

CHAPTER X

THAI COIN IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCES

As mentioned previously, when Prem assumed command of the Second Army Region, his Chief of Staff at the time was Harn Linanon. Linanon was one of the principle authors for PM Order 66/23, and when he later became Fourth Army Commander, Linanon would apply the same combination of development projects and public relations initiatives in the southern provinces as well during this period.

10.1 Tai Rom Yen

The initiatives emplaced by Linanon in the south were part of what was called the Tai Rom Yen policy, which translates to south in the cool shade. This policy had four basic principles:¹

1. To secure the lives and properties of all people regardless of ethnicity and religion
2. Eliminate by peaceful means all dictatorial, influential, and shady power which dominate the region to ensure all people enjoy rights, freedom, and equality
3. To establish security on the Thai-Malay border
4. To establish good relationships between authorities and people.

¹ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983: p.25

The objectives of Tai Rom Yen were identical to those in the 2d Army region, in that they were political more than military. Again, the overall intent was not to completely destroy the insurgents but instead coerce them into giving up armed resistance by fostering the all encompassing socio-economic-political development necessary to eliminate those conditions conducive to insurgency.

10.2 SBPAC and CPM 43

It was during the implementation of Tai Rom Yen when in 1981 the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Committee (SBPAC) and the Civilian-Police-Military Task Force 43 (CPM 43) were established to enhance mutual understanding and trust between Bangkok and the ethnic Malay Muslim community, while also improving intelligence gathering and coordination among various elements of the Thai authorities and security forces.² Sometimes referred to as a combined security and development agency, these two organizations were in fact separate with respect to operational chains of command, yet each cooperated in an overall effort to alleviate instability and insurgency by addressing the multiple problems and needs of the southern provinces.³

CPM 43 was placed under ISOC, itself being under direct control of the Prime Minister's Office while SBPAC was attached to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and made responsible for the overall administration of the southern border provinces.⁴ CPM 43's function was to coordinate security operations, and it was reportedly instructed to ensure that extrajudicial killings and disappearances ceased.⁵ It maintained several large and

² "No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces" Human Rights Watch (HRW) vol. 19, no. 12(C) New York, N.Y., Aug. 2007: p.16.

³ Marc Askew "Conspiracy, Politics, and a Disorderly Border: The Struggle to Comprehend Insurgency in Thailand's Deep South" Policy Studies 29 (Southeast Asia). Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.39.

⁴ "No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces" Human Rights Watch (HRW) vol. 19, no. 12(C) New York, N.Y., Aug. 2007: p.16.

⁵ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.16.

effective agent networks which were tied into many of the Muslim and criminal communities located throughout the region.⁶ Lacking its own organic staff, personnel were seconded from the military and police, yet at the time these personnel were high quality, dedicated individuals.⁷

SBPAC worked hard to build trust with Muslim leaders and their communities. It was not charged with fighting terrorism, and had no authority to issue orders to the army or police.⁸ Rather it worked on rural development projects and investigated complaints of injustice and corruption, was liked by the Muslim Malay speakers of the region. The SBPAC received large numbers of complaints about abuses committed by government officials in the area, resulting in many officials being transferred. The center coordinated preparations for the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, and had even tried to broker a compromise over the issue of wearing headscarves in government educational institutions. The center became a “beacon for ideas of administrative justice, symbolizing the Thai state’s sincerity and goodwill”.⁹ The center was an important channel of communication between the government and the Muslim leadership of the community.

10.3 Tai Rom Yen and Good Governance

The World Bank defines good governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. Essential components include efficient public sector management,

⁶ Rohan Gunaratna. *Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand*. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.13.

⁷ Marc Askew. “Conspiracy, Politics, and a Disorderly Border: The Struggle to Comprehend Insurgency in Thailand’s Deep South” *Policy Studies 29 (Southeast Asia)*. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.51.

⁸ Duncan McCargo. *Rethinking Thailand’s Southern Violence*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007), p.44.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 41.

accountability of public officials, a legal framework for development, and the availability of information and transparency.¹⁰

The strength of the Tai Rom Yen Policy was its ability to address not only the counter guerrilla aspect of COIN strategy, but it worked to rectify the structural causes of the disaffected Malay Muslims as well. As such it was an all encompassing strategy to apply COIN in order to facilitate good governance in the region. In 1985, author Andrew Cornish conducted a detailed study of rubber production in Yala. Quoting researcher Nantawan Haemindra, he set on six main reasons for the problem in the south. They were:¹¹

1. Official ignorance of Malay culture.
2. Inability of local officials to speak Malay.
3. Arrogance of officials.
4. Racial prejudice of officials.
5. Maintenance of close relations between Malays in southern Thailand and those in Malaysia.
6. Poor economic conditions in the south when compared to Malaysia.

Reviewing the intent of Tai Rom Yen, as well as the PM orders which inspired it, it can be seen that Linanon's strategy recognized that good governance provided the means to ameliorate the conditions conducive to insurgency. By the late 1980s, the separatist movement had all but disappeared and many of the insurgent leaders had given up the armed struggle. When the Thai government announced a March 10, 1998 deadline for separatists to accept offers of amnesty, nearly 1000 militants, mainly from PULO and BRN, turned themselves in to join rehabilitation programs.¹² They received amnesty and were reinstated to full citizenship rights through CPM 43 run reintegration programs that

¹⁰ World Bank Institute Governance and Anti Corruption. <<http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance>>

¹¹ Andrew Cornish. *Whose Place is This?* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1985), p.112.

¹² Chandra-naj Mahakanjana. "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand" *Working Papers No 5*. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.10.

provided plots of land and vocational training.¹³ Prominent Malay Muslims entered the political arena, moving away from armed struggle and taking part in local and national electoral politics.¹⁴ For most of the 1990s, the region was relatively stable, though not entirely free from violence, and by 2000 it was believed that the Malay Muslim insurgency had been defeated. That year, CPM 43 estimated that only 70-80 separatist militants remained active in the south, while over 200 leaders of various separatist groups were living in exile.¹⁵

The experience of the Communist Insurgency led to the recognition that insurgency is a political problem. Lessons learned by Prem resulted in acknowledging that it was necessary to foster democratic development and the elimination of dictatorship in order to win the support of the people. Democratic development would facilitate the ending of grievances and allow for political inclusion. PM orders 66/23, 65/25, and Tai Rom Yen are examples of this recognition.

Yet the type of democratic development spelled out in these documents is not the kind which lends itself to human security and human development. This “Thai Democracy” instead is founded on the concept of a virtuous ruler and having the right man for the job who can instill ethics and values in the bureaucracy. It is centrist in nature. The fact remained that Thailand had a centrist legacy, from the earliest times of the Sukhothai period and King Trailok. Centralization was the means to protect against internal and external threats. Thai COIN in the south was intended to pave the way for good governance in terms of addressing the professionalism of the bureaucracy as a means to foster democratic development. But the bureaucracy was subordinate to the

¹³ Ornanong Noi Wong. “Political Integration Policies of the Thai Government Toward the Malay- Muslims of Southernmost Thailand (1973-2000)” diss., Northern Illinois University, 2001: p.161.

¹⁴ “No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand’s Southern Border Provinces” Human Rights Watch (HRW) vol. 19, no. 12(C) New York, N.Y., Aug. 2007: p.16;

Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, “Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand” Working Papers No 5. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.10.

¹⁵ “No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand’s Southern Border Provinces” Human Rights Watch (HRW) vol. 19, no. 12(C) New York, N.Y., Aug. 2007: p.17.

MOI in Bangkok, not to any constituency in the south. Although the 1990s witnessed increasing political space for Malay Muslims, in fact it was seen as yet another Bangkok strategy to co-opt and control Islamic leaders, teachers, and the political elite through the creation of representative bodies such as provincial Islamic councils, parliamentary seats, and elected sub district councils. The co opted elites gradually became alienated from the ordinary people of the region, and the political space turned out to be largely ornamental, rather than providing real opportunities for local participation.¹⁶ Thai COIN did not necessarily address issues of language, culture, religion, and ethnicity as political grievances.

The economic development programs which remained a cornerstone of Thai COIN were driven top down, not bottom up, and the southern provinces continued to lag behind much of the country in key areas of development.¹⁷ Being centralist in nature, these development programs continued to serve government ends and did not address the aspirations of the recipients.¹⁸ This legacy of centrism would continue to exacerbate the dissension in the south. Structural causes for violence were still present after the relative peace in the 1980s and 90s. Many in the Malay Muslim community believe that the natural resources of the south were being exploited by outside interests or by Thai Buddhists. Unemployment, low educational attainment, substandard infrastructure and poor representation in the public sector as well as in high status employment due to the Thai language barrier continued to fuel grievances against the existing political system.¹⁹ As the new separatist movements emerged with an identifiable religious agenda, the Thai

¹⁶ Duncan McCargo. What's Really Happening in Southern Thailand. Occasional Paper. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Regional Forum. Singapore, 2008: p.7.

¹⁷ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.17.

¹⁸ Andrew Cornish. Whose Place is This? (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1985), p.122.

¹⁹ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.18.

government would again resort to suppression and coercion, once again alienating those whose loyalties were up for grabs. The relative dormancy would end in 2004.