

CHAPTER XIV

SPECIAL AUTONOMY AS A LONG TERM SOLUTION

14.1 Centralism and Structural Causes

Throughout the entirety of this thesis, I have demonstrated that the structural causes which contribute to the southern violence are a function of the centralizing nature of Thai politics. These structural causes include, but are not limited to the distinct history, language, and culture of the Malays, the level of socio-economic development in the south as compared to the rest of Thailand, perception of Thai governing legitimacy, oppressive nature of Thai security forces and weakness of local government. Meanwhile, since the earliest days of the Ayutthaya period, the Siamese/Thai political tradition has been centralist in nature and assimilationist in character in order to define what it means to be Thai. Thus, the violence which now grips the southern provinces is a political problem, and as such its solution will require the restructuring and development of the constitutive system to reflect the not only the wishes and aspirations of the local inhabitants.

14.2 Loyalties Up for Grabs

The majority of Malay Muslims overall believe in the Thai system, yet they want government that is accountable to them. As previously mentioned, a study by the Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus, indicated that 41.8 per cent of southern Muslims wanted a special administrative body established for the three southernmost provinces. An almost equal number called for the restructuring of local administration. The study's subtext is that local Muslims see the central government as insensitive and

unresponsive to their needs. Local residents want to be empowered to manage their own affairs, though they remain divided over the proper administrative structure.¹ In an additional survey conducted by that university's College of Islamic Studies along with the Yala Islamic University, researchers concluded that the real needs of the people in the three southern border provinces were:

1. People's participation.
2. Acceptance of cultural diversity.
3. Justice and equity.
4. Respect of local identity.²

They support the monarchy as well, and appreciate the royal sponsored projects. "On average, 70 % come out and vote. Why would they do that if they don't believe in the system?"³ Most Malays do not wish to secede, nor do they want to become part of Malaysia. They see the Thai system as more flexible, and conducive to the traditional way of life they enjoy. Many have traveled and recognize strict Sharia law. They see the militancy as self destructive, and they hope for peaceful reconciliation. "The Thai state needs to provide political breathing space."⁴

14.3 COIN to Facilitate Good Governance

Taking a lesson from its own history, the Thai government must view their COIN efforts as a means to an end: To facilitate good governance, and not merely as a strategy to round up separatists. Unlike some scholars, I do not believe that withdrawing the

¹ Unknown Author. Lessons on south from Okinawa. Available from: <<http://www.nationmultimedia.com>> [4 September 2007].

² Gotham Arya. Local Patriotism and the Need for Sound Language Education Policies in the Southern Border Provinces. Occasional Paper. Mahidol University Research Center on Peace Building. Bangkok, 2008

³ Dr. Panitan Wattanayagorn, personal interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 5 Jan 2008

⁴ Sunai Pasuk, personal interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 4 Feb 2008.

security forces, or complete disarmament will in and of itself end the violence. The security force aspect of the whole nation approach to COIN is still necessary to provide for a secure, stable, and just environment. A secure, stable, and just environment will win the loyalty and support of the people. Security will yield intelligence, as stakeholders will not fear providing information to authorities. Stability provides for human development, which is equally as important as economic development. Justice demonstrates that the Thai government values Buddhist as much as Muslims and each group can depend on equal and fair treatment under the law.

Professional conduct and accountability of the security forces will need to be upheld and enforced throughout the remainder of rotational deployments. And while the use of paramilitaries will no doubt continue, it is imperative that these remain under close supervision and command of the RTA. Currently, only 1 regular army officer is assigned to each Tahan Pran company as commander. This has contributed to discipline problems and poor command and control. In the future, I suggest at least one RTA rifle squad needs to be embedded with paramilitary forces to maintain the professionalism and accountability of the force, as well as to ensure unity of command throughout the task force areas of responsibility. Security forces will be withdrawn eventually, and disarmament will take place, but in the near term they are necessary to provide a secure framework to work towards administrative restructuring.

The police force in the southern provinces needs to be reformed and restructured to reflect demographic reality. Unless a local constabulary is formed, which I would suggest, the National Police Force needs to make a concerted effort to recruit and post ethnic Muslim Malays in the region. This hold true with paramilitaries as well, though I do not suggest entire Buddhist or Malay Muslim units. I hold that there must be integrated and diversified, with embedded RTA units to ensure professional conduct and unity of command.

14.4 Change in the Concept of Democracy

Just as Prem recognized that it was necessary to foster democratic development in order to win the support of the people, so must contemporary leaders truly commit to decentralization as a means to increase stability, engender peace, and by extension foster true sustainable democracy based on local ownership of structure and processes. The Thai concept of democracy must change to reflect that which lends itself to participatory politics, human security and development, rather than the benign authoritarianism and bureaucratic moral behavior which is the current model.

14.5 Model of Decentralization

With respect to decentralization, and more specifically devolution as a long term solution, the question is which model to apply. How far to devolve? Many advocate the current level of administrative and fiscal decentralization schemes, and their corresponding organizations such as the TAO and PAO provide sufficient structure to eventually accommodate different ways of life of locals, protect human security, and provide a framework for reconciliation. But without political will, as we have seen, these existing schemes actually possess no real political power and are instead seen as not genuine.

Various research projects have captured ideas and views on what the implications would be if the border provinces were recognized as an autonomous region. I hold that the solution will be in the form of asymmetric autonomy, whereby the provinces will be the center of gravity and will be able to keep the political and administrative practices and institutions of the local communities. This model will recognize and facilitate the ethnic, religious, and cultural differences of the majority Malay Muslim population. Asymmetric autonomy is a strategy of conflict resolution, and will win the support of the

Muslim Malays, demonstrate the benevolence and sincere intentions of the Thai state, and in turn preserve Thailand's sovereignty and integrity.

I suggest that a referendum be held in the majority Muslim provinces to propose certain implementation of Haji Sulong's original seven point demands. Again, this was actually the first demand by local citizens for self government or decentralization of the Bangkok administration and rule.

Sulong's demands were:

1. The Thai government should give full authority to one person to administer the four provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun. He or she should be elected by and from the people in the four provinces
2. Tax and income from the four provinces should be spent in the four provinces only.
3. The government should provide the teaching of the Melayu language in primary school up to grade four.
4. 80% of the government officials in the four provinces should be Muslims.
5. The government should use the Melayu language in government offices in the four provinces along with the Thai language.
6. Government should allow the Office of the Provincial Islamic Committee to issue regulation on Islam and Islamic tradition with the consent of the person mentioned in the first point above.
7. The government should separate the religious court from the provincial court and give the religious court the full jurisdiction

This model places the province at the center of gravity for devolution of central power, recognizing that the provinces reflect what was once the Sultanate of Patani, and therefore reflect one of the pillars of Malay identity. I suggest that the current SBPAC be taken out from under ISOC. The SBPAC will eventually transition to become the provincial governing body. Starting immediately its chief should become an elected official. This elected official will in the future be the governor, and will also be an MOI official to provide for direct interface with the central government. PAOs and TAOs will continue to serve as they are currently designed.

Taxes and income will be spent in the provinces based upon a 75-25 percentage division. The majority going back to the provinces.

I do not advocate a minimum percentage of Muslim bureaucrats, or any semblance of an affirmative action placement program, but I do suggest active recruiting to increase their participation in government and bureaucracy. Employment should be based upon merit, not ethnic or religious quota.

The central government should continue to subsidize Pondok schools to provide for teaching of Malay, and Malay should be a working language in government offices. Thai still needs to be taught in school, and remains the official language of Thailand.

Based upon referendum, Sharia law will apply only to Muslims living in the provinces, and religious courts will be separate from provincial and central courts.

Equally important as administrative restructuring will be the addressing of certain "open sores" in the Thai-Malay Muslim in order to bring lasting peace, and demonstrate the Thai government's commitment to justice, accountability and reconciliation. These are of course transparently investigating the Kru Tze incident, the

Tak Bai incident, and the disappearance of human rights lawyer Somchai Neelapaichit. Justice needs to be served in each case.

There have been enough think tanks created to look for solutions. Universities and Institutions have no shortage of experts who have done “further study” as suggested by PM Surayud and Samak. Further study is not required. What is required is a unified, coherent plan, commitment, and political will to bring peace through decentralization and democracy.