CHAPTER VI

FORMATION OF SEPARATIST GROUPS

The policies implemented under the Sarit regime generated increasing local resistance and led to the development of more radical and organized separatist movements. Militancy and violence increased dramatically, as government buildings, schools, and police stations came under attack. While some of these separatist groups were purely political, others mixed their politics with criminal activities.[1] Yet for the most part, the objectives of these groups were to establish an independent Islamic state in the three southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.[2] The degree to which the groups could be described as ethno-nationalist versus Islamist in nature differs according to the source, but all did use Islam as a "mobilizing resource" to a large extent.

6.1 BNPP

In 1959, the Patani National Liberation Front (BNPP) was created by ex leaders of GAMPAR and the PPM, and was the first organized armed group to call for Patani's independence.[3] The original leaders of BNPP were mostly members of the traditional Patani Malay elite and religious functionaries like ulamas and imams of mosques and madrassas.[4] The BNPP was a guerilla organization which collaborated with rebels and criminal segments of Malay Muslim society alike.

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[1] 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.9.
[2] Rohan Gunaratna, Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.6.
[3] "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.15.
[4] "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.15.

In the 1970s, the BNPP attempted to use Islam to gain external support from the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab League.[5] BNPP promoted full independence and a separate Islamic state, focusing on militant and violent activities.[6] Nonetheless, it failed to gain backing from Islamic countries and splintered in 1985, renaming itself the Islamic Liberation Front of Patani (BIPP) with a new mandate to emphasize its stronger commitment to the defense of Islam.[7]

6.2. BRN

The Patani-Malay National Revolutionary Front (BRN) formed sometime between 1960 and 1963 had as its aims the establishment of an independent Patani state on the basis of the Malay Muslim identity of the majority of the population.[8] Originally, BRN was much more focused on political organization, particularly in religious schools, than on guerilla activities, and it espoused an Islamist, socialist ideology.[9] Although weakened in its early years by factionalism, since 2000 the BRN, and in particular an element known as the National Revolutionary Front Coordinate (BRN-C) has emerged as the core insurgent group ideologically and organizationally.[10]

BRN-C draws upon disaffected youth and revivalist Islam, and its leadership has deliberately maintained a high level of secrecy around senior personalities. As will be

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[5] S.P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand" Contemporary Southeast Asia, 1 Apr 2006: p.5.

[6] 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.9.

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

[8] Anthony Davis. JANES World Insurgency and Terrorism BRN. Available from: <http://jwit.janes.com> [10 Feb 2008].

[9] "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.

[10] Anthony Davis. JANES World Insurgency and Terrorism BRN. Available from: <http://jwit.janes.com> [10 Feb 2008].

discussed further in this thesis, this secrecy has proven to be a significant problem for the Thai government in addressing the true nature of the resurgent violence since 2004.

6.3 PULO

The Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) was founded sometime either in 1967 or 1968 as an armed group consisting mostly of foreign educated Muslims with its headquarters in Mecca.[11] It was established on principles of religion, race, national identity, homeland and humanitarianism, and contends that the former Patani state has been unlawfully annexed by Thailand. PULO charges that Thailand rules Patani with colonial repression, and thus wants secession for the southern provinces in order to form an independent Malay republic or sultanate.[12]

PULO became the largest and most effective of the separatist movements, and occupied a political middle ground. It is reported that many of its fighters trained abroad in the 1970s and 1980s, and began to establish links with other guerilla organizations.[13] PULO was behind most insurgent attacks during the late 1970s, and allegedly has close links with some elements of the fundamentalist Parti Islam se Malaysia (PAS)[14] RTA officers still contend that the PAS provides support for southern insurgents, regardless of the parent resistance organization.[15] This despite public pronouncement of the Malaysian

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[11] 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.9.
[12] Rohan Gunaratna, Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.37.
[13] "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.
[14] Rohan Gunaratna, Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.37.
[15] COL. Changkaew Ekarat, personal interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 Feb 2008.

Governments efforts to assist in ending the violence by way of education as well as joint military patrols along the border.[16]

In the 1980s, PULO began a more violent strategy, but weakened after losing Saudi government support.[17] PULO later split and New PULO was formed in 1995. According to Gunaratna, New PULO preferred minor attacks aimed at harassment in that it lacked the capability to conduct large scale operations. PULO and New PULO maintained differences in strategy, yet coordinated closely in 1997-98 during what was called "Operation Falling Leaves", in which state officials, teachers, security officers were targeted.[18]

6.4 GMIP

The Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Pattani (GMIP) was formed by a Soviet Afghan war veteran in 1995.[19] GMIPs objective is to establish an Islamic state in southern Thailand, yet it is also believed to have wider Islamist aspirations.[20] Most of its funding comes from charitable and religious foundations based in the Middle East and reportedly some of its members have announced their support for Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.[21]

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[16] Author Unknown. Malaysia to Assist in Education in Deep South. Available from: <http://www.nationmulitmedia.com> [29 Jun 2007].
[17] 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.9.
[18] Rohan Gunaratna, Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.40.
[19] S.P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand" Contemporary Southeast Asia, 1 Apr 2006: p.7.
[20] Rohan Gunaratna, Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.41.
[21] Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-politicai Conflict in Southern Thailand" Working Papers No 5. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.11.

6.5 BERSATU

The amount of cooperation, collaboration, and perhaps multiple memberships in these various separatist groups may be evidenced by an organization called BERSATU-the United Front for the Independence of Pattani. Formed in 1989, BERSATU was an umbrella organization for political coordination and pooling of resources for Malay Muslim separatism.[22] BERSATU's primary aim originally was to bring the separatist cause to the world's attention. However, currently BERSATU no longer functions as a united front organization, but instead functions as an independent group with no permanent bases in Thailand. [23]

In addition to the above mentioned separatist organizations there were believed to be as many as 60 other fringe groups consisting of both ethnic Malay Muslims and criminal gangs.[24] And while Thailand was beginning to fight a low level insurgency in the south against politically and ideologically organized ethno nationalist militant guerilla groups, she was also dealing with a Communist insurgency in other areas of the country. In addition, Thailand faced external pressure as well with the Communist movements in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam all sponsored by the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. Faced with internal and external security threats, Thailand would begin to develop its own counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy, which in the early years was more or less strictly a counterguerrilla strategy. Initially, Thailand would apply extremely suppressive measures consistent with its historical paradigm of putting down

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[22] "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.15.
[23] Rohan Gunaratna, Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p.43.
[24] "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.15.

rebellions in the interest of preserving territorial integrity. As per its historical "model" Thailand would apply solutions at the periphery based upon perceptions from the center. Years would pass before Thailand moved from purely counterguerrilla operations to implement a true COIN strategy, recognizing the true political nature of an insurgency.