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## **An Alternative Policy Proposal for the Provinces Populated by the Malay Ethnonationality in the South of Thailand**

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*This article provides a public policy analysis of governance in the provinces populated by the Malay ethnonationality in the South of Thailand. Important stakeholders are identified as well as important sociopolitical environmental factors. The final sections of the paper present a proposal for a new governance structure for the Muslim South of Thailand taking into consideration the social, cultural, and economic context as well as the wellbeing and right to self-determination of the local population. This study concludes that considerable economic, political, and social opportunities for development are being lost in the South of Thailand due to misguided governance policies.*

**Keywords:** Malays, South of Thailand, Autonomy, Governance, Devolution of Power

*Dieser Artikel stellt eine politische Analyse von Governance in den von der nationalen Minderheit der Malaien bewohnten Provinzen in Südthailand vor. Zunächst werden zentrale InteressensvertreterInnen und soziopolitische Faktoren identifiziert. Anschließend diskutiert der Autor einen Vorschlag für eine neue Governancestruktur, die soziale, kulturelle und wirtschaftliche Kontexte ebenso beachtet wie die Bedürfnisse und das Recht zur Selbstbestimmung der lokalen Bevölkerung. Der Beitrag konkludiert, dass beträchtliche Möglichkeiten zur wirtschaftlichen, politischen und sozialen Entwicklung aufgrund von fehlgeleiteten Politiken ausgelassen wurden.*

**Schlagworte:** Malaien, Südthailand, Autonomie, Governance, Machtdezentralisierung

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## ***Introduction***

The Deep South of Thailand has been plagued by violence and underdevelopment for decades. Bordering the Federation of Malaysia, the three southernmost provinces are mostly populated by ethnic Muslim Malays who speak a dialect of Malay called *Melayu Patani* (Liow, 2006a, p. 27, 2006b; McCargo, 2008, p. 4). Historically the region was part of the independent Sultanate of Patani<sup>2</sup> and was later annexed by Thailand in the early twentieth century (Kershaw, 2001; McCargo, 2008, p. 61; Perkasa, 2008, p. 41). Separatist movements have existed in the region since Siam started to exercise greater influence over the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the highest point of the insurgency came during the 1970s and 1980s when several separatist groups joined forces with the Communist Party of Thailand to fight the Central government (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007). Nevertheless, the insurgency was thought to have been exhausted by the 1990s due to effective counterinsurgency tactics by the military and strong American support for the armed forces (Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008). In 2004 an important army armoury was raided and several bombs detonated in the Southern provinces (“Child Recruitment and Use in Southern Thailand“, 2008, p. 6; Perkasa, 2008). Since that year more than 3,000 people have died due to the violence in the South. Owing to instability of the central government, the army was given almost absolute control over the Southern provinces and martial law was imposed (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007). The result has been a policy of dealing with the insurgency through military methods which closely resemble the ones used to fight the once powerful Communist Party of Thailand through raid and sweep operations in villages and internment of suspects in concentration camps for prolonged periods of time (Liow, 2006b, p. 43; Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007).

The result of the current policy has been an exponential increase in the defence budget, increased unemployment in the South, and a rise in local support for the insurgency (Gunaratna & Acharya, 2006, p. 149; Perkasa, 2008; Yegar, 2002). Finally, paramilitary militias have been formed in Buddhist villages in the South with the support of the Palace and the security establishment (Ungpakorn, 2007; von Feigenblatt,

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2 To avoid confusion concerning the use of the terms ‘Pattani’ and ‘Patani’: After the Malay-speaking regions in Southern Thailand were integrated into Siam in the early twentieth century, Malay-sounding names have been converted to names that are phonetically in tune with Thai rhythm. Hence, ‘Pattani’ is the official romanisation of the Thai spelling. ‘Patani’, on the other hand, is the Malay version, often used in historical contexts or when referring to historical claims over the territory.

2009a; 2009b, p. 5). These paramilitary militias have attacked Muslim villages with impunity.

### ***Importance of the Southern Unrest for Thailand and the Region***

The insurgency and unrest in the Southern provinces of Thailand have caused more than 3,000 deaths since 2004. In addition to that, the problem has weakened successive civilian governments with the result of strengthening the hand of the security forces and the Palace (ALRC, 2009, p. 1; Chang, Chu, & Park, 2007, p. 76; Hamlin, 2009; Neher, 2002; Ungpakorn, 2007). Furthermore, the unrest has been used as an excuse to increase the military budget by more than 300 percent in five years and thus diverting needed funds away from development projects (Askew, 2010, p. 130; von Feigenblatt, 2010). The violence in the region has negatively affected the important tourism industry not only in the Southern provinces but also in the entire country with the net effect of damaging the already precarious state of the economy, which was facing a 2.2 percent contraction in 2009 due to the global financial crisis (CIA, 2009). Moreover, the breakdown of the rule of law in the Southern provinces, and to a certain extent in the entire country, has led to a sharp increase in illegal business activities such as smuggling drugs and weapons through the porous Malaysian border, thus giving rise to violent crime (Askew, 2010, p. 57; von Feigenblatt, 2010). Finally, the Muslim identity of the insurgency has fueled speculation about possible infiltration by regional Islamic terrorist networks such as Jeemah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda (Gunnaratna & Acharya, 2006; Liow, 2006a, p. 93). In addition, the region is considered to serve as a litmus test of separatist tendencies in other regions with historical experience of independence and semiautonomy (Means, 2009). In summary, dealing with the Southern unrest is important for economic, security, and humanitarian reasons.

### ***Possible Beneficiaries of the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region***

To establish a Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region would be beneficial for the entire country – with the exception of the armed forces and the Palace. Possibly modelled after the Special Administrative regions of China,

Hong Kong and Macau, and the Basque region in Spain, the policy would combine greater self-government with a strong economic development component. Thus economic integration into the national and global economy, which while not easily achieved is possible, as demonstrated by the experience of Bali and Beppu as tourist destinations, would substitute for government centralisation in the administrative realm (Barber, 1996). Therefore the challenge would be to privatise governance and thus raise it to the international level while at the same time making it sensitive to local needs. By dealing with the core grievances of the Melayu Patani population and also with the problem of underdevelopment in the region, the new Greater Patani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region would lower the incidence of violent crime, assuage fears of religious and local leaders about the loss of distinct socio-cultural heritage of the area, and avoid a complete rupture of the region with Thailand. Furthermore, the economic benefits reaped from the development of the area and the increase in productivity of the rubber industry of the South would also benefit the rest of the country through greater tax revenues and a subsequent increase in tourism. Greater stability will also be of great benefit to the entire country and would free needed resources away from the defence budget and into infrastructure development in other underdeveloped regions such as the Northeast.

From a political perspective, the civilian central government would be strengthened vis-à-vis the military and thus increase stability in the country. Only the Palace and the armed forces would be weakened by the proposed policy due to their relative loss of influence. While the military and the Palace could attempt to claim some credit from the pacification of the South, the perceived loss in sovereignty would ultimately weaken the traditional security views of the military and Palace establishment.

### ***Competing Policy Options for the Southern Unrest***

Several policy options have been proposed for dealing with the Southern unrest. The policy that is currently in place can be labelled the “military counterinsurgency strategy” and combines overwhelming force with intelligence gathering (ALRC, 2009; Askew, 2010; Ungpakorn, 2007). A second option proposed by some academics and the insurgents in the South is the peaceful separation of the three southernmost

provinces to become either the Republic of Patani or the Sultanate of Patani (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007; von Feigenblatt, 2009c, p. 606). This option is based on the norm of self-determination for ethnonational groups and on the historical claim over the territory (Perkasa, 2008; Syukri, 1985). Another variant of this policy is the option of the three provinces, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat, joining the Federation of Malaysia, however this option was only seriously considered during the 1940s (Askew, 2010; von Feigenblatt, 2009b, p. 4). Finally, a third category of policies involves some form of self-government combined with economic development. Several proposals in this category favour some devolution of authority to local governments in the South and greater development through increased trade with Malaysia and Singapore or an improvement in local industry (Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008). Geographical proximity to Malaysia is an advantage that can be utilised by promoting the integration of the local economy into Malaysia's production chain. In other words, economic integration at the sub-regional level can take the place of political integration and thus allow the South to benefit from the positive externalities of joining a relatively advanced production chain in sectors as diverse as automobile manufacturing and electronics. While the military strategy has proven to be futile in dealing with the unrest, the second option which involved complete independence or annexation with the Federation of Malaysia is unrealistic due to lack of political capital and the relative weakness of the insurgency (von Feigenblatt, 2009d). However, the third category of policy options is more promising than the first in terms of effectiveness in dealing with the core grievances of the local population and at the same time it does not impinge on national sensitivities regarding the territorial integrity of the Thai nation-state. In terms of political capital and the relative power of interest groups, the first option clearly has the upper hand at this point, however, some positive signs can be identified showing that the third category would be feasible in the near future (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007).

### ***Analytical Framework***

This study follows an elite theory model of public policy making (Anderson, 2006). While this model has many weaknesses, it is a good fit for the Thai political system and socio-cultural environment. The Thai political system is elitist and revolves

around the Palace. Governance depends on a network monarchy which includes the armed forces and a powerful bureaucratic elite. Thailand's government is strongly unitary in nature and the provinces are directly controlled by the capital. An elite model concentrates on the role of a small group of power brokers in the policy making process. The population is assumed to be a passive player under the control of the elite. Thailand has been characterised by anthropologists and area specialists as a highly hierarchical society with a very large power distance (Chang et al., 2007; Mulder, 1996; von Feigenblatt, Suttichujit, Shuib, Keling, & Ajis, 2010; Wyatt, 2003). Moreover, the undemocratic history of the country serves as evidence of the role of a small group of power holders in making the important decisions (Albritton & Bureekul, 2007; Ungpakorn, 2007). Nevertheless, some aspects of constructivist social theory will be used to describe the role of the militants in the South and of the Malay community in general. The reason for this is that the Southern unrest is partly a grassroots movement and thus its behaviour cannot be duly explained by elite theory and needs to be understood from the point of view of those involved in the struggle (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007). It should be noted that while elite theory provides the best theoretical fit to explain the actions of the Thai side of the issue, it lacks the explanatory traction to explain the yearnings and grievances of the less centralised Muslim Malays. Identity needs are important and constructivist theory, with its emphasis on norms and ideas and how they shape social action, provides a useful lens to complement elite theory (Jackson & Nexon, 2009).

### ***Stakeholders***

The Southern unrest involves a vast array of stakeholders and thus any proposed policy to deal with it must include them in both, the decision making process and most importantly during its implementation. Stakeholders can be roughly classified as Thai and Malay. External stakeholders will also be discussed in terms of their relationship to the two sides.

#### ***Armed Forces (State and Non-State)***

Arguably, the most important group of stakeholders in the Southern unrest involves

armed groups (Gunaratna & Acharya, 2006; Storey, 2008). Included in this category are both state and non-state armed groups. The most powerful stakeholder in the military realm is the Royal Thai Army (Gunaratna & Acharya, 2006; McCargo, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007). More than just a subservient branch of the government, it is a semi-independent institution with its own power resources and interests (McCargo, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007; von Feigenblatt, 2009c). Historically, the Thai Army has been used mostly for internal counterinsurgency operations (Yegar, 2002). The United States supported it during the 1970s and 1980s so that it could defeat the Communist Party of Thailand and serve as a bastion of capitalism in South-East Asia (Kershaw, 2001; Neher, 2002; Rolfe, 2008). In addition to that, it is not a professional army in the modern sense of the word. Officers consider their troops to be their source of power and are more than willing to use them for their own interests. More than ten military coups have taken place in Thailand in recent history (Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010; von Feigenblatt, 2009e, p. 4; Wyatt, 2003). In terms of ideology, the Thai Army is highly conservative and royalist. Nationalism is strong in the army and it considers itself to be constrained only by the needs of the nation and the Monarchy, not the civilian government (Handley, 2006; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010).

The army has virtually complete control over the Southern provinces and has imposed martial law (Liow, 2006a, 2006b, p. 37). Abuses of human rights are widespread and the army favours a traditional counterinsurgency strategy to deal with the Southern unrest (Dingwerth, 2008; Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008; McCargo, 2008, 2009; Perkasa, 2008). In terms of economic interest, the Army is corrupt and is involved in the smuggling of weapons across the Malay border, among other illicit activities (Askew, 2010; Perkasa, 2008). The violence in the South has also been used to justify exponential increases in the budget for the military (Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010).

The police are comparatively weaker than the army but are similarly characterised by virulent Thai nationalism and corruption (Askew, 2010). It has been involved in a turf war with the army over influence in the South (Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010). Furthermore it has also been known to commit abuses in the Southern Provinces but not of the same scale as the army. Politically, the police are identified with the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was deposed by the military coup in 2006 (Askew, 2010; Ungpakorn, 2007; von Feigenblatt, 2009e, pp. 3-5). Thus, it is viewed with suspicion by the armed forces. The civilian government has more influence over the police

than over the army.

Paramilitary groups are involved in the Southern unrest. Buddhist militias organised by the police and the army with the support of the Palace have increased in number since 2004 (McCargo, 2008, 2009). Buddhist militias are usually very nationalistic and carry out vigilante attacks on Muslim villagers. The lack of direct control over them by the central government means that there is very little accountability regarding their actions. In general, Buddhist militias have a vested interest in the continued presence of the armed forces in the South so as to defend their interests. On the Muslim side there are about ten different militias with a total of fewer than 2,000 fighters (Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008; Perkasa, 2008). The fragmented nature of the militant groups makes it difficult to provide a clear picture of the relative strength of each group and their overall goals. However, one of the oldest and best known groups is the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) which was founded by a descendant of the last Rajah of Patani in the mid-twentieth century (Perkasa, 2008; Syukri, 1985). This organisation has both a political and a military branch and its main goal is to coordinate the attacks of the separate militant groups. Its military force is thought to range from 300 to 500 armed fighters. Its leadership is composed of intellectuals trained in the Middle East and exiled Malay aristocrats in Malaysia (Liow, 2006a, 2006b; Perkasa, 2008). Its goal is the re-establishment of the Sultanate of Patani or at least the achievement of autonomy within the Thai state. The main interest of this group is the protection of the distinct Malay Muslim culture in the South of Thailand and guaranteeing enough leadership jobs for members of the Muslim Malay intelligentsia (Perkasa, 2008). While PULO is not a very large organisation, it has the tacit support of the majority of the Malay population, and also has links with Muslim countries and organisations all over the world (Askew, 2010; Gunaratna & Acharya, 2006). It should be noted that there are other insurgent groups operating in the South of Thailand which are considered by some scholars to be equally as important as or even more important than PULO such as BRN but there is very little information regarding its structure and membership in comparison to PULO (Liow, 2006b). The other groups tend to be more secretive and lack an overt political arm which makes it difficult to assess their true support and resources (Askew, 2010; Funston, 2010; Joll, 2010). Finally, there is a third kind of militia operating in the Deep South of Thailand without a clear political agenda. Transnational organised crime

(TOC) is omnipresent along the porous border with Malaysia and it has at its service armed bands of militants (Jones & Smith, 2007; Millard, 2004; Storey, 2008). Drugs, human trafficking, and smuggling rings all operate in the region and have links with powerful local politicians and officers. The Democrat Party is widely believed to be involved in criminal activities in the South along with certain elements in the armed forces and the police (Askew, 2010; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010). TOC groups have a vested interest in the Southern unrest in that they want the conflict to continue so as to guarantee an uncertain environment for their illicit activities.

### ***Civilian Government and Bureaucrats***

The civilian government and the bureaucracy consider the unrest in the South a major problem. It weakens their authority relative to the armed forces and is detrimental to the overall economy of the country (Askew, 2010; Glassman, 2005; Ungpakorn, 2010). However, it should be noted that with the exception of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, most civilian governments do not have very strong national support and their power base is greatly limited by the Palace and the armed forces (Chang et al., 2007; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010). This is evidenced by the recurrent *coups d'état*, constitutional changes, and interference by the Palace (Dressel, 2009; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010; von Feigenblatt, 2009e; Wyatt, 2003). Most civilian governments function as mediators representing a vast array of interests including business, the military, and the Palace. Moreover, a majority of civilian governments have been forced to hand over the control of the South to the military and have had their arms tied in terms of negotiating with the insurgents (Lintner, 2009, pp. 112-115; Ungpakorn, 2007). Due to the influence of narrow interests on the weak civilian administrations, the government has to appear strong in terms of defending national sovereignty and Thai nationalism. One of the only differences between administrations is the preference of the Shinawatra faction for the involvement of the police in the South rather than the military and the support of the Democrat Party for greater involvement of the military (ALRC, 2009; Ungpakorn, 2007).

Bureaucrats in Thailand are generally very conservative and nationalist and tend to come from Bangkok and central Thailand. Civil service examinations are usually passed by members of the elite due to structural advantages such as better access to

education at the secondary and tertiary levels and are the preferred career of ethnic Thais (Askew, 2007). Due to Thailand's political instability, the bureaucracy is one of the only constants in the country. Most bureaucrats serve under many administrations and even constitutions. In general, the main interest of the bureaucracy is the continued influence of its members over the administration of the South of Thailand and the defence of national sovereignty.

As explained in a previous section of this paper, the Democrat Party is the strongest party in the South and there are allegations that several prominent members are involved in criminal activities along the Malaysian border. Nevertheless, the exact nature of their involvement is not known but several independent scholars have found evidence of their involvement in several illicit enterprises (Liow, 2006a; Ungpakorn, 2010). While the role of the Democrat Party in illicit activities remains in dispute, the political party is actively involved in the traditional patronage politics of the region and thus exerts considerable power at the local level (McCargo, 2008).

### ***Traditional Leaders***

This category includes Muslim religious leaders, Malay aristocrats, and the Thai Palace. Muslim religious leaders derive their authority from their role in the *pondok* network of Islamic schools, their control over mosques, and the high regard Muslims traditionally have for teachers (Askew, 2007; Means, 2009; Millard, 2004; Mulder, 1996; Ungpakorn, 2007). In addition, they are considered to be the protectors of Malay Muslim culture in the Deep South of Thailand. Their main interest is to protect the Muslim religion and the Malay language, and to have some influence over local governance. Most religious leaders have expressed a fear of government encroachment on Malay religious and cultural affairs (Liow, 2006a; Perkasa, 2008; von Feigenblatt, 2009c). They have also alleged that the government has tried to reduce their power by bringing *pondok* schools under the control of the Ministry of Education (Jitpiromsri & McCargo, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007). Most religious leaders ask for religious freedom and some form of autonomy for the region. Identity needs are usually at the forefront of their demands (von Feigenblatt, 2009d, 2010). Most do not request complete independence. Closely related to this group are the traditional Malay nobility. The descendants of the former ruling Houses of the region are related to the Royal Houses

of several Sultanates in Malaysia (Kershaw, 2001; Ungpakorn, 2007; Yegar, 2002). This group was traditionally headed by the direct descendant of the last Rajah of Patani, who later on went into exile in the Sultanate of Kelantan (Wyatt, 2003; Yegar, 2002). They derive their legitimacy from hundreds of years of history in the region and their connection to the culture and traditions of Patani (Perkasa, 2008). Most of the *Tunkus*, Malay Princes, of Patani have been involved in the separatist movement in one way or another and most favour some form of autonomy for the region and the restoration of their Houses. The Princes enjoy the support of the majority of the religious leaders as well as of the population and they also have international legitimacy due to their historic relationship with the Sultanates of Malaysia and Great Britain (Millard, 2004).

The Palace, as it is known, encompasses the Royal Family and the Privy Council (Handley, 2006; Ishii, 1994, p. 458; Kershaw, 2001; Yegar, 2002). In Thailand, the Privy Council is composed of powerful retired generals who rule from behind the scenes (Kershaw, 2001; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010; Wyatt, 2003). The present members of the Royal Family are not direct descendents of the previous few kings and the present King was actually born in the United States (Handley, 2006; Kershaw, 2001). Conservative generals revived the institution of the Monarchy in the post-war years and the present King was elected by the head of the previous ruling family. In order to give the King some semblance of legitimacy, the new Royal Family was included in the previous Chakri Dynasty even though this is in fact a new dynasty (Handley, 2006; Ungpakorn, 2007). Massive propaganda campaigns raised the profile of the monarch and his family. After years of a concerted propaganda campaign and indoctrination through the media and schools, the Monarchy gained a lot of influence over government affairs (Kershaw, 2001; Ungpakorn, 2007; von Feigenblatt et al., 2010; Wyatt, 2003). The King has given his blessing to several military coups and the Queen has encouraged the organisation of Buddhist militias in the South (McCargo, 2008; Pitiyanuwat & Sujiva, 2005). Through the use of the draconian *lèse majesté* laws, which make any insult or criticism of the King a criminal offence punishable by up to 15 years in prison, conservative politicians have tried to silence alternative centres of power, including the traditional Malay nobility and the Communist Party (Le-Coz, 2009; Neher, 2002; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010; von Feigenblatt, 2009c). The Palace tends to be the most nationalist and conservative institution in the country and is usually

linked to the armed forces. Among the most important interests of the Palace is the protection of sovereignty over the South, the assimilation of the Malay Muslims in the South, and most importantly the silencing of alternative histories of the region showing the legitimacy of Malay Royal Houses (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007). In terms of power, it is probably one of the most powerful institutions in the country due to its considerable wealth, informal influence, and connections with the armed forces (Kershaw, 2001).

### ***Business Interests***

Tin mining and rubber plantations, among others, are some of the important businesses in the region (Perkasa, 2008; Yegar, 2002). Most tin mines and rubber plantations are owned by Chinese and ethnic Thais. Business owners in the region tend to be non-ideological in that they support whoever gives them protection and allows them to do business (Askew, 2007). This means that some pay protection money to corrupt members of the armed forces and to the Muslim insurgents. Some even pay both sides (Liow, 2006a, 2006b). There is also an important link between business interests and Democrat politicians who have a stake in some enterprises (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2010). In general, business owners want peace in order to do business and they want the region to remain part of Thailand (Askew, 2007). They also have an interest in improving the infrastructure of the area and facilitating trade. In terms of power, business owners are relatively weak in that they control resources but they depend on others for their security. Moreover, since most of them are Chinese, they are usually not involved in the bureaucracy and suffer from some of the same discrimination as most other minority groups in Thailand (Askew, 2010; Ungpakorn, 2007, 2010; von Feigenblatt, 2009c, p. 598).

### ***External Interest Groups***

Due to the religious factors in the unrest in the Deep South of Thailand there are external groups with an interest in the conflict (Kiong & Bun, 2001; Means, 2009; Millard, 2004; Perkasa, 2008). Malaysia and other Muslim countries have been involved in the conflict in one way or another. Due to the ethnic ties between Malays across

the border, many insurgent leaders have moved to Malaysia in order to seek funds and support from fellow Muslim Malays (Liow, 2006a; Perkasa, 2008; Syukri, 1985). Conservative Malay political parties have indirectly supported the Muslim separatists in the South of Thailand by providing asylum as well as funds (Askew, 2007; Means, 2009; Millard, 2004). In addition to that, Jemaah Islamiyah has also cooperated with the insurgents in terms of logistical support and in the arms trade (Gunaratna & Acharya, 2006; Yegar, 2002). Funding from Middle Eastern sources has also been channelled through charities in order to support the Muslim community. Libya has been one of the strongest supporters of the Muslim community in Thailand and has provided funds and political support (Yegar, 2002).

On the other side of the conflict, the United States and its allies involved in the 'War on Terror' have supported the Thai government in its characterisation of the Muslim insurgents as part of international Islamic terrorism. This means that the United States has supported the traditional counterinsurgency approach of the Thai government as an important front in the War on Terror (Neher, 2002; Yegar, 2002).

### ***Alternative Approaches to the Unrest in the Deep South of Thailand***

There are other approaches to solving the unrest in the Deep South of Thailand besides the Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region approach that is proposed in this paper, however, none of them are very promising in terms of achieving sustainable peace and development. One such option is the one proposed by Duncan McCargo and colleagues (Askew, 2007; Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008). This proposal involves the establishment of a Ministry for the South. It basically recommends the concentration of the administration of the South under a single ministry rather than having it divided among separate ministries and government agencies. This proposal also stresses the importance of strengthening civil control over the administration of the region but stops short of recommending local governance (Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008). A Ministry for the South would make the administration of the region more efficient and would weaken the role of the military in the region but it would not deal with the most important grievances of the Muslim population in the South. Thus, this proposal can be considered to be administrative streamlining rather than a long term solution to the Southern unrest. This approach to the Southern unrest

does not include any greater autonomy for the region but simply a more efficient means of exerting direct control over a distant region of the country by the central government.

Another possible solution to the Southern unrest would be to re-establish the nineteenth century system based on feudal tenure by the Malay aristocracy (Syukri, 1985). Feudal tenure in the South of Thailand was based on the co-option of the Malay nobility into the administration of the region. This would provide some measure of autonomy under Thai sovereignty but would not be acceptable to the Thai government nor to the armed forces (Jitpiromrisi & McCargo, 2008; Syukri, 1985). This possibility was very popular in the decades after World War II, but has since then lost popular support. Thus, this possibility suffers from a lack of political capital in order for it to be accepted by important stakeholders.

### ***Consequences of the Creation of the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region***

Possible consequences of the creation of the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region can be divided into three broad categories, namely economic, political/security, and socio-cultural. On the economic front, the establishment of the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region would increase trade with other provinces as well as with other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and attract foreign direct investment due to a more business friendly environment, greater political stability, and therefore a lower level of investment risk. This would create more jobs in the region as well as increase revenue for the central government in terms of taxes and tariffs. The transition from a military approach to one based on constructive engagement through the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region would translate into savings in armaments and a reduction in the military budget. The savings could then be reallocated to social services and development projects throughout the entire country.

A failure to establish the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region would result in continued capital flight due to the violence, a decline in the living standard of the inhabitants of the region, and a decline in the tourism

industry of the country as a whole. Moreover, further increases in the budget of the armed forces could be expected (Askew, 2007; Ungpakorn, 2010).

Some important consequences of the proposed policy on the political and security fronts would be a drastic reduction in terms of the budget and size of the army. Its influence would also be diminished since its involvement in the South and in other security issues will be greatly reduced. Civilian governments will be strengthened through an improvement in the economy and in the security of the Southern provinces. This could also have a positive impact on the general political stability of the country and reduce the likelihood of more military coups due to the improvement in the overall security of the country (von Feigenblatt, 2009c; von Feigenblatt et al., 2010). Moreover, the police would be strengthened in comparison to the army, since it would be given greater responsibility for the internal security of the country and law enforcement. It can also be expected that the Democrat Party would be greatly weakened due to its links to the military and corruption in the Deep South (Ungpakorn, 2010). Transnational organised crime in the border provinces would also come under greater national and international scrutiny due to the possible increase in trade and foreign direct investment. Most importantly, Malay Muslims should participate in greater numbers in the governance of the region. It is also expected that Malay Muslim politicians at the national level will also be strengthened due to the greater leverage they would gain through the establishment of the Autonomous Administrative and Economic Region and the greater resources they would be able to muster. Thus, there would be a gradual shift of some political power away from the centre in Bangkok and towards the South (Askew, 2007).

The possible consequences of failing to implement the recommended policy would mean a continuation of the status quo with all the unsatisfactory externalities that entails. Moreover, greater violence and local dislocation can be expected, as well as the further economic decline of the region and the country as a whole. Furthermore, the armed forces would continue to use the Southern unrest as an excuse to exercise influence in local and national politics (Kershaw, 2001; McCargo, 2004).

Finally, on the socio-cultural front, the country as a whole would become more pluralistic (von Feigenblatt, 2009c; von Feigenblatt et al., 2010). This means that diversity would be cherished rather than suppressed. Education could gradually be decentralised based on the example set by the Greater Pattani Autonomous Administrative

and Economic Region so as to include the particular histories and religious practices of different ethnic groups (von Feigenblatt et al., 2010). There is also the possibility that this would lead to a negative backlash by the ethnic Thai population of central Thailand, at least in the short term. It could be vigorously resisted by the Palace and conservative elites in the capital. For the Malay Muslim community the adoption of this policy would satisfy many of its most important grievances and gradually lead to a decrease in fundamentalist Islam (Perkasa, 2008; Ungpakorn, 2007; Yegar, 2002). The reason for this is that the Malay Muslim Community would not feel threatened by the dominant culture any more, thanks to their autonomy, and this would reduce the need for fundamentalist teachings. Needless to say this assumes that part of the appeal of fundamentalism is due to existential uncertainty and the related fear of a possible loss of identity. Furthermore, the general population in the South will not be as open to extremist teachings if they feel that their culture and religion are alive and thriving (McCargo, 2009).

The failure to implement the proposed policy would further alienate the Malay Muslim population and provide the perfect breeding ground for fundamentalist Islamic extremism. Rather than leading to national unity, as conservatives claim, it would force ethnic and religious minorities to become more fundamentalist and to distance themselves from the majority in an attempt to protect their culture. This would in fact be a continuation of the present situation which has shown an increase in the teaching of a Middle Eastern variant of Islam which stresses stricter compliance to religious teachings than the moderate version of Islam historically prevalent in the region (Mulder, 1996; Ramakrishna, 2005).

In summary, the proposed policy offers advantages on economic, political/security, and socio-cultural fronts. While there is the possibility of a negative backlash by conservative forces, this would only be a temporary setback. Failure to implement the establishment of the Greater Pattani Autonomous Economic and Administrative Region would be tantamount to a continuation of the present trend with all of the well known negative externalities.

## ***Making the Greater Pattani Autonomous Administrative and Economic Region a Reality***

### ***Funding and Economic Considerations***

Due to the nature of the proposed policy, finding the necessary funding to undertake the establishment of the Greater Pattani Autonomous Administrative and Economic Region will not be very difficult. First of all, very little funding is required, since most changes are administrative, and the savings made in other areas can be invested in the development of the region. Savings in the realms of security and pacification could be used for investment in infrastructure and human capital. This would improve the chances of the economic side of the policy being successful.

More specifically, gradual reductions in the defence budget will free up plenty of resources that can then be partly used for the implementation of this policy. It is also likely that Malaysia and other Muslim countries would be willing to provide some funding for the development of the region under the proposed autonomy. This would pump needed foreign direct investment into the region and create jobs, in addition to lowering the cost of implementing the policy for the central government.

### ***Political Considerations***

Political capital is the most important resource that will be necessary to move this policy forward. Civilian political parties should be convinced of the viability and benefits of this policy so that they provide the political support necessary in order to overcome the opposition of the armed forces and some elements in the Palace. It would clearly benefit civilian political parties to demilitarise the South and to divert resources away from defence and into social projects. Further research should be conducted by national and international scholars so as to demonstrate the potential benefits of this policy and persuade civilian parties to adopt it. In this respect, the role of national NGOs and grassroots organisations will be pivotal in convincing politicians. Since NGOs and civil society in general are usually fragmented in Thailand and lack a clear leadership, an overarching steering committee should be formed to orchestrate and coordinate the political movement (Ungpakorn, 2010; Yegar, 2002).

### ***The Role of the Media***

In Thailand, the media are very conservative and operate under strict censorship (Ungpakorn, 2007; von Feigenblatt, 2009c). It can be assumed that most mainstream media will be opposed to this policy due to their conservative nature and fears of reprisals by the military and the Palace. However, alternative media can be used, such as the internet, radio, and newsletters, to get the message across. Due to the tense political atmosphere related to the coming elections, the time is ripe for public pressure on politicians. Politicians will be more responsive to popular demands as the elections approach. The policy should be framed as an opportunity for national reconciliation and as a way to strengthen democracy over the military. Since the economy is slumping, it could also be marketed as a way to boost the lagging economy with a very small investment. The excesses of the military budget could also be brought to light. It is very important to avoid certain topics such as the role of the Palace and to stress the fact that sovereignty will stay in the hands of Thailand. Conservative media will surely attempt to distort the news in order to show the policy in a bad light. Nationalism should be kept in check by presenting the policy as a way to strengthen national unity through economic integration.

### ***Summary and Conclusions***

The violent unrest in the Deep South of Thailand is a top priority issue not only for the Thai government but also for the region. Due to the economic and socio-political externalities of the conflict, inaction is not an appropriate policy option. Furthermore, as explained in this paper, the present approach has not led to a reduction in the violence nor to an economic recovery. Moreover, the post Cold War rise in aspirations for self-determination combined with a renewed unity of the *ummah*, makes it harder to ignore the calls for greater cultural and religious autonomy for the Melayu Patani ethnonationality.

This paper compared and contrasted three broad categories of policy options that have been put forward at one point or another as possible solutions to the unrest in the Deep South of Thailand. Socio-cultural as well as political and economic factors were taken into consideration in the analysis so as to determine which category

would yield the best results. It was determined that only an approach that grants some level of autonomy to the South in addition to promote development would prove to be sustainable.

The Greater Pattani Autonomous Administrative and Economic Region was proposed as a policy framework that applies 'best practices' from the Chinese experiences in Hong Kong and Macau as well as socio-cultural considerations appropriate for the local context. Rather than simply putting forward a proposal for a new administrative structure, the paper delineated some of the possible political obstacles that could be encountered during its implementation as well as several ways in which they could be overcome.

In conclusion, the most appropriate and feasible way to achieve sustainable peace in the Deep South of Thailand is to establish the Greater Pattani Autonomous Administrative and Economic Region and thus grant the area greater self-determination on some issues and at the same time integrate it with the country and the region through greater economic interdependence.

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