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> See “สมช. ไม่ฟันธงห้ามเผยแพร่วีซีดีตากใบ” สำนักข่าวประชาไท, 14 ธันวาคม 2547 [“National Security Council declines to say if distribution of Tak Bai VCDs should be prohibited”, Prachatai, 14 December 2004], [www.prachatai.com/news/show.php?Category=sm&No=1831](http://www.prachatai.com/news/show.php?Category=sm&No=1831).

<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, November 2007.

<sup>96</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Thailand: Political Turmoil and the Southern Insurgency*, op. cit., pp. 14-16.

<sup>97</sup> Narathiwat Court concluded a post-mortem inquest for Yapa Kaseng's death on 25 December 2008, stating that his death resulted from severe beatings under military custody. Under Thai law, such an inquest is required for any death in official custody but those found responsible for the death are not convicted at this stage. Following that, Yapa's family filed a civil lawsuit against the army, national police bureau, and defence ministry in March 2009, demanding 10 million baht in compensation (\$292,140). The trial is currently ongoing. Crisis Group telephone interview, staff of Cross Cultural Foundation, 6 June 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Memorandum of the internal security operations command's 4th region, dated 29 March 2008.

<sup>99</sup> Amnesty International documented 34 cases of torture. The report concludes that Thai security forces engaged in “systematic torture” and ill-treatment in southern Thailand. It argues that the torture is practiced systematically because it is habitual, widespread and deliberate in at least a considerable part of the territory, even if it is not the government's

There have been many unexplained disappearances in recent decades in the Deep South. One imprinted on the minds of many Malay Muslims is that of respected cleric Haji Sulong bin Abdul Kadir, also an advocate of greater autonomy for the Deep South. Together with his eldest son, he was believed to be drowned by police in 1954.<sup>100</sup> His case is used often as evidence of oppression and the lack of punishment by the government of perpetrators of human rights abuses.<sup>101</sup> Another high-profile case is Somchai Neelaphajit, a Muslim lawyer who went missing in mysterious circumstances in March 2004 after he called for an investigation into police torture of suspected insurgents.<sup>102</sup> Despite greater international scrutiny and the impact such abuses have in eroding the legitimacy of the Thai state, disappearances continue. Human Rights Watch documented 22 cases of enforced disappearance in southern Thailand in its research in 2005 and 2006, but the numbers seem to be greater.<sup>103</sup> It is also hard to verify extrajudicial killings – which are widely believed to be common – as any killings could be easily blamed on either the security forces or insurgents. But when left unsolved, such crimes only fuel rumours that over time come to prevail over facts, becoming powerful propaganda tools for the insurgents.

### C. “JIHAD” STRUGGLE

Successive movements in southern Thailand have assumed an ethno-nationalist character, although a religious framing for the struggle is more prominent now than in the past.<sup>104</sup> Malay Muslims in southern Thailand

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policy. “Thailand: Torture in Southern Counter-Insurgency”, Amnesty International, 13 January 2009.

<sup>100</sup> See more details about Haji Sulong and his movement in Crisis Group Report, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency Not Jihad*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interview, ex-student, Yala, October 2007. The ex-student was killed a few days later in a clash with security forces.

<sup>102</sup> See more details about Somchai's disappearance in Crisis Group Report, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency Not Jihad*, op. cit., pp. 17-18. The Abhisit government has instructed the DSI to expedite the re-investigation of his disappearance as a showcase of its effort to address the Malay Muslims' sense of injustice. Several attempts to find his remains in Ratchaburi, a central province where he was believed to have been killed, have proved futile.

<sup>103</sup> See “It was Like Suddenly My Son No Longer Existed”, Human Rights Watch, March 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group has consistently argued that the ideological underpinning for the struggle in southern Thailand is primarily ethno-nationalism, and not jihad. A similar view is also expressed in Joseph Chinyong Liow, “International Jihad and Muslim Radicalism in Thailand? Toward an Alternative Interpretation”, *Asia Policy*, no. 2 (July 2006), pp. 100-

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”.<sup>105</sup> This explains, in part, why more Muslims than Buddhists have been killed since 2004: as of March 2009, 1,869 Muslims have been killed, compared with 1,431 Buddhists.<sup>106</sup> Among the 3,400 killed since the resurgence of violence in 2004 are a number of women, children and elderly.<sup>107</sup>

Each member of the movement is taught firmly that killing those who obstruct our struggle is an obligation and is not against our religion after they are given three warnings; rather, they will be rewarded in heaven because those people are considered enemies of the movement and religion. Our struggle absolutely cannot fail, we can only achieve victory. If we are killed by the army, our death is considered martyrdom. But if we win in our struggle, then Islamic rule will spread again in the land of Patani.<sup>108</sup>

The insurgents perceive the Deep South to be *Dar al-Harb* (House of War), a land ruled by non-Muslims where the Sharia (Islamic law) is not recognised, and call for their brethren to reclaim it from the Siamese *kafir*.<sup>109</sup>

You should never trust the *kafir* because the *kafir* is a *syaitan* (devil) in the guise of a human being. Both *kafir* and *syaitan* are the enemies of God. The enemies of God are our enemies. And whoever follows *kafir* and *syaitan* should be called *munafik*, shouldn't they? *Kafir*, *syaitan* and *munafik* should all be in hell forever. Our dearest Muslim brethren, this is a land of war (*Dar al-Harb*), no different from Palestine, Afghanistan, etc. It is not the place where monks can hold hands with imams and *tok guru* can pray for monks and monks bless *tok guru*.

The *kafir* cannot build stupid reconciliation here. The *kafir* and Muslims have to live separately. This land has to be liberated and ruled by Islamic law. This land does not belong to Thailand; it is the land of “Patani Darussalam”.<sup>110</sup>

One of the stark differences between the old and new generations of insurgents in southern Thailand is their attitude to Buddhists. In the past, extracting protection money without killing villagers – Buddhists or Muslim – was acceptable. Most believed it was against Islam to kill Buddhists, with the exception of soldiers, police or state officials. Government informants were also fair targets and deserved to be killed.<sup>111</sup> Beheadings are a new phenomenon, suggesting insurgents have adopted this practice from Islamic militants abroad.<sup>112</sup>

The increasing use of Islamic language reflects the rise of Islamic movements globally. Some older generation militants see this as a tactical shift by those driving the present movement, as they wish to attract attention for their cause from Islamic countries. In the past, the use of such religious vocabulary was thought unappealing as it could have alienated non-Islamic countries, whose support the movement sought.<sup>113</sup> Previous generations of separatists used religious terms such as jihad, but the framing was never as explicit and influential as it is today. Not everyone agrees, as a study by a Thai political scientist showed that from 1976 to 1981 insurgents used Islam to justify violent actions. At that time, pamphlets issued by secessionist groups such as

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101. Duncan McCargo argues along the same lines that the insurgents' causes are political, centring on local questions of legitimacy. Islam serves as a mobilising resource and a way of framing these political objectives. See Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interview, former BRN-C military trainer, 13 January 2009.

<sup>106</sup> Srisompob Jitpiromsri, “Updated Statistics of the Deep South Watch: Thailand’s Southern Violence from January 2004 through March 2009”, Deep South Watch (www.deepsouthwatch.org), 20 April 2009.

<sup>107</sup> The religion of some victims remains unknown.

<sup>108</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, October 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Islam traditionally categorises realms as either *Dar al-Islam* (a land ruled by a Muslim ruler and where Sharia is the law of the land) or *Dar al-Harb*. See Joseph Chinyong

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Liow, *Islam, Education and Reform in Southern Thailand*, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>110</sup> Leaflet distributed in November 2006 and signed by the “Islamic Warriors of Patani”.

<sup>111</sup> Crisis Group interview, Doloh Sengmasu, former PULO fighter, Yala, 19 January 2009.

<sup>112</sup> There is an important distinction between the beheadings in southern Thailand and those in Iraq. In Thailand, beheadings occur after the person is shot and killed, rather than being the cause of death. Personal communication, Joseph Chinyong Liow, 4 March 2009.

<sup>113</sup> Crisis Group interview, former BIPP member, Kotabaru, 20 January 2009.

PULO often used phrases from the Koran and the Hadith.<sup>114</sup> One pamphlet stated that Muslims must be reminded that it is obligatory to fight the *kafir* and it is wrong to be under the rule of non-Muslims.<sup>115</sup>

The current generation of insurgents defines its movement as a holy jihad for the cause of God, by which it means armed jihad.<sup>116</sup> Those killed in the cause of jihad are considered *syahid* (martyrs). This framing helps the indoctrination process, encouraging a willingness to die as a martyr for the cause.<sup>117</sup>

The insurgents' vision of jihad is elaborated in the 65-page *Berjihad di Patani (Waging Jihad in Patani)* found on some of the 32 militants who died inside the Krue Se mosque. Written in Jawi script, it invokes the Koran in issuing the call to all Malay Muslims to wage life or death struggle to reclaim their land from the *kafir*.<sup>118</sup> While a political rather than religious text, it uses scripture to justify violent tactics stating that it is not sinful to kill *kafir* or *munafik* in the struggle. For the movements' followers, death in this "holy war" would mean they would stand before God as warriors.<sup>119</sup>

While the insurgents frequently use the language of jihad, the movement is not part of the global jihad.<sup>120</sup> *Berjihad di Patani* explicitly defines the struggle as

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<sup>114</sup> Hadith are accounts that report the words and deeds of the Prophet and his Companions. They are the primary resource for Muslim knowledge of Muhammad's exemplary practice.

<sup>115</sup> Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Islam and Violence: A Case Study of Violent Events in the Four Provinces of Thailand, 1976-1981*, USF Monograph in Religion and Public Policy No. 2 (Tampa, 1986) pp. 31-32.

<sup>116</sup> Jihad means to struggle or exert oneself and it needs not always refer to fighting. It can include the giving of charity, freeing slaves and challenging oppression. However, its primary sense is armed struggle, which may include resistance to perceived injustice or the creation of space for Islam and Muslims to flourish.

<sup>117</sup> Crisis Group interview, a religious teacher, Pattani, February 2008.

<sup>118</sup> Crisis Group's translation from the Thai version of *Berjihad di Patani* (translated by Waehama Deemae, translator employed by Yala's Muang district), unpublished document, p. 17. The original is written in Jawi script.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> For works which argue that the insurgency has assumed a more jihadist orientation, see Arabinda Acharya, Sabrina Chua and Rohan Gunaratna (eds.), *Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand* (Singapore, 2006); Zachary Abuza, "Three Years after the January 2004 Raids, the Insurgency in Thailand is Building Momentum", Counterterrorism Blog (<http://counterterrorismblog.org>), 3 January 2007; and Zachary Abuza, "Southern Discomfort: Thailand's Insurgency Enters Year Five", Counterterrorism Blog (<http://counterterrorismblog.org>), 2 January 2008.

defending the land of Malay Muslims, delineating the parochial battle lines of this fight. After Patani is reclaimed, a council composed exclusively of Islamic leaders from the Shafi'i school (see below) should be set up to select a leader, preferably a royal figure. The movement is territory bound and shows no influence from Wahhabism, a puritanical doctrine that originated in Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century. Nor has it been influenced by Salafism, a modern reformist movement aiming to return Islam to the purity of the religion as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations that followed him. Jihadi groups such as the al-Qaeda network and South East Asia's Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) consider themselves Salafi but they have added a political overlay of commitment to jihad.<sup>121</sup>

A leading Salafi scholar in the Deep South has argued the concept of jihad as interpreted by insurgents has deviated from the genuine teachings of Islam. Ismail Lutfi Japakiya, rector of the Saudi-funded Yala Islamic College, has countered that, in keeping with standard interpretations of Islam, a holy war can only be declared by an imam or the top Islamic leader.<sup>122</sup> It must be declared for the purpose of fighting invaders, ending injustice, defending truth and rescuing the oppressed. Jihad is not a tool to invade or oppress the weak or pursue personal interest. During the war, it is forbidden to kill non-combatants, particularly children, women, elderly, priests (or monks), and the sick. The killing of non-Muslims is also prohibited unless they are murderers or combatants.<sup>123</sup>

Despite challenging the theological foundations of the insurgency, Lutfi is alleged to have been involved with the underground movement in the past. He has been cited as having contact with JI, reportedly including

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<sup>121</sup> The al-Qaeda network and JI are inspired by the Salafi teaching of the thirteenth century scholar Ibn Taimiyyah and twentieth century political activists Sayid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam. The terms Salafism and Wahhabism are sometimes used interchangeably but should not be conflated. Wahhabism is an offshoot of Salafism and not all Salafis are Wahhabi. For more discussion on Salafism and Wahhabism, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°83, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix*, 13 September 2004, and Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

<sup>122</sup> There was talk in insurgent circles that a legal decision (*fatwa*) to wage jihad against the Thai state had been issued by an Islamic leader, whose identity was unclear. Crisis Group interviews, imams and Islamic teachers, September-October 2007.

<sup>123</sup> อีสมาอีล ลุคฟี จะปะเกีย, *อิสลามศาสนาแห่งสันติภาพ* (ยะลา: 2547), หน้า 59, 62, 85 [Ismail Lutfi Japakiya, *Islam: A Religion of Peace* (Yala, 2004), pp. 59, 62, 85].

Bali bomber Hambali before his arrest in central Thailand in 2003.<sup>124</sup>

Instead of Salafi influence, the southern insurgency bears the imprint of traditional Islam in the region, which is syncretic, with strong influences from earlier Hindu and animist beliefs. The majority of Malay Muslims in southern Thailand subscribe to the traditional Sunni school of Shafi'i,<sup>125</sup> known locally as the "Old Generation" (*kana khao* 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.<sup>126</sup> There is extensive evidence of Sufi practices among the insurgents, which most Salafis would find abhorrent.

I've always been one of the people who are opposed to Salafi ideology in the form of Wahhabism. In my view, this ideology is an extreme one. My teaching method in the classrooms is the same as when I convey the ideology of the struggle outside the classroom. In this process, I include elements of Sufism to strengthen the faith of fighters or to give them more certainty in facing their enemies in the future. Among these elements are holy verses from the

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<sup>124</sup> Interrogation deposition of Faiz Abu Bakar Bafana, 13 December 2002 in case dossier of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (trial 2003). Also see Crisis Group Report, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency Not Jihad*, op. cit., p. 32. While the speculation was strong in 2004 after the resurgence of violence, the allegations of Lutfi's involvement have waned within the intelligence and security agencies. There is no evidence that he has been involved in the violence, and, in fact, he has been reasonably cooperative with police. Lutfi has also worked for both political blocs that have controlled the Thai state in recent years as different governments have tried to co-opt him. First, he was a member of the Thaksin-initiated National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), and then the National Legislative Assembly, which functioned as an interim parliament after the 2006 coup ousted Thaksin. The NRC, chaired by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, was an independent 50-member body set up by Thaksin government in March 2005 to lay out long-term solution to end southern violence. Many of its members were Muslim leaders from southern Thailand. It produced a report with policy recommendations but was not seriously considered by Thaksin. The NRC is no longer active.

<sup>125</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

<sup>126</sup> See detailed discussion on the challenge of Islamic reformism in Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Islam, Education and Reform in Southern Thailand*, op. cit., pp. 76-99.

written on amulets and in the form of prayers which every person must recite at the end of each afternoon, dusk and evening prayers (*Asar, Maghrib* and *Isya*).<sup>127</sup>

Ahead of battle, Koranic verses might be recited for six hours a day or for a total of 2,000 times in the belief that this ritual would make those who did it impenetrable by bullets and knives.<sup>128</sup> Militants involved in the 28 April 2004 attacks performed Sufi rituals including holding hands while chanting in Arabic for 30 minutes. Afterwards participants were given additional scripture to recite at home after morning and evening prayers. The ritual leader also chanted incantations to give magical power to knives, machetes, swords, rosaries, shirts and amulets before distributing them.<sup>129</sup> A traditional fruit, betel nut, was prayed over, blown on and distributed. Those who ate it believed it increased their faith, physical strength and courage. It imbued them with the sense that their attack would be a success.<sup>130</sup>

Strict Salafis regard these acts as *shirk*, or idolatry. Along with the insurgency's nationalist orientation, such cultural adornments may be obstacles to engagement with foreign jihadi groups. Nonetheless, southern Thailand has been used on jihadist websites and in magazines in Malaysia and Indonesia as a rallying point for jihad. In an apparent attempt to redefine the conflict in the Deep South as part of the global struggle, jihadis in these locations defied the evidence to claim that Thai militants were not "adulterated" by any nationalistic ideas. They were portrayed as neither working for a secular democratic state such as Indonesia or Malaysia nor Islamic kingdom such as Brunei or Saudi Arabia. In a statement attributed to Abu Abaidah Hafizahullah on behalf of al-Qaeda's South East Asia Division and reported by Khattab Media,<sup>131</sup> the purity of the Patani jihad was stressed. The insurgents wanted no peace agreement or autonomous powers, only victory or martyrdom, vowing to continue their struggle until "the whole world obeyed God".

After having had several conversations with a group of *ansar*,<sup>132</sup> that is, mujahidin from Pattani Darus-

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<sup>127</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious teacher, Narathiwat, November 2007.

<sup>128</sup> Crisis Group interview, student, Narathiwat, November 2007.

<sup>129</sup> Police interrogation deposition, Pattani, 22 June 2004.

<sup>130</sup> Crisis Group interview, Songkhla, November 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Khattab was the name of the slain Palestinian who commanded Chechen troops, whom all jihadis recognise as a martyr. The statement was circulated in several Malaysian blogs and Indonesian websites in 2008.

<sup>132</sup> Ansar were the people of Medina who assisted the Prophet Mohammed when he left Mecca.

salam, they stressed repeatedly that the *Jihad fi Sabilillah* taking place in there was truly different than the uprisings that had taken place previously. They stressed that the goal of the jihad was truly “in the path of God” and not mixed up with anything nationalistic or worldly. If this is their own admission, who are we to probe their hearts to see if there is anything deeper? It’s enough that every night they recite the *surat al-Anfal* and *surat at-Taubah* that they have memorised, we should be ashamed if we continually brand them as people sullied by idolatrous teachings.<sup>133</sup>

To deter Malay Muslims from joining the movement, the government has made interventions in ideological debates to delegitimise the insurgents’ acts. The Sheikul 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 Patani* to counter *Berjihad di Patani*.<sup>134</sup>

The concept of jihad is held highly in Islam. It is a valuable thing which Muslims should practice. However, it is a pity that this word has been used by some to create a terrifying and frightening image and taint the genuine meaning of jihad.<sup>135</sup>

*Clarifications* criticises 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.<sup>136</sup> It is unclear how many Malay Muslims have read the publication since it was published only in Thai and not in local Jawi script. Such cultural insensitivity only erodes the weak legitimacy of the Sheikul Islamic Office, already seen as a tool of the Bangkok government to control and suppress believers in the Deep South.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> See “Al-Qaeda Asia Tenggara: Penegasan Tentang Bersihnya Panji-Panji Jihad Fi Sabilillah di Pattani” [Al-Qaeda South East Asia: Confirmation about the Purity of the Jihad in Pattani], Infojihad, 5 August 2008 (<http://infojihad.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/al-qaeda-asia-tenggara-penegasan-tentang-bersihnya-panji-panji-jihad-fi-sabilillah-di-pattani/>).

<sup>134</sup> It is unknown exactly how many copies of the Malay-language *Berjihad di Patani* are in circulation.

<sup>135</sup> สำนักจุฬาราชมนตรี, ซึ่งแจ้งข้อเท็จจริงการบิดเบือนคำสอนศาสนาอิสลามในเอกสารเบอร์จิดา ดิ บัดตานี (การต่อสู้ที่ปัตตานี), ไม่ปรากฏวันที่ตีพิมพ์, หน้า 54 [Sheikul Islamic Office, *Clarifications on the Distortion of Islamic Teaching in Berjihad di Patani*, undated, p. 54].

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Two other books produced by the authorities are สภาที่ปรึกษาเสริมสร้างสันติสุขจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้, คณะกรรมการอิสลามประจำจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้, ชมรมสถาบันศึกษาปอเนาะจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้,

The contest over the legitimacy of insurgents’ acts has also been fierce between Malay Muslims. Some imams were warned by insurgents not to bathe the bodies of dead militants, so that their deaths would be considered martyrdom.<sup>138</sup> Insurgents debate among themselves whether *munafik* should be allowed to be buried in Muslim cemeteries.<sup>139</sup> The debate over symbolic meanings is significant. The government’s attempts to engage in the struggle of ideas and legitimacy, if done appropriately and effectively in the local language, could be no less important in ending the insurgency than actual physical combat with militants.

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อิสลามกับความจริงที่ต้องรู้ (ยะลา: 2550) [Advisory Council for the Promotion of Peace in the Southern Border Provinces, Islamic Council in the Southern Border Provinces and Association of Ponoh in the Southern Border Provinces, *Islam: The Truth That Should be Known* (Yala, 2007)]; and *อิสลามความจริงที่ต้องเปิดเผย* (ยะลา: 2550) [*Islam: The Truth That Should be Revealed* (Yala, 2007)], produced by Yala provincial authority.

<sup>138</sup> สำเร็จ ศรีหราช, *ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 185 [Samret Srirai, *The BRN-Coordinate*, op. cit., p. 185].

<sup>139</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Islamic leaders and former BRN member, October 2007.

## V. STRUCTURE OF INSURGENT OPERATIONS

Five years after the resurgence of violence in the South, the operational structure and leadership of the movement remain shadowy and enigmatic. This deliberate tactic has apparently not affected its ability to organise itself, including the recruitment of members. A campaign of violence has resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. The insurgency can no longer be dismissed as merely the work of petty bandits.

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

The structure of the movement and the leadership's control over the actions of rank-and-file members remain uncertain. Security forces and some independent analysts say the majority of insurgents operate under the leadership of BRN-C or its descendants, while others describe it as "a network without a core".<sup>140</sup> Crisis Group's field research suggests those having undergone the indoctrination process and trainings operate as part of independent cells, each with a high degree of autonomy.

With its access to records of interrogation of captured militants, the military has come up with its own operational structure of the BRN-C, although sceptics believe it is too neat for a fluid and dynamic movement. The army believes the insurgents operate in small cells, each of which is called *ayah*. The word, literally meaning father in Malay, is also used to refer to the militants' leader at village level. In this description, there are four units under each *ayah*.<sup>141</sup> First, the *ulama* (religious leader) unit takes care of educational, religious affairs and indoctrination. Second, the *pemuda* (youth) oversees young members. Third, the *durong-ngae* provides logistics, economic support, intelligence, and incites hatred towards officials among villagers.<sup>142</sup> Finally,

the secretariat coordinates between the *ayah* and other divisions.<sup>143</sup>

The military's understanding is that there are about 500 *ayah* in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla provinces, representing some 30 per cent of the total number of villages.<sup>144</sup> *Ayah* is the smallest unit in the militant structure believed to be parallel to the Thai bureaucracy. Above *ayah* is *lekaran* or *tambon* (sub-district), *daerah* (district), *welayah* (province) and *kas* (region). The five Malay Muslim-dominated provinces are divided into three regions: Eastern, Central and Western Patani.<sup>145</sup>

There is a separate military wing, divided into three areas, each of which is believed to have between 600 and 1,000 fighters and is split further into two distinct groups. The first is village-based and organised in a regular military fashion with each RKK (a unit of six fighters) being part of a larger *regu* (squad) that in turn is a member of a *platung* (platoon) and *kompi* (company). The second group is a more highly trained commando unit with no fixed base, changing its area of operation frequently. Each commando unit consists of a "Malay tiger force" operating primarily in the jungle, a rapid assault unit carrying out attacks in villages, a bomb unit and a medical unit.<sup>146</sup> A provincial commander through the chain of command controls both the RKK and commando units. The military believes the insurgents' operation is structured along these lines in their strongholds, although they may not be able to establish exactly this structure in all areas.

Security forces believe the insurgency is led by a high council of the BRN-C called the Dewan Pimpinan Parti (DPP, or Council of the Party Leadership). The membership of the DPP is unclear, although they have a list of possible members that includes a brother of a Narathiwat politician and some *ustadz*.<sup>147</sup> Under the DPP, there are seven divisions: foreign affairs, military, youth, economy, propaganda, *ulama* (religious leaders) and administration. The administration and military divisions, as discussed above, are the largest.

<sup>140</sup> See a spectrum of theories on the nature of the movement in the Deep South in Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*, op. cit., pp. 168-175.

<sup>141</sup> Some intelligence reports suggest there is also a farming unit, and that economic and logistical support are carried out by separate units.

<sup>142</sup> It is this group that lays spikes or logs on the roads to prevent security forces from pursuing the militants.

<sup>143</sup> สำเร็จ ศรีหราช, *ขบวนการ BRN-Coordinate*, อ้างแล้ว, หน้า 18, 84-85 [Samret Srirai, *The BRN-Coordinate*, op. cit., pp. 18, 84-85].

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p.183.

<sup>145</sup> The five southernmost provinces are Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Songkhla and Satun. Violent insurgency did not erupt in Satun, although it also has a Malay Muslim majority. Not being part of the old Patani sultanate, residents in Satun are more comfortable speaking Thai and better integrated with the rest of Thailand.

<sup>146</sup> Military documents obtained by Crisis Group.

<sup>147</sup> Crisis Group interviews, military and police senior officials, January 2009.

While the role of a theatre-wide operational plan in directing the movement's day-to-day activities is debatable, the seven-step plan found at the house of Masae Useng outlining a grand strategy to liberate Patani is often cited. These stages are: 1) create public consciousness of Islam, Malay-ness, Patani homeland, Siamese invasion and struggle; 2) galvanise support and organise members through religious schools, sport clubs and cooperatives; 3) set up secret organisations to carry out activities; 4) set up an armed group of about 3,000 fighters;<sup>148</sup> 5) cultivate nationalist ideology among Malay Muslims, including government officials and those living in Malaysia; 6) prepare to begin waves of attacks or "light the firework of revolution"; and 7) carry out a revolution.<sup>149</sup>

Sceptics suggest that the security forces, which operate under a clear structure of command, are engaged in an exercise of self-projection when they describe their enemy as having the same hierarchical and static structure with clear doctrines and plans. An independent analyst researching the movement argues that it operates under a loose structure of patronage. There is no one single leader who can influence, much less control, militants on the ground. He identifies the BRN-C as having the largest operation on the ground, suggesting PULO and BIPP also play a role.<sup>150</sup> A senior leader of a defunct separatist group with good contacts in both old and new generation fighters said the movement has a decentralised structure, as fighters could not organise and motivate to engage in combat just on impossible dreams.<sup>151</sup>

Thai security forces are highly suspicious of the BRN-C's alleged Indonesian connections. They believe initial groups of insurgents, mostly prior to the resurgence of violence in 2004, received military training in Indonesia. It is not clear if this training was conducted by militants or if Thai Muslim students studying there simply signed up for training courses provided by the army for students. Authorities speculate that the BRN-C uses the Association of Thai Islam Patani Students in Indonesia as a front to recruit members.<sup>152</sup> There is

also speculation in the absence of solid evidence that some Indonesians might have been involved in attacks.<sup>153</sup> But to date, no solid evidence has been found of any direct links with jihadist groups in Thailand's large archipelagic neighbour.

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<sup>148</sup> Besides the 3,000 trained (*terlatih*) fighters, the document states that it also plans to produce 300 skilful (*cekap*) fighters and 30,000 indoctrinated (*bermoral*) members.

<sup>149</sup> The seven-step plan document was written in Jawi script and translated into Thai by the authorities.

<sup>150</sup> Personal communication, independent analyst, January and March 2009.

<sup>151</sup> Crisis Group interview, former BIPP member, Kotabaru, 20 January 2009.

<sup>152</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Thawee Sodsong, director-general of the Department of Special Investigation, Bangkok, 7 January 2009; Maj. Gen. Samret Srirai, deputy commander of the fourth army region, Pattani, 13 January 2009; and

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Police Lt. Gen. Adul Saengsingkaew, assistant police commissioner-general and commander of the Police Forward Command, Yala, 26 January 2009.

<sup>153</sup> Some army officials believe that there were some Indonesians among dozens of insurgents who raided the army depot in Narathiwat on 4 January 2004. They also believe that some unclaimed dead bodies of militants killed on 28 April 2004, widely known as the Krue Se incident, were Indonesians. Crisis Group interview, Maj. Gen. Chamlong Khunsong, deputy commander of the joint civilian-police-military command, 15 January 2009.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Islamic schools are central to identity formation of Malay Muslims in southern Thailand. Given that the insurgency is ethno-nationalist in its origins, it is unsurprising they have been a locus of recruitment and radicalisation. They have also been the breeding grounds of the insurgency because the ideas that underwrite the movement have been fomented for generations in the beliefs of their staff and the informal lessons taught students. The passing down of this world view illustrates the deep cultural and historical roots of this conflict. The inculcation of nationalistic sentiments, strong religious devotion and training for combat operations began years before violence resumed in 2004.

The primary cause of those engaged in the movement is to defend their identity and struggle against oppression. Proud of their “glorious” history, militants aspire to reclaim what was once an independent sultanate from what they perceive as oppressive non-Muslim rulers. The movement targets devout Muslims of strong character for recruitment, motivating them with a narrative of the glorious Patani sultanate, current oppression by Buddhist Thai rulers and the inspiration of armed jihad. The use of religious framing, particularly jihad rhetoric, to mobilise supporters is more explicit than in the struggle of old separatist groups. While militants’ words may be the same as those used by Islamist jihadi groups such as al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, the movements are ideologically dissimilar. The struggle is rooted in Malay nationalism rather than any solidarity with a global Islamic jihad.

The simplistic perception of the insurgency held by some Thai officials that they are mere drug addicts or petty criminals, as the Thaksin government claimed, is being challenged. Large numbers of militants are driven by ethno-nationalist ideology and a sense of injustice.

Distracted by its own troubles, the Thai government needs to refocus its attention on the South so that it can develop and implement more than just a military response to the insurgency. Harsh suppression of the insurgents’ violent activities has been counterproductive and aided recruitment. Surveillance and control of insurgent activities inside Islamic schools without addressing the larger causes of the conflict can only add to decades of resentment. While attitudes need to change on both sides, attempts to re-educate Malay Muslims or create a counter-ideology of Thai nationalism in absence of real changes to government policies will be ineffectual.

The grievances that have long fuelled the insurgency must be addressed with demonstrable results. This means stopping abuses and punishing those responsible for past crimes. Changing policies and practices that disregard the ethnic identity of Muslim-Malays in southern Thailand will be an important next step, and should include increasing respect for their language, religion and culture. Rectifying the shortage of Malay Muslim representatives in southern political and government structures should also be part of a solution that is more political than military in nature.

**Bangkok/Brussels, 22 June 2009**



APPENDIX A  
 MAP OF THAILAND



APPENDIX B

MAP OF THAILAND'S SOUTHERN PROVINCES



## APPENDIX C

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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