Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines: Religion, Ideology, and Politics

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East-West Center
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Contents

List of Acronyms

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BBMP	Barisan Bersatu Mujahidin Patani (United Mujahideen Front of Patani)
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
BIPP	Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani (Islamic Liberation Front of Patani)
BRN	Barisan Revolusi Nasional (National Revolutionary Front)
DPP	Dewan Pembebasan Pattani (Pattani Liberation Assembly)
GIRR	Global Islamic Revival and Renaissance
GMIP	Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Pattani (Pattani Islamic Mujahideen Movement)
GRP	Government of the Republic of Philippines
HUJI	Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami (Movement for Islamic Holy War)
ICG	International Crisis Group
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NGO	nongovernmental organization

Joseph Chinyong Liow

OIC   Organization of the Islamic Conference

PULO   Pattani United Liberation Organization

Executive Summary

Both Thailand and the Philippines are home to Muslim minorities which have been engaged in persistent, at times virulent, conflict with the central Thai and Philippine governments for decades. While these drawn-out internal conflicts have primarily been ethno-nationalist in character, they appear to be taking on a more explicit religious dimension as a result of a range of factors. These include the failure of secular nationalism in achieving the ends of the respective rebellions, the resultant search for alternative (and presumably more effective) ideological impetus, the role of exogenous stimuli and catalysts such as the radicalization of local *mujahideen* volunteers involved in the international *jihad* waged in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation, and the impact of post-9/11 events on Muslim worldviews. Against the backdrop of ongoing international concern for Islamic terrorism, which is increasingly manifesting itself as a transnational phenomenon built on collaboration between *jihadi* terrorist and militant groups that capitalize on grievances throughout the *Ummah,* interest in the religious character of local conflicts, such as those under scrutiny in this monograph, have, not surprisingly, taken on greater urgency. Accordingly, what was not previously seen to be conflicts with decidedly religious contents are today being increasingly portrayed and understood in numerous policy, media, and security studies circles as a phenomenon driven and defined by Muslim radicalism, militancy, and international *jihadi* terrorism.

The purpose of this monograph is to investigate and interrogate the ideological context and content of conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines insofar as they have pertained to Islam and radical-

ism. In so doing, the study attempts to answer three fundamental and interrelated research questions: How and why has Islam gained greater salience in the ongoing conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines? Has the complexion and objectives of resistance changed fundamentally as a result? From a policy and academic perspective, what is the significance of this move to a more Islamic register in both southern Thailand and southern Philippines, and what does it tell us of the conflicts' trajectories? The monograph will not provide a historiography of violence and catalogue of resistance groups, as such ventures have already been undertaken elsewhere in the literature. Instead, it will focus on investigating and analyzing the nature, character, expression, and trajectory of conflict in these two Muslim-dominated regions by focusing primarily on the ideas and dialectics underpinning them, which serve as an important litmus test for the salience of Islam as an ideological driver of conflict. Further, in order to foster a better holistic understanding of local conflicts in Southeast Asia in general, the study will also compare and contrast the character, trends, and trajectories of these two conflicts in order to distill crucial similarities and differences.

In the main, this monograph argues that while conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines have taken on religious hues as a consequence of both local and external factors, on present evidence they share little with broader radical global Islamist and Jihadist ideologies and movements, and their contents and contexts remain primarily political, reflected in the key objective of some measure of self-determination, and local, in terms of the territorial and ideational boundaries of activism and agitation. Furthermore, though both conflicts appear on the surface to be driven by similar dynamics and mirror each other, they are different in several fundamental ways. Accounting for and understanding these differences are crucial from both an policy and academic perspective—in the first instance to foster a more nuanced appreciation for the dynamics of Muslim politics in Southeast Asia and, in the second, to suggest that approaches to conflict management and resolution will necessarily have to differ in the two cases.

Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines:
Religion, Ideology, and Politics

For those who study politics and security issues concerning Muslim societies, the events of September 11, 2001, widely known as "9/11," was a major watershed that heralded shifts in analytical parameters and conflict configurations. Over the last five years, the mushrooming of *jihadi* violence and terrorism has forced a reassessment of assumptions and compelled us to consider transnational radical religious ideology in the study of conflict involving Muslim societies throughout the world.

This is certainly how certain quarters in scholarly and policy communities see the erstwhile longstanding, intermittent conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines between Muslim ethnic minorities and their respective central governments. While violence and conflict in these Muslim-dominated areas is not new—indeed, it is built on decades of organized armed resistance conducted by groups such as the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO, formed 1968) and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN, formed 1960) in southern Thailand and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF, formed 1972) in southern Philippines—in recent times it appears to have taken on a decidedly religious character as a result of factors ranging from the local, such as the

failure of secular nationalism to achieve the ends of the respective rebellions, to the structural, as in the role of exogenous stimuli and catalysts such as the radicalization of local *mujahideen* volunteers involved the international *jihad* waged in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation and the impact of post-9/11 events on Muslim world-views and outlooks. By the same token, what were not previously seen to be conflicts of a decidedly religious type are today increasingly portrayed and understood as a phenomenon driven and defined by Muslim radicalism, militancy, and international terrorism.

> ***conflicts [not previously seen as]…religious…are today …understood as…defined by Muslim radicalism, militancy, and international terrorism***

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to provide a comparative investigation into the ideological context and content of conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines insofar as they pertain to Islam and radicalism. Rather than provide a historiography of violence of resistance groups (as others have done), it investigates the nature, character, expression, and trajectory of conflict in these two Muslim-dominated regions by focusing primarily on the ideas and dialectics of rebels and militants themselves—particularly those leaders who have articulated them—which serve as an important litmus test for the salience of Islam as an ideological driver of the conflict. The study hopes to answer three fundamental and interrelated research questions: How and why has Islam gained greater salience in the ongoing conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines? Have the complexion and objectives of resistance changed fundamentally as a result? From a policy and academic perspective, what is the significance of this move to a more Islamic register in southern Thailand and southern Philippines, and what does it tell us of the conflicts' trajectories?[1]

In the main, this monograph argues that while conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines have taken on religious hues as a consequence of both local and external factors, on present evidence they share little with broader radical global Islamist and Jihadist ideologies and movements, and their contents and contexts remain primarily political, reflected in the key objective of some measure of self-determination, and local, as seen in the territorial and ideational boundaries of activism and agitation.

Furthermore, though both conflicts appear on the surface to be driven by similar dynamics, they are different in several fundamental ways. Understanding these differences is crucial from both an academic and policy perspective—in the first instance to foster a more nuanced appreciation for the dynamics of Muslim politics in Southeast Asia and, in the second, to suggest that approaches to conflict management and resolution will necessarily have to differ in both cases.

Muslim Minorities and Self-Determination

As the introduction has established, the immediate concern here is how and why Islam has been manipulated by Islamists in southern Thailand and southern Philippines and how it has emerged as the point of reference for movements of self-determination. Islamists, as S. Sayyid stresses, are those who use the language of Islamic metaphors to think through their political destinies, those who see in Islam their political future (Sayyid 2003: 17). A part of this political future, particularly for oppressed Muslims who reside in non-Muslim states, could conceivably be the creation of a separate state. Mohammed Hafez makes this plain when he includes in his definition of Islamists "Muslims who feel compelled to act on the belief that Islam demands social and political activism…to create a separate union for Muslim communities" (Hafez 2004: 5). In this sense, religion can be said to animate nationalism by providing meaning and intelligibility along with the foundations for statehood for Muslim minorities.

> *what we witness in Muslim-minority Southeast Asia are attempts to "re-territorialize" Islam through claims of authenticity and indigenism*

This being the case, contrary to Olivier Roy's assertions that globalization has led to "de-territorialization" of Islam as political dynamics shift from the core of Muslim-dominant states to the diasporas at the periphery (Roy 2004), what we witness in Muslim-minority Southeast Asia are attempts to "re-territorialize" Islam through claims of authenticity and indigenism, thereby turning his argument on its head. This explains routine polemical references to the carving out of an "Islamic state" made by separatists from southern Thailand and southern Philippines, where this "Islamic state" is predicated not only on perceived religious injunctions that Muslims need

Joseph Chinyong Liow

to live within a state defined with reference to their religion but also on the notion that such an entity existed in a territorial form in the past and pre-dated the creation of the modern nation-state by the Western enterprise of colonialism (Syukri 1985; Majul 1999).

Both Thailand and the Philippines are home to Muslim minorities that have been engaged in persistent, and at times virulent, conflict with their respective central governments, with the political objective of, if not creation of an independent territorial state, then certainly restitution of local political identity muscled out of national consciousness, as it were, by hegemonic and extractive forces generated at the center. That separatists insist on conjuring up historical memories of mythical proportions in order to justify their objective of "liberating" the Pattani and Mindanao Sultanates in this modern era necessitates that minority nationalism remain an important concept in the study of motivations. As this investigation will show, both projects of self-determination have recently also acquired a distinct religious hue underlying the fusion of political and religious identities.

Indeed, anthropologists studying Muslim communities in these countries remind us that cultural and religious values continue to be a strong component of personal, communal, and social identity, and it is against this backdrop that explicit expressions of nationalist aspirations have come to be couched in religious terms by insurgents bent on tapping into this heightened religiosity by employing it as a meaningful frame of reference for the articulation of discontent and turning it against the state.

What is further striking about the local context is that articulation of minority self-determination often takes place against "other" nationalisms that, as it turns out, are also framed in religious terms and that anchor state-orchestrated nationalist projects. Among Bangsamoro Muslims in southern Philippines and Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand, self-determination, articulated with reference to Islamist dialectics, has been a reaction to the centrality that Catholicism and Buddhism has assumed in the discourse and construction of Filipino and Thai national identities in mainstream nationalist

> ***self-determination…has been a reaction to the centrality [of]…Catholicism and Buddhism [in]…Filipino and Thai national identities***

thinking. Alluding to this disconnect, Charles Keyes intimated in the case of Thailand that "one of the underlying factors behind the virtual exclusion of…Muslims from national politics is the equation of Buddhism with the national religion" (Keyes 1987: 204). Similarly, Thomas McKenna noted how "Christian Filipinos who controlled the Philippine state regarded all unhispanicized citizens as impure and marked Philippine Muslims as especially untrustworthy because of their long history of mutual enmity" (McKenna 1997: 57).[2] This pattern of "othering" emanating from the political centers of Manila and Bangkok was seen as antithetical to the survival and preservation of the culture and identity of the peripheries in southern Thailand and southern Philippines precisely because of their religious disposition, and hence has fostered suspicions among these Muslim-minority communities and fanned the flames of Muslim resistance over the years.

This highly localized context has been further amplified by a transnational overlay that occurs when Islamic religious nationalists draw on broader conceptions of victimization in the *Ummah* to give further intelligibility to local conditions. The globalization of Islamic identity, underpinned by the durability of the concept of the *Ummah* and reinforced by the spread of printing technologies and the Internet, has ensured that grievances of co-religionists in otherwise unrelated circumstances can also become the cause of Muslims everywhere when manipulated to resonate with local contexts, the most prevalent example of this being the regular references to the Palestinian cause by a wide variety of Islamists throughout the world.[3] This process, while not undermining the essentially localized nature of religious nationalist objectives, nevertheless introduces a secondary layer of structural forces that further augments local resistance.

This overlay of the global into the local and vice versa, which essentially marks the internationalization of local conflicts, takes three forms. First, the process of internationalization has taken place when foreign Jihadist groups make explicit reference to specific local conflicts (or vice versa), when local militants unequivocally link their cause to a broader struggle. There should be an important proviso here, however, which is that both parties must be engaged in this exercise of cross-referencing. Hence, while the Chechnyan conflict has seen international Jihadist groups and local militants reference each other, the recent London attacks, where militants' claims of an Al-Qaeda link later proved erroneous, do not appear to fit that mold. Second, a conflict is deemed internationalized

when foreign *jihadi* groups or radical Islamist movements extend either ideological or material support (or both) to local struggles. The prime examples of this would be Kashmir, where militants such as the Hizbul *Mujahideen* have been supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence for many years. Finally, and perhaps most palpably, overlay gives rise to internationalization of conflict when foreign *jihadis* themselves arrive in a new territory to partake in, or in some instances take over, the local conflict. This was clearly the case in Afghanistan in the 1980s and is arguably taking place in Iraq today.[4]

Turning to the cases at hand, it cannot be denied that developments such as the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have quite clearly created conditions that reverberate with local narratives by providing opportunities for religious symbols and metaphors to provide greater meaning to local insurgencies. This has of course been accentuated by the close security relations that the governments of the Philippines and Thailand enjoy with the United States, a country that has come to be viewed in certain quarters of the *Ummah* as an anti-Muslim aggressor.[5] Yet while this ideational overlay between global and local space is undoubtedly an important dimension that needs to be acknowledged and understood, it should not detract from the localized character of resistance in southern Thailand and southern Philippines. After all, one finds upon close examination of local leaderships, patterns of socialization, and mobilization of institutions that the contents and contexts remain rooted in the strong sense of indigenous identity and narratives of victimization drawing on history. As Merlyna Lim observed in her study of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia, "global narratives must ultimately be anchored in local contexts through resonance with local identities and local historical experiences" (Lim 2005: 3). Consequently, the important thing to consider is whether these transnational influences have caused longstanding struggles among ethno-religious minorities in southern Thailand and southern Philippines to be reoriented or recalibrated to reflect the trademark of global Muslim militancy today—the struggle of pan-Islamic Jihadism against the "far enemy."

As I have suggested, the global-local nexus rests on the issue of how global events form an overlay on local agendas in regions like southern Thailand and southern Philippines and provide further intelligibility to local narratives of victimization. Of course, a major reason that global events gain currency in local discourses and narratives is the existence of

very real and longstanding grievances among the Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand and the Bangsamoro Muslims in southern Philippines stemming from palpable socio-political and economic marginalization and in some instances outright victimization by repressive central authorities. These grievances provide reference points for how the global relates to the local and vice versa.

Given that the main subject of investigation here is the question of religious motivations, I shall not endeavor to provide a laundry list of historically rooted grievances among the Malay-Muslims of Thailand and the Bangsamoro Muslims of the Philippines. To be sure, these grievances have already been well documented elsewhere in the literature (Wan Kadir 1990; McKenna 1998; Majul 1999; Vitug and Gloria 2000; Aphornsuvan 2004; ICG 2004a, b, 2005; Islam 2005). In southern Thailand, for instance, Malay culture and language have been forcefully diluted by a string of policies emanating from Bangkok since the Anglo-Siamese treaties of 1904 and 1909 and by the attendant nationalistic policies of "Siamization," the effects of which can still be seen today in the southern Malay-Muslim provinces. This perpetuates a local narrative based on the memory of the proud Malay kingdom of Pattani that was forcibly subdued by Siam with the aid of Western colonial powers. Similarly, in southern Philippines, a string of dubious land registration policies enacted by various colonial administrations divested Bangsamoro of their ancestral lands; later, postcolonial Manila's policies of "Filipinization" of the islands of Mindanao and Sulu, which legitimized the state-orchestrated relocation of Christian settlers into the Muslim lands in the south, etched in local memory a deep sense of injustice and marginalization. In more recent times, these unresolved grievances and the general sense of marginalization they have engendered have been further aggravated by the treatment and abuses that locals have received at the hands of the state.[6] Indeed, it is these longstanding grievances, the sense of marginalization, and the outright repression that allow developments in the Muslim world to resonate with local narratives.

> *Malay culture and language have been forcefully diluted by [Bangkok]*

Islam, Nationalism, and Separatism in the Philippines

The Moro armed rebellion, spawned from an organized intellectual resistance movement in the 1960s, began in 1972 in southern Philippines and has been described as the largest and most persistent armed separatist conflict in Southeast Asia (Tan 2003: 98). While its roots and manifestations have been well documented in the literature, the ideological imperatives behind it—in particular the role of religion in the understanding and articulation of conflict—remains an underdeveloped area of research.

Popular renditions of the resistance narrative point to the fact that the Moro struggle of today had antecedents traceable almost five centuries earlier, when the Spanish arrived in the Philippine archipelago and initiated attacks, popularly known as the "Moro Wars," on the Muslim sultanates in the southern islands of Mindanao and Sulu. Because of their religious observance and practices, resistance encountered from the south was labeled *Moro* by the Spanish, since the term resonated, at least to their minds, with the North African Moors during Islam's occupation of the Iberian Peninsula several centuries earlier. This characterization of the resistance is, however, not entirely accurate. First, as Thomas McKenna intimates, the Muslim character of resistance really had its genesis in the American colonial enterprise and not Spanish imperialism (McKenna 1998). Furthermore, while it is true that the term *Moro* was employed in a pejorative sense to label the resistors from the southern islands who were undoubtedly mostly Muslim, it did not capture in its entirety the essence of the resistance itself, for it bracketed out non-Muslims who had also challenged colonial attempts at subjugating Mindanao.[7] Finally, the pejorative origins of the term have paradoxically paved the way for the creation of national, as opposed to religious, consciousness when locals employ the term to characterize those who resist the Philippine central government's assertion of authority over Mindanao, be they Muslim, indigenous Christian, or tribal groups.[8] Indeed, it was on these premises that the separatists adopted the prefix *Bangsa-,* the Malay term for *nation,* to their identity as Moro, implying that it is this identity that will form the backbone of the new and distinct nation of Bangsamoro land. In other words, the term *Moro* is defined more by resistance to external powers than by Islam or, for that matter, ethnicity. This is an important point to keep in mind, particularly when one compares it to the notion of "Malay-Muslim" resistance in the case of Thailand, a comparison to which we will return.

Not only was the Moro separatist project a reaction to perceived marginalization by successive Spanish, American, and Filipino central authorities, particularly on the question of ancestral lands lost to colonialism and the immigration policies that injected Christian settlers into these lands, it was also built on the archetypal primordialist myth of the existence of a people with a culture and identity distinct from that of the rest of the Philippine archipelago whose ancestral homeland originally consisted of the whole of Mindanao and the surrounding islands. At the heart of this myth is the perception, shared by nationalists of all strains, that the Bangsamoro nation predates modern Philippines and includes both Muslim and non-Muslim indigenous peoples, notwithstanding that the explicit identity did not exist in anthropological terms prior to nationalist conceptualization.

Equally important were the assertions that the Bangsamoro have never been conquered, either by the Spaniards or the Americans, and that their homeland had been unjustly annexed by Manila after independence. These statements, too, are not entirely true. It is known that in 1878, Sultan Jama ul-Azam of Sulu signed a peace treaty with the Spanish government agreeing to bind his subjects to the Spanish king in exchange for autonomy. Likewise, Datu Utto of Cotabato capitulated to Spain in 1887 and recognized the rule of the king of Spain (Brazal: 14). Mindanao itself was colonized by the United States after 1898, even if it did survive earlier Spanish attempts to subjugate it.

Finally, the myth of a united monolithic Moro resistance to colonization propounded by many nationalist leaders is, at best, a hopeful reinterpretation of the evidence. Before the late 1960s, the Islamized tribes in the Philippines were scattered, separate sultanates battling not only colonial authority but also each other. Paradoxically, it was American policy that consolidated southern Philippines into a Moro province and introduced the contiguity and coherence that made today's territorialization of resistance possible.

> *American policy… consolidated southern Philippines into a Moro province*

Longstanding resistance to colonial and central government rule erupted in 1972 when a separatist rebellion led by the MNLF broke out. The insurgency fed off grievances built on the central government's migration policies that brought Christian settlers into the majority Muslim south as well as

national integration policies that sought to incorporate the southern islands into the Catholic nation. These policies whittled down the indigenous Muslim population from 70 to 80 percent at its height to a minority of 30 percent (George 1980: 116). By coopting Muslim political elites into the prevailing structure of national power and committing them to the status quo, the state further neutralized and divested traditional leadership, known as the Datus, of their authority. Consequently, their legitimacy waned in the eyes of the Muslim community, leading some to argue that the Mindanao conflict is rooted as much in the vertical levels of contestation within Muslim society as it is in the relationship between center and periphery, which in turn "exemplifies the political complexities found in similar political movements formed in postcolonial situations" (McKenna 1998: 5). The resultant gulf was filled by socialist populists, religious leaders, and student movements. On the growth of popular Moro self-determination, Eric Gutierrez observed:

> The youths launched into a frenzied construction of images of their own "nation" radically different from the "homeland" offered by their untrustworthy, aristocratic and egocentric elders.…The fresh, new faces of non-traditional, youth-based leadership stirred the Moro re-awakening—Misuari, the intellectual; Salamat, the Islamic scholar and cleric; and Alonto, the aristocrat's son who found common cause with his generation. They set aside their differences, imagined and successfully engineered their own project, and broke away from traditional elite leadership. In so doing, they firmly established themselves as the alternative. (Gutierrez 2000: 312)

Further describing the dynamics that drove this rift within the Bangsamoro Muslim society, Syed Serajul Islam contended that "for traditional leaders, Muslim autonomy meant the recognition and reinforcement of their power. [Nur] Misuari's vision of Muslim destiny, on the contrary, was to eliminate the old leaders and to install himself in their place" (Syed Serajul 2002: 202–3).[9] By the early 1970s, events such as the Jabidah Massacre (in which Christian officers summarily executed Muslim recruits), the unbridled aggression by Christian militant groups such as the Ilaga against Muslim civilians, which included the massacre of about seventy Muslims in a mosque at Bario-Manili in North Cotabato on June 19, 1971, and the implementation of martial law by the administration of Ferdinand Marcos

in 1972 pushed Bangsamoro disenchantment over the edge and into armed resistance (Abinales 2000; Vitug and Gloria 2000).

The conflict between the Bangsamoro People's Liberation Army (the armed wing of the MNLF) and the Philippine military peaked during the 1972–76 period. Such was the intensity of conflict that up to 80 percent of the resources of the Philippine military were tied down in the south (Jenkins 1983: 17–18). Eventually the two parties signed the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, but the pact did not keep the peace for long, and armed conflict resumed within a year of its signing.

The question of negotiation with the Philippine government was one that strained the MNLF leadership and eventually brought internal disagreements to the surface. Some have speculated that splits occurred in the MNLF along ethno-linguistic lines (Rabasa and Chalk 2001: 90). This perspective, while containing a measure of truth, does not take into account the cross-pollination that had taken place in the resistance movement, which had witnessed the Tausugs, the ethnic group that anchored the MNLF, openly challenging the organization's leadership on the question of dialogue with the government even as the Maranao and the Maguindanao were flocking to join it. In truth, it was more likely that the split was driven by political and, in some respects, religious considerations. It further signaled the ineffectiveness of ethno-nationalism as an organizing principle for separatism. Even as Nur Misuari pursued negotiations facilitated by the Libyan government, a faction within the MNLF highly critical of his accession to negotiations emerged, charging that the terms of the agreement were more advantageous to Manila than Mindanao, particularly since the objective of the MNLF had been watered down from independence to autonomy (Chalk 1997: 88–90). This faction was also displeased with the apparent lack of Islamic orientation in Misuari's agenda. That Misuari never overtly agitated for the formation of an Islamic state in southern Philippines became a major bone of contention. Misuari was also criticized for centralizing power in a manner that contravened the Islamic decision-making principles of *shura* (consultation) and *ijma* (consensus).[10]

These tensions were encapsulated in Salamat Hashim's ruminations on the motivation behind the decision of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to split from MNLF: "The MNLF leadership was being manipulated away from Islamic basis, methodologies and objectives and fast evolving towards Marxist-Maoist orientations.…The Central

Committee has evolved into a mysterious, exclusive, secretive and mono-
lithic body whose policies, plans, and decisions…became an exclusive pre-
serve of Nur Misuari" (Vitug and Gloria 2000: 123). After an attempt to
remove Nur Misuari in 1976 failed, Salamat Hashim, then vice chairman
of the MNLF, left the organization and with the support of fifty-seven sen-
ior leaders formed a rival central committee known as the "New
Leadership."[11] The MILF was formally established with a proclamation
made in Jeddah in March 1984 that a separate revolutionary organization
was to be formed from this breakaway faction.

This period also witnessed mounting criticisms of Misuari from
Ulama and Ustaz, which signaled the increasing salience of Islam to the
separatist project; until then, they had remained mostly silent on
Bangsamoro politics under the feudal and MNLF leadership.[12] The incor-
poration of the term *Islamic* in the splinter group's name was a deliberate
move to emphasize that it was its Islamic credentials that set it apart from the MNLF, which under Misuari was begin-
ning to look like a secular relic from the feudal era. With the formation of the MILF, the armed separatist movement is widely believed to have "refashioned itself in Mindanao into a mass-based and self-consciously Islamic movement guided by Islamic clerics" intending to reform the

> **[The] salience of Islam has come to be represented most distinctly in the agenda of the MILF**

moral bases of authority (McKenna 2002: 6). More importantly for the
trajectory of Bangsamoro resistance, the advent of the MILF marked a shift
in the profile of separatist leadership away from the feudal elite, who by
then had become heavily invested in the Philippine state, to religious lead-
ers seeking to reform local religious and cultural practices and turn away
from what McKenna termed the "Datu problem." This salience of Islam
has come to be represented most distinctly in the agenda of the MILF and
in the thinking of its chief ideologue, Salamat Hashim.

The MILF
Because it remains the official signatory of the Tripoli Agreement, which
has formed the basis of subsequent peace talks with the Philippine govern-
ment, the MNLF is recognized by Manila as well as the Organization of
the Islamic Conference (OIC), under whose auspices negotiations have
been carried out, as the official representative of the Bangsamoro cause.[13] It

is questionable, though, if this is reflective of the current reality on the ground. Since its formation, the MILF has gradually expanded its influence and following. At its most recent meeting, the general consultation held from May 29 to 31, 2005, MILF leaders claimed a turnout of more than three million supporters. This figure is certainly debatable, and independent media sources have placed attendance at a more realistic figure of several hundred thousand. Even then, this was more than the MNLF could ever muster, making the MILF by far the largest and most powerful resistance group operating in southern Philippines today; it was a powerful demonstration of the capacity and leverage that the MILF brings to the negotiation table for talks with Manila.

The objectives of the MILF have been articulated in decidedly Islamist terms: "All Mujahideen under the Moro Islamic Liberation Front adopt Islam as their way of life. Their ultimate objective in their Jihad is to make supreme the word of Allah and establish Islam in the Bangsamoro homeland" (McKenna 1998: 208). MILF founder Salamat Hashim noted that "some personalities in the revolution advocate the idea that the sole and singular objective in our struggle is simply to liberate our homeland, giving no importance to the system of government that shall be established. We want an Islamic political system and way of life that can be achieved through effective *Da'wah* [proselytization], *Tarbiyyah* [education] and *Jihad*."[14] While the common perception is that the MILF was essentially a breakaway Islamic faction of the MNLF, it should be noted that not all of its senior leadership were religious clerics. Though the founding chairman, Salamat Hashim, and others like foreign affairs chief Abu Zahir, were recognized Ustaz, others, such as Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim (Salamat's successor), Abdul Aziz Mimbantas (vice chairman for internal affairs, succeeded Murad as vice chairman for military affairs), and Mohagher Iqbal (information chief) were not.[15]

The MILF's military activities have always operated at a low level compared to the insurgency spearheaded by the MNLF in the 1970s. The early years of the organization were primarily focused on strengthening Islamic identity and consciousness while developing a political community centered on Islam that would form the foundation for the struggle for an independent Bangsamoro Islamic state. To that end, the cornerstone of the MILF's Four Point Program for development was Islamization—facilitating the adoption and implementation of Islam in all aspects of Bangsamoro life.[16] According to Salamat, this Islamization was to be

achieved through systematic *dakwah* and *tarbiyah* to ensure that the Bangsamoro would be united with a common religious platform through which their political ideals could be articulated and understood (Salamat 1984: 52). It is widely known that the MILF currently runs "several hundred" *madari* in its occupied areas and camps and holds regular Ulama summits at the Dakwah Center in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao.[17] Even among the military units of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, the military arm of the MILF, a *murshid* (spiritual guide) is assigned to various units.[18] Muslim troops are also forbidden from drinking and smoking.[19] On July 31, 1996, the MILF decided to impose Islamic law in those areas where Muslims were enjoying religious freedom. The exercise of Islamic jurisprudence was overseen by a five-man Islamic court headed by Shaykh Ali Ismael, a University of Medina graduate in Islamic law.[20]

Not only has the MILF's support base gradually expanded since 1984; its members and sympathizers have also increasingly asserted themselves in mainstream political affairs. Urban Muslim professionals and intelligentsia have begun campaigning openly through the mainstream political and civil society channels for the MILF's goals. In 1988, Zaccaria Candao, an openly pro-MILF candidate, won a landslide victory for the governorship of Maguindanao. While not openly aligned with the MILF, Muslim civil society organizations have coalesced under the banner of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, an umbrella organization formed in 2001 that tends to sympathize with the cause of the MILF toward self-determination.[21]

The Ideology of Islamic Struggle
The ideology of the Bangsamoro struggle today continues to be encapsulated in the worldview, thought, and ideology of the MILF founding chairman, the late Ustaz Salamat Hashim, who passed away on July 13, 2003.[22] Salamat was a student of Al-Azhar University, where he graduated in 1969 with a master's degree in religion and philosophy. To the Bangsamoro people, he is popularly known as *amirul mujahideen* (commander of the resistance), and his ideology is consistent with his identity as an Islamic scholar and a *mujahid*.

Despite Salamat's Islamist credentials, he was an avowed nationalist who saw the Bangsamoro problem as essentially rooted in the politics of territory, and against a distinctly historical context:

When the Philippine government was granted independence by America in 1946, the Bangsamoro people felt that instead of becoming free, they instead lost their freedom. Before the establishment of the Philippine government by western imperialists, the Bangsamoro people were independent. They had their sultanates or independent principalities in Sulu and Maguindanao which were united by alliance and cooperation. The Bangsamoro people felt that when their homeland was annexed to the Philippine government, the freedom they enjoyed was entirely lost. So this is the problem we want the Philippine government to address.[23]

In 1985, Salamat published *The Bangsamoro Mujahid* as a guide for the conduct of the MILF *jihad*. In it, he argued that *jihad* was necessary "to defend their [Bangsamoro] religion, the dignity of the Bangsamoro people, and regain their legitimate right to self-determination" (Salamat 1985: 8). The ultimate objective for resistance was to "make supreme the word of Allah, which means––the establishment of a true Muslim community and a genuine Islamic system of government and the application of real Islamic way of life in all aspects of life" (9). Accordingly, Salamat proposed that it was through *dakwah* and *jihad* that the MILF Islamization agenda, which comprised of the transformation of every Muslim in MILF into "a true and real Muslim whose beliefs…and his entire life is in conformity with the teachings of Islam derived from the *Quran* and *Sunnah*," of every MILF home into "real Islamic homes where the teachings of the *Quran* and *Sunnah* prevail," and of the community into "a truly Islamic one governed by the *Sharia*" would be realized (9–11).[24]

On the face of it, Salamat's conceptions of *jihad* appeared to draw from the familiar virulent Islamist paradigm that divided the world between a *Dar al-Islam* [abode of peace] and *Dar al-Harb* [abode of war]. He hinted as much when he spoke of how "this material world is an arena of combat between *haqq* [truth] and *baatil* [falsehood], between *imaan* [faith] and *kufr* [apostasy], between *taqwaa* [love and fear for Allah] and *kibr* [pride], between justice and injustice, between the oppressed and oppressors.…[I]t is a battleground between Islam and all the manifestations and forces of *jahiliyyah* [ignorance]."[25] In an obvious and striking coincidence to the Manichean worldview of President George W. Bush, Salamat noted on another occasion at an MILF Youth Rally: "Are the Bangsamoro youth ready to join the Global Islamic Revival and

Renaissance [GIRR]?…Either you are with Allah, His Messenger and the believers along with the GIRR, or with the enemies of Allah."[26] This view echoed those that had been expressed by Islamists of an earlier generation such as Syed Qutb, the radical ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who viewed the world as divided between the *Dar al-Islam* and the *jahiliyya* of the *Dar al-Harb*.

The influence that radicals such as Syed Qutb and Syed Abul A'la Maududi of the Pakistani group Jamaat-e-Islami were known to have exercised on Salamat Hashim has been documented elsewhere (Abhoud Syed 1995a: 26). Upon closer scrutiny, though, it becomes evident that Salamat's conceptions of *jihad* shifted in response to contingencies. Several observations are worth making in this regard. First, the MILF *jihad* needs to be distinguished from those of the other militant Islamist group operating in southern Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf Group, which has used the *jihad* metaphor as a tool to authenticate all its activities, including kidnapping of civilians, looting, and other straightforward criminal activities.[27] Second, Salamat was very deliberate in contending that the Bangsamoro *jihad* went beyond militancy. This was clear in the importance given to education and proselytization in the MILF, and it is fully consistent with the perspective of mainstream traditional Islamic scholars that the taking up of arms is in fact the lesser *jihad* (*jihad qital* or offensive *jihad*, also known as *jihad bis saif,* or *jihad* by the sword) and that priority should be given to *jihad al-Akhbar* or the greater *jihad* (which includes *jihad* of the soul, or *jihad bin qalb*, *jihad* by the tongue, or *jihad bil lisan*, *jihad* by the pen, or *jihad bil qalam*, *jihad* by the hand, or *jihad bil yad*). Finally, while there is no doubt that Salamat had argued that Muslims will need to engage in *jihad qital* as *fard ayn* (personal obligation), he had in fact explicitly sanctioned it against the Philippine government on only two occasions––in response to the Estrada administration's policy of "all-out war" from April to July 2000 and to the February 2003 Buliok offensive of the AFP.[28]

It is clear from the preceding discussion that Salamat was a proponent of the Islamic state, and this, to his mind, was at the heart of the tension between the MILF and MNLF and explained the latter's "betrayal" of the

> **Salamat [Hashim] was very deliberate in contending that the Bangsamoro jihad went beyond militancy**

Bangsamoro cause: "The MILF adopts the Islamic ideology and way of life…[and] believes in the Islamic concept of state and government.…[The MNLF] is more inclined to secularism."[29] He justified the necessity of establishing an Islamic state on the basis that while a Muslim can and should perform his *Ibadah* (obligations), if "the political authority to whom he owes obedience and allegiance does not recognize the supremacy of the Law of God, he has not perfected his worship to God" (Abhoud Syed 1995b: 3–4). Within the MILF hierarchy, the priority of Islamic governance is given institutional expression in the form of the *Majlis-ash-Shura* (consultative assembly).

> *Islamic governance is given institutional expression in the form of the Majlis-ash-Shura*

If Salamat's understanding of *jihad*, as described above, was pensive, his position on the Islamic state has been inconsistent, often depending on his audience. For instance, Salamat had opined to the British Broadcasting Corporation that "we [MILF] have to accept the fact that most of the provinces here in the area are now dominated by non-Muslims. We can be satisfied with the provinces where the Muslims are still the majority. Regarding this Islamic State which people talk about, this idea did not come from us. What we want is to become independent. Regarding the system of government, that can be decided later" (Salamat 2002: 65). Indeed, MILF leaders today have departed from earlier calls for the creation of an Islamic state, and now favor a "decision by the people through a secular constitutional convention" on the specific type of administration for an independent Mindanao.[30]

> *MILF leaders…have departed from earlier calls for the creation of an Islamic state*

To make sense of this apparent contradiction, one has to appreciate the politics surrounding the MILF struggle. MILF leaders are fully aware that the demographics in Mindanao work against their objectives. Decades of resettlement have relegated the Muslim population to a southern minority. This explains the early reluctance on the part of Salamat Hashim and other MILF leaders for a plebiscite, as it would put them at a numerical disadvantage. On the other hand, they were equally aware that given these demographic constraints, their prospects would remain

dim if they were to persist with an uncompromising position. To adapt to these contextual realities, the ideological content of separatist struggle had to be recalibrated, which was done by adopting an inclusivist strategy that saw the MILF embrace non-Muslims as Bangsamoro. Consequently, in their definition of Bangsamoro today MILF leaders have asserted that this includes non-Muslim indigenous tribal communities (known as Lumads) as well as indigenous Christians. If this is true, it would be a departure from conventional understandings of Bangsamoro, once confined to the Muslims of the south. Likewise, MILF leaders have insisted that upon independence, they would not show any prejudice against non-Muslims, including settlers, who will be permitted the freedom to choose either to be identified as Bangsamoro *without any need to convert to Islam* or to remain as settlers.[31] Finally, it is also likely that allegations of links and tactical cooperation with *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) and Al-Qaeda in the post-9/11 international security climate must have weighed heavily on the minds of the MILF leadership and undoubtedly led to a recalibration of their rhetoric.

Global Influences

International developments exercise an important influence on the shape of the Bangsamoro struggle. A senior MILF official interviewed for this study bluntly said that "no organization like MILF can survive without external support."[32]

> *"no organization like MILF can survive without external support."*

As a mass-based movement, the MILF's popularity was facilitated by a Muslim revivalist movement in the Philippines that resonated with the global phenomenon that arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s but essentially peaked in the early 1980s after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iranian Revolution—which reconfigured its underlying basis (Cesar Adib 1999: 150–55). In fact, both MNLF and MILF actively enlisted and dispatched Bangsamoro *mujahideen* to fight in the Afghan war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.[33] Islamic revivalism was as trenchant a socio-political phenomenon in the Philippines as it was elsewhere in Southeast Asia, manifesting itself in the increasing number of Muslims shunning secular schools for religious institutions, both at home and abroad.[34]

During his student years, Salamat Hashim was himself profoundly influenced by global events, which informed his understanding and articulation of the Bangsamoro struggle. As Abhoud Syed Lingga, a close associate, observed: "His active participation in different student activities exposed him to various revolutionary trends, both Islamic and secular, which Cairo was known for at that period. This exposure brought him awareness of the colonial oppression his Muslim brothers and sisters were suffering back home, an awareness which gradually transformed him from a scholar to an Islamic revolutionary later on in his life" (Abhoud Sayed 1995b: 4). The impact that global events had on Salamat would later be reinforced when he took up the position of chairman of the Cotabato Revolutionary State Committee and handled the foreign relations of the MNLF.[35] It was through his connections with the Middle East that he was able to bring the Bangsamoro struggle to the attention of the Muslim world. To his mind, developments taking place in the rest of the Muslim world resonated profoundly with the Bangsamoro struggle:

> We cannot help drawing everybody's attention to the worldwide development before going further to discuss and deal with the challenges confronting us and the development surrounding us because we are part of the world in general and of the Islamic *Ummah* in particular. The challenges we are facing and the development of our problem should not be viewed in isolation from the international challenges and development of the entire Islamic *Ummah* of which we are in integral part.[36]

In his 2001 *Eid ul-Fitr* address (marking the end of the Muslim fasting period of Ramadan), Salamat tied the Bangsamoro struggle provocatively to the post-9/11 milieu of the global war on terror:

> The recent *Ramadhan* has been fraught with tests laden with hardships for the entire Muslim *Ummah*. In many parts of the world, we have seen the inevitable collision between Islam and the diabolical forces arrayed against Islam. We have witnessed the Muslim nations of Palestine, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Jammu-Kashmir [*sic*] in those other parts of the globe being subjected to the horrors of war. But this is nothing strange to us in the Bangsamoro homeland for we . . . are being subjected to the same ravages of the imposed war that saw the devastation of our communities and the massive dislocation of our people.[37]

Clearly, Salamat Hashim's ideological blueprint for the MILF's Bangsamoro struggle also leveraged on developments that had been taking place in the Muslim world at large, and events such as the ongoing conflicts in the Palestinian territories, Afghanistan, and Iraq continue to inform the Bangsamoro Muslim understanding of their own struggle. As a member of the MILF explained it: "If Bangsamoro don't struggle for themselves, they might fall into the trap of Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan."[38] Indeed, to many Muslim minds, including Bangsamoro Muslims in southern Philippines, or Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand for that matter, the "war on terror" is little more than a euphemism for a war on Islam. Consequently, they have mobilized and volunteered to depart for Afghanistan to fight against the American invasion like they did two decades ago against the Soviets, while bombings in Zamboanga and Basilan throughout 2002 have also been attributed to Muslim opposition to the Afghan invasion.[39] Likewise, the Arroyo administration's support for the war in Iraq was met with frequent civil protests throughout Mindanao.[40]

The transnational character of the Bangsamoro struggle has been further animated by support coming from foreign Muslim governments as well as Islamist and *jihadi* groups. Muslim rebels in southern Philippines have long benefited from foreign ideological and material support, particularly from Libya and Malaysia. More recently, links with radical global *jihadi* networks such as Al-Qaeda were further established on the back of personal relationships between Moro *jihadis* and members of the international terrorist organization forged in Afghanistan (ICG 2004b). Several *jihadi* websites have cited the Bangsamoro struggle, and Osama bin Laden himself has mentioned it as an arena in which the international *jihad* is to be pursued.

It is important, however, to contextualize the links between Al-Qaeda and the MILF. To be sure, links had been forged. What is more crucial to consider, though, are the implications that these links have on the objectives and strategies of the MILF. Contact between Salamat and Osama bin Laden was apparently established in the late 1990s, at a time when the MILF was still engaged in armed resistance against the Philippine state, and when the scope of Al-Qaeda's international *jihad* was not yet clearly manifest. This was the context in which the MILF received material aid and Al-Qaeda trainers into their military camps and, according to reports from the interrogation of *Jemaah Islamiyah* operations chief Hambali, pro-

vided training camps for the JI.[41] Tactical and operational cooperation, however, did not facilitate ideological confluence of any significant kind between the two organizations. Evidence instead indicates deliberate attempts on the part of MILF leaders to distance themselves from Al-Qaeda and subsequently JI, particularly since 9/11. In a private letter dated May 20, 2003, to President Bush, Salamat Hashim offered the following assurances:

> The MILF as a liberation organization has repeatedly renounced terrorism publicly as a means of attaining political ends. It is a resistance movement with the principal aim of securing safety of the life and properties of the Bangsamoro people. The MILF official policy has always been: We are not deliberately targeting non-combatants, and those who died during encounter [*sic*] caught in the ceasefire, we feel very sorry for these unfortunate incidents.[42]

Having said that, the loss of its main camp (Abu Bakr as-Siddiq was overrun during the Estrada administration's July 2000 offensive against the MILF) has led to the dissipation of authority, particularly over fringe areas in the MILF sphere of influence. Consequently, many ground units, popularly known as "lost commands," have begun operating autonomously, and while the current MILF leadership has disavowed *jihadi* connections established before 9/11, it is these units that continue to be of concern in relation to their possible retention of ties with terrorist and criminal elements such as JI or the Abu Sayyaf. In fact, as the International Crisis Group (ICG) report on southern Philippines suggests, even prior to the destruction of Camp Abu Bakr MILF forces were already organized as loosely knit units, and that MILF leaders probably "decided at an early stage to make a virtue of necessity, and allow individual units to pursue their own strengths guided only by vague directives" (ICG 2004b: 12). Hence, while it is fairly clear that the MILF central committee does not condone association with terrorist organizations, it is less certain if all ground units have abided by the directive.

the current MILF leadership has disavowed jihadi connections

Negotiating Islam

In a striking departure from its erstwhile resolute ideological commitment to an independent Islamic state in its formative years, a perception born of the earlier dialectics through which Salamat Hashim had articulated Bangsamoro resistance, the MILF has since demonstrated a capacity for pragmatism in pursuit of its objectives, and its commitment to religious ideology belies a readiness to recalibrate policies in reaction to shifting tactical, political, and strategic contingencies. While his ideology was undoubtedly religious in orientation, the Islamic agenda was hardly unequivocal, and Salamat Hashim was also demonstrably adept at compromise and negotiation. It has already been established that the MILF is acutely aware of the social, political, and strategic constraints on the organization's pursuit of Bangsamoro self-determination. For instance, there has been a noticeable shift in the manner and language in which MILF objectives have been articulated. What began as an unequivocal demand for immediate independence for the Muslim areas of Mindanao to be followed by independence for the entire island has diluted over time, morphing into restrained calls for autonomy, federalism, and commonwealth.[43] Second, despite articulating theirs as an Islamic struggle, the MILF was not averse to cooperation and alliance with non-Muslims when it proved advantageous to do so. Asked about the possibility of such cooperation, Salamat had replied: "Since we have the same enemy and we face the same problem, then our religious beliefs cannot prevent us from having alliances even with the so-called godless people. As a matter of fact, during the time of the Prophet . . . there were alliances between the Prophet and the people who were not Muslims."[44] This pragmatism was further demonstrated in the surprisingly moderate reaction to the Bush administration and its war on terror. While MILF stridently opposed the Afghan and Iraqi invasions, Salamat was careful not to get carried away with criticism of Washington. On the contrary, he sought to improve relations with Washington and wrote several private letters to President Bush not only expressing sympathy for the American people in the wake of the 9/11 attacks but also giving assurances that the MILF did not condone the use of terrorism as a tactic to achieve political ends.

> *Salamat Hashim was… demonstrably adept at compromise and negotiation*

The MILF paid close attention to the strategic temperament of the post-9/11 era when it recalibrated its strategy around the Islamization of resistance. A case in point is the MILF's relationship with the militant Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). As recently as 1996, Salamat Hashim had declared the MILF's affinity with the ASG, which was known to be closely linked to JI. This close association made sense because "the MILF shares a common goal with the Abu Sayyaf Group: to establish an independent Islamic state," and, further, "intentionally or unintentionally, the Abu Sayyaf Group contributes in expressing the sentiments and feelings of the Bangsamoro people of being oppressed and persecuted, as well as their earnest desire to become free" (Salamat 2000: 46). After 9/11, however, the MILF leadership has sought to distance itself from JI and the ASG. Leaders are quick to draw attention to their cooperation with the Philippine government under the auspices of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Committee, established in June 2004 to institutionalize and facilitate collaboration between the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) and the Army of the Republic of Philippines (AFP) to flush out criminal and terrorist elements in Mindanao (primarily, but not solely, ASG and JI). Some of these recent joint security operations include attacks on ASG units and kidnappers operating in the south.[45]

Notwithstanding MILF's cooperation with the AFP, certain terrorism analysts have warned against dismissing the possibility that segments within the organization continue to maintain ties with radical Islamist groups. For instance, some have maintained that such links continue not only with JI and ASG but also with newer groups, such as Kompak Mujahidin, Laskar Jundullah, and Negara Islam Indonesia, that allegedly have a presence in Mindanao.[46] Be that as it may, given the political objectives of the MILF leadership and its propensity toward negotiation and compromise for reasons established above, there are three compelling reasons why it is likely that any ongoing

> *the MILF leadership has not echoed the pan-Islamic agenda of regional terrorist organizations*

collusion with radical groups is being pursued outside of the purview of the organization's leadership. First, at the strategic level, the global war on terror has a palpable impact on the Bangsamoro struggle in terms of international perceptions of the MILF and its agenda; MILF leaders are aware

that it would not serve their interests and objectives if they were to be caught in the path of Washington's resolute hunt for Islamic terrorists (Julkipli 2005: 10–12). Second, the MILF itself has been weakened by the loss of its major camps as a result of government offensives. The destruction of the MILF's main camp severely disrupted the centralized structure of the organization and significantly affected not only the operational capability of its ground units but communication and coordination faculties as well. This has led to the decentralization of power within the organization, which has in turn led to its current weakened condition. Even though MILF leaders continue to couch their commitment to ongoing negotiations with the Philippine government in Islamic terms, opining that "above all, it is the duty to every Muslim to respond positively whenever you are asked or approached by someone asking you for peace…then you are mandated by Islam to respond positively," it is abundantly clear that the organization is negotiating from a point of weakness relative to its capabilities approximately a decade ago.[47] Finally, the MILF leadership has not echoed the pan-Islamic agenda of regional terrorist organizations such as the JI, even if some of their leaders were involved in the meetings of the Rabitatul Mujahideen (League of Holy Warriors) conglomerate of regional radical *jihadi* groups during 1999–2000 that hoped to bring into fruition a region-wide Islamic state. It is clear from the articulation of their leadership that the MILF's objectives are fundamentally local and political in nature—the return of what they perceived to be the rightful homeland of the Bangsamoro. Consequently, the issue of ancestral lands, for MILF, is the cornerstone of the ongoing MILF-GRP (Government of the Republic of Philippines) negotiations, and will ultimately determine success or failure of the talks.[48]

Islam, Nationalism, and Separatism in Thailand

Conflict in southern Thailand, which erupted again in recent years after approximately two decades of dormancy, has a long history centering on the Malay struggle for self-determination against Thai cultural and political subjugation. The genesis of separatism can be traced to the incorporation of Pattani Darussalam and six other Malay sultanates in the south, first by conquest and then by diplomatic machinations into Siam in the early twentieth century. This led to the emergence of Malay-Muslim resistance, led by displaced feudal elites who rallied under the banner of the Pattani Malay Movement operating out of British Malaya (Vickery 1970:

871). Like Mindanao however, it was only in the 1960s that armed separatist organizations were formed.

Separatism in southern Thailand has much to do with the demographics and history of the region. Problematically known in popular discourse as the "deep south" or "southernmost provinces," Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani are home to an ethnic Malay majority whose chief ethnocultural marker is the religion of Islam, which, depending on the province, constitutes as much as 80 percent of the local population. Beyond these three provinces lie Satun and Songkhla, both home to large Muslim populations and situated within the geographical boundaries of what is known as southern Thailand but which has a noticeably different ethnic makeup. While Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani are Malay-majority provinces, in Satun and Songkhla today they are a minority.[49]

A Struggle for Identity and Opportunity

Historical contexts of cultural, communal, and national identity as well as the existence of a range of grievances stemming from state policies have always been at the heart of the struggle in southern Thailand, and they continue to inform the content of Malay-Muslim struggle today. This is abundantly clear from the historical roots of rebellion, which can be traced back to popular resistance to Thai rule on the part of a Malay-Muslim population that sought to preserve its cultural and linguistic practices against the assimilationist exercise of "nation-building" in the face of the denial of educational, economic, and employment opportunities to the Malay-Muslim minorities and, in some instances, the heavy-handed policies carried out by certain Thai administrations in the name of integration and assimilation.

In order to understand the dynamic that exists today, one has to appreciate not only the salience of Malay identity but also Bangkok's incessant drive to craft and assert a distinct Thai nationality. The latter process, which continues to the present day, can be traced to King Vajiravudh's initiative in the early twentieth century to promulgate policies aimed at constructing a national identity centered on the notion of one (Thai) nation, one king, and one (Buddhist) religion.

The populist and nationalist policies of…Thaksin…constitute a new chapter [in]…center-periphery tensions

Not coincidentally, this period also witnessed the genesis of unrest in the south, for, according to Surin Pitsuwan, Vajiravudh's rule marked "the beginning of a long and torturous struggle to widen the sphere and deepen the level of autonomy for the Malay-Muslims of Patani based on specific ethnic differences" (Pitsuwan 1985: 69). These tensions would later be further aggravated by confrontational policies of the Phibun Songgkram (1938–44; 1948–57) and Sarit Thanarat (1957–63) administrations, which included attempts at circumscribing Islamic education and Malay cultural practices, which understandably elicited a strong Malay nationalist reaction. The populist and nationalist policies of the current Thaksin administration constitute a new chapter to the record of center-periphery tensions. Nevertheless, while these policies undoubtedly create the conditions for conflict by generating and aggravating grievances, on their own they do not explain how and why Malay-Muslims understand and translate these grievances in a way that perpetuates violence.

Ethno-cultural consciousness ensured that separatism in southern Thailand was an exclusive affair. Unlike the southern Philippine resistance in Mindanao that has, if not encouraged, at least acceded to non-Muslim claims to Bangsamoro identity, the Malay-Muslim resistance remains insular, based exclusively on Malay identity. Again, historical antecedents have much to do with this state of affairs. According to Malay history, which separatists use to nourish and legitimize resistance, the kingdom of Pattani was seen as a traditional Malay polity that had survived for more than a millennium. The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, which effectively cemented the northernmost borders of the Malay-Muslim world, was seen as an act of Anglo-Siamese complicity that forcibly incorporated seven Malay sultanates into Siam.[50] This history is often juxtaposed in the popular imagination with the "golden age" when Pattani was a trading hub as well as a center for excellence in Islamic studies, which British and Thai colonialists contrived to eliminate (Wan Kadir 1993; Aphornsuvan 2004; Ibrahim Shukri 2005).

This exclusivist subtext to southern Thai separatism is, however, often missed in many narratives of the conflict that tend to portray it as a phenomenon covering the entire region of southern Thailand, popularly defined as the Malay heartland configured around Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and Satun.[51] Despite having a Muslim majority of about 67 percent, however, Satun's population is only 10 percent ethnic Malay. Whether by coincidence or design, Satun had been spared from the violence plaguing

its neighboring regions. This further reinforces the argument that the conflict in southern Thailand remains primarily organized along ethnic, rather than religious, lines. The question of where to locate Satun in separatist violence cuts to the heart of dichotomous identities at work, which, as Ruth McVey tells us, lie in the tension "between Patani and those Muslims who do not share Patani's past" (McVey 1989: 52). To be sure, this dichotomy is not confined to separatism and continues to be played out in everyday politics today, providing fertile ground for debates on exclusivity, authenticity, and legitimacy within Thailand's Muslim community. Consider, for example, the Malay-Muslim opposition to the office of the *Chularajmontri*. Appointed and recognized by the government as the spiritual leader of Thailand's Muslim community, the office of the *Chularajmontri* historically comes out of the *Sheikh-al-Islam* (Islamic scholar) tradition of Iranian Shi'ism. This office has never been occupied by a Malay-Muslim and, because of its Shi'a origin, has never been accepted as legitimate representation of the predominantly Sunni Malay-Muslim community's aspirations or grievances. Much in the same vein, Muslim politicians and religious leaders of non-Malay backgrounds are viewed with suspicion when they attempt to champion the Malay-Muslim cause.[52]

In investigating the southern Thailand case, it is also important to account for the relative lull from the mid-1980s through the 1990s in the otherwise longstanding conflict between Malay-Muslim separatists and the Thai state. This period was marked by a discernible shift in policy toward the south defined by greater attention to and respect for local culture and grievances and facilitated by the climate of democratization and the introduction of economic and industrialization policies to raise the standard of living in the southern provinces (Liow 2004: 535). Even so, it is important not to overstate this apparent lull, significant though it surely was. While the climate undoubtedly stabilized, it was clear that tension and mutual suspicion continued to percolate beneath this veneer of tranquility. The continuation of sporadic attacks and the perception among the Malay-Muslim population that the Buddhist minority in the provinces benefited most from higher standards of living seemed to demonstrate this (Liow 2004). Moreover, there has since been relatively credible information that this "lull" might have been a calculated move by the separatists to halt their activity in order to consolidate their admittedly weakened resources and forces in preparation to relaunch the insurgency. We shall return to this point.

A Phenomenon in Search of Ideology

Compared to the Philippines, where Salamat Hashim provided leadership and ideological direction for the MILF that anchored Bangsamoro Muslim resistance, Malay-Muslim resistance in southern Thailand today lacks comparable ideological or organizational leadership. Leaders of the Malay-Muslim struggle have traditionally originated from the feudal elite. Departing from this trend was Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir, a religious teacher who emerged after the Pacific War as the recognized leader of this resistance and whose memory, according to Malay-Muslims I interviewed over the course of fieldwork in the south, continues to frame resistance today.[53] Thanet Aphornsuvan describes Haji Sulong's impact thus:

> Politically, the appearance of Haji Sulong in the Muslim movement was very significant.…In this revival of Malay nationalism, a new formula had been created from which political autonomy based on the Islamic principles would be championed.…The Patani Muslim Movement spearheaded by Haji Sulong thus became a mass movement and importantly was the first time that the leadership of the movement turned to the religious leader.[54]

Haji Sulong was responsible for bringing the Malay struggle to a higher plane at a time when the separatist movement was losing its momentum against the authoritarian military government of Phibun Songgkram, and has since been described as the "cause célèbre" and father of the Pattani independence movement (Pitsuwan 1985: 164). Unlike Salamat Hashim, whose messages pointedly articulated a separatist agenda, Sulong confined his agenda to agitation for greater autonomy and preservation of Malay-Muslim culture:

> *Sulong confined his agenda to agitation for greater autonomy and preservation of Malay-Muslim culture*

> We Malays are conscious that we have been brought under Siamese rule by defeat. The term "Thai Islam" with which we are known by the Siamese government reminds us of this defeat and is therefore not appreciated by us. We therefore beg of the government to honor us with the

title of Malay Muslims so that we may be recognized as distinct from the
Thai by the outside world. (Hayimasae 2002: 83)

His arrest and trial in January 1948 and controversial disappearance in
1954 was met with widespread protests from the Malay-Muslim communities, setting the stage for the armed insurgency to follow. Paradoxically,
while in life Haji Sulong championed peace and nonviolence in reaction
to state aggression and provocation, his death would be a call to arms.

Haji Sulong's push for Islam as an instrument to mobilize Malay-Muslims toward the elimination of religious ignorance and poverty as well
as to counter the repressive policies of the Thai government was significant in that it marked a departure from the political activism of the Malay
aristocrats—descendants of former Pattani rulers, whose immediate
objectives to regain the traditional power of the *Raja* lost to Bangkok had
overshadowed Islam as a motivation for resistance (Aphornsuvan 2004:
13–14).[55] Islam was no longer seen merely as an embodiment of rituals,
as previously emphasized in the teachings of the traditional religious institutions; under Haji Sulong's tutelage it became for Malay-Muslims *Ad-deen* (comprehensive way of life), governing both private and public life.
Describing the Malay-Muslim resistance under Sulong's influence, Wan
Kadir Che Man postulates that it was "essentially Islamic reactions against
alien domination. In some instances, Islam has become the fundamental
ingredient of the struggles; in others, Islamic concepts and symbols are
integrated into nationalist dogma…to appeal to a wider population"
(Wan Kadir 1990: 12).

Among Haji Sulong's most significant and enduring contributions to
the Malay-Muslim struggle was, arguably, the transformation of Islamic
education. The details of how Sulong challenged both the Thai state and
the traditional Malay-Muslim elites on this matter of religious education
have been dealt with extensively elsewhere and need not occupy us here.[56]
What should be stressed in this study is that while Islam provided a somewhat abstract rallying point for Malay-Muslim grievances, it was the
Islamic schools that have served as the vehicle to mobilize sentiments
toward separatism. By the 1930s, the Thai government had secularized
education in an intrusive manner under the administration of Phibun
Songgkram, posing a direct challenge to the ethnic and religious identity
of the Malays. Islamic education institutions responded by stirring strong
feelings of loyalty and affinity from students toward religious teachers (a

universal custom of traditional Malay society), who in turn became influential agents of support for Malay political activism. The famous Dusun Nyor Rebellion of April 1948, for example, was led by Ustaz Abdul Rahman. Religious teachers later played a prominent role in the formation of separatist organizations, even though the orientations of these organizations would later prove more secular than Islamist. Ustaz Abdul Karim Hassan founded the BRN in March 1960, and Tengku Bira Kotanila, a graduate of Aligarh Muslim University, formed PULO in 1968.

Schools and Mobilization

The function of religious schools in the equation of conflict in southern Thailand is substantially different from that in the Philippines. In the latter instance, resistance has long been highly institutionalized with the formation of two major mass-based organizations, MNLF and MILF. Institutionalization of Malay-Muslim resistance will be discussed at greater length later in this study. Suffice to say for now that in southern Thailand, Malay-Muslim resistance never enjoyed the same level of institutionalization owing both to effective government policies, both castigatory and conciliatory in nature (particularly in the 1980s and 1990s) and rivalries between separatist groups. Even at their height, major organizations such as PULO and BRN never commanded the mass support that the MILF has harnessed over the past two decades. Given these constraints, in southern Thailand it has historically been religious schools that have been most integral to the mobilization strategies of separatism, particularly indoctrination and recruitment. Since the rise of armed resistance, insurgents have attempted to penetrate the region's *pondok* (traditional Islamic school) in order to recruit for the struggle (Wan Kadir 1990: 113). Recruitment processes also took place overseas, among southern Thai students attending religious schools in the Middle East, Pakistan, and Malaysia.[57] Wan Kadir Che Man estimates that as many as 30,000 Malay-Muslims lived in Saudi Arabia during the 1960s and 1970s, and during the late 1980s the number was at least 10,000, most of them involved in activities of separatist groups (Wan Kadir 1990: 110).

Today, it is widely believed that recruitment is taking place in a clandestine fashion; while it draws from religious schools it is suspected to be occurring in the context of smaller study groups.[58] This was affirmed in the ICG study on southern Thailand, which described the following *modus operandi*:

> Recruitment agents, often religious teachers, reportedly select youths who display three key characteristics: piety, impressionability, and agility. Agents recruit these youths into small groups, initially by befriending and inviting them to join discussion or prayer groups. Candidates are sounded out in conversations about Patani history. Those who seem receptive to liberationist ideology are invited to join the movement. (ICG 2005: 26)

Considering the structure of Islamic education in southern Thailand's private Islamic schools today, where lessons are divided into three sessions, with formal religious classes in the morning, academic and vocational lessons in the afternoon, and unofficial "study groups" in the evening, it is perhaps conceivable that inasmuch as mobilization takes place in the school system, it is likely that these unofficial "study groups" provide the best mechanism. If that is true, it means that Islamic schools are not directly involved—nor should they be seen as complicit with militant activities as the Thai government has tended to portray them as being. Monitoring the activities of study groups has proven, and will continue to prove, an arduous process, not just for state security officials but also for the Malay-Muslim community itself. Beyond indoctrination, according to some reports religious schools have apparently also figured prominently as an avenue for paramilitary training in the guise of extracurricular sporting activities, though this certainly remains to be verified.[59]

Incessant, if sometimes dubious, references to the role of religious schools in the contemporary conflict draw on their tradition of involvement in Malay-Muslim separatism in sustaining narratives of victimization and the ideological impetus of ethno-nationalism (Dulyakasem 1981; Pitsuwan 1985; Mohd. Zamberi 1993; Ahmad Omar 2002). As a result, these institutions have commanded the attention of the Thai security apparatus and political elite today, some of whom view it as a bastion for radical and militant Islam and have even called for their eradication.[60] In August 2004, for example, the Fourth Army Intelligence Division estimated that some thirty religious schools were known to be active in the ongoing insurgency.[61] Recently, several high-profile attacks have featured militants who

several high-profile attacks have featured militants who have been traced back to Islamic schools

have been traced back to Islamic schools, where they were either students or teachers. A number of prominent cases have revolved around Yala-based Thammachat Witthaya, arguably the most prestigious Islamic private school in southern Thailand. A raid on December 17, 2004, led to the arrest of four suspects, all teachers at Thammachat Witthaya, with alleged connections to BRN-Coordinate, apparently a new organization that appropriated the BRN name and is suspected to be orchestrating much of the recent chain of violence. These four were incarcerated, and a fifth remains on the run.[62] The school's students were identified among casualties of the April 28 coordinated insurgent assault on twelve government buildings and police outposts across Pattani, Yala, and Songkhla. I was recently informed that certain study groups had actually been formed in Thammachat Witthaya to instill a deeper consciousness of Malay identity and history in some students.[63]

Another matter that had drawn the attention of security officials was the alleged relationship that Pusaka, an Islamic education foundation, had with militants.[64] In 1994, Pusaka was formed as an Islamic education foundation in Narathiwat by Najmuddin Umar, until recently a member of parliament and leader of the influential Wadah faction of Muslim parliamentarians.[65] The foundation sponsors as many as a hundred Islamic private schools in southern Thailand (fifty-six in Narathiwat alone). Intelligence officials allegedly only came to know of the organization after documents surfaced during a 2003 raid on the home of Masae Useng, a religious teacher from Narathiwat and a known separatist with links to the BRN.[66] They have consequently raised concerns that Pusaka may be working in tandem with BRN-Coordinate to perpetuate violence, and it is believed that this cooperation may possibly be behind larger-scale attacks requiring a high level of skill, sophistication, and coordination, such as the January 4, 2004, arms heist.[67] Thus far, though, no evidence has surfaced to substantiate this speculation, Masae Useng remains at large, and the prosecution's case against Najmuddin Umar is losing steam.

Three critical considerations should be kept in mind when assessing the role that schools might be playing in the contemporary southern Thai separatist conflict from the perspective of our interest in the religious dimension. First, while it is probably true that religious teachers from certain schools have been involved in militant violence, it would be a mistake to extrapolate from this a causal relationship that implicates all religious schools. This was a major policy *faux pas* of previous administrations that

led to misinformed policies, which did little more than further incite disenchantment toward central authority and feed the flames of separatism. Judging from recent developments, the Thaksin government is in danger of going down the same path. Religious schools are more than educational institutes—for the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand, they are a bastion of history and identity. Hence, even if elements within the system itself are complicit in the insurgency, policymakers have to tread carefully—if they target the entire system of Islamic education, they risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Second, to the extent that militants are capitalizing on the pervasive educational infrastructure of the *pondok* system, in order to address the problem at its source it is important to consider exactly what message is being perpetuated through schools to facilitate militant activity. At an abstract level, it can be suggested that schools are possibly the most efficient vehicle of Islamization, as religion can be easily used to frame and explain social and political crises for impressionable young minds. Yet in southern Thailand, the nexus between religious schools and separatist conflict has taken a somewhat different form. Militants do not appear to be using the system to indoctrinate students in strict Islamist ideology. The notion of *jihad,* for instance, has not been articulated by Islamic teachers with any notable frequency.[68] On the contrary, there is evidence that it is "liberationist ideology," as alluded to in the earlier quotation from the ICG report, that has featured most prominently. Furthermore, the schools emphasize local narratives of Malay history that teach of the unjust subjugation of Malay-Muslim lands by Siam, as is the case with the alleged study groups at Thammachat Witthaya. The proliferation of the Malay version of the Pattani historical narrative, it should be added, is not confined solely to southern Thai religious schools; elsewhere in the Malay world students are exposed not to the version of Pattani history sanitized by Thai education authorities but to this "authentic" Malay-Muslim history.[69] Curiously, though, contrary to what some analysts might suggest, this commitment to nationalism and Pattani's proud Islamic heritage has had the extenuating effect of denying some foreign influences, including the international *jihadi* movement, an ideological foothold in southern Thailand.[70]

Finally, the role that Islamic schools are believed to have assumed in the contemporary conflict is all the more striking because of a prevailing belief that the Bangkok government has been more successful in integrating the *pondok* (traditional Islamic schools that until recently fell outside

the purview of the central government) than Manila has been with the *madaris* in southern Philippines. Indeed, the vast majority of Islamic education institutions on the Thai government's list of suspects are state-funded Islamic schools that have to some extent been integrated into the mainstream national academic system through the introduction of academic and vocational subjects, not to mention the Thai language, into their curriculum. This is telling on two counts. First, the wide perception, raised earlier, that the Thai state had "successfully" integrated the Malay-Muslim community and managed the southern conflict over the last two decades or so has at least to some extent been mistaken. Second, local narratives of identity and victimization are patently more resilient than some would have expected, and these narratives continue to feed the Malay-Muslim community's understanding of self and other as well as the terms of this relationship vis-à-vis Bangkok.

The More Things Change,
the More they Remain the Same?
On the surface, the religious school connection appears consistent with evidence that militants involved in contemporary conflict have taken on a younger profile and have possibly been mobilized into a loose umbrella organization, which some sources have identified as Dewan Pembebasan Pattani (Pattani Liberation Assembly), or DPP.[71] This, together with purported claims of non-involvement on the part of some separatist leaders of an earlier generation, lend some credence to prognoses of a new phenomenon brewing in the restive south beyond the traditional agenda of separatism. Adding further credibility to such suppositions is the very nature of the conflict itself, which has expanded from the rural-based attacks on symbols of Thai authority to urban-centered violence against civilians as well.

Without denying the changes that have taken place, particularly in terms of the tactics and targets being chosen by militants today, I argue that there is equally persuasive evidence pointing to patterns of continuity with the struggles of the past, hence locating the motive of self-determination at the heart of the ongoing conflict. Several observations can be made to that effect. While the rank-and-file militants today are unquestionably younger, the same cannot be said with confidence about their leaders, whose identities continue to be clouded in mystery. In fact, in the *Straits Times* report cited earlier that tracked the emergence of the DPP, it was also established that the DPP "do not know who their leader is."

Second, an admission by Wan Kadir Che Man, a former leader from Bersatu, an umbrella organization formed in 1997 to coordinate activities of BRN, PULO, and *Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Pattani* (Pattani Mujahideen Movement, or GMIP), indicated that planning for the current wave of violence had already been in the pipeline more than a decade ago, when separatist leaders from PULO and BRN met and decided to bide their time in order to consolidate and rebuild over a ten-year period, after which they would relaunch the separatist rebellion circa 2000 by mobilizing small cells of insurgents that were to have been formed over this consolidation period.[72] Wan Kadir has further expressed that while it is highly likely that "old separatists" were the ones who reignited the struggle by orchestrating the January 4 arms raid, they had not calculated on the resultant policy missteps of the Thaksin administration, which created a tinderbox of anger that would explode after the October 25, 2004, Tak Bai incident, in which more than eighty Malay-Muslims were killed in custody after being rounded up for participating in a mass protest. The result of this post-October 25 "explosion" of Malay-Muslim anger has been a proliferation of violence motivated by neither ideology nor politics but simply revenge against the state, which in turn explains the vast number of seemingly isolated,

> ***militant study groups…are indoctrinating…students not in global Jihadism but in Malay nationalism***

small-scale acts of violence. Consequently, separatist militants have been "pleasantly surprised" at this turn of events, which has caused the Malay-Muslim community to drift further and further away from Bangkok's grasp, in so doing creating a ready pool of potential recruits.[73] If this is indeed true, then it indicates that the current violence may possibly not be as "new" a phenomenon as initially thought but also that, left unchecked, it is likely to take on a life of its own beyond the separatist agenda, if it has not already done so. Third, evidence has surfaced that a significant number of militants are much older.[74] Fourth, as the preceding discussion has highlighted, there is also evidence that indicates that militant study groups linked with Islamic schools are indoctrinating their students not in global Jihadism but in Malay nationalism, much in the same vein as their predecessors. Fifth, despite the claims of non-involvement on the part of some former separatists, there is conjectural evidence that

implicate senior Malay-Muslim politicians with links to separatist activities of an earlier epoch who may be actively manipulating these youth groups and instigating them to violence from behind the veil of political office.[75] Finally, any attempt to describe the ongoing violence in southern Thailand as an entirely new phenomenon must come to terms with the fact that conflict in that region is a recurring, cyclical phenomenon that has always mobilized around and drawn on history (Thanet 2004).

Overall, the picture that emerges seems to portray a configuration of old and new—violence built around a new generation of rank-and-file militants loosely bound to an older, more established leadership, leveraging the "prestigious" nomenclature of past organizations such as BRN and GMIP but otherwise likely conducting tactical operations autonomously. Put differently, rather than an entirely new phenomenon emerging from a *tabula rasa,* as some have suggested, the empirical evidence suggests that the current wave of violence was fashioned in the crucible of historical resistance to the central Thai state, and may still be feeding off the ideology and objectives of their predecessors, even if the strategies and tactics have shifted and the ideology has been reframed to accommodate a greater emphasis on Islam in the context of Malay-Muslim cultural identity.

Violence, History, and Symbolism

The profound significance of this confluence of continuity and change came out in dramatic fashion on April 28, 2004, when more than a hundred militants conducted twelve coordinated pre-dawn attacks and martyrdom operations on a series of police posts and security installations in Yala, Songkhla, and Pattani (leading to 108 militants and five police and military officials being killed and seventeen arrests) that broke the prevailing pattern of separatist violence in southern Thailand. The attacks culminated in the siege on the historic Krisek (Krue Se) Mosque in Pattani, and it is to the powerful symbolism surrounding this particular theater that the paper now turns.

According to eyewitness accounts, a number of men had streamed into Krisek Mosque on the evening of April 27 at around 8 o'clock, whereupon they conducted prayers and Quranic recitation throughout the night. At 4 o'clock the following morning, a call to *jihad* was issued to the town through the Mosque public address system in an (ultimately failed) attempt to incite a mass uprising. Following this, the group set out mostly with machetes and attacked police posts and government installations in surrounding villages. Similar attacks took place in other provinces at

around the same time, indicating that the Krisek militants were possibly part of a larger, coordinated operation. Despite having ample time and opportunity to disperse into the surrounding villages and forests, the militants in Pattani chose to return to Krisek, knowing full well that they would easily be surrounded. In hindsight, it is apparent that many of the militants were already prepared to be *shahid*, martyrs for Islam, and in the tradition of Muslim martyrdom had instructed family members not to wash their bodies after death.[76] By 6 o'clock in the morning, Thai security forces had encircled the Mosque. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, Panlop Pinmanee, deputy director of internal security operations, overruled Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's instructions to exhaust all means of negotiation and ordered the mosque to be seized by force. Heavy weaponry such as rocket launchers and M-16 assault rifles were used against the Islamic militants holed up in the mosque after a tear-gas attack failed, resulting in the death of all thirty-two militants and one non-combatant who was mistaken for a militant and shot by snipers.

During an inquiry immediately following the attacks in the Thai senate, Kraisak Choonhavan, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, revealed that some of the militants were found with a single bullet through the head and rope marks on the wrists, indicating that summary executions might have taken place.[77] It was reported that some of the people captured in the other attacks that day carried with them prayer beads and consumed holy water prior to the attacks in the belief that it rendered them invisible (ICG 2005: 21–22). According to one source, these militants also admitted to partaking in elaborate mystical rituals prior to the operations (Aeusrivongse 2005: 7), including meditation, *ilmu kebal* (self-defense, invincibility training), chanting of holy verses and *Zikir* (recitation of the name of Allah), and use of *gacabek* or prayer beads (which, according to *tarekat* practice, assist followers in meditation).[78] This evidence raised the possibility that a new group with cultish, if not millenarian, religious inclinations might have surfaced in southern Thailand's kaleidoscope of conflict.[79]

The attack had a symbolic historical and cultural significance that cannot be overemphasized. In Malay-Muslim folklore, the 400-year-old Krisek Mosque is emblematic of Malay-Muslim identity. Legend tells of a Chinese lady of noble birth, Lim Ko Niew, who had come to southern Thailand 400 years ago in search of her brother. Upon hearing that he had converted to Islam and refused to return to China, she committed

suicide, but not before laying a curse on the mosque that was then being constructed at the site of Krisek. Malay-Muslims believe the fact of the Mosque remaining intact today despite the curse demonstrates their resilience in the face of persecution. The decision by militants to mount attacks on April 28 was equally striking in that several other incidences of rebellion against the Thai state have been recorded in the Malay-Muslim provinces on or around that date, the most prominent of which was the Dusun Nyor rebellion of April 28, 1948, in reaction to Haji Sulong's imprisonment.[80] Both of these facts point to a calculated attack, meticulously orchestrated and executed in order to maximize symbolism and arouse Malay-Muslim fervor.

Notwithstanding this careful orchestration of violence to resonate with historical memories of victimization, the events of April 28 also heralded a new and disturbing dimension to the southern Thai conflict. For the first time in recent history, the traditionally ethno-nationalist struggle had assumed a patently discernible religious flavor. The sight of bloodstained floors and holy books in the Krisek Mosque no doubt resonated with the Muslim population in the south and further fed resentment as Islam served as an increasingly potent avenue to comprehend, rally, articulate, and express resistance against the central state.[81]

While it remains unclear the extent of influence that those behind the April 28 attacks enjoy among the Malay-Muslim population, the incident itself is telling on several counts for our purpose of understanding the religious dimension to the southern Thai conflict.[82] During the course of interviews and casual conversations conducted during my fieldwork, I was frequently told that the perpetrators of the violence were not drug addicts and delinquents, as depicted by the Thai government and echoed by the media, but "good, religious boys and men." Herein lay a pressing concern, for this implies a context where motivations may not have been purely instrumental in nature; that the April 28 violence witnessed the first martyrdom operations in the long history of Malay-Muslim resistance serves only to substantiate this. This begs the question as to the objectives of the apparently religiously motivated attack. The answer to this, I would suggest, lies in a controversial Jawi manuscript titled *Berjihad di Pattani* (Holy Struggle for Pattani) that was found on the bodies of several of the dead militants in Krisek. This document would prove to be the most systematic articulation of the religious dimensions of the southern Thai conflict to have surfaced in its history.

Berjihad di Pattani

Allegedly penned in an obscure town in Kelantan in northern Malaysia, *Berjihad di Pattani* calls categorically for a holy war of liberation for the kingdom of Pattani from "colonialists."[83] Doused with metaphorical references and verses from the Quran, *Berjihad* reflects in its polemics the familiar radical Islamist diatribe that conjures a Manichean world struggle between Islam and the *Jahiliyyah*.[84] What is striking about *Berjihad* is the objectives to which Islamic idioms are directed—mobilization of the population to support and sacrifice for the reinstatement of Pattani Darussalam. Alluding to the historical struggle for Pattani, the author wrote:

> We should be ashamed of ourselves for sitting idly and doing nothing while the colonialists trampled our brothers and sisters. The wealth that belongs to us have been seized. Our rights and freedom have been curbed, and our religion and culture have been sullied.…Our late parents, brothers, and sisters sacrificed their lives for their land as warriors; they left behind a generation with warrior blood flowing in their veins. Today, let us make a call, so that the warrior blood will flow again and the generation will emerge again.[85]

He proceeds to call specifically for martyrdom, which emerges as a central theme in the book, in order to fulfil this objective: "*Wira Shuhada* (martyrs), how glorious we will be if we fall as warriors of our land.…When Martyrs are killed, they are not dead but alive next to God…[and] will watch and listen to every piece of news to see if their children will follow in their footsteps."[86] Another striking feature of the polemics in *Berjihad* is the writer's attack not only on "colonialists" as *jahili* (people of ignorance) but Muslims as well. For instance, he suggests that while some Muslims may be performing the Five Pillars of Islam, "their actions or practices are a disguise, for their hearts are filled with hatred and fury against Islam."[87] Later, he goes further to criticize them as "*Munifiqun*" (hypocrites), saying that "Allah not only forbids us from electing the hypocrites as leaders, but Allah also forbids the believers from offering prayers for the dear hypocrites and

the points of reference in Berjihad are specific, narrow, exclusive, and local

from standing at their graves to offer prayer."[88] *Berjihad* is equally notable for what is not mentioned in its exegesis—the specter of global *jihadi* struggle that so preoccupies many Muslim militants and terrorists today is not raised, nor does it allude at any point to the anti-Western and anti-Zionist motivations that fixate Islamists and *jihadis* worldwide. Unlike some MILF pronouncements, it does not even allude to Muslim suffering and persecution elsewhere in the *Ummah*. Even in its highly rhetorical and ideological form, the points of reference in *Berjihad* are specific, narrow, exclusive, and local.

There are several further points worth noting in this attempt to mobilize religion in justification of violence in southern Thailand. First, and perhaps most important for our purposes, is that the numerous *Surah* citations belie the political poignancy of the document. The author of *Berjihad* makes it very clear that his objective is the liberation of Pattani and creation of a separate state. Even the question of the Islamic character of this new state and the implementation of the *Sharia* for which all card-carrying Islamists gallantly labor (albeit often with their own interpretations)—this receives mere passing mention and appears secondary to the overarching objective. Unlike the highly ideological *zeitgeist* of Maududi and Qutb, the author was not interested in delving substantively into the titanic struggle between *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*, nor was he overly concerned about the alleged global threat posed by the *jahili* to Islam, a few allusions notwithstanding. The sole concern of *Berjihad* was, in its own words, the "liberation of our beloved country" from "the disbelievers' occupation." This fundamentally contradicts the account provided in a *Time Magazine* report that made mistaken reference to the "paucity of references to the liberation of the south" in *Berjihad,* noting that "it looks like they don't care for autonomy."[89] In fact, much effort was given to rekindling memories of the valiant struggle of the Malay-Muslim "freedom fighters" and "Jihad warriors" of a previous generation who had fought and died for the same political cause. The final chapter tellingly provided a systematic exposition of the executive and legislative elements of the Pattani state that would be established after the ejection of the "colonialists." Of particular interest is that the "rightful" leader of the state of Pattani was envisaged to be "a royalty related to the King of Kelantan."[90] This speaks not only to the historical ties that Malay-Muslims shared across the Thai-Malaysian border but also to the *ancien regime,* whose reinstatement appears to be the objective of the *Berjihad* separatists.

Berjihad is also notable for its attempts to amplify latent antagonisms within the Muslim community in Thailand. That the author engages indirectly in *takfir* (the highly politicized exercise of labeling fellow Muslims infidels) and makes blatant calls for the martyrdom fighters to attack fellow Muslims deemed to be hypocrites betrays an attempt to foster or capitalize on existing fissures within the Thai Muslim community. The document reserves its most virulent attacks for members of the Muslim elite who had been coopted into the Thai state. At one point, the author disparages the practice of veneration that is often associated with Shi'a Islam, though is not exclusive to it. Part of his overall condemnation of Thai Muslims in positions of authority may have included a veiled attack on the Chularajmontri, the nominal spiritual leader of the Muslim community in Thailand.[91] As mentioned earlier, the *Chularajmontri* was an office created during the Ayutthaya dynasty and modeled after consultation between the courts and Iranian diplomats along the lines of the *Sheikh-al-Islam*. The office was subsequently revived by Thailand's Islam Patronage Act of 1945 and functions today in a ceremonial and advisory capacity (Imtiyaz 1998). Though the last three *Chularajmontri* in the democratic period of Thai history have been Sunnis, that the position was modeled after a Shi'a tradition remains a bone of contention in Thailand's Muslim culture, and many Malay-Muslim have registered the fact that while the past two *Chularajmontri* have been Sunni scholars, they have not been Malay and hence were widely regarded as lacking the legitimacy to represent Malay-Muslims.[92]

On the other hand, however, demonstrations of orthodoxy associated with the condemnation of Shi'a practices papered over the influence of Sufi and animistic beliefs and practices that blended into *Berjihad* and the events of April 28, 2004. Despite its relative unpopularity in southern Thailand, which has been chiefly Sunni in jurisprudential orientation and increasingly Salafi in outlook as a consequence of the influence of Islamic revivalism over the past two decades, many of the religious rites associated with the April 28 attacks bore the imprint of militant Sufism seen previously in Chechnya, Sudan, Morocco, and Algeria. Numerous reports spoke of how the militants had engaged in practices such as the use of prayer beads, holy water, and "consecrated sand."[93] This connection with mysticism was also confirmed when Abdulwahab Datu, Tuan guru of the Tarpia Tulwatan Mullaniti Islamic Boarding School in Yala, informed military officials during an interrogation that he had been acquainted with the author of *Berjihad,* Poh Su Ismail, but subsequently distanced himself

from him because he questioned the latter's belief in and employment of supernatural powers.[94] References to Sufi beliefs were also contained in the *Berjihad* document itself, particularly in relation to invincibility.[95] Given the esoteric nature of this brand of Sufism, it was not surprising when it was discovered that militants for the attacks were apparently covertly recruited and indoctrinated in liberation ideology through small study groups or cells based in religious schools.[96]

Institutionalization of Resistance

The absence today of a predominant group in southern Thailand that enjoys the prominence that the MILF does in southern Philippines despite the historical legacy of organized resistance has been a puzzle for comparative analysis of trends of internal conflict in the two countries. While there is no dearth of resistance groups in southern Thailand, none has the support and presence of the MILF, nor has any been able to articulate convincingly an Islamist political agenda with widespread support. On the register of militant groups in southern Thailand, PULO was, in its prime, probably the largest (Gunaratna et al. 2005: 36–40). While often seen as more secular than Islamic in orientation, it did make some attempt to articulate resistance along Islamist parameters.[97]

In his study of violence in southern Thailand in the 1976–81 period, Chaiwat Satha-Anand dissected the manner in which Islam was employed by PULO to justify violence (Satha-Anand 1987). This was clearly evident in its propaganda machinery. In his analysis of PULO propaganda pamphlets, Satha-Anand found frequent reference to Islam in support of its political cause. For example, routine calls for Malay-Muslims to engage in *jihad* were supported with liberal doses of Quranic and *hadith* (prophetic traditions) citations to appeal to popular religious sentiments (31). PULO's Islamization of resistance was configured as a four-step exercise. It began with identifying the distinctiveness of Islam in opposition to the state religion, Buddhism. This distinction was aimed at extenuating the cultural differences that existed between the Malays, who "follow Allah while they [Thais] follow Buddhism which reveres the Buddha image" (32). The second and third steps were to emphasize the superiority of Islam and the need for Muslim unity. Only when this was achieved would PULO proceed to remind Malay-Muslims that it is their obligation to fight the *kafir*, which in this case referred to Thais. According to this study, pamphlets had been propagated that declared Muslims were not to be governed by non-Muslims.[98]

For PULO, however, the mobilization of Islamic idioms was clearly not an end in itself but rather served a distinct political agenda. Explaining the leverage Islam offered to political projects, Clifford Geertz noted that it was an expression of the "politics of meaning" through which "men give shape to their experience, and politics is one of the principle arenas in which such structures publicly unfold" (Geertz 1973: 311–26; Satha-Anand 1987: 35). According to Geertz, religion is a sacred symbol that induces or motivates its adherents toward a "chronic inclination to perform certain sorts of acts and experience certain sorts of feelings in certain sorts of situation" (Geertz 1973: 96). Thus, Islam's utility was in capturing the consciousness of the Malay-Muslims; once this was accomplished, it would automatically diminish their loyalty to the government by delegitimizing the latter in their eyes. To Chaiwat Satha-Anand's mind, it was precisely this "politics of meaning" that transformed discontent to violence to the extent that even those among the Malay-Muslims who did not take up arms still sympathized with the violent actors whose vision and reality they all shared (Satha-Anand 1987: 35).

In truth, cursory references to religion belied the fact that movements such as PULO and BRN were primarily secular in orientation. That these insurgents readily formed an alliance with the Communist Party of Thailand in the 1970s, with many members even opting to join the communist movement, was in itself detrimental to any pretensions of religiosity they might have harbored or hoped to demonstrate (Girling 1981: 270). Moreover, unlike the situation that evolved in the southern Philippines after the emergence of the MILF, attempts by Thai separatists to recalibrate ideology so as to emphasize Islam did not result in the expansion of the support base for these organizations in southern Thailand. Improvements in government intelligence capabilities as well as the introduction of political representation, community outreach programs, and more liberal cultural policies, all orchestrated by the Southern Border Provincial Administration Center, which was established in 1984 to win Malay-Muslim hearts and minds and curb popular support for the separatists, ensured the containment of their popularity among the Malay-Muslim community. Nowhere was this more clearly illustrated than when several hundred militants surrendered their arms under the Thai government's policy of amnesty over the course of the 1990s.

Global Influences

Mirroring the southern Philippines struggle, separatists in southern Thailand have long been reliant on international connections. At various times, the leadership of separatist groups either operated out of or obtained shelter and support from Egypt, Syria, and Malaysia. The link with Malaysia has proven particularly testy because of the existence of a range of complicated issues, namely, a historical background of Malaysian sympathy and support for the separatist movement, the dual nationality of numerous Malay-Muslims residing in southern Thailand, the porousness of the borders, and the questionable commitment of both parties to information exchange and intelligence cooperation (Liow 2004). At the heart of the problem, however, as one Malaysian special branch officer shared, were the difficulties that Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country, encountered in being seen by both its domestic Muslim constituency and the broader Muslim world as tolerating or, worse yet, assisting in the Thai government's ill treatment of Malay-Muslims in the south.[99] The situation has not been helped by regular (and unsubstantiated) press reports of repeated accusations made on the part of Prime Minister Thaksin and some cabinet colleagues (primarily Defense Minister Thammarak Issarangura) that Malaysia was harboring militants.

> *separatists in southern Thailand have long been reliant on international connections*

An important consideration in assessing external influences on the Islamization of resistance in Thailand is the impact of the Islamic resurgence and concomitant political developments in the Muslim world such as the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both of which took place in 1979. As Wan Kadir Che Man, the former leader of Bersatu, expressed:

> The young people of Patani today seem more and more inclined to cultural politics of religious grounds. During my youth, my generation were nationalists. This was a key theme in the 1970s. But today the resurgence of Islam worldwide gives the separatist movement a more religious flavor, and we see the Islamists working closer with the nationalists. In other words, separatism is even stronger in Patani today because of the combination of both political and religious ideas.[100]

In the course of an interview, another former separatist expressed that it was precisely the heightened Islamic consciousness that was latched upon by separatists and used to facilitate revival of the insurgency.[101] Likewise, the American invasion of Iraq and Thailand's support of that invasion has had negative repercussions in the south, where protests and boycotts of American products were launched in response. In a casual conversation with three young Malay-Muslim men in Pattani in August 2004, all expressed anger at American foreign policy and felt that the Thaksin government was complicit in Washington's "attack" on Islam.[102]

Thailand's support [for America's]…invasion [of Iraq] has had negative repercussions in the south

The Islamization process has largely been facilitated by the return of numerous Malay-Muslim students from foreign educational institutions where, after clampdowns on religious schools by the Thai government during the military regimes of the 1960s and early 1970s, they amassed under the auspices of financial support from Arab governments and international Islamic charities. One outcome of this has been the accelerated growth of the religious tendency to separatism, which even separatist organizations with a secular bent attempted to capitalize on, as in the case of PULO, discussed earlier. The convergence of religion and militancy assumed particular prominence in the wake of the 1979 Afghan war. Some analysts speculate that up to 2,000 Muslims from Thailand were involved in the *mujahideen* resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, though the actual number was likely much lower. That Islamic resurgence and the resilient *mujahideen* struggle inspired resistance movements in Southern Thailand to move toward a more radical Islamist register was further discernible from the manner in which interests were beginning to be reorganized and rearticulated. Separatist organizations now began to adopt names that stressed Islamic credentials, such as BBMP (*Barisan Bersatu Mujahidin Patani;* United Mujahideen Front of Patani), BIPP (*Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani;* Islamic Liberation Front of Patani), and GMIP, which was formed by veterans of the Afghan war.

This question of how events in the global *Ummah* inform local resistance has gained greater currency in the wake of recent developments and concerns for the possible existence of linkages between southern Thai mil-

itants and foreign terrorist organizations. To be sure, these concerns have some foundation. Reports have surfaced of videos and training manuals filmed in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and Chechnya being found in religious schools and residences of local religious teachers. Images of southern Thai violence have appeared on international *jihadi* websites. In June 2003, several suspected JI members were arrested in Thailand. Later, in August, JI operations chief Hambali (Riduan Hishamuddin) was arrested in Ayutthaya en route to Bangkok. Though such revelations have fanned speculation that the international *jihad* had arrived on Thai shores, on closer scrutiny they do not appear to be convincing evidence that this has in fact happened. Training materials are widely available on the Internet, and their possession should by no means be

> ***Images of southern Thai violence have appeared on international jihadi websites***

taken as irrefutable evidence of direct links with foreign terrorists. In the same vein, information on the situation in southern Thailand that has surfaced on *jihadi* websites reveal little about the existence of actual networks. The case against alleged Thai JI members has floundered as a result of lack of evidence, and charges have been dropped. Meanwhile, Hambali's interrogation revealed that he had failed to obtain local support for operations on Thai soil.[103]

Aside from JI and Al-Qaeda, others have attempted to link southern Thai militancy to Bangladesh. Some, for example, point to potential links built around Thai Muslims studying in questionable Bangladeshi madrasahs (Raman 2004b; Gunaratna et al. 2005: 64–68). Elsewhere, Raman has claimed that Thais were being trained in militant tactics by groups such as HUJI, or Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Raman 2004a). Again however, these claims are little more than speculation, for there has been nothing conclusive to substantiate them. The suggestions of HUJI involvement in the southern Thai violence draw a weak and rudimentary causal relationship based primarily on the observation that the tactics used by some of the militants in southern Thailand resonated with those employed by militants in Bangladesh. The hit-and-run tactics of militants operating in southern Thailand are actually a popular insurgent tactic, as are small-scale bomb attacks; they do not on their own indicate any specific operational cooperation. Interrogations conducted by Thai security

officials of captured and suspected militants have uncovered no information pointing to a South Asian connection. Likewise, fact-finding missions conducted by both government and NGO groups for the three major violent incidences of 2004—the January 4 arms depot raid in Narathiwat, the April 28 incident, and the October 25 Tak Bai riots in which more than eighty Malay-Muslims were killed—have not uncovered any evidence of foreign involvement.

The Wahhabi connection, manifested in the presence of the Yala Islamic College and several religious schools led by members of its alumni and personified in the college's rector, Ismail Lutfi Jakapiya, has also been raised as a matter of concern by analysts suspicious of the Wahhabi-Salafi connection to Thailand's insurgency.[104] Even though that insurgency in southern Thailand has existed for many decades, it was only recently that certain quarters have attempted to depict Wahhabism as the ideological force behind this violence. In the same way that some in the West demonized with a broad brushstroke Shi'a ideology as the "enemy" of the free world and civilization following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Wahhabism today is portrayed as a fundamentally deviant and militant school of thought in Islam that cannot be reconciled with modernity

> ***Wahhabism today is portrayed as…fundamentally deviant and [incompatible] …with modernity***

and hence poses a similar threat because of its origins in Saudi Arabia and the actions of some of its adherents (including Osama bin Laden), even though on close scrutiny these purist versions of Islam differ substantially from the outlook and practices of global *jihadi* groups (ICG 2004a). Nevertheless, in the case of Thailand, a more sophisticated and contextualized appreciation of Wahhabism is required to understand fully its impact on Thai society, politics, and insurgency.

Much of the apprehension towards Lutfi stems from his known meetings with foreign militants, meetings which he himself had admitted to. In particular, Lutfi is known to have met members of JI, in particular Hambali. The fact, however, is that during these meetings Lutfi had rejected JI overtures and registered his disapproval of the terrorist organization's agenda and methods.[105] On the contrary, Lutfi sits on the National Reconciliation Committee initiated by Prime Minister Thaksin in March

2005 to make policy recommendations for the south, and he has spoken out against the violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, publicly proclaiming that "extremism is against Islamic principles. Calamity will befall the extremists."[106] The current unofficial leader of the Wahhabi community, Ismail Lutfi has emerged as a key Muslim ally of the Thaksin administration and has collaborated with the state, using his stature and ideology to undermine the religious call to arms of the Muslim insurgents in the south. Moreover, various government leaders, including the prime minister himself, have on occasion sought Lutfi's advice and endorsement of policies toward the Muslim community. There are also less evident, but equally persuasive, reasons why Lutfi is unlikely to be linked to violence in the south. Lutfi's Yala Islamic College has applied for full university status, with plans for further expansion of the curriculum into more secular fields (the college already has departments of business, information technology, and social sciences) in order to increase its reputation and enrollment. As a public figure with obvious stakes in stability in the southern region, it is highly unlikely that Ismail Lutfi would jeopardize his own interests by having his reform agenda associated with violence in the south.

A more likely channel through which violence could possibly be traced to Lutfi, though still purely speculative at this juncture, would be his Saudi-funded local charity, Islah. With a branch in each of the three Malay-Muslim provinces in the south, this charity is headed by Lutfi and disburses financial aid to needy Malay-Muslims in the region. What is conspicuous about its activities, however, is its bookkeeping. Contractual terms of disbursement entail only that recipients of aid commit to attending Lutfi's weekly *khutbah* (sermon) every Sunday.[107] Conventional bookkeeping is not practiced, as that is not considered "the way of Islam."[108] Hence, keeping track of these funds, their recipients, and the projects they are purportedly funding becomes arduous, if not impossible. These are loopholes that could quite conceivably be exploited by militants—albeit likely without Lutfi's knowledge or that of his staff.

> ***Wahhabi orthodoxy remains at the periphery of Muslim society in southern Thailand***

Finally, it should be noted too that despite Lutfi's personal popularity, Wahhabi orthodoxy remains at the periphery of Muslim society in southern Thailand, and its puritanical dogma is being actively resisted in many traditional Shafi-Sunni mosques and educational institutions.

Contents, Contexts, and Comparisons

Several scholars have juxtaposed internal conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines (Wan Kadir 1990; Syed Serajul 1998; Chalk 2001; Yegar 2002). Most of these studies, however, assume congruence and similarity and have skirted systematic analysis of fundamental differences.

There are significant *prima facie* similarities in the Islamization of resistance in southern Thailand and southern Philippines. At a rudimentary level, it seems that the logics behind the two are identical—a phenomenon of religious nationalism whereby Muslim-minorities believe, rightly or otherwise, that they possess a coherent identity centered on Islamic precepts that predate the formation of the modern nation-state and whose proponents are seeking to re-territorialize this identity. As a consequence, we witness in both instances the articulation of political agendas cloaked in Islamic vocabulary but which are very different from those of the international *jihadi* organizations to which they are alleged to be linked. In southern Thailand and southern Philippines, the objectives not only are political, they also remain distinctly local. There is no sustained articulation of global *jihad* in either the *Berjihad di Pattani* document or any of the speeches and statements by any members of the MILF leadership, including Salamat Hashim. While much has been made of the links connecting the MILF, southern Thai insurgents, and JI, these suppositions overlook glaring contradictions in the ideologies of these groups. Three in particular are worth noting. First, the JI emphasis on a regional caliphate is not echoed in southern Thailand or southern Philippines, certainly not in any highly ideological fashion. Second, the JI emphasis on *hijra* (migration) in its *Ushulul Manhaj Al Haraky Li Iqomatid Dien* ("Guidelines on Systematic Moves Towards Upholding Islam") has not been upheld in the ideology behind either the southern Thai or southern Philippine conflicts, where the objective is not migration but the exact opposite––territorialization of Islam in the local context. Third, an aspect of the JI strategy that echoes Syed Qutb has been its call for the creation of a vanguard to lead the struggle: "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity."[109] In the Thai case, neither *Berjihad di Pattani* nor the ideology of PULO, as representatives of the new and old order of militancy, respectively, make any such call, nor do they provide for the creation of such a group of "enlightened" individuals. Similarly, in the case of

the Philippines, it is clear that the MILF's strategic provision is not for a vanguard but rather for mass mobilization.

Notwithstanding these similarities, there are also substantive differences between the two cases, some of them glaring and fundamental, which warrant attention. In Thailand, the identity of the separatists remains unclear. This has undoubtedly created problems from a tactical standpoint in terms of negotiations and counterinsurgency operations. The picture in the Philippines is much clearer, and it is the MILF that stands at the forefront of the struggle for national self-determination and, barring calamity or a negotiated settlement entirely in its favor, will likely do so for the foreseeable future. Because of this, the question of potential conflict resolution processes is also quite different in the two countries. In Thailand, while several groups have attempted to communicate sketchy demands to local Malay-Muslim community leaders, that no group has emerged to claim responsibility indicates a number of things, not least of which is the likely decentralized and disparate nature of the ongoing provocations. This certainly contrasts to the Philippines, where the Manila government had engaged in negotiations with the MNLF and are in a dialogue with the MILF.

Second, there has been no systematic and sustained articulation of the Islamic blueprint for separatism in Thailand. While the *Berjihad* document could conceivably play this role, it has only surfaced recently, and its appeal within the Malay-Muslim community remains doubtful. Indeed, several Malay-Muslim religious scholars have already spoken out against the document, pointing to its numerous errors and misinterpretations, while its tendency towards mysticism, though characteristic of the folk Islam indigenous to the Malay world, has been met with caution by an increasingly Salafi-oriented Muslim population. This contrasts starkly with the MILF, which commands the support of a vast majority of Bangsamoro Muslims disillusioned with the MNLF and has not only crafted an ideology of religious nationalism but also entered into negotiation with the Philippine government about a Bangsamoro homeland, even though this ideology has, in truth, vacillated in response to shifts in the broader political and strategic environments, as this study has shown.

Third, in southern Thailand the mobilization of Islam has taken place within an insular and exclusive ethnic context where the identities of "Malay" and "Muslim" are intimately entwined, drawing attention to the importance of religion as a key marker of Malay ethnic identity. Not only

does this exclusivist separatist imagination go against the grain of Islam's universalism—making it resistant to Wahhabi penetration—it has also sewn discord within the local Muslim community that echoes the *Kaum Tua-Kaum Muda* (old generation-new generation) debates that created much dissonance in the Malay world a century ago. Once again, this contrasts markedly to the concept of Bangsamoro in Mindanao, which, if the current crop of MILF leaders is to be believed, ascribes to non-Muslims equal rights in claims of authenticity, although these same leaders do not appear prepared to extend these "rights" to the right of non-Muslim Bangsamoro to claim ownership of Moro ancestral lands. As the Bangsamoro struggle persists, Islam is becoming increasingly critical to the harmonization of differences within the Muslim communities in Mindanao that have traditionally been split along feudal and ethnic lines as well as across religious boundaries.

Fourth, the two cases differ in terms of popular support. Despite recent rumors and media reports of splits in the MILF and attempts to unseat Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim, the apparent success of the MILF general consultation last year indicates that the organization's separatist political agenda has widespread support (Lumayang 2006). It is more difficult to ascertain the extent of popular support that separatists operating in southern Thailand enjoy among the Malay-Muslim population. One possible explanation for this ambiguity is that Malay-Muslims have over the past decade engaged in what Saroja Dorairajoo has termed a "culture of negotiation" in order to reconcile with the Thai state, no doubt prompted in part by the changing circumstances of Thai politics in the 1980s and 1990s noted above.[110] Nor is violence a fair gauge of support for separatism, since the spike in violence in the south can also be attributed to individuals who have lost kin or been ill-treated in the course of interrogation and, lacking other recourse, have taken justice into their own hands. In other words, while separatists may have initiated the latest cycle of conflict in southern Thailand, the rate and manner to which violence has spiraled downwards over the past year and a half has not only caused great alarm but also raised questions as to whether violence is axiomatic of widespread sympathy and support for the insurgents or a reaction to perceived injustices sanctioned by the state. An important consideration in this respect is the continued reluctance of the defensive Thai government to placate widespread anger over the killings by security forces at Krisek and Tak Bai on April 28, 2004, and October 25, 2004,

respectively. As long as this remains the case, while images of the conflict continue to circulate in the community, these incidents will be etched into the collective memory of the Malay-Muslim population and further feed the narrative of victimization that fuels disenchantment, resentment, and ultimately, rebellion.

Fifth, while I emphasized earlier the need to be circumspect about the "successful" management of the southern Thai conflict in the 1980s and 1990s, the fact is that compared to the southern Philippines, where conflict has by and large been endemic since the 1970s even in the wake of the Tripoli Agreement, there had been some measure, however small, of reprieve.

There is one final and important difference that should be mentioned, even if it is somewhat paradoxical in the light of the previous point. While the rebels, the central government, and the international community are hopeful of a successful political resolution of the Manila-MILF conflict despite some measure of protests from certain quarters in the Christian and Lumad communities in Mindanao,[111] the same cannot be said of the situation in southern Thailand, where, as this monograph has demonstrated, the question of *who* is representing *what* for *whom* remains uncertain. Largely because of this perplexing mystery, there is a very real concern that any conflict reignited for political ends may well transform into communal struggle in the wake of policy sclerosis in Bangkok. Already, there are signs of this in terms of strained Muslim-Buddhist relations and retaliatory attacks involving mosques and temples.

Conclusion

There is no question that religion plays a very important role in the lives and identities of Malay-Muslims in Thailand and Bangsamoro Muslims in the Philippines. Enrollment in religious schools, both at home and abroad, has flourished, while personal religiosity is also decidedly manifested in manner of dress and stricter adherence to the precepts of Islam. Salafism, a return to the original ways of the Prophet and his followers, is slowly gaining a foothold across Southeast Asia and in the process is influencing how Muslims understand their place in society. Concomitantly, it should not be surprising that

> *Salafism…is slowly gaining a foothold across Southeast Asia*

social, political, and economic developments affecting these Southeast Asian Muslim communities are viewed and interpreted through the lens of religion. It is in this respect that religion is employed to reinforce apprehension toward the state, that religion provides meaning and intelligibility for Muslims attempting to navigate challenges to the faith.

religion is employed to reinforce apprehension toward the state

At the same time, Muslims in Thailand and the Philippines have also come to inhabit both local and global Islamic identities as a consequence of intersecting processes of globalization, spread of information, and Islamic resurgence, and they share in the apprehension of their co-religionists worldwide as regards the war on terror, which to many has been unfolding as a war on Islam. Indeed, this interplay between local and global interstices means that developments in the Muslim community in Thailand and the Philippines are often framed and understood in relation to socio-political currents in the broader Muslim world. What, then, is one to make of patterns and trends of continuity and change, of the interface between global and local influences, in the context of conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines?

This monograph has attempted to reflect comparatively on the nature, character, expression, and trajectory of conflict in these two Muslim-dominated regions, and I hope that it has demonstrated that attributing them to the seductive appeal of radical Islam is a gross simplification of profoundly complex and convoluted problems that involve not only religion but also politics, nationalism, history, and identity. Even though the militants have increasingly mobilized religious symbolism and employed Islamic dialectics, idioms, and metaphors to articulate their struggle, mainstream Muslim resistance does not cohere with the objectives of global *jihadi* ideology. The reference points remain primarily local and political. I have argued that the discourse and action of Islamist nationalist movements and militants in both southern Philippines and southern Thailand have been determined in overwhelming measure by the existence of both territorial and ideational boundaries. Moreover, fashioned in the crucible of resistance to domination from the centers of national political power, the narratives of separatism, liberation, and nationalism, even as they employ religious referents, have been embedded in the local fight against the "near enemy" as opposed to the global *jihad*

against the "far enemy." Furthermore, while Islam has gained greater currency in the course of conflict, nationalism remains anchored primarily on ethnic reference points (Malay-Muslim) in the case of Thailand, and has been tending towards a civic dimension insofar as the question of claims to authentic Bangsamoro identity is concerned. The Islamization of these conflicts thence, is directed not at the purification of Islam by ridding the faith of "deviants" such as is taking place in Pakistan and Iraq between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, the ideological emasculation of the liberal-democratic way of life as Syed Qutb preached, nor to the anti-West, anti-Zionist global *jihadi* ends of the neo-Salafi movement. Rather, it is directed to context-specific political objectives of self-determination, regaining lost national identities, setting right historical wrongs, and creating a sovereign nation-state. In other words, our understanding of the religious contents of these conflicts cannot be divorced from the specific historical, political and ethnic contexts to which they remain anchored, or the local identities and politics that frame them.

Endnotes

1. While this is not essentially a theoretical piece of scholarship, I would like to suggest here that the answers to these questions nevertheless speak to several broad conceptual themes. First, they address issues of continuity and change in terms of the means and ends to which militants are engaging in conflict, particularly on the matter of how religion informs political objectives. Second, they capture the intersection between global and local interstices in the way that the dynamics behind these longstanding conflicts, long believed to have distinct local roots, relate to transnational influences and processes within the global *Ummah*. Finally, conceptions of similarity and difference frame this comparative study of insurgencies among Muslim minorities navigating different social, political, and strategic contexts.

2. See also Reynaldo Ileto's account of the influence of religious literature, in this case the Pasyon, on Philippine national consciousness in Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979.

3. I was further struck, for instance, during a routine conversation during my fieldwork in Pattani in August 2004, how three middle-aged Malay-Muslim men were not only well aware of the abuses that were uncovered at Abu Ghraib but were quick to draw parallels with the plight of Malay-Muslims at the hands of the Thai authorities in southern Thailand—and from there conclude with the familiar refrain of an international conspiracy spearheaded by the Americans against Muslims throughout the world and, increasingly, in Southeast Asia as well.

4. It should be noted that while large numbers of foreign *jihadis* fought alongside the Afghan *mujahideen* rebels, it was Afghans who did the bulk of the fighting.

5. That said, I acknowledge that, in some quarters among the Bangsamoro political elite as well as the MILF, there is a belief that the United States has a historical responsibility to assist in peace negotiations with the Manila government to remedy the mistake of including the Moro heartland in the Philippines upon independence. This perhaps explains former MILF leader Salamat Hashim's regular correspondence with members of the U.S. government during the process of peace negotiation.

6. While there are numerous examples of these abuses and repression, I would like to mention only two anecdotes that illustrate perceptions of marginalization. In the case of southern Thailand, as a result of the Tak Bai incident of October 25, 2004, where more than eighty Malay-Muslim protesters were killed (mostly through asphyxiation) while being transported to an army camp for questioning, two young Ustaz (religious teachers) expressed to me during an interview that they were convinced that Malay-Muslims would never get recourse to justice in Thailand and said that they were prepared to fight the state if necessary, the only obstacle being the difficulty of obtaining firearms. Insofar as southern Philippines is concerned, observers of the situation are well aware of the dehumanizing attitudes that many Philippine security officials, particularly those posted in the south, have of Moros. In fact, during a recent security and terrorism conference in Kuala Lumpur, a senior official from the Philippine army even opined publicly that Moros should basically be exterminated because they are all likely to be terrorists.

7. It was understood that among Christian Filipinos the term *Moro* was a pejorative designation used in folk theater, where "moro-moro" were depicted as savage and treacherous pirates who fought against Christians.

8. Indeed, non-Muslim voices also have representation in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's *Majlis al-Shura* (consultative assembly), which serves as an intermediary between the organization's legislative and executive branches. Interview with senior MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 16, 2005.

9. Nur Misuari was the founding leader of the MNLF.

10. Interview with senior MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 16, 2005.

11. Anthony Davis, "Rebels Without a Pause," *Asiaweek*, April 3, 1998.

12. Interview with MILF member, Cotabato City, July 15, 2005.

13. While I recognize the plurality of voices representing the Bangsamoro cause (MNLF, ASG, National Democratic Front, various muftis), I limit my discussion here mainly to the MILF because it is to my mind currently the largest and best organized of the resistance groups operating in southern Philippines.

14. Rigoberto Tiglao, "Peace in His Time," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 5, 1996, 25.

15. I was informed by a Muslim scholar that the MILF Central Committee, which has about twenty members, has a roughly equal breakdown of leaders with religious and secular educational backgrounds. The interview was conducted in Manila, July 20, 2005.

16. The other three points were to strengthen (1) the military, (2) the organization, and (3) self-reliance.

17. Interview with senior MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 16, 2005.

18. Interview with MILF militiaman, Cotabato City, July 14, 2005.

19. Ibid.

20. Anthony Davis, "Rebels Without a Pause," *Asiaweek*, April 3, 1998.

21. Interview with official from Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, Cotabato City, July 15, 2005. The official did emphasize that they preferred to use legal means and not armed rebellion. He also noted that there are now 123 groups under its umbrella leadership and that funding for the organization comes from the Katuntaya Foundation as well as several European NGOs. As to his sympathy towards the MILF (as opposed to the MNLF and the National Democratic Front), this was explicitly mentioned during the course of the interview.

22. This view was expressed by several members of the MILF, including Central Committee members, during the course of my fieldwork in Cotabato in July 2005.

23. "The Muslim Separatist Rebel Wants the East Timor Formula," *Asiaweek*, March 31, 2000.

24. To justify this, Salamat cited the Quran, Surah 2:193 and 4:74.

25. Salamat Hashim, "Id el Fitr Message to the Bangsamoro Nation," Mindanao, December 16, 2001.

26. Salamat Hashim, "Either you are with Allah, or with the enemies of Allah," address delivered at the Bangsamoro Youth National Peace Summit, Cotabato City, October 21, 2001.

27. For a detailed treatment of the Abu Sayyaf Group, see Mark Turner, "Terrorism and Secession in the Southern Philippines: The Rise of the Abu Sayyaf," *Contemporary Southeast Asia,* vol. 17, no. 1, 1995.

28. Julkipli M. Wadi, "State, Religion, and Post-Nationalism in the Philippines," paper presented at the International Conference on "State, Religion and Post-Nationalism: The Southeast Asian Experience," University of Malaya, Malaysia, February 23–24, 2001, 9.

29. "MILF Leader to Nida'ul Islam," April-May 1998. Available at www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/ph2.htm.

30. Interview with MILF member, Cotabato City, July 14, 2005; interview with MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 2005.

31. Interview with MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 15, 2005. How exactly this would be done while preserving "authentic" indigenous identity was, however, not explained. Moreover, it remains unclear as to whether this allows for legitimate claims to ancestral lands within Muslim-majority territories on the part of non-Muslims and Lumads, especially since the latter were vassals of Moro nobility in the past.

32. Interview with senior MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 16, 2005.

33. Interview with MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 15, 2005. Pressed for a specific number, some of the officials would only divulge that they were "in the hundreds" and not "thousands."

34. See Thomas M. McKenna, "Islamic Education in the Philippines: An Analysis of Trends" in National Bureau of Asian Research, *Southeast Asia Education Survey.* Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, June 2005.

35. Salamat Hashim spent most of the 1970s abroad, only returning to the Philippines in 1986. During this period, he spent substantial periods of time in Libya, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, among other Muslim countries.

36. Salamat Hashim, "State of the Bangsamoro Struggle for Independence Address," address delivered at MILF's 17th General Assembly, Camp Abubakre As-Siddique, November 13, 2001.

37. Salamat Hashim, "'Id el Fitr Message to the Bangsamoro Nation," Mindanao, December 16, 2001.

38. Interview with a MILF member, Cotabato City, July 15, 2005. He was articulating the MILF position that unless the Bangsamoro are prepared to fight for the cause of Islam, they will be subdued by foreign powers like their Muslim brethren in these other places.

39. Interview with a Muslim scholar, Manila, July 20, 2005. Even so, it is unclear how many volunteered or even actually departed for Afghanistan.

40. The Bangsamoro also joined in widespread civil society protests organized in Manila. Interview with a Muslim scholar, Manila, July 20, 2005.

41. Marco Garrido, "Philippines: Blurring the boundaries of terror," *Asia Times*, October 30, 2003.

42. Salamat Hashim, letter to George W. Bush, May 20, 2003. The letter was authenticated with Assistant Secretary James Kelly's response, dated June 18, 2003. Both letters are in the author's possession, obtained from MILF sources.

43. Indeed, one of the main reasons for the split in the MNLF, which led to the formation of the MILF, was precisely the sense among those who started the new group in the 1970s that the MNLF was wavering in its objective of immediate independence. No doubt the goal of eventual independence remains, but the objective is no longer immediate.

44. Jose F. Lacaba, "The Bangsamoro Agenda," *Midweek*, December 10, 1986.

45. "AFP to crush Abu before yearend." *The Philippine Star*, July 21, 2005; "MILF, military rescue hostages," *The Manila Times*, December 8, 2005.

46. Conversations with Rohan Gunaratna, Singapore, August 3, 2005.

47. Edith Regalado, "Despite turmoil, prospects for peace with MILF remain bright," *The Philippine Star*, July 15, 2005. One should note, however, that negotiations with the *Jahiliyyah* were permitted even by Sayyid Qutb, widely seen as the father of Islamic radicalism whose ideas, as noted earlier, exercised a profound influence on Salamat Hashim. See Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*. New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2002, 20–21.

48. Interview with senior MILF officials, Cotabato City, July 16, 2005. In recently concluded negotiations, an initial proposal for ancestral domains was agreed to cover five Muslim autonomous provinces of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao, along with areas in Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Sarangani, all of which have large Muslim communities. See "MILF raring to talk peace," *The Manila Times*, November 9, 2005. But it is unclear if the MILF definition of ancestral lands includes camps that were overrun by the ARP in 2000.

49. One should note, though, that about a century ago the population of Satun was almost entirely ethnic Malay. Conversation with Thomas Parks of Johns Hopkins University in Singapore, August 12, 2005.

50. This was a concession in exchange for Bangkok to abandon claims to the northern Malay states of Kedah, Perlis, and Kelantan.

51. For instance, Andrew Holt, "Thailand's Troubled Border: Islamic Insurgency or Criminal Playground?" *Terrorism Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), vol. II:10, May 20, 2004. Holt writes, "The Thai provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and Satun have long acted as a zone of Islamist discontent and violence."

52. These sentiments were expressed to me by a wide spectrum of Malay society, including religious leaders, teachers, politicians as well as academics and researchers over the course of several visits to southern Thailand over 2004 and 2005.

53. He continues to be seen as the "heart and soul" of the Malay-Muslim people. See Don Pathan, "A Short History of Southern Sultanates," *The Nation*, April 3, 2002.

54. Thanet Aphornsuvan, *Origins of Malay Muslim "Separatism" in Southern Thailand*. Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series No. 32. Singapore: National University of Singapore, October 2004, 13–14.

55. In fact, by the time Haji Sulong began to popularize his ideals in the late 1920s, the aristocratic elite had already either been coopted into the Thai parliamentary system with positions of nominal power or fled to British Malaya in the hope that pressure could be put on London to intervene on their behalf to redraw the boundaries of southern Thailand—if not retreated from the political scene altogether.

56. See Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Islamic Education in Thailand: Negotiating Islam, Identity, and Modernity" in National Bureau of Asian Research, *Southeast Asia Education Survey*. Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, June 2005.

57. Discussion with Thai military intelligence officials, Singapore, December 23, 2004.

58. Interview with Thai Special Branch, Bangkok, July 13, 2005.

59. Anthony Davis, "Thailand faces up to southern extremist threat," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 1, 2003.

60. "TRT MPs propose shutting down *Pondok* schools," *The Nation*, September 14, 2005.

61. Interview with Fourth Army intelligence, Pattani, August 15, 2004.

62. These four are Yusof Waeduramae (former teacher and supervisor at Tham Witthaya, alleged to be chief of BRN military affairs), Mohammad Kanafi Doleh (teacher at Satri Tham Witthaya girls' school), Ahama Bula (assistant headmaster of Tham Witthaya), and Abdul Razak Doloh (teacher at Tham Witthaya). The fifth suspect is Sapaeing Basoe (headmaster of Tham Witthaya and suspected head of BRN-Coordinate). Aside from these five, a list of twenty-one suspected leaders of the insurgency has been publicized by the Thai authorities.

63. E-mail interview with a Thai media source, November 12, 2005. The Thai journalist obtained this information from a Wahhabi-linked Tok Guru (teacher) working in Thammachat Witthaya.

64. Pusaka is an abbreviation of *Pusat Persatuan Tadika Narathiwat* or the Center for the Narathiwat Kindergarten Associations.

65. Wadah is a faction formed by Muslim members of parliament in Thailand.

66. "TRT MPs fund body linked to militants," *The Nation*, April 2, 2004; "Shadowy group behind violence," *Straits Times*, May 1, 2004.

67. Interview with Thai military intelligence, Bangkok, January 24, 2005.

68. Studying a survey of more than thirty Islamic schools and more than one hundred Islamic teachers undertaken for another research project, my research assistant noted that in no instance was the ongoing violence in southern Thailand explained in class-

rooms as *jihad qital* (defensive jihad). In fact, the vast majority refused to acknowledge any religious content to the violence whatsoever.

69. I was informed of this peculiar development by a journalist contact in Singapore (March 22, 2005) very familiar with the southern Thailand situation who had discovered this during a trip to Bandung, Indonesia.

70. This was intimated to me by three religious teachers, including the secretary-general of the Islamic Private School Association, during the course of an interview in Pattani on January 21, 2005.

71. "Mystery Group Runs Insurgency in Thai South," *Straits Times*, July 25, 2005. The DPP's links to other groups remains unclear.

72. Telephone interview with Wan Kadir Che Man, September 20, 2005.

73. Ibid.

74. Consider, for example, the coordinated attacks of April 28, 2004, which will be discussed later. The popular perception was that most of the militants were teens when in fact of the more than a hundred militants killed, only two were teenagers, aged 16 and 17. The rest of the militants were in their thirties. See "Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Commission on the Krue Se Incident," released April 24, 2005.

75. Interview with a Malay-Muslim senator, Pattani, December 19, 2004; interview with Thai military intelligence, Bangkok, July 13, 2005; Telephone interview with Wan Kadir Che Man, September 20, 2005.

76. I was informed that many of these youths had left these instructions in the form of notes to their family members before they departed for the mosque the night before. Interview with Ahmad Somboon Bualuang, Pattani, August 15, 2004. This was confirmed by Chaiwat Satha-Anand in Bangkok, August 17, 2004. I was also informed that in Narathiwat province there are tombstones with the word "*Shahid*" written on them, where the bodies were buried after April 28, 2004.

77. "Killings at Pattani's Krue Se Mosque and a Cover Up Enquiry," www.countercurrents.org/hr-achr060504.htm, May 6, 2004.

78. "The (un)making of a militant," *New Straits Times*, September 12, 2005.

79. Thai media reported a group by the name of *Talekat Hikmahtullah Abadan* (Direction from God toward Invinsibility), but I have not been able to confirm the existence of such a group. See "Imam admits contact with separatists," *The Nation*, September 1, 2004.

80. Malay peasants had clashed with police forces of the Phibun Songgkram government in Kampung Dusun Nyor in the Rang-ae district of Narathiwat in violence, allegedly resulting in 400 Malay-Muslim and thirty police deaths. This was not the only violence associated with April 28. On April 29, 1980, a noodle shop in Pattani was bombed, resulting in fourteen injuries. On April 28, 2003, a guerrilla unit armed with automatic rifles raided an armory of Thaksin Pattana 2 outpost in Narathiwat's Sukhirin district at 2:30 a.m., killing four soldiers before stealing more than thirty machine guns. Half an hour later, an outpost in Tharn Toh district, Yala, was raided, with twenty more guns stolen and many soldiers wounded.

81. Events since April 28 give further credence to concerns that the violence in the south is rapidly taking on a religious flavor. In July, three Buddhist temples in the south were desecrated in attacks that immediately reminded Thailand's Buddhist majority of the demolition of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban in February 2001.

82. It seems very likely that, with this failed attempt at inciting a popular uprising, the group may have exhausted their capabilities, resources, and manpower.

83. The author of *Berjihad di Pattani* is believed to be a Kelantan native who has gone by the aliases of Poh Su, Poh Su Ismail, and Ismail Jaafar.

84. *Berjihad Di Pattani*, personal copy, August 10, 2002, 2.

85. Ibid., p.5.

86. Ibid. The author cites *Al-I-Imran* 3:169 to substantiate this call, and *Hadith Shaheeh Muslim*, book 1, 65 Hadith 113 to justify the use of violence.

87. Ibid., 8.

88. Ibid., p.9.

89. See "Southern Front," *Time*, October 11, 2004. Needless to say, the claims do not appear to be accurate according to my copy of *Berjihad di Pattani*.

90. *Berjihad*, 24.

91. As the author wrote, "Allah not only forbids us from electing the hypocrites as leaders, but Allah forbids the believers from offering prayers for the dead hypocrites and from standing at their graces to offer prayer." Ibid., p. 9.

92. This view was shared by Malay-Muslim academics as well as religious teachers from Pattani and Yala during the course of fieldwork interviews conducted in January 2005.

93. "Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Commission on the Krue Se Incident," released April 24, 2005.

94. "Imam admits to contact with separatists," *The Nation*, September 1, 2004.

95. For instance, at one point the author writes: "We Muslims, who believe in Allah and the Prophet, never rely on modern weapons. It is an obligation for us to hope for Allah's help. For He is the only One who has weapons that are most powerful and have the greatest capabilities." Later, he adds, "If Allah is willing, a rain of bullets could not harm us." See *Berjihad*, 7, 17.

96. This was verified during interrogations of some suspected to be involved with the April 28 militants. See "Imam admits to contact with separatists," *The Nation*, September 1, 2004. This was also confirmed in my interview with military intelligence officials in Bangkok on July 13, 2005; they expressed that the April 28 event "was not linked to the central leadership of the insurgency."

97. After a lengthy hiatus from southern Thai resistance activity, PULO has resurfaced on the radar when it was suspected of masterminding the exodus of 131 Malay-Muslims from Narathiwat to Kelantan in a move that has created problems for relations with Malaysia. See "Muslims flight to Malaysia 'planned,'" *Straits Times*, September 9, 2005.

98. Similar means of propaganda have resurfaced in recent times in the form of pamphlets and flyers threatening Muslims with harm if they conduct business transactions on Thursdays and Fridays.

99. Interview with a Malaysian Special Branch officer, Kuala Lumpur, August 11, 2004.

100. See Farish Noor's interview with Wan Kadir Che Man on June 16, 2005. Available at www.brandmalaysia.com/movabletype/archives/2005/06/dr_farish_a_noo.html.

101. Telephone interview with a former separatist leader, August 18, 2005.

102. Conversation with a group of Malay-Muslim men, Pattani, August 17, 2004.

103. Interview with Thai military intelligence, Bangkok, January 24, 2005.

104. "Thailand's Muslim Insurgency has 'Wahhabi' Ties," *The Daily Star*, May 6, 2004.

105. Interview with Thai military intelligence, Bangkok, January 24, 2005; interview with Ismail Lutfi, Pattani, January 14, 2006.

106. "Islamic rector calls for violence to cease," *The Nation*, June 2, 2004.

107. Interview with an independent Malay-Muslim researcher, Yala, January 18, 2005.

108. This perspective was shared by my Malay-Muslim researcher in an e-mail interview, February 13, 2005.

109. "Ushulul Manhaj Li Iqomatid Dien" in *Pedoman Umum Perjuangan Al-Jamaah Al-Islamiyah (General Guidelines of Jemaah Islamiyah's Struggle PUPJI),* 7.

110. Saroja Dorairajoo, *From Mecca to Yala: Negotiating Islam in Present-Day Southern Thailand.* Paper delivered at the symposium "Islam in Southeast Asia and China: Regional Faithlines and Faultlines in the Global Ummah," Hong Kong, November 28–December 1, 2002.

111. "MILF raring to talk peace," *The Manila Times,* November 9, 2005.

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This study analyzes the ongoing conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines between indigenous Muslim minorities and their respective central governments. In particular, it investigates and interrogates the ideological context and content of conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines insofar as they pertain to Islam and radicalism in order to assess the extent to which these conflicts have taken on a greater religious character and the implications this might have on our understanding of them. In the main, the monograph argues that while conflicts in southern Thailand and southern Philippines have taken on religious hues as a consequence of both local and external factors, on present evidence they share little with broader radical global Islamist and Jihadist ideologies and movements, and their contents and contexts remain primarily political, reflected in the key objective of some measure of self-determination, and local, in terms of the territorial and ideational boundaries of activism and agitation. Furthermore, though both conflicts appear on the surface to be driven by similar dynamics and mirror each other, they are different in several fundamental ways.

About the Author

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