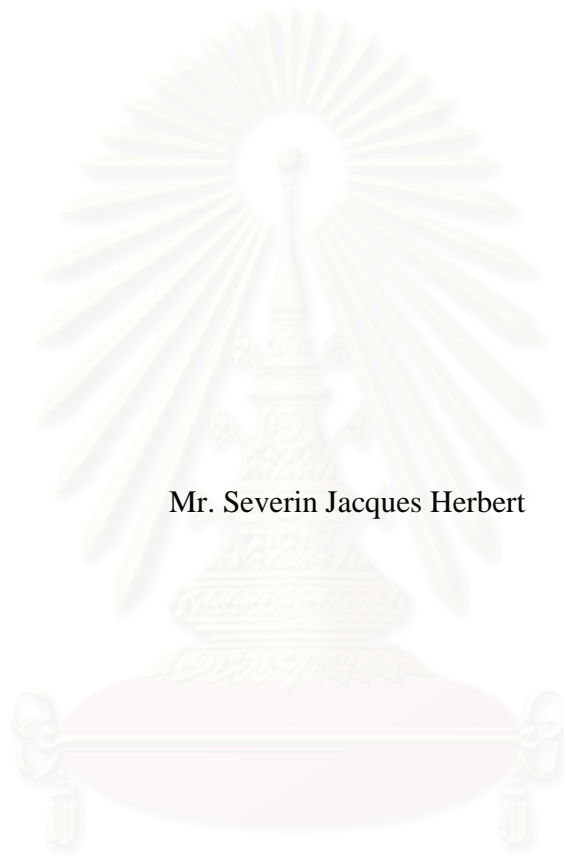


HOW THAKSIN AND THAI RAK THAI PARTY RE-IGNITED
THE VIOLENCE IN THE THAI SOUTH



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สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Southeast Asian Studies

(Interdisciplinary Program)

Graduate School

Chulalongkorn University

Academic Year 2006

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ทักษิณและพรรคไทยรักไทยสร้างความรุนแรงขึ้นมาใหม่ในภาคใต้ของไทยได้อย่างไร



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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา (สหสาขาวิชา)

บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ปีการศึกษา 2549

ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

เชวาริน จาก เฮอริเบิร์ต : ทักษิณและพรรคไทยรักไทยสร้างความรุนแรงขึ้นมาใหม่ในภาคใต้
ของไทยได้อย่างไร (HOW THAKSIN AND THAI RAK THAI PARTY RE-IGNITED THE
VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH) อ.ที่ปรึกษา: นายอุกฤษฏ์ ปัทมานันท์, 97 หน้า

ในภาคใต้ของประเทศไทย มีการต่อต้านต่อวิถีปกครองที่มีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุขมาช้านาน ซึ่งการ
ต่อต้านนี้ได้รวมไปถึงการต่อต้านรัฐบาลไทยเช่นกัน ทั้งนี้ ในช่วงศตวรรษที่ 14 บัตตานียังถือเป็นรัฐหนึ่งของ
อาณาจักร มาเลย์-มุสลิม ที่รุ่งเรือง และขึ้นชื่อว่าเป็นศูนย์กลางการค้าของกลุ่มคนมากมาย โดยเป็นเวลากหลาย
ทศวรรษที่ชาวมาเลย์-มุสลิมได้พัฒนาวัฒนธรรมต่างๆขึ้นมา แต่วัฒนธรรมนี้มิได้มีความเหมือนวัฒนธรรมของ
ประเทศไทยแต่อย่างใด จึงทำให้พระมหากษัตริย์หลายพระองค์ได้ทรงเพียรพยายามที่จะยึดครองรัฐนี้ แต่ก็ไม่ประสบ
ผลสำเร็จ จนกระทั่งนายพลในองสูลต่านนาม นายจันทร์ทองได้หักหลังองสูลต่าน โดยช่วยให้พระบาทสมเด็จพระ
พุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลกมหาราชทรงสามารถยึดครองอิสรภาพ และราชบัลลังก์ได้สำเร็จ

ในปี ค.ศ. 1909 ภายหลังจากการแบ่งแยกรัฐเคดะห์ของสหราชอาณาจักร รัฐปัตตานีได้เปลี่ยนเป็นจังหวัด
ปัตตานีและถูกปกครองโดยรัฐบาลไทย หลังยุคอาณานิคมในช่วงกลางศตวรรษที่ 21 ชาวมาเลย์-มุสลิมได้รับ
ผลกระทบจากการกดขี่ โดยที่วัฒนธรรมอันเก่าแก่ของตนได้ถูกลดความสำคัญ ภาษา, การแต่งกาย และแม้กระทั่งชื่อ
ของตนก็ถูกห้ามไม่ให้ใช้ในสถานที่ราชการ การกระทำเหล่านั้นนำมาสู่การปลุกระดมชาวมาเลย์-มุสลิมโดยลัทธิ
คอมมิวนิสต์ ให้ลุกขึ้นมาหยิบอาวุธและต่อต้านการปกครองของรัฐบาลไทย อย่างไรก็ตาม ชนกลุ่มนี้ได้เจอกับ
ปัญหาที่ชาวมาเลย์-มุสลิมส่วนใหญ่ไม่เห็นด้วยกับการกระทำที่รุนแรง เนื่องจากคนส่วนใหญ่มีความสุขที่จะอยู่อย่าง
สงบกับชาวไทยพุทธ

จากปี ค.ศ. 1980 เป็นต้นมา การแพร่ขยายของระบอบประชาธิปไตยและความมั่นคงของสังคม ได้ทำให้
คณะแบ่งแยกดินแดนลอบทำทลาง จนกระทั่งค.ศ. 2004 ได้มีการบุกคั้นทำลายค่ายทหารที่วัดกรูเซอ ส่งผลให้ชาว
มุสลิมหลายคนถูกสังหาร การโจมตีครั้งนั้นได้ส่งผลผลักดันให้กลุ่มแบ่งแยกดินแดนเริ่มเคลื่อนไหวอีกครั้ง วิทยานิพนธ์
ฉบับนี้ได้วิเคราะห์ถึงเหตุผล รากฐาน การเป็นมาของความขัดแย้งระหว่างเชื้อชาติ และการแพร่กระจายของศาสนา
อิสลาม อย่างไรก็ตาม เนื้อหาหลัก คือการถกเถียงเรื่องนโยบาย และวิธีบริหารประเทศของพันตำรวจโท ทักษิณ ชิน
วัตร และพรรคไทยรักไทย ซึ่งเป็นเหตุผลที่ทำให้สถานการณ์ใน 3 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ปะทุขึ้นมาอีกครั้ง

ด้วยชั้นเชิงแนวรุกของทักษิณ ที่จะควบคุมทุกภูมิภาค และทุกระดับของการเมือง บวกกับการขาดความ
เข้าใจของวัฒนธรรม และขอบเขตของการปกครองในภูมิภาค 3 ชายแดนภาคใต้ ซึ่งนำไปสู่ความรุนแรงของภาคใต้
ในปัจจุบัน

สาขาวิชา: เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

ปีการศึกษา: 2549

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต

ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา.....

4789514820: MAJOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

KEY WORDS: THAKSIN AND THAI RAK THAI/VIOLENCE/THAI SOUTH
SEVERIN HERBERT: HOW THAKSIN AND THAI RAK THAI PARTY
RE-IGNITED THE VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH. THESIS ADVISOR:
MR. UKRIST PATHAMANAND, 97 pp.

Southern Thailand has longed resisted the rule of central Siamese Kings and then governments. The Kingdom of Pattani, established as a Malay-Muslim kingdom in the late 14th century was both prosperous and known to the western world as a trading post of some repute. For centuries, the Malay-Muslims prospered and evolved a culture and traditions which were separate from those of their Siamese neighbours to the north. Various Kings of Siam attempted to subjugate the Kingdom but to no avail. It took the treachery of Nai Chanthong one of the Chiefs of the Sultan to bring the kingdom to the Siamese King Rama I and it lost both its independence and its monarchy. In 1909, after the British portioning of Kedah and the sultanate of Patani was granted to Bangkok to rule. As a part of the post-colonial wave of nationalism that swept Southeast Asia in the middle part of the twentieth century, the Malay-Muslim community suffered the indignity of having many of its symbols of its culture and way of life – such as dress, language and names – relegated to a minority status, banned as they were in government institutions. As a result of this state led this perceived internal colonialism many Malay-Muslims took up arms against the central Thai governments, aided by the Communist movement of the time. This armed separatist struggle, however, was waged only by a minority of the Malay-Muslims, the majority continuing to live peacefully with their Chinese and Thai Buddhist neighbours.

From the 1980's onwards, the spread of democracy and civil society rather took away the radical elements of the south and the separatist movement became quiet until 2004 When a raid on an army camp and a pitch battle at the symbolic Kru Ze temple which ended with the deaths of many Muslims. The attacks signaled the resurgence of the separatist movement. This paper explores the reasons why, including the roots of ethnic conflicts and the spread of radical Islam. However, its main premise is to argue that the policies and management style of Thaksin Shinawatra and the Thai Rak Thai party were the real reason why this peaceful but potentially explosive region decided once more to take up arms.

Thaksin's aggressive stance, his desire to control all regions and all levels of politics, his lack of understanding of the culture and political landscape of the South all led to the violence which the South is presently witnessing.

Field of Studies Southeast Asian Studies
Academic Year 2006

Student's signature
Advisor's signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks and deep gratitude to Mr. Ukrist Pathmanand, my academic advisor, for his useful advice, guidance and assistance during the period of my study. Despite his very busy life he was able to find time for my many drafts, many mistakes and many panic-stricken e-mails.

My heartfelt thanks also go to the Dr. Mark Hensman and Harrow International School for both affording me the time in my first year of study as well as supporting me financially throughout my period of study.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond, and the other lecturers whose courses helped build up my knowledge of the Southeast Asian region

I am also indebted to all the staff in the Southeast Asian Studies and Thai Studies Centers, Chulalongkorn University, many of whom I have outlasted, for their administrative assistance. In particular Khun Panya for his help with me administrative matters and the submission of this thesis.

I also owe debts to my classmates in the Southeast Asian Studies Program, even the new ones with whom I have not studied, for their direct and indirect assistance .

Finally, I am especially thankful to my parents and my friends both here in Thailand and around the world, especially Maggie, Denry, Sarah M and the Rock, who have never stopped listening And Maggie – who had to cope with nights in front of the television rather than going out as I tried to get this thesis finished.

Thanks to you all – this is dedicated to all of you.

CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract (In Thai).....	iv
Abstract (In English).....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Contents.....	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Argument.....	2
1.3 Notes on spelling.....	3
1.4 Methodology and Sources.....	3
1.5 Thesis Structure.....	4
CHAPTER II WHO IS THAKSIN SHINAWATRA AND WHO ARE THAI RAK THAI?.....	6
2.1 Rationale.....	6
2.2 What Do They Want For You.....	6
2.3 Thaksinomics: ‘a period of economic recovery and reconstruction.....	7
2.4 CEO Management.....	9
2.5 Economic Policies.....	11
2.6 Social Agenda: ‘What do the people want? They want good management.’.....	14
2.7 The War on Drugs.....	17
2.8 ‘...to be a good leader you have to be a master story teller’.....	20

	Page
2.9 Conclusion to Chapter 2.....	23
CHAPTER III THE NATURE OF SOUTHERN THAI POLITICS.....	27
3.1 The Distinctive Character of Southern Politics.....	27
3.2 Masculinity and Southern Politics.....	28
3.3 Prem and the Network Monarchy.....	31
3.4 Thaksin's Approach.....	34
3.5 Conclusion to Chapter 3.....	37
CHAPTER IV POSSIBLE CAUSES OF SOUTHERN VIOLENCE.....	38
4.1 Relations Between Malay-Muslims and Central Government.....	38
4.2 Theories of Ethnic Conflicts.....	40
4.2.1 Structural Factors.....	42
4.2.2 Possible Structural Causes I: Absolute and Economic Deprivation.....	42
4.2.3 Possible Structural Causes II: Social Discrimination and Political Subordination.....	45
4.3 The Rise of Islam	48
4.3.1 Post 9/11 and the Muslim World.....	50
4.3.2 Separatism, Jihad and Global Insurgency.....	53
4.3.3 Recruitment.....	56
4.3.4 Conclusion to Chapter 4.....	58

	Page
CHAPTER V MISMANAGEMENT.....	60
5.1 Thaksin Versus King.....	60
5.2 Thaksin's Tactics.....	60
5.3 The SBPAC.....	62
5.4 9/11 and the Aftermath.....	64
5.5 Crisis Management – Kru Ze and Tak Bai.....	70
5.6 Musical Chairs.....	74
5.7 Ideas for Reconciliation: Paying Lip Service to Chaturon Chaiseang and the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC).....	77
5.8 Conclusion to Chapter V.....	86
 CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION: COUNTRIES ARE NOT COMPANIES.....	 89
6.1 After Thaksin.....	89
6.2 Leadership Style.....	90
6.3 Dealing With Society.....	91
6.4 Failure To Understand.....	93
 REFERENCES.....	 94
 BIOGRAPHY.....	 97

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

I don't know who is the secessionist and who is the terrorist. I only know that our lives are harder this year.¹

I am not afraid of any change.²

Duncan McCargo sums up correctly in the opening statement of *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence*, the paradox that is the conflict of southern Thailand:

What lies behind the recent violence in the Thai south? This apparently simple question is surprisingly difficult to answer.³

It is difficult to answer for two reasons. The first is that no one as yet has identified the nature of the violence or of the perpetrators of the crimes. The proximity of the re-ignition of the violence to 9/11 led many, understandably but not necessarily correctly, to the assumption that these were the actions of Muslim terrorists. The subsequent explosions in Bali and the arrest of a high profile Al-Qaeda terrorist in Thailand did little to dissipate that idea. However, when further examined the assumptions made by some Singaporean based professors were more fad than fact. The violence in the South has never been led by a Muslim insurgency but always as a result of ideas and moves made by the central authorities. Both the

¹ Deramae, local leader of Mayung Village, Bacho District, cited in *Violence in the Mist*, p.14.

² Governor Prinya, Narathiwat Province, speaking on Thaksin's urging governors to be more like CEO's. Cited *ibid*

³ McCargo, *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence*, p.3.

official history of Patani told in *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*⁴ and the excellent book by Michel Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*⁵, tell of a people who resisted Siamese kings wishing to make them into a vassal state or Thai prime ministers such as Phibun Songkram who attempted to squash their indigenous and keenly felt cultural and religious identity. Their resistance has always taken on a different manifestation. In the 1960's and 70's, when the violence was at its zenith in the 20th century, the violence was linked to communist insurgency. Thirty years on it is another external influence, fundamentalist Islam, which is seen as the driving force. And always, the central powers give the same reason for the violence – separatism. The Muslims of the South, claims many a Thai leader, want a separate Patani state. This could have certainly been the argument when in 1909, Kelantan was annexed by the British into Malaysia. However, in the present day, the south has proved itself to be loyal and in love with its King, respectful and mindful of other religions and non Muslim groups (whether they be Buddhist or Chinese immigrants) and has one of the best voting records in elections in the whole country. The people of the border states participate wholly in the centrally constructed idea of Thailand – king, nation, religion – and in the democratic process. Not the actions of a people wishing to be part of a separate state.

So, we must return to the first point made that when provoked, when they feel threatened, the South reacts and reacts violently. The reason for this present out of ethnic conflict is, I believe, a simple one – Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai Rak Thai party and their philosophy of being able to “manage” a country just like a business.

1.2 Argument

The aim of the thesis is to explore the philosophy and approach of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the Thai Rak Thai party to governing the country and, in particular, their ideas and decisions concerning the border regions of Southern Thailand. It will discuss how the Prime Minister's CEO approach to government, although arguably successful with the economy, was unsuccessful when trying to manage social problems and disorder. The paper will show how his desire to have no

⁴ *History of the Malay Kingdom Of Patani* by Ibrahim Syukri

⁵ translated by Michael Smithies

opposition at all led to a colouring of Thaksin's judgement and that of his party in such a way that rather than continue the peace that had existed in the South for sometime they re-ignited the violence. The paper will go on to discuss how Thaksin demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of the character of the Southern Muslim people, their ways of voting and the political atmosphere and machinery of the region and that this misunderstanding also led to the violence that has torn the region apart since 2002.

1.3 Notes on spelling

Many of the names of places, people or events are transliterations from the original Thai, Yawi or Arabic languages. As a result, the spelling of names, people and events does change depending on the sources used. For example, the temple of Kru Ze can also be spelt Kru Se depending on the writer's preference. I have, therefore, decided to not change the spelling if directly quoting from a source but have standardised certain names in the main body of the text. Each decision was based on which spelling the majority of writers chose to use.

In the case of Patani, I have chosen to spell the word in its original transliterated state from the Yawi⁶, rather than from the modern Thai spelling, which is Pattani. The reasons for my choice are simply that the original name dates back so far that it seemed reasonable to use the original and local spelling of the word rather than its more modern and counterpart.

1.4 Methodology and Sources

As a result of the contemporary nature of the troubles, and the lack of surety as to who is behind the violence being perpetrated, sources for this thesis all suffered from the same problem – they were polemic. The books which were published immediately following the September 11th attack in New York and the Bali bombing focused on the threat of a pan-Islamic terrorism. Suddenly, every small separatist movement in Southeast Asia, from the Aceh freedom fighters to the Moro Muslims in the Philippines were working together or had been infiltrated by Al-Qaeda. Books

⁶ for a full account of the history of Patani, read Sykuri, I. (pseudonym) *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani (The Malay Kingdom of Patani)*

about the change in the nature of Islam proliferated book shops, and writers warned of the dangers that Southeast faced if its ASEAN leaders did not act swiftly or decisively. Anyone who was a Muslim or acted in the name of Islam was labelled as a potential terrorist with *jihad* in his heart. Within this environment of rising tensions, where countries were either with the US or against them, small separatist movements were engulfed in the same labelling process so that they're members suddenly became terrorist cells for larger organisations such as Al-Quaeda or regions became breeding grounds for training or sources of potential attacks. Unsurprisingly, the main body of this work came from a threatened West, or from eastern writers educated in the West.

When the expected Al-Quaeda attacks did not come in Southeast Asia, commentators looked elsewhere. Thai academics took a more regionalistic look at the problem, separated it from events outside the world and politicised it more. Thaksin Shinawatra, not a favourite of the academic world in Thailand, came to be the great perpetrators of the problems in the south. Again, however, these articles and books arguably were biased against a leader who had scorned a generation of bright academics and who perhaps looked at the problems in the South as a way of attacking a popular Prime Minister, at least with the electorate.

The sources, then, are polemic and scattered. I have tried to give as wide a range of opinions from both poles in order to balance the thesis but cannot hide the fact that I am biased towards the more localised arguments of Thai academics and those foreign academics who have expertise in the region and Thai politics.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The opening chapter will deal with a general overview of TRT and its policies both economic and social. The chapter will seek to show how Thaksin was part of the new breed of politician seen in particular in the west. One who used the media and business ties to secure and maintain his position – a type of political cronyism – much like his Italian counterpart Silvio Berlusconi. It will explore how Thaksin created several personas of himself – be it the paternal leader or the corporate CEO – using the media, management of problems or policies to help the economy. It will attempt to show that there was a lack of commitment to social policies or even a desire to produce policies whose focus is not economic. It will also try to paint a picture of a man who believed that his will was to be followed unquestioningly even if that meant

that civil society would have to sacrifice some of its basic rights. Chapter 2 will examine the political culture of the region and how Thaksin and TRT misjudged how the South operates as both a cultural and political entity and how this cost them elections and further isolated the South.

Chapter 3 will focus on the different roots of ethnic conflict by exploring possible structural causes for the recent violence in the south including economy, education and employment. Some of this examination will also draw parallels with other areas of the world which have experienced similar ethnic conflict, such as Northern Ireland. The chapter will also examine the growth of Islamism and Islamic education and explore the claims made by many that since 9/11, Southeast Asia and Southern Thailand have become linked to other pan Islamic terrorist movements.

Chapter 4 will go on to explore how, within the environments discussed in the previous chapters, Thaksin's style of leadership bludgeoned the delicate balance which had been maintained in the southern region for over twenty years. It will examine the decisions made by Thaksin and TRT in the face of events in the South including the events at Kru Ze and Tak Bai as well as offering an analysis of the security measures taken by TRT in the shadow of 9/11. All of this will also be examined in the light of the recent National Reconciliation Committee's report which highlighted the issues of concern, gave suggestions as to how peace could be brought to the troubled region and, implicitly perhaps, highlighted the fact that TRT tried to "manage" the South rather than come up with policies to help the situation.

The final conclusion will provide a brief summary of the arguments laid out in the previous chapters.

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHAPTER II

WHO ARE THAI RAK THAI AND THAKSIN SHINAWATRA?

2.1 Rationale

To understand how Thaksin and his government have dealt with the South, one must reach an understanding of their political philosophy and, more importantly, Thaksin's attitude to politics and problem solving for if TRT is the government elect, Thaksin is TRT. That is to say he is not only its creator and founder, he is the soul of the party, its policy maker, chief negotiator and overall chief. He dominated all aspects of decision-making and the recent protests and marches which led to the snap election in April 2006 were directed more at the Prime Minister than at the TRT party. His rise, the TRT election wins with almost landslide results, his continued popularity outside of Bangkok and the Southern region, can only be described as a phenomenon. Back to back election victories – three if one includes the annulled April 2006 election – is unprecedented. The TRT's more westernised approach to electioneering and policymaking were also new to Thai politics and left the various opposition parties flailing. Indeed one only has to look at the recent proposals by the Democrats in the field of healthcare and education to see how TRT's brand of populist programmes has changed the landscape of Thai politics. In order to fully comprehend TRT's influence and understand the philosophy of the party and its leader one must focus on certain of their aspects and approaches: TRT economic policy (or *Thaksinomics* as it is more popularly known), the government's social agenda and Thaksin's own political discourse.

2.2 What do they want to do for you?

Where better to start this discussion but with Thaksin's own words taken directly after winning the general election in 2005.

In continuation of the policy of the previous administration, and in line with the public announcement...that the past four years was a period of economic recovery and reconstruction, the upcoming four years will be devoted to the emergence of a strong and sustainable Thailand. During the past four years, the Government's policy emphasised problem-solving and opportunities for the majority of the people, which proved to succeed at a number of levels. However, there are still some unresolved problems which the government strongly intends to deal with, particularly poverty. In addition, the government will develop the quality of life and social services to prepare the country for demographic changes, and to take care of people from the cradle to the grave. Drugs, influential persons and corruption will be eradicated from the Thai society.¹

Although, only a short quotation from the introductory passage of Thaksin's speech, it also embodies all that Thaksin and TRT believe about government and its role in the running of the country.

2.3 “Thaksinomics”: *A period of economic recovery and reconstruction*²

Labelled as such by journalists in 2001 and taken on by academics by the following year, there were many who made doom laden predictions for Thaksin's approach to the economic situation of Thailand. Many predicted a rise in government debt, others foresaw the International Monetary Funds strict standards imposition as disappearing. Both were wrong. Indeed by 2003, when the stock market began a meteoric rise and the growth rate rose, TRT were hailed almost like new pioneers – the IMF even “hosted a seminar which discussed Thaksinomics as a new development

¹ Speech to the National Assembly 2005

² Pasuk & Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* p.99

model for Asia.”³ Pasuk and Baker argue that Thaksinomics moved away from the neo-liberal model that the IMF tried to impose after the Asian crisis of the late nineties and introduced a more “developmentalist” approach – the view that

In catch-up economics, government has to play a positive role in protecting and promoting firms and sectors to overcome the dis-advantages of competing against more advanced economies.⁴

This developmentalist approach begins with the aim of GDP growth. Indeed all other Thaksinomic policies are “subordinate to this overriding objective.”⁵ By achieving Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, Thaksin wanted to pull Thailand out of the economic stupor and depression that it had found itself in and not over a long period but as quickly as possible thus laying the foundation for his next aim: “to leapfrog the Thai economy into the first world”⁶. This may not sound much different from the policies of many third world countries, or even developed ones at that. GDP is massively important to all economies but it is not so much Thaksin’s aims but his manner of achieving those aims which are of interest.

For Thaksin, Thailand was not so much a country as a company. A country which was ripe for producing more income from all its sectors and a company does not need politicians as much as it needs CEO’s and directors who approach problems and provide solutions from “the perspective of corporate management and business school thinking”.⁷ From out of this “Company Thailand” was born although Thaksin had believed this notion for many years. In 1997, he had said

A company is a country. A country is a company.
They are the same. The management is the same.
It is the management of economics.⁸

³ ibid p.99

⁴ ibid p.100

⁵ ibid p.100

⁶ ibid p. 101

⁷ ibid p.101

⁸ ibid p. 101 cited from Chumphon Phatraphom, 2002, *How Rich Is Thailand*

2.4 CEO Management

When elected, Thaksin called himself the “CEO Prime Minister” and if he was the CEO then he would have to have a board of directors around him who would advise and guide policy. These were his technocrats – not a new idea as the Chatichai government (1988-91) had also had a team of advisers, the Ban Phitsanulok group – but they advised not only on the strategic thinking of the government but party as well.

At the core was Pansak Vinyaratn...described as an “ideas man...the intellectual firepower behind the prime minister’s business acumen...”⁹

Under Pansak was an advisory team “comprised of seven core members”¹⁰ and a “Thaksin team...40 –50 (members) and was able to conduct performance checks on all policies approved by the cabinet”. It is even said that Pansak conducted his own weekly “macroeconomic meetings with key policy advisors, meetings which were not attended by the finance minister, Somkid Jatrutipitak”.¹¹

These “directors” were unelected and seem to have more of an influence on Thaksin than his own advisors or officials of government, namely the Cabinet. Indeed, politics seems to have little to do with policy making when one also looks at other names Thaksin pulled out of obscurity on his election. Vijit Supinit was governor of the Bank of Thailand during the 1997 crisis and Chaiyawat Wibulsawasdi who was head of the central bank at the time had also lost his job. Both now found themselves in prominent advisory roles in the Thaksin administration as chairman of the stock exchange and chairman of Shinawatra property company respectively. Others who were implicated in fraud cases during the crisis suddenly found themselves in the clear and working within the government – like Narongchai Akrasnee. The reason for this, says Pasuk and Baker, is that they would all have been “presumably chastened and educated by the experience of the crisis...they were also

⁹ Ukrist and McCargo, *The Thaksinisation of Thailand* p.94 citing from Shaun Crispin, “Ideas Man”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1st May, 2003

¹⁰ *ibid* p.97

¹¹ *ibid* p.97

presumably grateful for their rehabilitation”¹². A very subtle way of saying that these were Thaksin’s ‘yes men’. Certainly, part of Thaksin’s discourse also reflected the change in governmental approach to problems.

Under the guidance of Pansak, Thaksin’s speech writer, quotations came forth from such publications and gurus like *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth*, Philip Kotler, a marketing expert and Professor Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School. Thaksin even had his own Asia Books recommendation section where he would regularly have his name next to the latest management or business bible from the States. There were “MBA-style training courses for some 200 permanent secretaries, department heads, state enterprise bosses and provincial governors”¹³ and even his own speeches began to sound like management textbooks:

a series of bullet points held together by a certain thematic thread¹⁴

Government was dominated by those who saw themselves as a board of directors whose role was management, Thailand was the company. In order to run the country like a company meant the economy would have to become a business and that meant

Looking for ways to mobilise any dormant, hidden, or underexploited assets including unused natural resources and neglected human resources. Most of all it meant reviving the entrepreneurs who been devastated by the crisis, and mobilising stocks of capital which were lying unused after the collapse of the financial system. Under this approach government assumed a more active role than before.¹⁵

¹² Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* p. 103

¹³ Ukrist and McCargo, p.177

¹⁴ *ibid* p.178

¹⁵ Pasuk and Baker, p.103

2.5 Economic Policies

From this new approach were borne many concrete policies. They will be outlined here but not assessed for their success as this is not an essay concerned primarily with economic policy. It is however, important to be aware of their presence and the detail given to them when we compare them to the policies regarding social policy or the Southern question.

During its first four years, the Government adopted and implemented a “Dual Track Policy” which emphasised the importance of stimulating the economy at the level of the grass-roots and the small –and medium sized – enterprises – (SME) which constitutes the majority of the people.¹⁶

This policy to bring the rural areas – a huge area in Thailand – is rooted firmly in capitalism:

Capitalism needs capital, without which there is no capitalism. We need to push capital into the rural areas.¹⁷

Thaksin pushed his loan schemes, particularly the SME’s, in an attempt “to encourage Thais to be more entrepreneurial and to harness their innovative and creative capacities”: to start their own businesses. The aim of the loans and the overall policy of the dual track policy was to integrate farmers further into the market which would both overcome poverty and contribute to GDP growth. However, as with all good business, external investment was important and the Thaksin government began the second half of the Dual Track Policy, which was to encourage foreign investment through pushing exports (the baht exchange rate was deliberately depressed to help) and promoting tourism (and expatriate living as well with a loosening on laws governing foreign retailers and even the buying of property) as well

¹⁶ Thaksin’s speech to the National Assembly, 9th March 2005

¹⁷ Pasuk and Baker citing speech, p.115 from 21st August, 2003

as travelling the world, promoting the new Thailand and its economy as an attractive country/company to invest in.

The Poverty Eradication Policy included

the One Tambon One Product...(and) the government will improve the financial system to support grass root economies, ranging from the well prepared Village Fund to the Village Bank ...the government will allocate the budget according to the population of all villages and communities under the Small Medium Large (SML) Scheme to enable them to solve their own problem.¹⁸

The above schemes which was promised in TRT's electoral platform – another innovation by TRT, the electoral platform – were funded by “tapping unused reserves of credit in the state banking system”¹⁹. For example, the Government Savings Bank were used for the one million baht village fund. This same bank also was given the People's Bank to manage. The Japanese inspired One Village, One Product which offered loans and credit to local enterprises was funded by many state financial institutions. The government's own agricultural bank (BAAC) was the money behind the agrarian debt moratorium while the government also pushed the BAAC into providing loans for many types of local organisations and villages. The government's thinking was simple and driven solely by economic factors – stimulus of the overall economy:

1. reducing the people's expenses
2. increasing the people's incomes
3. expanding the people's opportunities

I propose they could be re-written as:

1. easing the burden on the business

¹⁸ Thaksin's speech to the National Assembly, 9th March 2005

¹⁹ Pasuk and Baker, p. 105

2. creating a wider market for the business to sell to
3. creating more branches for the business

Human resources are also reduced to monetary factors. Thaksin's ambition to run the country as a business put growth as the "prime place" in economic policy. The policies were detailed, if not always executed perfectly (there are claims that many loans to farmers and other organisations will never be repaid). Growth was all important. But at what cost? Along side the economic policies other more ominous sounds also began to emanate from Thaksin:

We are in a state of economic war...the poor are like wounded soldiers....if we don't cure their injuries, where shall we find the soldiers to fight the war?²⁰

All areas would be employed in this war including the police who would become,

A tool of the state, to help increase the national income.²¹

The economic war on poverty initiated by Thaksin was arguably a positive plan. The war on drugs, launched in early 2003, "seemed to return to the brutal methods and contempt for human rights, which had been the hallmark of the old security state"²² and marked Thaksin's and TRT's attitude to managing society.

²⁰ *ibid* p. 103, cited from Pran Phisisetthakan, *Thaksinomik lae CEO prathet Thai*

²¹ *ibid* p. 103

²² *ibid* p. 135

2.6 What do the people want? They want good management²³ – Social Agenda

Between around 1999 and 2002, Thaksin returned repeatedly to three political ideas: stagecraft as management, a social contract in which people surrendered their freedoms, and an ideal rule by disinterested persons of vision.²⁴

The same attitudes that Thaksin brought to the economy he attempted to bring to overall leadership and society: management. Management can solve “the people’s problems” not ideologies. Strategies and strong leaders are needed to lead a people who, in Thaksin’s view, should be passive. It is a type of social contract. If the people wish to benefit from being a part of a state which is economically successful, the people have to give up certain rights. In one speech he quoted from Rousseau’s *Social Contract* but put his own slight on it by saying

The act of setting up a state, the people consent to give up their social freedoms...this is for the sake of social order and majority rule.²⁵

This is obviously more reliant as an idea on Buddhism than it is on Western philosophy. Indeed, Thaksin adopted Buddhist language and teaching in further speeches, (mis)quoting the renowned Buddhist thinker Buddhadasa thus aligning himself and his ideas and giving them credence as well. It also implied that politicians should not criticise or argue with the government as then the Parliament would not be one in the “Buddhadasa sense”.²⁶ Politicians should be “a gathering of men with moral integrity”²⁷, above the world and its petty arguments and self-protection – the disinterested vision. By taking on this higher ground, Thaksin

²³ *ibid* p.135

²⁴ *ibid* p.135

²⁵ *ibid* p. 136 cited from a political speech made to at the opening of a conference of Asian political parties in November 2002

²⁶ *ibid* p.137 cited from Chumphon Phatraphon

²⁷ *ibid* p. 137 cited from Chumphon Phatraphon

became a paternal figure, a moral leader who could only be criticised by those people who only had their own interests at heart. This idea was widened to include parliamentary opposition. If a parliamentary party criticised Thaksin/TRT they were also anti-people:

Virtually anything initiated by the government is resisted by such opposition without considering whether the government's actions are in the best interests of the people.²⁸

By interpreting the Buddhist notion of moral leadership Thaksin was attempting to “delegitimise political debate”²⁹. His admiration of the Singapore parliament sums it up: the opposition is allowed to exist in order to legitimise the parliament as a democracy but without giving the opposition any chance of actually challenging the government:

In his ideal political system, people surrendered their right and freedoms to the state, which was managed, just like a corporation, by people with a disinterested vision.³⁰

In order to create a state where all people would want to be part of a state and thus give up their rights, Thaksin looked for ways to encourage nationalistic feeling. In much the same way that politicians who criticised Thaksin were the enemy of the morally good, so Thaksin used foreign criticism of any policies, events or ideas to promote Thainess. UN agencies were targets, foreign journalists and publications were placed under scrutiny and Thai newspapers were taken to task for even quoting from foreign newspapers.

²⁸ *ibid* p. 139 cited from a political speech made to political parties at the opening of a conference of Asian political parties in November 2002

²⁹ *ibid* p.139

³⁰ *ibid* p. 139

He declared that foreign aid and loans (“hand outs”) would no longer be accepted, including the offer of aid following the tsunami disaster of Christmas 2005. When the UNHCR granted refugee status to Burmese exiles, Thaksin claimed,

Nobody can violate our sovereignty. We are
a UN member. We are not a UN lackey.³¹

The same response was given out when the UN and the US criticised the government on its human rights records. Patriotism was called upon and patriots were asked to “contribute their talents to the nation”³² and to subsume their individuality – again the influence of Buddhism is evident. All criticism or protests are regarded as unpatriotic:

A handful of people should not block the
development of the entire nation.³³

and perhaps even questioning their moral stance. If Thaksin and TRT policies are legitimised by Buddhist pre-cepts then those who criticise are anti-Buddha and, implicitly, anti-Thailand. NGO’s set up to help in rural areas who questioned policies found their funding cut or were declared illegal. They even had to report monthly about their finances and their activities and some were put under surveillance under security measures. Thai fishermen, protesting at the Pak Mun dam project were offered money to be quiet and showed a complete lack of understanding of the fisherman’s situation. Many protests have ended in police brutality, or even violence from his own security men as recently seen in the new World Trade Centre and Paragon Mall. All of these protestors are currently under arrest for various offences. The reason for these actions given by Thaksin was

it’s just people looking to make a name for themselves
with no purpose.³⁴

³¹ *ibid* p.141 no reference

³² *ibid* p. 143

³³ *ibid* p.143, cited from a statement to the press, 27th June 2003

³⁴ *ibid* p. 148, cited from *Thai Rath* newspaper, 31st March, 2003

If the public and NGO's had their voices ignored, the media has found its voice controlled and academics are dismissed as not having "full information" or even criticising because they "want to look cool."³⁵ Civil society and dissension has no place in Company Thailand. Opposition is by definition illegitimate and anti-national.

2.7 War on Drugs

But how does this thinking lend itself to policy-making? The war on drugs points the way. Responding to a real social problem, Thaksin's government wanted to put a stop to the trade in methamphetamines. Thaksin wanted to eliminate drugs within three months of announcing the campaign:

Sometimes people were shot dead and had their assets seized as well. I think we have to be equally as ruthless. The drug people have been ruthless with the Thai people, with our children, so if we are ruthless with them it is not a big deal...if drug traders are listening they must make up their minds whether to stop selling or carry on. If they don't stop, there is a chance they will be dealt with in every way, both life and limb...If some drug dealers die, it will be a common thing.³⁶

Thaksin believed that officials and police were involved in this trafficking and that any official found guilty would lose their job. More violent language was heard from the Interior Minister Wan Muhammad Nor Matha who talked of beheading those commanders – i.e. the governors of the regions – who did not shoot their enemy as the sixteenth century Thai King Naresuan had done³⁷. Pressure was put on the

³⁵ *ibid* p.157, cited from Nayok Thaksin lem 2

³⁶ *ibid* p. 160, cited from a briefing to officials, 14th January 2003

³⁷ Nor Matha clarified the story later – King Naruesan beheaded any of his generals who did not keep up with him on the battlefield when fighting the Burmese.

police and governors for success and provinces were given targets for arrests and seizures of drugs. Results, no matter what the cost, was all that mattered to the government and threats of removal to the provinces leaders was a definite threat.

And so the war began on February 1st, with nightly news of drug dealer after drug dealer having been killed not by the police but by other drug dealers in a series of *kha tat ton* or “kill to cut and remove”³⁸ – a silence killing.

At the close of three months, some 2.637 had been killed, of which officially 68 had been shot by the police in “self defence”³⁹

The actual nature of the killings is still unclear but a pattern was seen:

Almost all were shot by handguns. Many were killed by a gunman riding pillion on a motorcycle, the classic style of professional hits...Several were killed soon after having reported themselves to the police.⁴⁰

Naturally, the authorities claimed that the police were not involved but Pasuk and Baker make links between these killings and those of the communists and their sympathisers in rural areas in the 1980’s. They quote Andrew Turton an anthropologist who described this operation:

A more recent development is the appearance of “death squads” ...set up by provincial police authorities to pursue criminals without the process of law. There are indications that these units

Nor Matha does not mean that the governors should be beheaded but the aggression and the violence of the threat are unnerving nonetheless cited in *Thaksin: The Business of Politics* p.161

³⁸ *ibid* p. 162

³⁹ *ibid* p. 162

⁴⁰ *ibid* p. 162

have been responsible for a number of deaths and disappearances... Villagers in many areas recall innocent farmers being killed in fields... by Government troops literally “headhunting” for bounty and preferment... existence of a large number of people willing to act as “gun hands”(mue puen)... to carry out killings on behalf of others... extra-judicial killings include those of persistent offenders carried out with the approval sometimes of whole communities, which are tolerated by the police; those carried out by the police themselves, other than with legal sanction... in this case the victim is often someone who has been critical of local power interests, and whose death is passed off as being that of a communist suspect, or alternatively, as having been caused by communists.⁴¹

This analysis sheds light on two issues. It underlines the value for life that TRT and the authorities had for human life and that they believed that they had the *right* to take life for the benefit of the society they were trying to create and secondly the quotation does seem to mirror events in Southern Thailand to which this essay will turn in late chapters.

Reaction to the deaths from outside of Thailand were inevitably critical. Again, Thaksin’s rhetoric remained the same. To the UN, he remarked that they were not his father. To Amnesty International,

We are an independent country. We do not need to give away our independence to others.⁴²

Despite protests from lawyers, academics and the US ambassador, Thaksin introduced a second war on drugs in 2003:

⁴¹ *ibid* p. 162 – 163 cited from Andrew Turton, *Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Social Consciousness from History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia*

⁴² *ibid* p. 164 cited from *The Nation*, 13th February, 2003

In the first three months, the police did very well...
the enemy are weakening. Kill them off. Don't
leave a trace behind, because they are a threat to society.⁴³

Within the public and even amongst monks there was widespread support. Figures released by the authorities talked of thousands of arrests and billions of baths worth of assets. The King, however, “expressed some reservations following Thaksin’s victory announcement”:⁴⁴

Although the authorities say many of the deaths
were caused by killings among drug gangs,
scepticism remains...I suggest that the national
police chief disclose the details of how the 2,500
deaths happened⁴⁵

Confusing and contradictory figures were announced. Who killed who, what was investigated, how much was actually seized, all these changed numbers depending on their source.

The final sum of all this was that the war on drugs, a response to a social problem, was one of licensed violence, and that the violence was a legitimate tool of the government much as it had been in the 1970’s and 1980’s. This was not a policy in the same way that the economic ideas of “one tambon, one product” but a show of power from a man and government which believed itself as the moral leaders of Thailand and its judge and executioner as well.

2.8 ...to be a good leader, you have to be a master story-teller⁴⁶

As already discussed, Thaksin has attempted to create a persona of the wise leader by aligning himself with great business gurus and modern Buddhist thinkers.

⁴³ *ibid* p. 165, cited from Pran

⁴⁴ *ibid* p. 166

⁴⁵ *ibid* p. 166, cited in *The Nation*, 6th December 2003

⁴⁶ McCargo and Ukrist, p. 166, cited in *New Strait Times*, 10th July, 2003

Personas in politics are not new ideas. In Britain, for example, the public have seen Thatcher's Iron Lady or Blair's 'Man of the People'. However, for Thailand the promotion of an agenda by creating a political image or persona has never been taken to such an extent as Thaksin seems to have taken his through

The assiduous use of marketing, a strong emphasis on language and systematic attempts to influence and control the country's media.⁴⁷

Thaksin began his radio shows on 28th April 2002. Modelled on the American president's transmissions, each week Thaksin would talk about events of the week or talk about future policy changes or events. It was the first time that a Prime Minister had done this and meant that, wherever he was in the world, the people would still be able to hear his voice. As a concept it was perfect for Thaksin's manner of governing. The communication was one way thus not allowing any form of dialogue and negating criticism from those listening. It meant that any debate that needed to be had was not in the public domain – i.e. the radio – but either behind closed doors or in a Parliament dominated by his party. It allowed him to announce policies which he knew would pass whatever the listener believed and left him in control of his voice, his policies, the agenda of the week, his party and his company/country. As previously discussed Thaksin had adopted the tone and persona of the wise leader who should be followed without question by aligning himself with Buddhadasa and so the didactic mode of discourse naturally should be employed. As McCargo and Ukrist have stated:

...Thai newspaper columnists, whether popular or academic in style, frequently resort to didactic modes of discourse. ...The same mode...is the dominant mode of speech adopted by His Majesty the King.... respect for teachers, monks and superiors...⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *ibid* p. 166

⁴⁸ *ibid* p. 173 cited from Duncan McCargo, *Politics and Press in Thailand: Media Machinations*

This didactic discourse was perfect for Thaksin's brand of politics. Within it he could shift and mould his persona to suit the occasion and hide behind a culture which pays great deference to his position in societies hierarchy. One week he was the scourge of foreign NGO's in his nationalistic mode, the next he was the tough policeman waging war on crime and so forth. However, a persona is also a mask and what is masked here is essentially a business man. It is for this reason that one can speak with confidence on his economic policies because he did create some but when one looks for his social policies or indeed any policies which are outside the direct sphere of economics one finds vague ideas, knee-jerk reactions, condemnations of people and loose control of events. The problems in the South are a reflection of this failure. Just what are Thaksin and TRT's policies vis-à-vis the South.? Let us once again turn to the speech he made in 2005.

Certainly the South is not mentioned in the economic section of the speech. Nor do we find it in the section with the vague title Human Development and Quality of Life. Thai products found in the South will receive Government support "by encouraging research development of technological innovations and biotechnology". Natural Resources and Environmental Policy have nothing and Foreign Policy and International Economic Policy talks of Thailand leading the way in the region. Ironically, the section dedicated to the Policy to Promote Democracy and Civil Society Process receives twenty lines and no mention of the South. But there, twelve lines long, in the section National Security Policy, is the answer to the problems in the South:

The Government will solve the problem in the southern border provinces by mobilising resources and improving administration and management according to the principles of understanding, reaching out, development, and strict law enforcement to achieve peace and safety of life and property in the area at the earliest. The Government is also determined to improve the quality of life and well being of the people in the area in a sustainable manner by emphasising the participation of every sector, building national and communal reconciliation, dispensing fairness and justice, strictly

eliminating dark influences and corruption by government officials, together with poverty eradication, education development, and economic and social development in line with the special characteristics of the area, way of life, and culture of the people, including co-operating with other countries, especially neighbouring countries, in developing, preventing and solving the problem of transnational crime and disruption of peace in the border areas.⁴⁹

This is pure Thaksin. The persona adopted is one of the benevolent and protective leader, underlined by words such as “dispensing”, “reconciliation”, “participation” but there is still a threat of violence with the mention of “eliminating dark forces”. If he cannot buy his way out of the problems then he will use any other means possible to achieve his aims including state violence.

2.9 Conclusion to Chapter 2

(he) has ushered in a new phenomenon of the media age: the power of the media, unmedia-ated by politics... is rehearsing a new political act...that of mediacracy⁵⁰

Although this may sound like an assessment of Thaksin Shinawatra, this is actually a quote from an article in *The New Statesman*, profiling the Italian premier, Silvio Berlusconi. In the article, John Lloyd, its writer, calls Berlusconi

The harbinger of a new style of political control⁵¹

A style of control where the mass media was controlled partly by private ownership by Berlusconi himself through his multi media company, Mediasat, and

⁴⁹ from Thaksin’s speech to the National Assembly, 9th March 2005

⁵⁰ John Lloyd, *The Whole of Italy in His Hands* from *The New Statesmen*, 4th February, 2002

⁵¹ *ibid*

partly through his parliamentary control of the government television and radio stations. He too is, primarily, a man of business, a political outsider when one considers the other great leaders of the west with whom he shared the political and economic stage – Bush, Blair, Chirac. While these men have devoted their lives to politics – what one used to call professional politicians - Berlusconi devoted his to building up a business in the 1970's. A business which now makes him according to Forbes Magazine the 25th richest man in the world.

The above reads much like Thaksin's own rise to power in Thailand. Indeed there are many similarities between these two leaders which emphasise the values Thaksin believed were required in the management of a country.

Berlusconi returned to power in 2003 with a slogan: that the business of Italian government was business. Thaksin said Thailand was a company. Both believed that countries should be managed like a company, Berlusconi believing that Italy was like a giant service country. Antonio Polito described the whole idea in *La Repubblica* as

Ambassadors more like directors of company branches,
consuls more like commercial representatives, and a
Foreign ministry more like Pubitalia (an Italian
promotion company).⁵²

Evidence would suggest that Thaksin thought the same way – the governors and village heads becoming managing branches of the Village Banks, while the Governors were also put under pressure to reach quotas during the War on Drugs. And at the top of the tree, the CEO leaders controlling all forms of media and thus opposition. Both downgraded the state – but not their office – by reducing its institutions. Berlusconi by waging war on the judiciary, Thaksin by his nepotistic choice of army leaders and police chiefs or by reviving dead political careers much to the relief and gratitude of those he appointed. Thaksin went further by appointing a cabinet and then bypassing their opinions, preferring to listen to a body of unelected advisers, such as Pansak Vinyaratn – a further erosion of the state by relegating one of its central institutions, the Cabinet.

Both produced policies which were populist and media friendly, focusing on economic growth through the enterprise in all areas. Thaksin produced his rural

⁵² quoted ibid

based schemes, Berlusconi lowered taxes and reduced the constraints on enterprise. Both played on feelings of nationalism and religion, Thaksin aligning himself with well known religious figures, Berlusconi by expressing support for

Freedom, the individual, family, enterprise,
Italian tradition, Christian tradition and love for
weaker people.⁵³

Neither welcomed criticism or potential challengers to their power dispensing with high flyers or men who proved that they could think and produce alternative ideas to them. These were not the machinations of great leaders but threatened egos. Egos that believed that problems needed managing quickly in business like fashions without need of recourse to experts or alternative suggestions. When asked about the a problem involving the cumbersome foreign ministry, Berlusconi replied that he would clean the place up, make it more business like and then hand it over to someone else within six months: “it’s all very simple”.⁵⁴

The same attitude and desire for speedy solutions marks the management style of Thaksin. The difference however, was that while Berlusconi faced an out of date ministry and a judiciary seeking the truth, Thaksin faced an altogether different proposition – Southern Thailand. A region traditionally different from the rest of Thailand; a bastion of Democrat support; Muslim almost to the core, with a history of suspicion of central state control and rebellion; a region which was experiencing a period of calm and steady economic growth – but was naturally resistant to Thaksin and his brand of media and money driven crony capitalism. The capitalist mediocracy of Thaksin was brought to bear on the traditional Muslim South. It was driven by Thaksin’s desire to break all forms of opposition to him; by his need to control all aspects of his Company Thailand; to have his business style of leadership to be seen as the correct and only way to run a country. A professional politician of experience would have tried to understand the region first – its economic structure, the beliefs of the majority of the people, the political landscape. But not the businessman in Thaksin. There was only one form of leadership – swift, effective, efficient and with

⁵³ footnote from Wikipedia, *Silvio Berlusconi*

⁵⁴ quoted by John Lloyd, *The New Statesmen*

the economy as its primary concern – and it had to be applied to every ‘department’ in the company.

The consequences of his actions was the re-igniting of a fire that has grown out of control and swept through Southern Thailand.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF SOUTHERN THAI POLITICS

3.1 Distinctive Character of Southern Politics

Duncan McCargo argues that there is a “distinctive character”¹ to the region’s politics. It is a character which is “animated by deeper ‘primordial loyalties’”² than politics elsewhere in Thailand, which has resisted a “recent trend towards commercialisation” unlike the politics in the rest of Thailand and which has allowed the Democrat party to maintain its “longstanding strength” and domination of elections. McCargo argues that history, culture, geography and religion have all contributed to this unique character. It was this unique character and political landscape that caused Thaksin and TRT to stumble during the elections and which was affronted by Thaksin’s approach to leadership, electioneering and politics.

3.2 Cultural and Historical Factors

In his 1999 study Rouhomaki noted the stereotypes of the South commonly held by Thai bureaucrats – and arguably the rest of Thailand:

Whether true or not, southern Thailand has a reputation as a fearsome place where rival gangs are engaged in feuds with each other. For instance, many Bangkokians ... would characterise Southerners as stubborn (*hua khaeng*) and quick to anger (*do*). This is an image that is often portrayed in many Bangkok newspapers.³

¹ Duncan McCargo, *Southern Thai Politics: A Preliminary Overview* p. 2
Leeds University Website

² Ibid p. 2

³ ibid p. 9 cited from Olli-Pekka Ruohomaki, *Fishermen No More: Livelihood and Environment in Southern Thai Maritime Villages*, 1999

Although implicitly criticising this view of the South Rouomkaki does suggest that there are certain “real behavioural distinctions”⁴ between southerners and the rest of Thailand:

These distinctions are manifested in a kind of Southern regionalism, a feeling of dislike for the central government and its representatives and pride in the local dialect, culture and history⁵

Can cultural explanations really be used as a reliable form of political analysis? McCargo suggest not “but some images may serve to inform and even partly to shape the character of politics in the South.”⁶

3.3 Masculinity and Southern Politics

Much is written of the very macho character of the men of the South and especially how it relates to the way of life and geographical harshness of the region. Suthivong Pongpaiboon comments that

The inhabitants of the South made their living from lowland and highland farming, fishing, selling products of the forest, and catching land and water animals. High risk was involved in life and poverty, with security and certainty hard to come by. They naturally lacked self-confidence.

This is important for two reasons. The first highlights one of Thaksin's errors of judgement. His insistence that the local population turn its economic focus towards the tourist industry displayed how much he misunderstood the region. Tourism is a social activity requiring skills of language and social interaction which the Southerners were never brought up to do. Secondly, the living they were taught to

⁴ ibid p. 9 citing Ruohomaki

⁵ ibid p. 10 cited from Rouhomaki

⁶ ibid p.10

make – fishing and farming – was slowly being marginalised with no support from the central government, while the tourist industry which they would find difficult to have access to both socially and because of elements of their religion, was being promoted as their saviour by a comfortable and more globalised central government. Thus, men are measured by their ability to survive, no matter what the environment or situation:

A man's life in the South was more raw, closer to the edge; surviving could require a robust masculinity, a readiness to fight, to defend oneself, and if necessary even to steal from others.⁷

Ekawit argues further that these masculine skills are linked to verbal fluency⁸ and that southerners are “dynamic language users, talkative and argumentative”⁹

Savitri agrees and suggests that southern politicians

Such as Chuan Leekpai, Trairong Suwannakiri and Suthep Theuksuban share common characteristics. They are usually skilful performers. They bear characteristics of southerners, portrayed in the character of *ai then*, a cynical, argumentative, having excellent command of language and a witty way with words.¹⁰

All of the above are Democrat politicians local to the region. Savitri notes that Chuan “is a master of subtlety and wit – parliament’s ‘honey-coated razor’”¹¹ whilst “Trairong and Suthep use a distinctive southern accented *thong daeng* style, ‘argumentative, loud and direct’. Indeed Savitri says

⁷ *ibid* p. 10

⁸ Savitri Gadavanij suggests the same pointing to the visual sparring of the southern shadow play *nang talung* which has a character called *ai then* who plays a type of jester role and who discusses controversial or taboo issues and topics cited in McCargo p. 12 from an unpublished paper, *Rethinking No-confidence Debates*, 2002

⁹ *ibid* p.12

¹⁰ *ibid* p. 12 citing Gadavanji

¹¹ *ibid* p. 12 citing Gadavanji

The southern contingent of MP's includes many of parliaments best performers, reflecting a political culture that emphasises public speaking skills and prizes a certain mode of masculinity in its leaders.¹²

Chuan, Trairong and Suthep, although different in their styles, do manifest this masculinity. How this effects the political vying in the south is made clearer when we see that the South moved towards a regionalisation of party support - the Democrats – by the early 1990's, with a nearly “hegemonic dominance”¹³ of the Democratic Party in 1992 reflecting the rise of the aforementioned Chuan Leekpai to the leadership of the party.¹⁴ Chuan played on the regionalism of the southerners by “declaring in a southern dialect at an election rally in Nakhon Sri Thammarat: ‘Wouldn't you be proud of me if I became the 20th Prime Minister, the second one from the south?’”¹⁵

The ploy worked. In September 1992, the Democrats won 36 out of 45 seats (80 percent) where previously they had won a paltry 34 per cent (1979), a better 61 per cent in 1983 and then a terrible 37 percent in 1988. In 1996 led by Chuan again, the Democrats won 46 out of 51 seats and then in 2001, against the voting of the rest of the nation which with a landslide TRT won, the Democrats took 48 out of 54 seats (89 per cent). The seats they did not take were held by Muslim MP's who were under the New Aspiration Party and who merged later with TRT. This domination by the Democrats is only a recent phenomenon and its association with the rise of the southern Chuan cannot be ignored. The importance for the south to have a southern Democrat leader and prime minister cannot be under estimate either. Chuan's party was involved in a land reform scandal in 1995 in which Democrat politicians from the south were accused of abusing land reform provisions designed to help poor farmers. The scandal brought down the government and Chuan as PM but did not effect his

¹² *ibid* p. 12

¹³ *ibid* p. 13

¹⁴ This regionalism is not unusual in Thai politics. McCargo points out that the New Aspiration Party tried to build a regional base in Isan and that Chart Thai have long standing support in parts of the central region p. 13

¹⁵ *ibid* p. 13 cited from *Bangkok Post* 12th September, 1992

position amongst voters of the south.* However, how far Chuan had turned the Democrat Party into a regional party was underlined in April 2003 when Banyat Bantadtan, a southerner, beat his Bangkokian rival, Abhisit Vejjajiva for the Democrat leadership. Banyat won despite Abhisit having the endorsement of Chuan. McCargo also claims that Banyat won “despite the fact that he had no obvious appeal to voters beyond the South, and little national credibility.”¹⁶ Banyat’s victory apparently testified to the triumph of southern tribalism over common sense, the subordination of the party to narrow regional interests”.

3.4 Prem and the Network Monarchy

The first prime minister from the south and the Southern Thai politician *par excellence*, had been Prem Tinsulanond “whose integrity and perceived incorruptibility were much admired”.¹⁷ By aligning himself with the qualities of Prem, Chuan was claiming to have the same qualities says McCargo. A mix of “a southern mode of masculinity based upon straightforwardness, decency and alack of pretension”¹⁸ and playing on a regionalistic electorate who had a “strong desire for an elected southern prime minister”¹⁹ in place of the centralist prime ministers who the south had, throughout their history, perceived as being anti-Muslim.

However, McCargo believes that Chuan also succeeded because of the Network Monarchy that he had created over a twenty year period and that Prem had moulded so that, even when he was no longer Prime Minister or even head of the Democrats, he continued to influence the area no like no other politician. Thus the southern border region that Thaksin was confronted with in his first term was one that had been set up and centred on Prem. It was a complex political network based on a “mixture of monarchism, moralism and structural corruption.”²⁰ According to McCargo, right up until 2001,

* Indeed Thai Rath which tried to attack the scandal was boycotted in the south and anti Thai Rath posters put up.

¹⁶ Ibid p. 16

¹⁷ ibid p. 13

¹⁸ ibid p. 13

¹⁹ ibid p. 13

²⁰ McCargo, *Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South* from *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* p. 41

Prem was often able personally to determine who was selected to serve as provincial governors, senior military commanders and other key administrative posts in Patani, Yala and Narathiwat.²¹

Other sweeteners included the granting of posts as district officers and turning a blind eye to the getting of commissions by army officers who stopped any illegal trafficking on the Thai – Malay border. The result was an understanding between the locals and the army. Patronage and favours would be granted through “development funds” passed on to the army who would then funnel down cash to the grassroots ensuring a network of informers who would inform the military if any separatist activity was occurring. Another positive outcome of this unorthodox relationship was that more “local Muslims were encouraged to enter local politics, contesting parliamentary seats and gaining ministerial posts under the auspices of the Democrat Party and later the New Aspiration Party.”²² It was this system of patronage and special relationship that Thaksin wanted to break up.

Although an interesting idea, McCargo does seem to relegate the key role that the Democrats themselves played in bringing a more peaceful and stable atmosphere to the South, particularly during the leadership of Chuan Leekpai. Thanks, perhaps, to McCargo’s Network Monarchy, the Democrats became more trusted in the South in the 1990’s because of efforts made by the party to encourage more Muslim participation in the entire democratic process. As Omar Farouk Bajunid points out, it was Leekpai’s coalition government in 1992 which appointed two Muslim members of parliament to deputy minister positions and a third to deputy speaker.²³ Leekpai’s government of 1997 – 2001 should also be credited with the stance it took during the economic crisis of 1997 where it opted for a more regionalist approach, looking to build a regional economic integration through “the construction of a common identity”²⁴ rather than re-iterating central Thainess. He also began to try and make links with western partners and, more importantly, Muslim countries. In 1997,

²¹ *ibid* p. 40

²² *ibid* p. 40

²³ Bajunid, *Islam, Nationalism and the Thai State from Dynamic Diversity in Southern Thailand* p.12

²⁴ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.127

Thailand “became an observer at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).”²⁵ This was seen as a politically astute move as it “wrongfooted the few countries which still supported the separatist groups in the deep south.”²⁶ The Leekpai administration also made deals with other countries – mostly Muslim – who the US government termed as ‘rogue states’, such as Iran who imported rice and gave Thai companies agricultural project on the Caspian Sea.²⁷ In 2000, the Thai government signed “a resolution condemning Tel Aviv for not respecting United Nation resolutions.”²⁸ This break away from what Washington desired was all part of a deliberate shift the Thai government towards autonomy and *rapprochement* with the region but was not, as Gilquin points out, a nationalistic fall back onto Thai Buddhist values:

In shifting to a form of nonalignment, the Government tried to position itself to satisfy not only the Buddhist majority, but also the the Muslim minority.²⁹

All of Leekpai’s efforts sealed the Democrats, in the minds of the Malay-Muslims, as being representative of them, as being understanding of their situation and of being someone who did not want to have a region which felt ostracised because of their way of living. The South were not fooled by Thaksin’s pledge of reuniting the nation, a response to the crisis of 1997 which shook the Thai people and gave them a realisation “of the fragility of the Thai nation.”³⁰ The fact that the rest of Thailand voted for Thaksin’s re-hashing of a united nation – Thai Rak Thai – only confirmed what the Muslims South feared and they resisted and continued to resist by constantly rejecting Thaksin’s party and staying loyal to the Democrats. Whether there is a strong Network Monarchy or not, McCargo is wrong to ignore the hard work that the Democrats put into the South and their right to win elections based on their own policy and not just Prem’s say so.

²⁵ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.127

²⁶ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.128

²⁷ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.128

²⁸ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.128

²⁹ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.128

³⁰ Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p.124

3.5 Thaksin's Approach

Knowing that a Democrat victory was ultimately unassailable, an astute Prime Minister would have realised that the way to win over the south was not to attack the Democrats or their power bases down in the south but to bring in a type of consensus politics in order to appease and befriend a region which was anti TRT not because of what Thaksin stood for but because TRT were not Democrat and Thaksin was not a Prem or a Chuan. However, Thaksin was not an astute politician. He was a businessman and his attack on the institutions of the South in order to break the Democrat stranglehold was naïve and ultimately unwinnable. And if this naivety in not understanding the loyalty of the area was a misjudgement he surely also failed to see that the commercialisation in the Thai electoral process was not one that could be used in the South either.

Commercialisation of the Thai electoral process has increased rapidly since 1979. Vote-buying, vote intimidation and abuses of power by electoral officials and “MP buying” (offering financial incentives to switch parties)³¹ are widespread in Thai elections. Vote buying is huge in the northeast according to Callahan and McCargo³² and the northeast provided TRT with a large proportion of its seats. Callahan has argued that the south is seen as “beyond vote buying”³³ because of its strong regional identity and allegiance to the Democrats but that he has evidence of “allegations of illegal practices by the Democrats in Hat Yai in 1995...and bureaucratic bias in favour of the Democrats was quite pervasive in the South”.³⁴ The “benefits” given out were, according to Callahan, not to win the election as they would have won anyway but just to continue the good will “relationship between the party and its supporters”.³⁵ Electoral commercialisation was still found but more as a sweetener than a guarantee of votes. Thus Thaksin, with all his money, would never have been able to buy into the market anyway.

³¹ McCargo, *Southern Thai Politics: A Preliminary Overview* p. 16

³² *ibid* p. 16 cited from Callahan and McCargo, *Vote Buying in Thailand's Northeast: The July 1995 General Election from Asian Survey* 36 1996

³³ *ibid* p. 16 cited from Callahan, *Pollwatching, Elections and Civil Society in Southeast Asia*, 2000

³⁴ *ibid* p. 16

³⁵ *ibid* p. 16

Nor would he have been able to use the leverage of *jao por* which Thaksin could use in the other regions. *Jao por*'s, like the old village headmen, deliver votes in return for favours. However, studies suggest that there are very few, if any of these godfather figures in the South. The closest manifestation was the *nai hua*, tin mining entrepreneurs but these are few and far between. The reason for this is again a regional one. Pasuk and Sungsidh suggest that strong urban elite in the south created a "kind of proto-civil society which in turn impeded the rise of bossism"³⁶ alongside the "strong CPT activity in the 1960's and early 1970's"³⁷ which may have "acted as a counterweight to the growth of new local potentates"³⁸. Whatever the reason, the very 'in's' that Thaksin applied in other regions throughout his term of office – vote buying and *jao por* businessmen – and the regionalistic brotherhood of the south with its mistrust of central government and its support for a party which the south perceived as its only voice and in fact as a southern party, frustrated Thaksin's desire to own all of Thailand.

Instead, Thaksin tried to attack the Democrat stronghold from within. As previously discussed, he dismantled what he saw as the institutions which housed the Democrat power bases such as the SPBRC and Centre 43 and turned more and more power over to the police, believing the Fourth Army that were in the South to be in the pocket of Prem. As previously discussed, all this resulted in was the animosity of the local population. Next, Thaksin tried to find Muslim supporters of his own in the South with whom he could work and gain a legitimate political foothold. He believed that he had found his answer with what would become known as the *Wadha* faction.

Despite the Democrats dominance there was another party in the south that had Muslim MP's and was ripe for Thaksin to pluck.: the New Aspiration Party. Thaksin had approached the New Aspiration Party as soon as it became clear that he would make few inroads in the South. There assimilation into the TRT government, thus giving more seats to the already dominant party, did weaken the Democrats party machine in the south, the ploy did not take into account the south's unique culture and religion. The merging of this slice of Muslim support also contributed to the erosion

³⁶ *ibid* p. 16 cited from Pasuk and Sungsidh, *Corruption and Democracy in Thailand*, 1994

³⁷ *ibid* p. 17

³⁸ *ibid* p 17 cited from Pasuk and Sungsidh

of patron-client relations among elites and voters in the south and to a feeling that TRT were trying to buy their way into the south. The leader of this group of Muslim MP's (known collectively as the *Wadah* faction or "Harmony" in Yawi) was Wan Muhammad Nor Matha. Wan Nor was a senior politician in the New Aspiration Party and hailed from Yala. He had already been used once politically by Chavalit Yongchaiyudh to help shore up his government in 1996-97 by consolidating a large southern vote and was closely associated with him. Thaksin, in a cynical move of what was minority tokenism, appointed Wan Nor to the post of interior minister, hoping that Wan Nor could do the same for him and "wrest control of the administration of the sub region from Democrat officers whom he believed to be in Prem's pocket."³⁹ However, the ploy backfired for a number of reasons. Firstly, Wan Nor had lost the trust of many of his fellow Muslims by joining a party that had taken away power structures which had once given them a voice – as discussed above – and had thus contributed to the unpicking of Muslim civil society. Secondly, although a good politician, Wan Nor was not up to the job of solving such a complex regional problem as the South. Thirdly, his role as the mediator or interface between the Muslim south and the Thai government suffered with his association with security force brutality – "How could [Interior Minister] Wan Nor order the police to beat us? He is also Muslim. Does he realise what he has done to his people?"⁴⁰ – and then with his association with Chavalit who himself was blamed by Muslims for the killings at the Kru Ze temple. Mistrust of him and his colleagues grew. The usual ground information that Wan Nor traditionally had access to "dried up. All manner of political and other tensions that had been artfully suppressed by the old Prem-brokered benefit-sharing arrangements quickly emerged into the open. Violence swiftly followed."⁴¹ Perceived as failing to control the security situation – or possibly failing Thaksin in his bid to penetrate the South - Wan Nor was sacked from the post of the interior minister. Thaksin's attempt to win the south politically had failed although far be it from Thaksin to take the blame on himself.

³⁹ McCargo, *Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South* from *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* p.50

⁴⁰ McCargo, p. 50 citing from Areeya Maedee quoted in Supara Janchitfah, *Kho Sanoe Phak Prachachon To Sathanakhan Khwamruangreng Nai Phaktai (Proposals from the people's sector on violence in the South, 2004*

⁴¹ *ibid* p.50

3.6 Conclusion to Chapter 3

The Wadah failure illustrates just how far Thaksin had misjudged the political nature of the South. Unable to use his normal offensive weapons, Thaksin chose not an constructive and intelligent approach to wresting power away from the South but a different but as aggressive approach. What he misjudged was the loyalty of the region to Prem and to the Democrats – ironic for a man who prized loyalty above many other attributes. His transparent and, I believe, offensive attempt to use a token Muslim in a role that was simply to try and show that he understood the situation in the South and was their friend, was undermined by his wrecking of communication channels such as the SBPAC. His blatant use of the New Aspiration Party members failed to work as it was all too clear that Thaksin was not sincere in his desire to listen to their voices –and in turn the voice of the Southern Muslims. He failed to understand also the nature of the politicians he was trying to fight – hardened and ready to fight, wily and intelligent enough to promote themselves in a way that Thaksin and all his professional electioneering could not match because they did not understand the voter. In the election of January 2005 however, he probably wished he had listened – for the Democrats swept almost every seat in the South.

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHAPTER IV

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF SOUTHERN VIOLENCE

4.1 Relations between the Malay-Muslim and Central Government

Historically speaking, Thailand has had its large share of armed conflict. Between the 1960's and early 1980's, the Thai government fought an armed communist insurgency. Muslim separatists were active in the southern region of the country from the 1940's until the late 1980's but, as the Cold War thawed, the communist movement dissolved and terrorism and political violence in the southern provinces dissipated. However, since 2001, violence has again escalated. Over 2000 people have been killed since then either in bombings, drive by shootings or machete attacks, small battles or in tragic accidents. The root of this new violence seems to be the reawakening of the long-dormant Malay-Muslim anger against the central government. The internal security situation in the country's southernmost provinces has rapidly worsened and worries both in Thailand and from her allies outside of Southeast Asia are growing that the country could soon become another hotspot of Islamist terrorism in the region.

However, the situation in the South is hardly a recent phenomenon. The state of Patani has a remarkable history of conflict with whatever central power controlled Siam or Thailand. The present conflict can be traced back at least 100 years and various monarchs and governments have long tried to stymie what they see as a rebellious region.

Since its integration into Thailand in 1901-2, different administrations have followed a policy of what Arong Suthasana has called "check and rule".¹ For example the nationalistic governments of the 1930's and 40's under Phibun* produced some oppressive policies including the appointing of Thai Buddhist officials in all echelons of government in the South and the banning of Islamic dress and law and the

¹ Horachaikul p. 137, cited from Arong Suthasana 'Muslim minority in the context of Thai politics', in *Journal of Social Science*, July –December, 2000

* some of Phibun's policies included banning the local dialect of *yawi* from government offices and demanded that Muslim names be changed to Thai names

obliging of Muslims to attend Thai schools in the 1940's. When Muslim-Malays sought legitimate protest through the parliamentary system, as an MP in Parliament Amin Tomina did in 1957, he was accused of creating a separatist plot and had to flee the country. Violence in the South hit a peak in the 1960's and 1970's – fuelled by a strong and well-organised Communist movement – and then declined as successive governments found more conciliatory approaches to the region and its problems. So, as Surat Horachaikul says in his essay, it would be

Unfair to say that Thaksin should be responsible for the entire tragedy...the problem in the South is cumulative in nature. It is born of a long history of distrust.²

However it cannot be ignored that within a year of TRT being elected, violence in the southern states – particularly Patani, Yala and Narathiwat – had increased. Data shows that during the period 1993-2004 there were 2,593 incidents of political related violence.

Of these, only 750, or 29 per cent, occurred between 1993 and 2003, while a remarkable 71 percent, or 1,843, took place in 2004 (including January of 2005). Eighteen percent of incidents occurred between 1993 and 2003, while 82 percent of incidents occurred from 2001-2004 (including January of 2005).³

This match was needed to once again re-ignite the troubles and it surely no coincidence that the increase in violence began after Thaksin's accession to Prime Minister.

² *ibid* p. 138

³ Srisompob Jitpiriromsri and Panyasak Sobhonvasu, *Unpacking Thailand's Southern Conflict: The Poverty of Structural Explanations in Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence*, p. 90

4.2 Theories of Ethnic Conflict

It is also important to understand that ethno-religious violence or ethnic conflicts, in most multi-ethnic societies have multiple causes. David Horowitz, who has written many works pertaining to ethnic conflict theory, describes the framework in which ethnic conflict occurs resulting

Finally, the state system that first grew out of European feudalism and now, in the post-colonial period, covers virtually the entire earth provides the framework in which ethnic conflict occurs. Control of the state, control of a state, and exemption from control by others are among the main goals of ethnic conflict.⁴

Consequently, one of the key objectives of ethnic conflict is to seek self-control, either by controlling the state – a revolution – or establishing or re-establishing one's own state in order to govern themselves. Certainly this is true of the demands of most of the 'terrorist' groups in Southern Thailand who wish to establish some kind of autonomous Muslim state.

Horowitz believes that

in severely divided societies, ethnicity finds its way into a myriad of issues: development plans, educational controversies, trade union affairs, land policy, business policy, tax policy. Characteristically, issues that would elsewhere be relegated to the category of routine administration assume a central place on the political agenda of divided societies.⁵

This can certainly be applied to Southern Thailand where issues of education, job discrimination and local economic incentives have always been at the centre of debates between the South and the central government. As conflicts intensify, these

⁴ Horowitz cited by William G. Cunningham, *Theoretical Framework for Conflict Resolution*, www.cain.ulst.ac.uk

⁵ Horowitz cited *ibid*

issues can become “entangled within the wider ethno-national conflict.”⁶ This entanglement becomes a severe hindrance to any sort of resolution.

Horowitz claims that there are two systems into which societies can be placed:

ranked systems are societies in which one ethnic group is in complete domination of another.

Unranked systems are composed of two ethnic groups with their own internal stratification of elites and masses.⁷

Which is Thailand? In the case of its dealings with the Muslims of the South, I believe Thailand to be an unranked system. Despite its integration in the early 20th century into Siam, the Southern states still maintain an identity and system of elites and masses which sets itself up as a system apart from the rest of Thailand. The migration of ‘Thai’ families and Buddhists to the south to take over jobs with the state or to be placed into positions of power did not mean that the central state power had conquered the South. Indeed, what the actions of the central state has done was to push issues such as legitimacy and history into key issues. Horowitz, says that

Migration and incomplete conquest also gives rise to different kinds of lingering historical grievances...an indigenous group that was colonised and forced to abide the entry of ethnic strangers for colonial economic purposes may later regard their presence as illegitimate *ab initio*⁸

This theory can be applied to many ethnic conflicts from Rwanda to Northern Ireland also can be applied to Southern Thailand.

⁶ Horowitz citd ibid

⁷ Horowitz cited ibid

⁸ Horowitz cited ibid

4.2.1 Structural Factors

“Structural”⁹ factors including historical concerns, religious differences and social and economic marginalisation have resulted in local grievances and a latent crisis in inter-ethnic relations. The growing violence seems to have come as a result of the “enabling environment”¹⁰ of the latent historical insurgency in the region. As already stated, the troubles are cumulative but governments knowingly inherit troubles and must come up with strategies and policies to solve or alleviate problems which are originally not of their own making. This chapter will explore the various “structural courses”, namely economic deprivation, and political subordination, and will make passing reference to another area of the world, Northern Ireland, which itself has experienced ethnic conflict. The chapter will then go on to examine whether the world-wide growth of Islam and the spread of global terrorism is the reason for the new spate of violent attacks in Southern Thailand.

4.2.2 Possible Structural Causes I: Absolute and Relative Economic Deprivation

Economic deprivation in an area normally lends itself to easy recruitment of people in the area into organisations or ways of life which are unlawful. The promise of money and possessions, security and status is a lure, particularly for the young. This is particularly true in areas where the deprivation is perceived as a fault of the central government and this perception helps the groups recruit followers, whether they be the drug gangs in New York or ‘freedom fighters’ in the heart of Rwanda or Muslims in Southern Thailand. One only has to look at figures for Northern Ireland in the 1980’s¹¹, when the sectarian troubles were at their most troublesome to see that economic deprivation or disparities provided what Horowitz would call the entanglement of routine administration into an issue on “the political agenda of ethnically divided societies”. Figures provided by the Conflict Archive on the Internet Web Service (University of Ulster), show that the average weekly wage in Northern Ireland in 1980 was 119.20 (pounds sterling) a month. This was the lowest

⁹ Auriel Croissant, from *Unrest in Southern Thailand’s Contours, Causes and Consequences Since 2001* from the website *Centre for Contemporary Conflict*, 2003

¹⁰ *ibid*

in the British Isles. Wales, the second lowest, had an average monthly income of 138.60 (pounds sterling) a month. In 1986 -87, the Catholics, the indigenous group of Ireland, were more reliant on the Income support than their 'colonial' Protestant neighbours arguably pointing to a disparity in jobs and wages. Certainly, the majority group who earned 15,000 pounds or more a month in 1986-87 were the Protestants with Catholics seemingly in the more low wage jobs. The amount of Protestants who earned from 10,000-15,000 pounds sterling plus was 34 percent as opposed to 21 percent of Catholics. At the lower end of the salary scale – 2,000 – 6, 000 pounds sterling, only 47 percent were Protestant as opposed to 59 percent who were Catholic. Although not the cause of the troubles in Northern Ireland they became one of the focus issues for Catholics and provided, for them at least, a grievance against the British Government. The same can be seen in Thailand.

Thailand has an impressive record of economic growth between 1960-97. However, while the Kingdom as a whole enjoyed financial success there were many regional imbalances which deepened during the period. Notably, in the deep south or border states. At first glance it would seem the opposite. The gross provincial product (GPP) for Patani

rose from 7,840 million baht to 33,300 million baht, while those of Yala and Narathiwat increased from 6,745 million baht and 8,737 million baht to 24,437 million baht and 28,646 million baht respectively. During the same period, the average per capita income of Patani grew from 9,340 baht to 57, 621 baht, while that of Yala and Narathiwat also increased from 14,987 baht to 52,737 baht and 38,553 baht, respectively.¹²

In comparison with the rest of Thailand, and especially the Northeast, the income of the border provinces are broadly comparable. Economic indicators such as the purchasing of motor cars and motorbikes also point to a healthy economy. However, the Muslims of the South are

¹² Jitpiriromsri and Sobhonvasu, p. 96-97

Wont to compare their economic circumstances with those of fellow Malays in Malaysia, or of Buddhist Thais in Songkla and other more affluent parts of the South.¹³

Further data supplied by the Thailand Human Development Report 2003 shows that Satun, Patani, Yala, Narathiwat are among the least developed provinces of the Kingdom. For example, figures suggest that the average unemployment rate for the Kingdom in 2003 was just over two percent. The unemployment rate in Southern Thailand was 3 percent. In Satun it was just under 9 percent. Household income has increased by region in all the regions but again the gap in mean household income and per capita income (Gross National Product) has widened between the regions so that although income levels increased in absolute levels, other regions in the Kingdom have increased at a greater rate than in the South (and the Northeast). This growing economic disparity has been ever present during the Kingdom's growth period and cannot solely be blamed on the Thaksin administration. What did drop under the Thaksin administration was the amount of visitors at accommodation establishments such as Narathiwat and Hat Yai. In 2003, for example, in 2003 110,001 Thai visitors visited the accommodation establishments of Narathiwat. This figure had dropped to 88,810 by 2004. International visitors had dropped even more so with 311,091 visitors in 2003 and only 245, 667 visitors the following year.¹⁴ Phuket, by comparison rose from 3,508, 950 visitors to 4, 234, 982 over the same period. For a government that put a lot of effort in selling the notion of tourism to the Muslims of the South, the figures point to a real failure. The violence in the border regions was damaging the economy even more and the Thaksin government and its polices were seen as being the cause of this violence and thus the fall in tourism and economic success.

In response to the economic disparity – and by linking the violence to the poverty – the Thaksin government used with its economic packages such as *One Tambon, One Product* which it increased in the South and injected huge amounts of money into the Southern border areas, “including the creation of a *halal* food

¹³ *ibid* p. 98

¹⁴ Thailand in Figures, p.508-509

industrial complex in Patani”.¹⁵ Thaksin was even involved in helping establish the country’s first Islamic Bank which was based in the south and hoped to encourage inward investment from the Gulf states. However, these ideas were seen as top-down and centralised reforms, designed to reinforce the power of the Thai state by giving it greater authority. However, as in Northern Ireland, the violence was not simply a “result of the failures of local economic development”¹⁶ and the Thaksin government made a serious misjudgement in linking the violence so strongly to poverty. It was perceived as another problem caused by a biased centrist government and certainly added to the “enabling environment” and as such should not be underestimated in its contribution to the situation.

4.2.3 Possible Structural Causes II: Social Discrimination and Political Subordination

The economic deprivation felt by those in the south cannot be seen as the only factor for the outburst of violence because, as previously stated, the northeast of Thailand is in a worse financial position than the south. However, whereas the northeast is seen as being the life and soul of Thailand, the Malay-Muslims of the South perceive their culture to be treated both politically and culturally as subordinate to the rest of Thailand and, as a result, their economic deprivation is amplified. This is not to say that Muslims in Thailand are repressed for their beliefs. The constitution accords Muslims equal rights and opportunities. Muslims enjoy freedom of belief which is symbolised by a network of religious institutions and organisations including more than five thousand mosques and several thousand religious schools. However, data again shows that most Muslim people in the three border provinces do not have the same educational and employment opportunities in comparison with their Buddhist counterparts, despite their being the majority population in the region. The National Statistics Office show that

In terms of the highest level of attainment,
69.80 percent of the Muslim population in
Patani, Yala and Narathiwat provinces have

¹⁵ *ibid* p. 106

¹⁶ *ibid* p 106

only a primary school education, compared with 49.6 percent of Buddhists.¹⁷

At the higher levels of education, only 9.20 percent of Muslims have completed their secondary education¹⁸ At tertiary level only 1.70 percent of the Muslim population have a bachelor's degree. This points to a serious under representation of Muslims in the area of educational attainment. To combat these figures a variety of social-economic programs were implemented at the "macro-level and in service and public sectors"¹⁹ but there is still a large disparity when translating these into jobs or improving standards of living for the Muslim population. There is an active Malay-Muslim civil society movement which promotes the collective interests of the Muslims in Thailand. Some Muslims from the South have risen to become successful businessmen, army leaders and even to the post of Prime Minister in the shape of Prem Tinsulanond. However, several indicators point to a failed integration of the Muslims of the South. Although recent governments were in theory keen to increase the number of Muslims in the bureaucracy in practice numerous obstacles ranging from educational attainment to demands for social conformity have limited such recruitment, especially to the higher grades of the civil service.

Figures for 2000 indicate that of all the 766,000 working residents in the three border provinces, only 6.6 percent were employed as government officials. Muslim government officials comprised only 2.4 percent of all working Muslims in the region.²⁰

Those Muslims who do have jobs find themselves in low status jobs.

35 percent are self-employed, working largely in the informal sectors in occupations such as street

¹⁷ *ibid* p. 98

¹⁸ these figures from the NSO do not distinguish between government secondary schools and the private Islamic schools. Cited *ibid* p. 98

¹⁹ *ibid* p.99

²⁰ *ibid* p. 99

vendors, tea-shop owners and second-hand clothing dealers. A sizeable proportion of them, 32.5 percent work in the private sector, notably in rubber plantations, farming and factories....19.2 percent of Buddhists had positions in the bureaucracy. This covers many forms of prestigious and middle-class employment...teachers, doctors, nurses and most other public sector workers are formally civil servants.²¹

With these figures in mind it is easy to see why many Muslims in the three border provinces have what they see as “legitimate grievances against the existing political system.”²²

Again, this is not a new problem. Consecutive governments, from the nationalistic Phibun regime of the 1930’s and 1940’s to the sudden closure of the Training Centre for Malay Language and Muslim Culture in the late 1970’s and even through the more conciliatory 80’s and 90’s with Prime Ministers such as Prem at the helm²³ have failed to integrate the South because of overbearing and nationalistic – or perhaps popular – policies. The sense of being marginalised or even looked down upon by the rest of the country can be seen in how the media portray the South – any trouble or violence is immediately blamed on Muslim terrorists particularly since 9/11. The South also has a reputation for being bandit territory characterised by having a high crime rate, lawlessness, endemic corruption within the bureaucracy, smuggling, small arms trade and other forms of illegitimate business.²⁴ As a result, many believe that

Our Southern Muslims now are living like immigrants

²¹ *ibid* p. 100

²² *ibid* p. 100

²³ For all of Prem’s role as the guardian of the South he was also one of the more vociferous critics of the National Reconciliation Committee’s report which gave the South concessions including making Yawi, the regional dialect, the “working” language of the region

²⁴ Surat Horachaikul has a small discussion on the “common banditry pursued by criminals and bureaucrats” and other commentators including Ruth McKivie and Duncan McCargo also discuss the roles of *jao por* in the region. This essay will not.

in their own homeland.²⁵

It is clear to see that the marriage of an economic, cultural and political subordination has intensified the ethnic consciousness of the Malay-Muslim and brought them into conflict with the state in the 1940's, 1960's, 1970's and again since 2001. However, it is not altogether clear why this latest manifestation has arisen. Ethnic differences viz-a-vie employment or educational opportunities and economic deprivation do not always lead to political instability and ethnic violence. According to the Geographic Information System (GIS) data

Only eighty-five communities officially classified as below the poverty line experienced violent incidents during the twelve months of 2004. The pattern of violence bore no obvious relationship to locations of poor communities.²⁶

Poverty and lack of education and employment opportunity do provide a strong environment in which trouble can begin. The disparity that Muslims perceived in the above are, as Horowitz says, construed as simply discrimination by those experiencing the disparities. This is not to say that they would drive someone to pick up a gun and murder or even push people into demanding a separatist state but they do provide meat to feed the passions of an already historically wary group. A group who not only perceived discrimination in their own home but also were witnessing Islam being maligned and under aggressive attack all around the world.

4.3 The Growth of Islamism

As said in the controversial book by Samuel Huntington – *The Clash of Civilisations* – the Cold War may have ended but a new conflict is moving into place: that of Islam and the West. Whether one agrees with Huntington or not, it is almost

²⁵ Jitpiromsri and Sobhonvasu, p. 89 cited from Abdul Rahman Abdul Shamad, chairman of the Provincial Islamic Committee of Narathiwat, in *Matichon* newspaper, 1st December, 2004

²⁶ *ibid* p.104

impossible to not believe that there is a growing polarisation between the state of Islam and that of the states of the West. How governments deal with this new state of affairs will forge the future. In Southeast Asia, the ethnic diversity of the region has already seen both resolutions and conflict. Conventional wisdom holds that

Islam in Southeast Asia has always been defined
by tolerance, moderation and pluralism.²⁷

Those who claim that democracy and Islam cannot live side by side are proved wrong by the democracies, however tempered, of Indonesia and Malaysia. This is particularly true in Thailand where Muslims enjoy a “degree of religious and political freedom...without precedent in the country’s history.”²⁸ As Bajunid goes on to say, Muslims are now allowed to revert back to their original Muslim names, wear the *hijah* in government offices, have prayer rooms in airports, train stations and even the parliament building. Universities allow for weekly prayer meetings on Fridays on campus. Compared to the actions of other Southeast Asian countries who have harried and harassed some Muslim ethnic groups,²⁹ the improvement in the life of Muslims is a tangible one and also one which has a correlation with what was a growth in the democratic liberalisation of Thailand as a whole. According to research by Suria Saniwa in 1998, the democratisation of Thailand in the 1990’s “significantly contributed to the deradicalisation of Malay-Muslim opposition in Thailand.”³⁰ Studies by other political scientists such as Chaiwat Satha-Anand highlight actions taken by Muslims in disputes with authorities which point to positive engagement and as “exemplary models of civil society.”³¹

However, as almost everywhere in the Muslim world, the past two decades have seen a stronger emphasis on Islamic identity among the Thai Muslims and particularly those in the South.* Traditionally Malay Muslims practice a moderate

²⁷ Auriel Croissant

²⁸ Omar Farouk Bajunid, p. 11 *Islam, Nationalism and the Thai State from The Dynamics of Southern Thailand*, Silkworm Books, 2004

²⁹ note on Indonesia and Phillipines here

³⁰ report taken from Bajunid p11

³¹ cited ibid p11

* Gilquin makes an important point here about the diversity of Thai Islam. He points out that the term Muslim or even Malay-Muslim is not a catch all phrase when Thailand has Yawi speaking Malay-Muslims next to Thai speaking Malay-Muslims

variant of Islam – Sufism which can be defined as Sunni Islam with more moderate leanings. However, over the past few decades, purist Salafu (and more specifically Wahhabi) teaching has gained ground – propelled by donations from charities and benefactors in the Middle East and fostering a greater orthodoxy in many of the increasing number of religious schools. Alongside this is a greater feeling around the world that Islam is under attack from, in particular, the West and many believe that both of the above factors have had an affect on the conventional wisdom stated at the beginning of this discussion about the rise of Islam: that it has in Southeast Asia been defined by tolerance, moderation and pluralism.

4.3.1 Post 9/11 and the Muslim World

Bernard Adeney-Risakotta is one that believes that the impact of 9/11 was a very real one but one that may take time to make itself felt on Southeast Asia. His argument is that whilst 9/11 served to pull the United States together in a wave of emotional solidarity and saw a huge rise in patriotism and nationalism, the counter war on terrorism did not have the same effect among Southeast Asian Muslims.³² While September 11th was a far away attack on

“others”...the attack against Afghanistan on October 7 was perceived as an attack on “us”, but the “us” was not a single nation. Muslims do not feel threatened as nations by the war on terrorism, but rather the *umat Allah* (the people of God).³³

Adeney-Risakotta argues that while the US experienced their rise in nationalism and the importance of the nation-state,

living in mainly Buddhist areas. These are completely different from urban living Muslims in Bangkok and so forth. This diversity does go against the idea of grouping Muslims under one banner

³² Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, *The Impact of September 11 on Islam in Southeast Asia* p.327 from *Islam in Southeast Asia, Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century* ed. By K.S. Nathan and Mohummed Hashim Kamali p.325

³³ *ibid* p.326

Among Muslims, religious solidarity grew at the expense of nationalism.³⁴

For most of the world, an external threat is primarily a threat against the nation-state. For Muslims, it is a threat against Islam and the Muslim way of life. The basis for this belief is rooted in history where Muslims can point to ancient conflicts such as the Crusades, or more recent Middle East conflicts between the Palestinians and the Jews or the Gulf War.

For Southeast Asians, struggles against the West can be linked to the struggles against colonialism. Whilst Messrs Bush and Blair like to think that the west is seen as the home of democracy, decency and freedom, many Southeast Asian Muslims perceive the West to be a “source of colonialism, injustice and repression.”³⁵

For Malay-Muslims, they have their own private history of fighting the Siamese for many centuries for their own Kingdom of Patani. Since the end of colonialism, they have had to endure the move of the central powers to demand loyalties to the emerging nation-states that Thailand was becoming. As a result of this and of wider events and long history, there is deep suspicion among Southeast Asian Muslims of the central state within the nation-state and its supposed moral authority – an authority built on the works of great western philosophers.

Thus the post 9/11 world for Muslims saw an attack on their way of life and it has been argued has spurred many to take a more radical stand against what they see as the West mobilising again. In order to resist, according to Adeney-Risakotta, the Muslims in Southeast Asia have turned to

A pan-Islamic identity...more effective vehicle than nationalism for resisting Western domination. Most do not reject nationalism, but many see it as subordinate to their religion.³⁶

There are arguments to suggest that this pan-Islamic identity is taking root in the Southern Border areas of Thailand. Some of this can be seen in small changes in

³⁴ *ibid* p.326

³⁵ *ibid* p.329

³⁶ *ibid* p 330

the culture of Southern Thailand. Michel Gilquin talks of a “re-Islamicised” person who have adopted the dress code and fashions of the peoples of Kuala Lumpur.

For want of an Islamic-Thai ethos, and given the numerical weight of Yawi speakers and southerners in the Muslim community in Thailand, the Malay world provides their models.³⁷

Others point to more shocking evidence of the growth of a radical Islam and away from the characteristics of the nation-state, such as civil society or democracy. Wattana Sugunasil claims that the nature of the violence in the South has changed since the beginning of 2004 and that there has emerged a group of “radical Muslim militants who have espoused the cause of total war with the Buddhist *kafirs*”³⁸. His evidence is a letter found on the body of one of the militants killed by the Thai army at the Kru-Ze temple battle in 2004. The document, written in the Malay script of *Yawi* and entitled *Berjihad di Patani* (The Struggle at Patani), called upon the Muslim population of the South to rise up against the oppressive Thai government. It proclaimed “a *jihad* against the Thai government and all those who work and support it”³⁹ and take back Patani as a separate state. It claims Patani (or Patani in its original Muslim spelling) is the Dar al-Islam (the land of Islam) which has been invaded by the Siamese or central Thai government. The call of *jihad* is a defensive measure to push out what they see as colonialists. Even those Muslims who work for the government are labelled as the enemy or infidels who therefore deserve to die. It is not surprising then that so many Malay Muslims have been killed in the troubles by other ‘insurgents’ probably for ‘collusion’. This new, more radical discourse is not unique to Southern Thailand and Sugunasil claims that the separatist leaders “have borrowed from other radical Islamist movements that have flourished since the 1990’s.”⁴⁰ And not just in their discourse but in their actions as well.

³⁷ Michel Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, p. 125

³⁸ Wattana Sugunasil, *Islam, Radicalism, and Violence in Southern Thailand: Berjihad DI Patani and the 28TH April 2004 Attacks* from *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence*, p. 118

³⁹ *ibid* p. 119

⁴⁰ *ibid* p. 123

From 2001 to 2003, militant groups in Thailand have begun a new round of coordinated attacks using more sophisticated tactics...more menacing, as ideas of radical jihad were incorporated into local separatist movements.⁴¹

4.3.2 Separatism, Jihad and Global Insurgency

No study of the Southern Borders can ignore the arguments of those that claim that the area is ripe for the brand of terrorism most notably associated with Al-Qaeda and other global terrorist groups. Post 9/11 saw a real change in the mindset of the USA and its allies. The “War on Terrorism” meant that all countries had to look within its borders and seek out any terrorist cells or potential flashpoints of Muslim insurgency. All areas of policy were looked at and scrutinised. Southeast Asia found itself under a microscope and all areas of policy were examined. David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith for example, labelled the ASEAN states as complacent in their approach to a growing but “unsuspected Islamist terror network spanning” its borders.⁴² They blame the rise on a “theatre of intense instability”⁴³ which grew from the meltdown of the economy of the region in 1997. They base the claim on a group of young middle to lower class group in both Malaysia and Indonesia who feel disenfranchised by a western fuelled globalising world⁴⁴ and that this has spread to other Muslim communities in the region.

Many writers point to evidence such as the letters previously mentioned above as testimony to the new spread in a globalised, or at least growing, *jihad*. Rohan Gunaratna’s book, *Conflict and Terrorism*, is full of links between separatist political organisations such as the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) and other Muslim separatist groups such as the Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia. The same

⁴¹ *ibid* p. 126

⁴² David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, *Southeast Asia and the War Against Terrorism: The Rise of Islamism and the Challenge to the Surveillance State* p.144 from *September 11 and Political Freedom: An Asian Perspective*, ed by Uwe Johannsen, Alan Smith and James Gomez

⁴³ *ibid* p.145

⁴⁴ *ibid* p.146. This idea is supported by no less an expert than Anthony Reid who points out “how globalised the *jihad* side of the equation would become in the hands of Al Qaeda” cited by Bernard Adney-Risakotta p.331

books claims that at the Krue Ze Mosque raid, seven of those killed were said to not be Thai at all but perhaps Indonesians underlining these growing links between the various organisations in the region. Gunaratna's book also makes claims that the organisation known as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) are said to have claimed Thailand as a part of *Daulah Islamiyah Nusantara*, "the pan Islamic super-state that JI seeks to establish in Southeast Asia".⁴⁵

However, the evidence that the southern conflict has become part of the global battle against the West is at best sketchy and scattered in its evidence.⁴⁶ Natasha Hamilton-Hart argues that "terrorism studies do not sufficiently problematise the nature of sources"⁴⁷ and Michael K. Connors accuses Gunaratna's book to read like a "police dossier" rather than a factual analysis of the situation.⁴⁸ As Connors has said, the current political climate begun by the US post 9/11 with the "War on Terror" now means that at almost every incident where Muslims may be involved, experts and writers approach the situation with the pre-conception that it is part of a Muslim radical war, a global jihad by the "Muslim Brethren"⁴⁹, when there is little conclusive evidence to support the claims. This idea is taken up by Dr. Chaiwat Satha Anand who argues that the media's use of the word *jihad* has bastardised its true meaning and has created an association with "holy war" in the minds of the public. In fact, *jihad*, says Dr Satha Anand, means "struggling against worldly passions within oneself"⁵⁰ and not "an act of violence directed indiscriminately against non-Muslims"⁵¹ Its interpretation by the commentators in the west is indicative of the misunderstanding many experts have of the true nature of Islam and the supposed global insurgency. Indeed, according to one recent book, claims that Huntington's assertion in *The Clash of Civilisations* that a successful movement requires a stable, complex

⁴⁵ Rohan Gunaratna's book, *Conflict and Terrorism* p.63

⁴⁶ one piece of evidence that Gunaratna cites is that a VCD "entitled *Global Jihad movements* began to sell 'like hotcakes' p.63 – not really an indicator of a growth in the region. After 9/11 many Muslims were wearing t-shirts with Osama Bin Laden's face on it. Does this mean that they were about to take up arms?

⁴⁷ Michael K. Connors p. 156, cited from *The Pacific Review*, 18, *Terrorism in SEA*

⁴⁸ *ibid* p. 156

⁴⁹ *ibid* p. 147

⁵⁰ Dr. Chaiwat Satha Anand, *Jihad!* taken from *Violence in the Mist* by Supara Janchitfah p.97

⁵¹ *ibid* p.98

and adaptable institution is the reason why the southern Thailand is not in danger of seeing a strong revolutionary movement because

All the revolutionary organisations in Patani seem to be struggling against each other rather than fighting against the government. A revolutionary movement requires not only strong political organisation but also the support of social groups. The Muslims in Patani have failed to mobilise support both internally and externally.

However, it is arguable that there has been growth in the numbers who have turned to the a more radical Islam and that perhaps this radicalism has filtered down to the traditional separatist groups. The recent violence in the South – attacks on Buddhist monks and teachers – and the viciousness of the attacks, including the incineration of one young lady has the hall marks of organisations such as Bersatu, a more radical separatist group whose members are “renegades”,⁵² from other groups who

Create rifts among the Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims and tried to disrupt the government’s education programme by attacking schools, harming and threatening the life...of school teachers, coercing parents to stop sending their children to those schools.⁵³

The new shift in the violence does seem to support Gunaratna’s view that radicalism has found a foothold in the South but it does still seem to be the acts of a minority rather than a majority. Professor Walker Connor, who like Donald Horowitz, has contributed significantly to the field of ethnic conflict, believes that the essence of an ethnic movement

is not to be sought in the motives of elites who may manipulate nationalism* for some ulterior end, but

⁵² Rohan Gunaratna’s book, *Conflict and Terrorism* p.43

⁵³ *ibid* p.43

rather in the mass sentiment to which elites appeal.⁵⁴

Thus the elite groups – the separatist groups – are restricted by what the masses will tolerate. The groups may try and steer public opinion towards certain goals and objectives, but they are tempered by what the masses will accept is being done in their name. The fact that the security forces have found it difficult to suppress the violence and catch the terrorists is certainly due to the lack of help given by the masses in the area who have some sympathy and indeed share some of the grievances that the separatist groups have. By the same token, the fact that the masses have not risen up in a mass revolution and that attacks in Thailand have remained at a local level arguably points to the fact that the majority of Muslims in the South do not support the means and methods that have occurred and nor do they wish to see the type of groups such as Al-Quaeda in their region.

This is not to say that the situation will not change. A combination of what has been discussed above has led to a new wave of support for Islam which offers itself, much as did Communism in the 1960's and 1970's, as a way out of economic deprivation, as a means to achieve success and status and relates more to the lives of young southerners because of its religious aspects and customs far more than Communism ever did. Radical Islam is growing.

4.3.3 Recruitment

The question is how has this new radicalism been disseminated through the to the traditional separatist groups. Bhokin Bhalakula, the one time TRT minister of the interior, claims that

radical ideas brought over by Thai Muslims who had fought in the Afghan War against the Russians in the 1980's have helped provide the ideological basis and inspiration for the ongoing campaign in the South by a new generation of militants.⁵⁵

* nationalism here would mean achieving the goals of the Separatist group over the Central government this achieving independence from it

⁵⁴ cited by Cunningham

⁵⁵ *ibid* p. 126 cited in *The Nation*, 8th June, 2004

A new generation of Militants who

Were quite different; young, deeply pious, poorly armed and willing to die for their cause.⁵⁶

A generation who were faced by

A world dominated by corrupt politics and a group of elites, secular and religious alike, concerned solely for their personal political and economic interests, rather than spiritual development or other deeply felt religious matters. It is a world soaked in Western culture in dress, music, television, and movies and subjugated to vices and materialistic vices.⁵⁷

Within this gap between disenchanted and, as already argued, poorer groups (both financially and in aspirations) and a world beyond their understanding come the religious schools.

According to the Ministry of Education, there were more than 500 private Islamic schools in South Thailand in 2004, with around 2,000 teachers and 25,000 students. Most are registered with the Ministry of Education but some are beyond their scope. They are funded by private donations and have connections with *ponoh* (religious schools) in Pakistan and the Middle East. The schools are secondary age – primary education is compulsory in Thailand in Thai state schools – and were set up to meet the needs of young Muslims which the more Buddhist schools could not fulfil. There is also a feeling according to Rohan Gunaratna,⁵⁸ that Thai state schools are simply institutions which attempt to “assimilate the region’s distinct Malay-

⁵⁶ *ibid* p.127

⁵⁷ *ibid* p. 127 cited from a conversation in Patani

⁵⁸ an excellent critique of this Rohan Gunaratna’s book, *Conflict and Terrorism* is provided by Michael K. Connors called *War on Error and the Southern Fire: How Terrorism Analysts Get It Wrong* from *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence*. I am, like Connors, unconvinced by his Rohan’s arguments, however his place here is merited in that he does show a populist view of the situation in Southern Thailand

Muslim culture into the Thai mainstream”.⁵⁹ There is an estimated 70-75 percent of Muslim youth in the three border provinces enrolled in these Islamic schools. Outside of these mainstream schools are the *pondok* schools. These are village based schools whose teachers are mainly volunteers with little pay and who teach nothing but Islamic studies which includes language, religion, jurisprudence and Islamic mysticism.

Many of these students – 2,500 according to Government figures – studied in Saudi Arabia or other Islamic universities in the Middle East or South Asia and, on returning to Thailand, found themselves unemployed and so ended up teaching in local communities. This helped the growth of more radical and orthodox Islamic thinking in the South, particularly, Sufism (and its belief in magic) and the more extreme Wahhabi. This is not to say that the *pondoks* were spreading jihad but certainly the spreading of the word is, as radical thoughts of rebellion always are, easy among disaffected and poor youth. Young *ustaz* and their students become politically radical and the protagonists of movements such as *Umna-ism*. Whether this has or will translate into a violent reaction towards centrist authority is difficult to judge.

4.4 Conclusion to chapter 4

Arguably, the resumption of the problems in the south is marked by the attack on an arms store on 4th January 2004 in which four soldiers were killed. At the same time, fires were started in a group of schools in Narathiwat. On 28th April 2004, Kru Ze saw the death of 108 insurgents in different parts of the provinces. Was this resumption of hostilities as a result of economic poverty, inequality of opportunities in education and employment or a growth in Islam in a region which, historically, felt that it was almost continuously involved in an ethnic conflict with the central powers of Thailand?

Professor Walker Connor believes that observers of ethnic conflicts need to look past these salient reasons to a more basic human set of feelings:

...ethnic strife is too often superficially discerned as principally predicated upon language, religion, customs, economic inequality, or some other tangible element. But what is fundamentally involved in such a

⁵⁹ Gunaratna, p. 47

conflict is that divergence of basic identity which manifests itself in the “us-them” syndrome.⁶⁰

While such things such as religion and economic deprivation may be important contributing factors to ethnic conflict, it is the opposition of identities which define conflicts and the depth of emotion with which they are fought. What is clear is that the intensity of the conflict has escalated mirrored by the ferocity of the atrocities being committed. Connor believes that it is passion which motivates terrorists such as the Tamils, or Basques or the Irish. And arguably, it motivates those in Southern Thailand as well.⁶¹

All of the above are contributing factors in the re-emergence of the troubles in the South and they have been swallowed up into a huge grievance felt by many in the Southern border region of Thailand which has to do with identity and in particular a feeling that there is a dichotomy of *us-them*. The depth of emotion beneath this feeling is nicely summed up by Connor who quotes Chateaubriand from 200 years earlier:

Men don't allow themselves to be killed for their interests; they allow themselves to be killed for their passions.⁶²

With this much passion bubbling beneath the surface what the South required at the 2001 election a leader who believed in calm consensus management; who would try and understand not only the ways of the south and its unique characteristic which marked it out from the rest of Thailand but be able to read the political landscape of the region; who would see that economic deprivation would need special policies designed specifically for its local economy; a leader who would empathise with a large segment of his electorate who were worried about events outside of the country concerning the religion of Islam which was, in their eyes, their primary focus of loyalty. What they got was the Thaksin style of management – brash, unwieldy, polarising, confrontational, media driven, ego led and ultimately the key to open the door which would allow those bubbling passions to explode to the surface.

⁶⁰ cited in Cunningham

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² ibid

CHAPTER V

MISMANAGEMENT

5.1 Thaksin Versus the King

As was discussed in Chapter Three (The Nature of Southern Thai Politics) Duncan McCargo explains the relative calm of the 1980's and 1990's as being the result of what he calls the Network Monarchy. McCargo's argues that King Bhumipol was more than just a constitutional monarch, letting his governments know by either proxies such as the Privy Council leader Prem Tinsulanond¹ of his displeasure at certain policies or by openly making personal interventions. The strength of the Democrats in the South came from astute leadership of Chuan Leekpai in previous administrations, and, although no longer a force in the rest of Thailand, in the South, the Democrats were perceived by the Malay-Muslims as their voice and representatives in parliament. However, Thaksin believed that a country/company cannot have two board of directors – his and that of the King- and so Thaksin sought from the very start to “displace the network monarchy and to replace it with a more centralised form of political control”.²

5.2 Thaksin's Tactics

Thaksin's main aim in the South was to impose greater central control over a region dominated traditionally by TRT's main opponents, the Democrats. The South was also “Prem's backyard”.³ A native of Songkhla, Prem understood what Thaksin did not – the culture and politics of the border provinces. Prem understood that this was a sub-region which “was an enclave of military power and privilege, supported by local government officials who were overwhelmingly loyal to the Democrats.”⁴ Prem approached the problems in the south with much the same policy he had

¹ Duncan McCargo, *Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South* from *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* p. 39

² *ibid* p. 43

³ *ibid* p. 39

⁴ *ibid* p. 39

followed in Isan during the anti-Communist troubles in the 1970's. With him was a trusted ally, Harn Leenanond, whom he made Fourth Army Commander. Harn "was one of the principal architects of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC)"⁵ established in January 1981 and of more below. The policy that Prem and his Army Commander used was called "*tai rom yen*" (South in the cool shade) and "Harn used a mixture of development projects and public relations initiatives to calm local tensions".⁶

Politically it would make sense as it would break up the control that the Democrat Party had over the bureaucracy of the south and the party's near hegemonic dominance in the region. From the mid-1990's the only seats not held by the Democrats were those of a group of Muslim MP's from the New Aspiration Party (which then merged with TRT) in 2001, all from border provinces.* In the 2001 election which TRT won in a landslide and which left them dominating the Parliament with the number of seats they had won, the Democrats held 47 out of 53 seats on offer in the southern border region. However, rather than following the same 'softly-softly' approach to coax the South to turn his way, Thaksin applied his "standard approach to the problem".⁷

As was discussed in chapter two, Thaksin's approach to all perceived problems was based on a business CEO approach and a mistrust of anything or anybody who had held power before him. As a result, "he viewed all existing bureaucratic and administrative arrangements with distrust, believing that officials and the security services were too slow, unreliable and inefficient to handle difficult issues."⁸ Added to this he believed, rightly, "that structures had been created to serve the old system of network governance: in other words, he suspected officials (especially in the South) of holding loyalty to the Democrats, Prem and the palace rather than to him and his government".⁹ The CEO in him could not resist "thinking

⁵ *ibid* p. 39

⁶ *ibid* p. 39

* This merge with TRT was a Thaksin attempt to win more seats in the South. He then appointed the Muslim politician, Wan Muhammad Nor Matha, of the Wadah faction to curry favour with the Muslims of the South. A discussion of Nor Matha's role can be found later in this chapter

⁷ *ibid* p. 43

⁸ *ibid* p. 43

⁹ *ibid* p. 43

new, acting new”¹⁰ as a means to solve all problems that he thought were to be found in his new company. Decisions should be fresh and, as importantly, quick. As we have seen, Thaksin did not care for too much reading of diverse or perhaps dense reports and books, so he relied on his advisers, people who had been patronised by him and who thought as he did, to give him advice upon which he made his quick decisions. These men were put in jobs they did not wish to lose so to give advice or opinions which the Premier did not want to hear would risk their new positions. So they just agreed. Thaksin also believed in quick results. As with the “War on Drugs” policy, he believed the right man in the right job would get results quickly – another job ticked off his list. Finally, his bias to the police force meant that he believed that a power shift was required away from the military. This approach was the blueprint for all his decision concerning the South. However, there was no real problem in the South. What fuelled his actions here was a desire to subjugate all of Thailand to his will. The thought of a region which acted independently to his wishes was a thorn in his ego. There should be no opposition, there should be no dissent. The Democrats and the Prem network simply had to be dismantled.

Thaksin began by sending in his own people to report back on how the old system operated – who were the main players, what were the main institutions – in order to find the best ways to attack it. His plan was to replace the old guard loyal to Prem with a new brand of politician loyal to Thaksin and his government and then shift the centre of power away from the military to the police. Thus would he have a legitimate force in the South loyal to an ex-policeman and he would have broken Prem’s old network. The question was how to do it. He began by putting pressure on the existing security services and those who ran them. After a series of bombings in June 2001 Thaksin made it clear that he was unhappy with the SBPAC. A series of statements hinted at a forthcoming shake-up of the security of the south and a clear implication that Thaksin thought that the SBPAC was failing.

5.3 The SBPAC

The SBPAC was an important tool in the security services armoury for allowing negotiations and talks between all the various actors in the region. It was

¹⁰ *ibid* p. 41

certainly responsible for administering the promotions and patronising of various people in the area which benefited the Democrats and the New Aspiration Party but, more importantly, it was a mouthpiece for Muslims and it was trusted.

The SBPAC received large numbers of complaints about abuses committed by government officials in the area...resulting in fifty-one officials being transferred.¹¹

It served as a place where potential problems could be resolved by listening to all sides and by forming compromises. It even helped organise local community and cultural events such as “the annual hajj pilgrimage”.¹² A well-respected Patani Muslim, Worawit Baru, claimed that “You can’t just look at the surface of the SBPAC – it was more than just a formal institution.”¹³ For the Muslims in the South, “the Centre was a beacon for ideas of administrative justice, symbolising the Thai state’s sincerity and goodwill”.¹⁴ For Thaksin, however, it was the symbol of Prem’s network and a nest of Democratic opposition.

The dismantling of the SPBAC began in 2001 when Thaksin appointed Major General Songkitti Chakkabhatra to look into the problems of the South. The General, an old pre-cadet friend of Thaksin, reported back that the problems were just caused by common bandits and not insurgents.¹⁵ He advised Thaksin that the security situation in the South could be normalised. As a result of this normal status in the South the Prem-centred SBPAC would of course be redundant as a security enclave and it was closed by the National Security Council on the 1st May, 2002. At the same time, Thaksin also dissolved the joint Civilian-Police-Military Task Force 43 (CPM 43) which had been created at around the time that the SBPAC was founded. The move was widely criticised, as the centre had offered a place where “soldiers, police, Muslims leaders and religious teachers and local officials met to exchange views and

¹¹ *ibid* p. 41

¹² *ibid* p. 41

¹³ *ibid* p. 41 cited from interview with Worawit Baru, 24th October, 2005

¹⁴ *ibid* p. 41

¹⁵ *ibid* p. 45

compare notes”¹⁶ as well as acting as an interface between the regions leaders and the central government based in Bangkok. Almost immediately, the government realised that they had left a vacuum and so Thaksin then set up a Thai Provincial Police Structure, which was believed by locals to be corrupt and an antithesis of the key elements of the previous successful structures. The emerging security crisis in the south was then handed over to three different ministries which meant that arguments over responsibilities and who was to deal with situations were wrangled over rather than solved. Finally, as violence began to grow once more – the result of bandits still according to Thaksin – the Government set up the Southern Border Provinces Peace Keeping Command. It continued to carry out many of the duties of the defunct SBPAC but with one major difference – “it lacked direct contacts with Muslim leaders, the primary strength of the SBPAC”.¹⁷ The locals wanted the new command abolished but Thaksin, convinced that the old SBPAC as being solely Democratic and pro-Prem, allowed his fear of losing control to inform his rejection of the Muslim’s petition.

5.4 9/11/07 and the aftermath

The attack on the twin towers of New York is one whose resonance is felt today not just due to the audacity of the attack but to the media footage afforded it. Suddenly, the world was privy to shocking events in their front room which filled the majority of the world with revulsion and despair that such an attack could happen. It also allowed the United States government to begin its reforming of its own, and many would argue, the world’s approach to terrorism. The American pursued “war on terrorism” converted all ethnic, political or socio-economic protests or conflicts into “acts of terrorism”. Greg Fealy, the expert on Indonesian politics questions

Washington’s tendency to lump them (‘radical’ groups in Indonesia) into a radical camp simply based on their

¹⁶ *ibid* p. 47 cited from Kawi Chongkittaron, *Thailand: International Terrorism and the Muslim South*, *The Nation*, 17th May, 2004

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 48

Islamist credentials.¹⁸

In fact the US led coalition against terrorism just allowed groups to label others terrorists because of the lack of an agreed definition of what “terrorism” is. As former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski said

To the Indians, it is Muslims in Kashmir; to the Russians, it is the Chechens; to the Israelis, it is the Palestinians; to the Arabs, it is the Israelis.¹⁹

And for Thaksin and the TRT government it became the Muslim separatists of the South. What had been before an understanding and almost an acceptance by past governments that the violence in the south were the acts of some local Muslim groups,

Or acts of some government officials who have conflicts of interest, and/or acts of ordinary criminals²⁰

The new violence was linked to a transnational terrorist network and

The Kingdom ...dragged into the American-led global war on terrorism.²¹

Indeed the United States became close allies after 9/11. Thaksin said

Thailand and the US are allies. When the United States requests help from us, we respond. It is a gesture of hospitality²²

¹⁸ Horachaikul, p. 135 cited from Greg Fealy, *A Summary: understanding Political Islam in SEA*, 21st May, 2002
www.asiasociety.org/speeches/southeastasiaislam.html

¹⁹ cited by Sinapan Samyodorai, p. 220, no reference given

²⁰ Horachaikul p. 143, cited from *The P.M. Talks to the People*, (Weekly Radio Broadcast), 2nd November, 2002

²¹ *ibid* p. 143

On another occasion the CEO in Thailand explained Thailand's new foreign positioning:

Let's not forget that the United States is our largest market for Thai goods. We enjoy a trade surplus of 400 million baht with the United States.²³

TRT's new relationship with the US knew no bounds. The list that follows outlines the policies and agreements which indicate the special tie between TRT and the US after 9/11. It also underlines how this shift in policy and position made the Muslim community, particularly in the South, feel more isolated and arguably more defensive.

- The handover of Riduan Isamuddin (known to the world as Hambali) captured in Thailand in August 2003 to the United States without giving him a fair trial in Thailand, despite the claim by the Prime Minister that Hambali used Thailand as a base to commit crime within the sovereignty of Thailand. Thaksin told reporters: "the result of the investigators show that Hambali came to Thailand not only to seek a safe haven but he also planned to make a move during the APEC meeting. He came here to work and was using Thailand as a base for committing acts of terror. Investigations reveal some connection to APEC, but we still have to investigate further."

- The issue of "People's Protection and Internal Security Act of 2002" and the "Executive decree amending the Anti-Money Laundering Act Of 2003" to show the United States that Thailand has pledged to fight against terrorism

²² cited in Horachaikul, cited from Richard S. Ehrlich, *Thailand Takes "hospitable" Action on Iraq*, 1st October, 2003 www.atimes.com/atimes.html

²³ cited in Horachaikul from *Legality of the Thai-US Initiatives Questioned*, 26th October, 2003 www.nationmultimedia.com/specials/THAIinIraq/index_oct26.php

as the United States desires. (The latter act is an amendment that modifies the law so as to include terrorism within its ambit and permit the state to freeze assets of suspected terrorists. The amendments have been criticised on the grounds that the provisions are very broad, making the act draconian in nature.

- The deployment of nearly 400 Thai troops to join the United States led coalition forces in Iraq in September 2003, disregarding the fact that the United States and the British made war against Iraq without the passage of the second UN Security Council Resolution, not to mention the hidden agendas behind the so called war of “pre-emption” where...no weapons of mass destruction have been found.²⁴

- The designation of Thailand in October 2003 as a Major Non-NATO ally in reward of Thailand’s commitment to the war on terrorism and Thailand’s decision to send troops to join the United States led coalition force in Iraq.²⁵

If one deals with these events one by one, it is easy to see why there is an isolating effect on the Muslim south.

The arrest of Hambali would seem to be a success for the Thai security services. A dangerous criminal terrorist who may well have been plotting to disrupt the APEC meeting would naturally be seen as a victory and his handover to the Americans as a sign of good will. However, in the light of history and of other events it is easy to see why his arrest and subsequent lack of trial could be misinterpreted. Past events involving the judiciary and the security forces have led the Malay Muslims to lose trust in the people and the institutions that make these up. Massacres by soldiers in the late 1940;s in Narathiwat,(known locally as the Dusun-yor

²⁴ The Thai government also at this time gave serious consideration to an American proposal for allowing the use of Thai facilities such as Utapao Air base to help fight Islamic terrorism in Southeast Asia allegedly linked to Al-Quaeeda. Finally, even Thaksin did not agree believing this to harm relations between the south and the government.

²⁵ Horachaikul, p. 142-143

massacre)²⁶ the gun battle in the a Muslim temple of Kru-Ze where many were killed, the acquittal of soldiers and police for the deaths of those at Tak Bai and the disappearance and release of police accused of having something to do with the kidnap and possible death of the Muslim lawyer, Somchai Neelaphaijit have led to mounting scepticism that the judiciary is fair when it deals with Muslim cases or people. The arrest and non-trial of another Muslim, a prominent one, and his handing over to the US would further intensify this mistrust of bodies closely associated with a centralised government.

The issue of the People's Protection and Internal Security Act was just part of the weaponry the US created in its "War on Terrorism". Without going into the details of the debates surrounding the various attempts to define terrorism post 9/11, ASEAN help a Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Terrorism.²⁷ No agreement was made on the definition of terrorism but all the member states were keen to show that they would and could combat terrorism activities and terrorist groups. To be fair to the ASEAN groups, pressure was brought to bear on them by the US who insinuated many times that if the members of ASEAN could not sort out problems in their own backyard the US would be forced to act. Fearful of being seen as weak nation states with little homeland security, all of the ASEAN members instigated policies and declared that they would all

Co-operate on sharing intelligence, facilitate the arrest and extradition of suspects and implement joint counter-terrorist projects.²⁸

The impact of these anti-terrorist measures were numerous and allowed Thaksin and his style of CEO leadership to strengthen his own power base and also to justify his views on civil rights and other issues. Firstly, there was increased military aid. The Thaksin government spent more and more money each year on strengthening the military including allegedly buying two Black Hawks from the US.

²⁶ Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *The Silence of the Bullet Monument: Violence and "Truth" Management, Dusun-nyor 1948, and Kru-Ze 2004* from *Rethinking the Violence in Southern Thailand*, p. 11-34

²⁷ the meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur on the 23rd May 2002. The meeting is cited by Sinapan Samydorai p. 221

²⁸ *ibid* p. 221

With an increased budget more money was sent to the forces in the south. The mistrust of the forces in the south has led many to believe that much of the violence is sponsored by the security forces in order to keep the central government sending money down to the security agencies. As a result, the perception was that state and the US were sponsoring violent attacks in the south against Muslims or against locals and then blaming local Muslims. Secondly, the practice of administrative detention increased as security agencies arrested and detained suspects for long periods for spurious reasons. This meant that anyone who protested against or questioned TRT or Thaksin could be arrested and detained. Many Muslim teachers suffered this indignation again to the chagrin of the local Malay Muslim population who saw their rights and religious leaders being sidelined and disrespected. The use of administrative detention took on a darker side when a number of Bangkok based officers were sent to the South in order to deal with the growing insurgency. “They pursued a policy of illegal arrest (known as “*um*” extra judicially killing individuals whom they suspected to be part of the movement.”²⁹ Many of those killed were actually former separatist members who had long since served as informers for military intelligence. Although no direct connection can be made, the shootings of these men and further drive-by shootings do echo the same policy used by governments during the anti-communist purges in the 1970’s and discussed in chapter two. They also draw parallels with how the police dealt with suspected drug dealers in “the war on drugs”. The killings caused suspicions between the two forces – the military and the police – who were meant to be working together and sparked rumours that some killings were tit for tat killings of informants for both sides. If a police informant died, a military informant would soon follow. Whether true or not the result was that grassroots information dried up. Disappearances also took place with at least twenty disappearances taking place between 2002 -03. The third effect of the new security measures was the increase in discrimination. There was increased surveillance of people who wore Islamic clothing and in Thailand complaints rose regarding the Special Branch who were wont to check locals in the South. Other complaints included overzealous security actions at airports and shopping malls. The 2002 Security Act also allowed TRT and Thaksin to underline and almost make illegal the claim to the right of self-determination. The law meant that anyone who

²⁹ Duncan, *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence* p.53

spoke of this right to self-determination could be labelled and treated as a potential terrorist. Finally, Thaksin was also able to restrict civil society, an evil which he believed restricted the growth of Company Thailand. Freedom of speech, the right to freedom of assembly, the right to protests have all been eroded. The Tak Bai tragedy was as a result of a demonstration which the police, with the new act on their side, violently broke up. NGO's in the area have had their activities restricted and local grievances are left unheard after the dissolution of SPBAC. The Act helped Thaksin and his intentions for the country but also aided his attempts to suppress the violence in the south all with the (perceived) backing of America, who already in the eyes of most Muslims, was anti-Islam. Thaksin's sending of soldiers to help the allied forces in Iraq (and Thailand's being awarded the role in the Major Non-NATO Alliance) only confirmed what many Malay Muslims felt – that Thaksin was anti Islam and desired to align with a country who seemed to want nothing more than the Muslim way of life. Thaksin's foreign policy had an enormous adverse affect on the south and with no political policy (except that of dismantling the Democrats power base) and with his normal economic policy of throwing money at a problem in a hope that he could buy the problem out, Thaksin found himself looking into a Pandora's Box which he had opened. How he dealt with its contents illustrated how little Thaksin understood the situation in the South and how confused he and his government had begun in trying to solve it.

5.5 Crisis Management – Kru Ze and Tak Bai

When fighting a fire it is important to recognise that a danger is present. Thaksin and TRT did not. They ignored all the early warning signs from the south until it was too late. Instead of recognising that the country might have an insurgency problem, Thaksin blamed the violence on gangs of organised criminals. This is interesting as, if Thaksin did believe this, his policy decisions made in 2003, for example, would have reflected a desire to deal with the situation. However, according to the security reports of that year,

The biggest challenge in drug trafficking comes in trying to staunch the inflow of methamphetamines, particularly from Myanmar...border issues have

frequently been a source of problems with Laos,
 Myanmar and Cambodia...Thai security concerns...
 including drug trafficking, illegal migration and
 smuggling...³⁰

No mention of any of these problems occurring in the South. Even as late as 2004, when arms were stolen from a military base Thaksin refused to entertain the idea that those involved were anything but “common bandits”.³¹ At least publicly. His instigation of martial law in Narathiwat – announced by the Fourth Army chief Lieutenant General Pongsak Ekbannasingha in an attempt “supposedly to prevent the transportation of the stolen weapons”.³² A quite draconian measure in order to deal with “common bandits”. Mixed messages continued to issue from the authorities.

Whilst security force leaders in both the military and the police agreed with the retired general and Thaksin advisor General Kitti Rattanachaya in his assessment that the southern insurgents had embarked on a “seven step plan, leading ultimately to the overthrow of the Thai state in the area”³³, others, including Thaksin and his cousin the former army chief General Chaisit Shinawatra continued to claim that the “violence was the work of obscure ‘influential groups’, a Thai euphemism for organised criminals.”³⁴ With no eyes and ears on the ground as a result of his earlier dissolution of the SBPAC and the police and militaries loss of the local’s trust, the authorities had no clue who their enemy was – and of course how to deal with them. By denying that there was a problem in the southern region (and claiming that the allegations were part of an evil plot to undermine the country’s tourism industry and tarnish its reputation as a safe place for foreign tourists) the government lost time in formulating a coherent response. If they had they may have been able to prevent two later tragedies.

³⁰ Asia Pacific Security Outlook 2002 p. 161

³¹ Duncan, *Re-thinking Thailand's Violent South* p.45 cited from Wasanna Nanuam, *Thai Government Slow To Realise Terrorism In the South*, undated, perhaps February, www.newsean.in.th

³² Ukrist Pathamanand, *Thaksin's Achilles Heel: The Failure of Hawkish Approaches in the Thai South* from *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* p.71

³³ McCargo, p.57 cited from Kitti Rattanachaya, *Jut Fai Tai Tang Rat Patani (Igniting the South: Establishing the Patani State)*

³⁴ Ukrist p.71

On 28th April 2004, more than 100 militants carried out attacks against 10 police outposts across Patani, Yala and Songkhla provinces in Southern Thailand. Thirty-two insurgents retreated to the Kru Ze Mosque, the holiest mosque in Patani. Chaiwat Satha-Anand has argued that this was a politically astute move by the militants as the symbolism of the mosque provided the militants with a win-win situation. If the security forces did not attack “the sanctity of the place would have been reaffirmed”³⁵ and so would the identity of the Malay Muslims within Thai society. By attacking the mosque, “the sanctity of the place was violated and the political cost of such an act in the eyes of Muslims both in Thailand and abroad, has turned out to be incalculable.”³⁶ For Chaiwat, the attack on the mosque (and the subsequent ‘revenge’ attack in October when a Buddhist monk was murdered in his temple and then set alight) meant that “some of the civility necessary for a political society is lost....these attacks cut into the cultural ties that bind together peoples of differences in a political community.”³⁷ Kru Ze was perhaps the turning point in the troubles for this very reason. The rocket attack on a mosque was the final tie to be cut between government and the South. It was revealed later that General Pallop Pinmanee, the commander of the Southern Peace Enhancement Centre and Deputy Director of the Internal Security Operations Command and the most senior Army commander on the scene, had contravened an order by the Defence Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh to stand off no matter how long the militants stayed inside the mosque. By negating their role in the decision making process (and by the subsequent removal of Pallop and setting up of an investigation into the incident) the Government may have thought they had removed themselves of all blame for the incident. In fact, the government damaged themselves more because what it revealed was that Thaksin and TRT seemed to have lost control of the very men they had put in charge and of the situation in the south. This point was underlined when it was also revealed later on that some of those killed at the Kru Ze mosque were shot in the head and there were traces that rope had been tied around their wrists (revealed by Senator Kraisaak Choonhavan in a Senate hearing, 3rd May 2004. It was also revealed that some people

³⁵ Anand p.33

³⁶ *ibid* p. 33

³⁷ *ibid* p. 34

killed in Sab Yoi market had been shot in the back of the head³⁸). Had Thaksin lost control of his security forces?

If the Kru Ze incident had inflamed passions in the South, the events at Tak Bai pushed the southern conflict into the global realm and put more pressure on Thaksin's image as a leader in control of his nation. Following the Kru Ze incident, Thaksin decided on a more hands on and aggressive approach. The southern conflict had become a personal challenge to his authority. "This personalisation reached its height during the Tak Bai incident in October 2004."³⁹ Six local men were arrested for having supplied weapons to insurgents. A demonstration was organised to demand their release and the police called in army reinforcements. The army used tear gas and water cannons on the crowd and shooting started in which seven men were killed. Hundreds of local men were arrested. They were made to take off their shirts and lie down on the ground. Their hands were tied behind their backs. Later that afternoon, they were thrown by soldiers into trucks to be taken to the Ingkayutthaborihan army camp in the nearby Patani province. They were piled five or six deep in the trucks and when they reached their destination it was discovered that the men had died of suffocation.

Thaksin defended the army's actions saying that technical errors had caused this "accident" and that the men died "because they were already weak from fasting during the month of Ramadan."⁴⁰ The reason for the violence in dispersing the Tak Bai crowd, said Thaksin was as a result of a belief that the demonstration was being masterminded by terrorist groups.

Thaksin then contradicted himself again in later statements blaming the unrest at Tak Bai on poverty and the religious teachings in Islamic school and then changing his stance again, referring back to an organised movement:

There are actions similar to a direct sales strategy, that is, there's a leader narrating accounts of the Patani state while urging youths to return home, invite more friends to join them and donate 50 baht each. They are false Islamic religious teachers or usatz.

³⁸ McCargo, p. 37

³⁹ *ibid* p. 52

⁴⁰ Ukrist, p. 73-74

The kids were made to return again the day after.
 It seemed they were so impetuous they encircled the
 Tak Bai police station. We discovered 76 pick up trucks
 And 185 motorcycles.⁴¹

If this can be taken as the official announcement concerning Tak Bai then one must note that another stance was taken up. Thaksin had acknowledged that the south was a hotbed of insurgency and that the actions taken by his security forces was legitimate. The “War on drugs” approach had been re-employed. The question is whether this was a decision taken by Thaksin or one forced on Thaksin who had perhaps no idea what was happening in the south and had lost control of the security forces: if they were going to use force without his blessing he would align himself with them in order to be seen as the tough Prime Minister fighting terrorists.

What has further angered local Muslims was Thaksin’s seeming insensitivity not only to the steady deteriorating situation in the south but particularly to the humanitarian tragedies of both April 28th and October 25th 2004. Rightly or wrongly there is a perception not only among the Muslims but also among non-Muslim human rights activists that the government lacks a willingness to hold the security forces accountable for their actions. At Tak Bai, for example, charges were filed against 58 suspects accused of participating in the demonstration. The trials proceeded slowly and by October 2006 only 2 out of 1,500 witnesses had been questioned. No one in the security services had been charged with any crime following the incident and it was not until after the recent coup that the government under Surayud Chulanont to apologise.⁴²

5.6 Musical Chairs

Whereas Prem had taken 20 years to set up his network which had held together a mostly peaceful area, Thaksin believed that he could do the job in seven days. As previously discussed, Thaksin was a man who believed that quick decisions

⁴¹ *ibid* p. 74, cited from reports of a statement made to the Senate, evening news, Channel 5, 27th October 2004 and *Phutjatkan*, 28th October, 2004

⁴² “I have come here to apologise to you on behalf of the previous government and on behalf of this government. What happened in the past was mostly the fault of the state,” cited in *The Nation* Newspaper, November 3rd 2006

were both decisive and correct and that problems should be solved quickly. Those who could not follow this thought would not be part of the team. There were four problems with this line of thought when concerning the south. The first was that all the support structures that Thaksin and his advisers could have used to help make quick and decisive decisions had been dismantled and in doing so bridges had been burnt. The second problem was that most of the time, those given charge to make decisions had found that decisions had already been made for them. Thirdly, decisions that had been made quickly had, invariably, ended with tragedy – Kru Ze and Tai Bak– and finally, following Thaksin’s preference to fill the top jobs with friends of his rather than with those who had knowledge or experience of roles which needed filling, Thaksin appointed people who had neither of the former attributes and who could not make the decision required to resolve situations effectively.

As McCargo says, “at its core, Thaksin’s main approach to dealing with the south was tactical rather than strategic”.⁴³ Ukrist goes so far as to call it “hawkish”.⁴⁴

Alongside his many Cabinet re-shuffles, ten in his first term, Thaksin rotated “senior officials, Army commander-in-chiefs, Fourth Army commanders, defence ministers, senior police officers, interior ministers”.⁴⁵ All were sacked and moved on because of their “supposed failures and shortcomings”.⁴⁶ What they all had in common was that they were all “hard-liners” and that none ever “advocated an alternative, more dovish policy approach to the South. They were all indistinguishable in their blind loyalty to Thaksin’s orders.”⁴⁷ His replacing of Wan Muhammad Nor Matha as interior minister because of his failure to deliver the southern vote – discussed in more detail in the next chapter – is a prime example of Thaksin’s whimsical approach. A ploy which he had employed in using a Muslim minister from the south as a foot in the door of southern politics failed to work and it was Wan Nor, not Thaksin’s idea, who had failed. However, instead of then looking to men who could help him form a policy to win back the south, Thaksin seemed to employ those who did not have the “experience or expertise”⁴⁸ to provide a solution. People like General Chetta Thanajaro (a respected Thai-Burmese expert but long

⁴³ McCargo, p. 51

⁴⁴ Ukrist, p. 69

⁴⁵ McCargo, p. 51

⁴⁶ *ibid* p. 51

⁴⁷ Ukrist p. 75

⁴⁸ *ibid* p. 75

retired) and Dr. Bhokin Bhalakula lacked any strong opinions – or even possibly desire - which would embroil them in the southern problem. Instead they rubber-stamped all that Thaksin would suggest. Even on the front line, Thaksin appointed army commanders who were either close associates of Thaksin – Lieutenant-General Pisan for example was in the same academy as Thaksin – or family members such as General Chaisit Shinawatra or those who had shown a likeness of thought and loyalty in the past such as Police Lieutenant General Priewphan Damaphong who had been one of the key men in the 2003 “War on drugs”. All of these soldiers and policemen showed in their encounters with the local Muslim community that they, and others appointed by Thaksin, believed in a heavy handed and uncompromising approach toward the south. Indeed, there is even evidence that Thaksin made some appointments and then bypassed the appointments he made in order to deal directly with the south. Ukrist describes how Lieutenant General Wongkot Maneerin, assistant national police commissioner, was appointed the deputy of the Southern Police Operations Centre (he was also a past classmate of Thaksin’s from cadet school and who like hard line tactics). However, in the first six months of his tenure, Wongkot had not once been to any meeting of the Thaksin created Southern Borders Provinces Peace building Command which demonstrated Wongkot’s decisions were all coming directly from the prime minister and that liaisons with the military – of whom Thaksin was still suspicious – was not a priority. Indeed, bypassing the security structures became more and more a Thaksin ploy. He favoured the police and sidelined those institutions who perhaps would be able to give his advise such as the National Security Council:

Armed with a weekly intelligence briefing from Jumpol (Intelligence Chief Jumpol Manmai), Thaksin directly supervises police operations in the South, pushing the Army-constitutionally empowered to enforce martial law – into the background.⁴⁹

And of course if any of those that he appointed to posts and then sidelined failed or did something wrong they were punished for their failures.

⁴⁹ McCargo, p. 52

All of this stems from Thaksin's desire to get things done quickly. His choices may have been either nepotistic or based on people who would not question but they were also intelligent men who, given time, may well have been able to forge the links needed to gain trust and the vital grassroots information which had disappeared. However, Thaksin never allowed anybody to get comfortable or get time in roles which needed time – months and maybe years – in order to gain a sound understanding of the situation. The other reason for this 'revolving door' approach to the important posts could come from the CEO desire not to see anyone do too well in their job. A successful approach in the south from an individual or a team could be a threat to his own power base and Thaksin could not contemplate any type of threat – imagined or real.

5.7 Ideas for Reconciliation: Paying Lip Service to Chaturon Chaiseang and the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC)

It took until March 2004, for Thaksin to even consider a new approach to the problem in the South. He called upon his deputy Prime Minister Chaturon Chaiseng to develop proposals to ease the problems in the South. To his credit Chaturon did just that. Sympathetic to the Muslims, "he met more than a thousand people, canvassing their views and listening carefully to them."⁵⁰ From his talks and discussions, Chaturon came up with seven proposals, the most important addressing how to end the killing. The proposals included sending Bangkok based policemen back to Bangkok and an amnesty for all of those who were involved in the conflict but who had not committed a crime.

The proposal is based on listening to the voices of local people and comes from the police, military, governors, district officers and all sides. The point on which there is the greatest agreement, the point which will really demonstrate the sincerity and determination of the government, is that extra-judicial killings and torture must stop... it is not just my opinion,

⁵⁰ *ibid* p. 55

because the people are most afraid of them.⁵¹

Widely supported even among the police and military of the area, Chaturon was attacked for being a “soft liberal”.⁵² His main critic was General Chetta Thanajaro the defence minister and Chaturon was quietly sidelined and soon after a more hard line approach by the security forces saw the tragedy of the 28th April 2004 and the storming of the Kru-Ze mosque and the introduction of zonings of villages dependent on how dangerous areas were perceived to be.

Nearly 1,500 deaths were needed before Thaksin issued Prime Minister’s Office Order No. 104/2548 setting up a 48-member National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to work

Independently from the government. The commission Comprised a variety of members from civil society, political parties and the public sector...but all parties put aside their differences to work together.⁵³

A mix of MP’s, civil servants, senators, local *imman* and experts were set the task of resolving the problem related to security and development.

The setting up of the NRC was the most positive move Thaksin made towards the south but it would be fair to say that it was a decision that he was pushed into making. A speech by Prem on the 28th February 2004 implicitly criticised Thaksin for not taking on board what the King had said about working with rather than against people. Repeating the words that the king had said, Prem called upon the government to follow a policy of *khao theung* (accessibility) and *khao jai* (understanding)⁵⁴ the very two characteristics which summed up the SPBRC before its dissolution. Thaksin understood and called upon Anand Payarachuan to lead the committee. By asking Anand to lead the committee, Thaksin was back-peddalling and harking back to the period of the forming of the 1997 constitution which Anand had been an architect on

⁵¹ *ibid* p. 55

⁵² *ibid* p. 55

⁵³ Ukrist p. 84

⁵⁴ McCargo, p. 61

and which was a period of consensual and plural politics – something with which Thaksin’s theory of governing was at odds. The NRC reported back that it was of the view that

There are several groups of perpetrators of the daily violence, with varied motives, and that they should be dealt with according to the law. The number of people who espouse separatism is not only small, but it is also not clear whether this is their true desire or merely a setting up of conditions in order to pursue negotiations.⁵⁵

The electoral roll of the final election won by TRT certainly backed up this claim with over 70 per cent of those eligible to vote in the south turning out pointing to a region who did not want separatism but to engage in Thailand’s civil society.

The remark also shed doubt on Thaksin’s later claim that this was a separatist movement on a large scale with backing from international terrorist groups. If this was only a small group of people what need of the draconian security measures and act of 2002. The report went on:

The NRC’s reconciliation efforts therefore have three main objectives:

- seek ways for the Muslim majority and the Buddhist minority in Thailand’s southern border provinces to live together reasonably happily as Thai citizens under the Thai socio-political system
- seek ways for the majority of the people in the country to understand the complex reasons for the troubles now facing the people in the southern border provinces
- work towards a future where people of diverse cultures, both within the southern provinces and between the people there and Thai society at large can live happily together.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *National Reconciliation Report*, (unofficial translation) p.4 Internet Download

There is implicit criticism here not so much of Thaksin's policies but certainly of his approach to the governing of the situation and, perhaps, to the country as a whole. The idea of having diverse cultures would be an anathema to Thaksin's CEO approach and a threat to his own perceived role as the grand, unquestionable leader of the country. The identification of different cultures strikes at the heart of Thaksin's idea that you can run a country as a company. Diversity means difference of opinion. It highlights the fact that countries are not businesses and that people are not shareholders all looking to make a profit. Diversity was a threat to the Thailand train of thought. More criticism was to come:

Thai society must begin with the understanding that although the conflict in the southern border provinces may have important causes at the structural level similar to the problems of rural Thailand elsewhere e.g., poverty, brutal competition for natural resources under pressure from external economic forces, poor educational quality, injustice at the hands of state officials and weaknesses in the judicial process, this conflict has been heightened and made more dangerous by differences in religion, ethnicity, language and the understanding of history...defeating the violence... requires for the most part political measures that aim to rearrange the relationship between the state and the people, as well as between the majority and minority both in the southern region and throughout the country.⁵⁷

I take this as an admonishment of Thaksin's government. By offering alternative possible solutions to the problems in the South, the report is actually highlighting everything that Thaksin's government should not have done as well as suggest policies they could have tried. For example, using the media to educate the rest of Thailand about the problems in the south rather than just creating draconian

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 4

⁵⁷ ibid p. 3

and isolating laws or not celebrating the diversity of society in the south and showing an understanding of a large population who lived within its borders. The writers of the NRC report seem to be suggesting that Thaksin and his government did not have one single policy with regards to the problems in the southern borders throughout their time in power. The problems in the south the report said were rooted in:

Unconstrained abuses of administrative power, the use of violence by militants and retaliation by violent means on the part of the state authorities.⁵⁸

Acknowledging the use of violence by militants, the government, the report claimed, did not act strongly enough on corruption by its own civil servants and were overly brusque in their own response through the security forces.

Injustices arising from the existing judicial process and administrative system.⁵⁹

The report seemed to be asking why it was that, in an area with so many Muslims, Islamic laws and courts were not given more power to deal with local issues? It could be argued also that there is implicit criticism here of the powers given to the security forces, administrative system and the judiciary by the *People's Protection and Internal Security Act of 2002*. The report highlighted

Economic weakness in the southern border provinces where numbers of poor people are high, as pressures on natural resources drive villagers towards poverty with no alternatives.⁶⁰

For a government that claimed it was helping the poor it seemed that perhaps those poor of the south – traditionally voters of the Democrat Party – were being

⁵⁸ *ibid* p6

⁵⁹ *ibid* p.6

⁶⁰ *ibid* p.7

neglected for other poor rural areas who had shown a loyal vote for TRT. Another failure of the TRT party was then being highlighted by the report.

The report made suggestions as to what would happen if these problems were not addressed. Invariably, it noted more violence, more deaths and more innocent victims. However, point 5 stated that

The relations between the State and the majority of the people in the southern border provinces are at a disturbing level. Thai Muslims of Malay descent do not trust the state because they are uncertain to what extent the violence is the handiwork of state officials.⁶¹

The implications of this statement, as already briefly discussed, are manifold. At best, it suggests corruption and protection of personal gain from certain officials, with throwbacks to the drive by killings in Isan during the communist uprisings discussed in Chapter 1. At worst it hints at state funded killings of either innocents or even a state funded and driven attack on its own citizens. Certainly, the fear caused by the violence did start to provoke a flight of Thai Muslims to Malaysia which, cynically, could be claimed to be a welcome relief to a CEO who would feel comfortable about diversity in his own company.

The proposals that the NRC proposed were equally as critical of what had gone before. In its the Peaceful Reconciliation in the Southern Border Provinces (Dousing the fire in the South Act) the NRC claimed that mechanisms were required to solve the problem of violence and build lasting peace and that other mechanisms were also required in order to rebuild the civil society sector. The Act that the NRC proposed would establish three bodies that would help solve the violence. These bodies would be given the following responsibilities:

promote understanding of the situation and
methods to solve the problem in all government
agencies, among people in the region and in Thai

⁶¹ *ibid*

society at large, and with the international community⁶²

this responsibility had already been held by the now TRT dissolved SPBRC.

build coherence in the strategies of all involved
agencies at the levels of policy, command and operation.⁶³

An implied and pertinent criticism that the government did not have a fully thought through policy to deal with the south – which in fact it did not. Part of this lack of policy meant that they were unable or unwilling to

recommend the transfer of incompetent government
officials out of the area⁶⁴

who may include friends of the prime minister or officials who were helping the security forces in ways which have been previously discussed as aggressive towards the local Thai –Muslim population.

The report went on to propose three more controversial ideas:

- promote the development of a justice system and judicial process which will enhance peace and reconciliation in the region
- put an end to any action or policy by any government agency that conflicts with the PCAS's strategy, with the authority to report any such action to the government
- promote the development of an educational system and socio-economic development that is consistent with the region's culture and religion and with a sufficiency economy, including the decentralisation of power to local communities, as mandated by the constitution, so

⁶² ibid

⁶³ ibid

⁶⁴ ibid

that they may plan and drive development towards sufficiency, balance, harmony and happiness⁶⁵

This suggests giving a degree of political autonomy to the south which jars with Thaksin's policy of how to run Thailand and would be the equivalent of breaking up a company. However, it would also appease the local population and give the responsibility back to a group who know what is best for their own region, religion and people. However, the NRC does not go as far as suggesting giving the region full political autonomy or even separating itself from the rest of Thailand. The report suggested a council of representatives who report annually to government and whose job would not be to

exercise any state or administrative authority but will promote the people's learning process and people's participation...leading to justice, improvement of the educational system and socioeconomic development... the council shall provide recommendations on the management of natural resources, monitor budgetary expenditures by government agencies in the area and decentralise power to local communities as mandated in the constitution.⁶⁶

These are sensible solutions. The council would provide a voice to the local community, expertise from those locals who understand all aspects of life both socio-economically and geographically and was in line with the constitution. Finally, the NRC proposed that

1. The Thai Military set up a Peace Force Unit, a special unarmed force comprised of civilians, military and police in the discharge of its specific duties, namely to keep existing conflict from spiralling into violence.
2. that the state clearly demonstrates that it chooses to engage

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ *ibid*

in dialogue with the militants, and ensures the coherence of security policy on this matter⁶⁷

These two recommendations were at odds with Thaksin's strong-arm tactics employed against those he thought were morally wrong – such as the war on drugs – his strong stance alongside the USA of not negotiating with terrorists and the 2002 Act which had allowed TRT to invoke Marshal Law and the zoning idea. The Peace Force was obviously a throwback to the coalition army – police force set up in 1981 and paints the Thai Military as being other than a force for peace in the area. The NRC report was officially given to Thaksin for consideration in July 2006 and the committee were told that their recommendations would be acted upon. However, the chairman of the committee, the former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun expressed little hope that the government would actually enact any of the proposals. He claimed that the government had no long term plan for the south. His reasons were clear. At the same time as accepting the report, Thaksin brought in emergency legislation in July 2005. The legislation allowed him to assume “personal powers completely unprecedented for a civilian Thai prime minister.”⁶⁸ He had given himself the power to

Declare a state of emergency and impose curfews anywhere in the country, and to ban public gatherings, censor news and ban media circulation, close premises, order evacuations, detain suspects without charge, confiscate property, intercept telecommunications and order wiretaps⁶⁹

And all without informing the NRC. Some members of the NRC complained that it had made them and their work redundant and wanted to resign.

A further example of the divide between the NRC and Thaksin occurred during a radio interview with the two prime ministers on 28th July 2005. It was meant to show that the two sides were working together but, according to McCargo,

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ McCargo, p. 63

⁶⁹ *ibid* p. 63

underlined the gulf between them. Where Anand spoke of Thailand's need to understand ethnic diversity, Thaksin spoke of "combating terrorists...and the problem of bad teaching in Islamic schools".⁷⁰ Thaksin continually interrupted Anand, "sidelined and harried"⁷¹ him but because his "moral authority shone through"⁷², the NRC were seen as an alternative approach to Thaksin's government.

Thaksin went on the attack, playing on the Thai people's support of his tough stance in the past – he had won public support for the military handling of Kru Ze and Tak Bai, as well as the war on drugs – Thaksin and his supporters painted the NRC as soft on terrorists and gained support from the Buddhist authority, the Sangha Committee, demanded the NRC be abolished while an abbot in Patani declared that the NRC were terrorist sympathisers. Thaksin tried to quietly shelve the proposals but the NRC and Anand had allowed critics of Thaksin to "regroup" and try to "harass and discredit the Thaksin government".⁷³ It was the beginning of the revenge of the old Network Monarchy.

5.8 Conclusion to chapter 5

Thaksin's leadership style, obsession with aligning himself with the US, his disdain for human rights and his insensitivity to the Muslim culture, based largely on their desire to keep to local ways and to shun more money-making or business orientated pursuits such as tourism, has not solved any of the issues in the South but in fact entrenched them. From the very beginning, TRT and Thaksin had no understanding of the problems in the south were, issuing confused statements as to who was to blame for the violence.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *ibid* p.64

⁷¹ *ibid* p.64

⁷² *ibid* p.64

⁷³ *ibid* p.67

⁷⁴ Sometimes it was the "work of BRN militants," or the work of "some government officials who have conflicts of interests" or the work of ordinary conflicts, Or the work of "well-trained militants crossing from Malaysia to Thailand to stir up chaos in exchange for financial reward from some Middle East countries." Quoted from Horachailkul, p. 143, cited from *Matichon*, 8th April, 2001

Whatever the problem Thaksin's solutions were the same that he applied to other problems in Thailand: money or aggression. Thaksin decided to promise money.

Over the next five years I will aggressively develop these three provinces. Our next generation must not face poverty. They must be given an education and get good jobs. This is an urgent task.⁷⁵

At the same time, he made no policies to create jobs in order to fulfil the above promise. Nor were policies forthcoming to protect the industries and business such as the fishing industry that were collapsing year on year. There were no policies created to remedy the problem where, in some provinces, a third of the population is living under the poverty line.

Indeed one policy idea he did float was in response to the boredom felt by a disenchanted youth – the prime targets for those seeking soldiers and helpers – which was to let them watch more football in order to keep them off the streets. The policies he did follow – aligning himself to the US, the change in the protection of human rights, the dissolution of institutions trusted by the local Muslim population – and his perceived arrogance as a CEO who would not apologise for the events at Tak Bak for example angered the locals (witness the huge anti -TRT vote at the election of 2006). Thaksin's reaction to the defeat in the south was that the TRT had failed to get their message across properly and that they would have to promote – market perhaps – their message better. Thaksin could not admit that the message itself might well be wrong. One Muslim from the south said:

Local people there are really scared of the violence.

They won't talk about it because they never feel safe.

They are scared from terrorists and bureaucrats.

The only thing they can do is shut up. And here

comes Thaksin Shinawatra, the man who believes he knows everything. What does he think of himself?

In the beginning he labelled those who struggle to fight

⁷⁵ Address to the National Assembly, 9th March 2005

⁷⁵ anonymous source cited by Horachaikul p. 144 from interview with an elderly man from Yala

for justice as ordinary criminals. When they responded more to tell him that they are not criminals, he began selling them economic development packages...

Does he think they have done this to ask for money?

I must also tell you that people down there are sick of promises.⁷⁶



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

⁷⁶ anonymous source cited by Horachaikul p. 144 from interview with an elderly man from Yala

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

COUNTRIES ARE NOT COMPANIES

6.1 After Thaksin

The military coup of 19th September was the culmination of much protest and urban anger at Thaksin and the TRT party. Within the military as well, Thaksin made his enemies, none more powerful than General Sonthi Bonyaratkalin who Thaksin had publicly disagreed with after the general had suggested that the only way to solve the troubles in the south was by taking a less hard-line approach. Within days Sonthi had instigated the coup that removed Thaksin.

Since the coup, the interim military backed government have been seen to make the right noises with regards to the South. The Prime Minister, Suriyad apologised on behalf of the state for the violence perpetrated at Kru Ze and Tak Bai; they re-opened the Thaksin closed SBPAC and they have enlisted the help of the Malaysian government in acting as go-betweens, an idea that Thaksin refused, unceremoniously telling Malaysia to not involve itself with Thai affairs.¹

However, rather than the violence abating in the south it seems to have increased. Killings continue to be perpetrated everyday and organised bomb attacks on town centres such as Songkhla and Patani have become better co-ordinated and perhaps even more deadly. Talk of the latest insurgency being caused by Muslim fundamentalists has raised its head again with a general in the Thai army estimating that the amount of men that the insurgents now have was growing everyday.² Could this mean that Thaksin and TRT were not at fault over the south? That in fact,

¹ Thaksin told Mr. Mahathir that his comments regarding southern Thai autonomy were "not helpful whatsoever to the determined efforts being undertaken by the Thai government to address and resolve the current situation" cited on BBC website www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3970801.stm 1st November, 2004

² Insurgents in the deep South can draw on the support of an estimated 10,000 young people they have moulded into a "united front", and could threaten the security of Bangkok, defense Minister Boonrawd Somtas, *Bangkok Post*, 23rd February, 2007

whatever policy was to be followed, violence was inevitably raising its head again as part of a worldwide fundamental Islamic movement?

I do not believe it does. I believe that the damage caused by Thaksin, TRT and the generals that were sent to the region was perhaps more profound than the damage caused by the Thai governments and regimes of the 1970's. That the rent he caused in the society of the Southern borders, is so deep, that the mistrust of central authority that he nurtured is so embedded that apologies are not accepted or even believed and that policies such as the re-establishment of the SBPAC are no longer seen as permanent enough to sustain real dialogue.

6.2 Leadership Style

Much like another strong leader, Margaret Thatcher in Britain's 1980's, Thaksin has split his country. There are parallels between the two. Both were self made people. Both embarked on a massive restructuring of their respective economies. Both would not brook what they perceived as failure or dissent within their ranks or within their country from opposition voices. Both were headstrong in their opinions and policies, believing that they were right and that their will was to be done.³ Both used violence, for different reasons but with similar results.* Both questioned the legitimacy of society as a real force in the face of a changing economic world.⁴ And both were removed by a coup.**

I use this comparison with the legendary Mrs Thatcher to underline the influence, strength and power that Thaksin and 'the Iron Lady' had but also to highlight the differences between them. Margaret Thatcher, for all her faults, never treated the country as her own business nor did she ever see herself as being anything

³ "The lady's not for turning", Margaret Thatcher once said at a Conservative rally on the 10th October 1980, underlining her strength of persuasion.

* Not as many of the public were killed by the police for example as occurred under Thaksin and his war on drugs, unless, of course, you count the Falklands conflict which many commentators in England, such as Hugo Young Thatcher's biographer, continue to see as an illegitimate use of armed force

⁴ Thatcher is famous for saying during an interview with Woman's Own magazine that there was "no such thing as society" (October 31st, 1987)

** Obviously the removal of Thatcher was far less violent than that of Thaksin

but its Prime Minister⁶, representing its concerns throughout the world and not using her position in order to make personal profit.⁷ She did not see herself as the moral protectorate of the people nor did she try to silence critics or detractors through control of the media. Her authority came from her democratically elected position and the strength of her policies and convictions.

The same cannot be said for Thaksin nor for his political twin in Italy, Silvio Berlusconi. The reason is simple. Any leader who, as Thaksin did, places themselves as a CEO of a country and who tries to transform their country into a company, is seeking, primarily, to deal with one characteristic of governing – the economy. CEO's and companies have but one loyalty – profit and shareholders.⁸ The initial and prime aim of Thaksin and TRT was economic recovery. Any obstruction to this, any blocks to ideas or proposals which inhibited this task needed to be dealt with quickly. Overall control of all aspects of a company are essential if that company is to succeed. Thaksin and TRT viewed Thailand with these same beliefs. If economic recovery was to happen, the government would have to control all areas of the Thai state. This meant that as well as managing the economy, they would have to manage society, “cushioning discontent, suppressing dissent and blocking the infiltration of new ideas (like participation, people centred development and community rights).”⁹

But countries are not companies.

6.3 Dealing With Society

Thaksin's first failure was to not understand, or perhaps, accept this. His attempt to redefine the social contract between government and people – the people give up their rights so allowing the government to achieve using any means possible – was simply “the old paternalist state in new clothing”.¹⁰ He projected a persona of

⁶ Thatcher is famous for saying at one party conference that there was no “such thing as society”

⁷ This is in reference to allegations made against Thaksin throughout his time about his business dealings, including the selling of Shincorp in Singapore

⁸ “There are only two guidelines (*to being a CEO*). One, what's in the long-term best interests of the enterprise and its stakeholders, supplemented by the dominant concern of doing what's right” Robert D. Haas, President of Levi Strauss and Co. from *The Corporate Conscience*

⁹ Pasuk and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics* pg. 127

¹⁰ *ibid* pg 242

being Thailand's moral compass by aligning himself with Buddhist leaders such as Buddhadasa. This made it difficult to criticise him without being perceived as also criticising one of the pillars of Thailand – Buddhism. When he was not being either the country's moral leader or economic guru he was the strong Thai nationalist, berating journalists, savaging NGO's and firing salvos at the United Nations. The delivery may have felt fresh, more professional, slick, western even to the electorate as did his business-like, brisk "thinking new, acting new"¹¹ approach which had blown the other parties out of the electoral water¹² - but the social vision he held was still old and narrow-minded. Contracts signed in a company with employers rely on everyone in the company accepting the terms and conditions laid down by those at the top. Thaksin tried to redraw his social contract with the country in the same manner that he had done as a CEO with his company employees.

But countries are not companies.

In America, following 9/11 there was great debate about the Patriot Act and the freedoms it had affected. This same debate was not to be allowed in Thailand. The media was stifled, the academics ridiculed and his critics tarnished as undemocratic. The policies and decisions, the output of the government was reduced to weekly monologues on the radio, unimpeachable and didactic. No one was going to tell Thaksin what to do in his company – he was the boss. Naturally, this put him at odds with many people. The Court and the traditional Network Monarchy, as McCargo calls it, was one. The other were the people in the South.

The South was to be Thaksin's nemesis. Seeking to root out the last bastion of real opposition to his leadership, Thaksin applied his strong-arm tactics to the region without ever fully understanding, its nature politically or culturally. He misunderstood that the politics of the region had been shaped by a distinctive history of rebellion and resistance. This was a land of toughened people who respected tough and honest talking and who had already had enough of their fill of central authority after having been semi-colonised first by the British and then the Thais. They were naturally suspicious of a central authority which had, for over half a century, harassed and attacked their ways of living, their religion and even their names. They supported

¹¹ McCargo, McCargo, *Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South from Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* pg 43

¹² one of his legacies will surely be the creation of a professional party that was elected on a series of policies as James Ockey says in *Making Democracy: Leadership, Class, Gender and Political Participation in Thailand*, 2004

their own heroes politically. Tough talking, witty men, who understood how the region thought and who, at least, purported to support the Southerners in improving their lot. And the majority of them were Democrats. Thaksin could not stomach this pocket of independence, despite the fact that he hardly needed the region to win elections. He despised the thought that the south was in the hands of two oppositions – the Democrats and the old network monarchy which he perceived as a threat to his CEO –country/company power base.

But a country is not a company.

6.4 Failure To Understand

Thaksin tried to break the stranglehold. He began by dismantling a beacon of peace and dialogue with the closure of the SBPAC and replaced it with a more monolithic institution which did not give room for dialogue. But Thaksin did not believe in dialogue as his weekly radio broadcasts demonstrated. Unrest followed. Strong arm tactics were employed by consecutive generals sent to deal with the small pockets of violence which developed. But this was no ‘War on drugs’. The South was a place used to violence and used to resisting Bangkok initiatives. Thaksin and TRT floundered. Whereas they knew how to create policies which stimulated an economy, they did not have an answer to a passionate resistance whose loyalty was not to money. The South had grown used to the economic and social deprivation of their region and the political subordination to a Bangkok authority. Their loyalties were to Islam but also to Thailand and the King. Another factor that Thaksin did not understand. Southerners believe in the democratic process and are fiercely loyal to the royal family. Thaksin’s initial portrayal of Southerners (and to be fair, the media in Thailand is ungracious to the South as well) was one of being anti-nationalist, bandits and trouble makers – separatists who were attempting to split the country in two. Certainly, there are those who would like to see an independent state of Patani but they are in a minority as the large election turnouts demonstrate. With no policies in place, Thaksin was always going to struggle with the escalating events in the South. This became evident in his attempts at crisis management in the face of the tragedies of Kru Ze and then Tak Bai.

The attack on as symbolically religious temple as Kru Ze demonstrated Thaksin and his generals lack of respect and understanding of who and what they

were dealing with in the South. As Chaiwat Satha-Anand said, the armed men hid in the temple for a reason. An attack on the temple would highlight, in the eyes of Muslims, the lack of respect the authorities had for their religion. A non-attack would be seen as a victory but not one which would have had as resounding an effect as the former choice would have had. However this was an authority that dealt in hammer blows and respected nothing that formed resistance. The same was true for Tak Bai where the democratic right to protest was squashed and the subsequent deaths never apologised for by an insensitive leader. The same roughshod tactics were the foundation for the actions made following 9/11 with, for example, the passing of the Security Act or the sending of troops to Iraq, driving more and more of a wedge between the South and the authorities. When conciliatory gestures or sounds were made, Thaksin paid them only lip service whether it was to his own deputy Chidchai Vanasatidya or a committee of intelligent and respected people whose NRC report he did not read because his eyes “were too sore”.¹³ Their suggestions would mean, in Thaksin’s mind, giving up power and influence in his own company and that was non-negotiable.

Thaksin could not comprehend a passion that was based on real convictions and not just economic thinking. That is why he and TRT never had a real policy for the South because the problems of the South are not truly economic. Thaksin was blinded by his thirst for overall power of the Thai state; blinded by his despising of opposition and alternate views and disdain for civil society; blinded by his placing of economic recovery and growth over all other elements including the beliefs, cultures and well-being of the people in Thailand and blinded by his lack of understanding of how far Thailand had become proud of its freedoms under a civil society. The blindness of his style of leadership led to the disturbing of what had been a smouldering ash bed of separatism and rebellion in the South. In turn this was re-ignited into a fire of protest and it now seems to be raging out of control.

¹³ McCargo, *Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South* from *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence* pg. 168

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