Separatist Conflicts in the ASEAN Region: Comparing Southern Thailand and Mindanao

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This paper examines two cases of separatist conflict, namely the conflict in Southern Thailand and the conflict in the southern Philippines. Both conflicts have been long-lasting, extremely violent, and embedded in ethnic and religious sentiments. The comparison shows that there are structural analogies in both conflict cases that indicate similar root causes. State-internal conflicts of this scale are not purely a matter of national politics. States and non-state actors have influenced – and are still influencing – both separatist conflicts in various ways and towards different outcomes. It becomes apparent that non-traditional security issues that are linked to state-internal conflicts demand a more proactive role of ASEAN in the field of conflict management.

Keywords: ASEAN; Conflict Management; Mindanao; Separatism; Southern Thailand

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In diesem Beitrag werden separatistische Konflikte am Beispiel Südthailands und der südlichen Philippinen untersucht. Beide Konflikte dauern bereits lange an, sind äußerst gewalttätig und von ethnischen und religiösen Spannungen geprägt. Durch einen Vergleich der beiden Krisenregionen werden strukturelle Gemeinsamkeiten sichtbar, die auf ähnliche Konfliktursachen hinweisen. Binnenstaatliche Konflikte solchen Ausmaßes sind nicht nur eine Frage nationaler Politik. Staatliche und nichtstaatliche AkteurInnen nahmen und nehmen auf unterschiedliche Art und Weise und mit unterschiedlichen Zielen Einfluss auf separatistische Konflikte. Es wird deutlich, dass nicht-traditionelle Sicherheitsfragen in Verbindung mit binnenstaatlichen Konflikten eine proaktivere Rolle ASEANs im Rahmen des Konfliktmanagements notwendig machen.

Schlagworte: ASEAN; Konfliktmanagement; Mindanao; Separatismus; Südthailand

INTRODUCTION

"The days when domestic political controversies could not be discussed in regional settings are over" (Pitsuwan, 2008, p. xx). This statement by former ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan represents a progressive stance on the operational mode of ASEAN. Since Southeast Asia as a region is seeking to become an integrated community, this no longer allows for keeping state-internal issues out of regional discussions. "New kinds of dangers have arisen that cannot be solved by governments alone. These threats have taken root in the cracks between sovereignties, the spaces between states" (Pitsuwan, 2008, p. xix).

Stability and security are major driving forces in regional integration. Founded in 1967 against the backdrop of the Cold War, ASEAN has always seen its core purpose in regional security concerns. However, ASEAN's more recent aspiration to establish a Security Community by 2015 is strikingly contrasted by the large number of prevailing conflicts in the region. ASEAN's working principle of non-interference normatively excludes the organization from playing a proactive role in conflict management, particularly when it comes to state-internal conflicts. However, this type of conflict can indeed become a concern for the region when it evolves to a stage where negative impacts such as criminal activities, refugee flows, and terrorism spill across national borders. It can be argued that ASEAN's current operational norms are insufficient to curb complex security issues in the region and hence pose a serious roadblock to efficient security cooperation.

To substantiate this hypothesis and exemplify the dilemma described above, the first part of this paper takes a look at two specific cases of separatist conflict, namely the Patani-Malays of Southern Thailand and the Bangsamoro of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. The choice of subject matter is far from random as both conflict cases have special relevance to ASEAN and the region of Southeast Asia. On the symbolic side, Southern Thailand represents the fault line of Southeast Asian diversity – precisely the geographical meeting point of maritime (predominant Muslim) and continental (predominant Buddhist) Southeast Asia. Prevailing conflict here surely has implications for the region's sense of being a united community. The case of Mindanao in the southern Philippines, on the other side, highlights the urgent need to address non-traditional security issues imposed by state-internal conflict. Illegal arms trade, kidnappings, and terrorist activities in the border region around the Sulu Sea have frequently challenged the security of the whole Southeast Asian region in the past.

The second part examines how various actors have managed these two conflicts, moving from the national to the bilateral, regional, and global sphere. State-internal conflicts of this scale are not purely a matter of domestic politics, even if ASEAN and its members would like to perceive it that way. States and non-state actors have influenced (and continue to influence) the separatist conflicts at hand in various ways and towards different outcomes.

PATANI AND MINDANAO – HISTORICAL ROOTS

The Patani-Malays in Southern Thailand

The separatist movement of the Patani-Malays concerns the three southernmost border provinces of Thailand: Pattani,[1] Yala, and Narathiwat. In contrast to the predominantly Buddhist Thai nation state in which Muslims make up a minority of approximately four percent, the population in these provinces consists of 80 percent ethnic Malay-Muslims (Abuza, 2009, p. 26; McCargo, 2009, p. 2).

Historically, the region was part of the ancient Malay kingdom Langkasuka. Under the influence of Indian and Arab merchants, the Court of Patani converted to Islam in 1457 (Yuniarto, 2004, pp. 36–40). The subsequent centuries saw alternating periods of independence and Siamese suzerainty. The Patani sultanate became a semi-independent vassal kingdom and tributary to the Siamese Empire of Ayutthaya (Abuza, 2009, p. 11; Haberkorn, 2013, p. 190; Mahmud, 2008, p. 4). The influence of Western colonization finally brought about the complete incorporation into the Siamese state with the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 (Abuza, 2009, p. 11; Tan, 2007, p. 267).

As Patani perceives itself as an entity under foreign control, rebellions and uprisings against Siamese rule[2] have always been part of its history. With Bangkok's intensified efforts to disseminate Thai national identity in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Patani separatist movement started to manifest itself politically. Especially the two authoritarian governments of Phibunsongkram (1938–1944 and 1948–1957) enforced strict assimilation policies "that adversely affected all facets of Muslim identity and ethnicity, including matters of attire, bureaucratic administration, education, judicial settlements and revenue collection" (Tan, 2007, p. 267). The 1950s also saw the systematic resettlement of Buddhists from the Northeast of Thailand into the Patani region (Abuza, 2009, p. 15).

Consequently, three principal Muslim separatist groups emerged in Patani, which demonstrates the continuing heterogeneity of the insurgents' political agenda. The first group, the Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani (Patani National Liberation Front or BNPP) founded by Malay aristocrats, was mainly "a conservative group committed to orthodox Islam. As stated in its constitution, the basic political ideology of the BNPP [was] based on the Al-Quran, Al Hadith and other sources of Islamic law" (Che Man, 1990, p. 105). However, the BNPP was divided into several fractions that favored either independence, autonomy within Thailand, or integration into Malaysia (Abuza, 2009, p. 17). In contrast, the Bertubuhan Pembebasan Pattani Bersatu (Patani United Liberation Organization or PULO) was more pragmatic and less religious in its outlook. With a broader base than the BNPP, its declared goal was to achieve an independent sovereign Muslim state through armed struggle, which also led to the establishment of its armed wing, the Pattani United Liberation Army (PULA) (Abuza,

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1   Annotation regarding terminology: 'Pattani' is the Thai name of the modern-day province; by contrast, 'Patani' is a Malay term that includes much deeper historical connotations. This paper will consistently use the Malay term – not to take a position, but in order to indicate the related aspects of constructed identity which are so essential for the nature of separatism (cf. McCargo, 2009, p. 1f).

2   Siam was renamed Thailand in 1939.

2009, p. 18). The third group, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (National Revolutionary Front or BRN) "was opposed to the nationalist agenda of PULO and mistrusted the BNPP's goal of restoring the feudal Pattani sultanate" (Abuza, 2009, p. 18). With close ties to the Communist Party of Malaya, it had a much more leftist, anti-capitalist orientation (Abuza, 2009, p. 20). Besides these three main separatist groups, there was a wide range of smaller groups that emerged especially in the 1970s, but all of them were highly prone to fractionalization and internally divided on issues of ideologies, strategies, and aims. During the 1980s and 1990s, the insurgency movement in the South waned partly because of increased divisions among all its sub-groups (Haberkorn, 2013, p. 191).

Elements of armed struggle have existed in the Patani separatist movement since its beginning. However, in 2004 under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, the conflict was revived with a new dimension of violence. Right after several coordinated actions in January 2004 that included raids of army camps, weapons and ammunition theft, the burning of schools, and several bomb attacks, the Thai Prime Minister declared martial law across the three southern provinces (Haberkorn, 2013, p. 192). The situation has greatly deteriorated since then. The International Crisis Group (ICG) estimated in a report from December 2012 that "[between] 4 January 2004 and 30 November 2012, violent incidents in the southernmost provinces killed 5,473 people and injured 9,693" (ICG, 2012a, p. 4). By these numbers, the separatist conflict in Patani is one of the most violent, contemporary state-internal conflicts in Southeast Asia.

In early 2013, the Thai government agreed to start peace negotiations with one insurgent group, the BRN (Rustici, 2013). Whether or not this step leads to a nascent 'peace process' in Patani is yet to be seen. The talks had to be postponed repeatedly due to the recent political turmoil in Thailand's capital (Hunt, 2014). As long as political stability in Bangkok is not restored, the insurgency in the South will most likely remain at the periphery of the Thai government's agenda.

The Bangsamoro in the Southern Philippines

The history of the Bangsamoro can be described as a continuous struggle against foreign domination in three parts: first against the Spanish, later the American colonizers, and finally against the Philippine nation state (Hussin, 2003, p. 11; Wadi, 2008, p. 21). Similar to the Patani-Malays, the Bangsamoro can look back on a pre-modern history of autonomous statehood. Before the arrival of colonialism, Islamized groups inhabited the southern regions of the Philippine archipelago, including the main island of Mindanao and the adjoining islands in the Sulu Sea (Che Man, 1990, p. 19). Unlike the Patani-Malays, the Bangsamoro are not a homogeneous ethnic group. The Tausug, Maguindanao, and Maranao are the three main tribes of in total 13 ethnolinguistic groups that make up the Bangsamoro people. In pre-colonial times, there were several sultanates in the region of Mindanao, each of them a separate political entity (Abreu, 2008, pp. 9–10).

The arrival of the Spaniards in 1565 stopped the spread of Islam in the Philippines. With their historical baggage of the Iberian *reconquista*, the Spanish instantly perceived the encountered Muslims as natural enemies. The Moro-Spanish Wars lasted

for about three hundred years, but although the political power of the local Muslim sultanates declined towards the end of the nineteenth century, Spanish colonialism never managed to fully subjugate the Moro people (Abreu, 2008, p. 12; Che Man, 1990, p. 22; May, 2013, p. 222). Spain had to cede its colony to the United States in 1898. This handover also included the Moro region even though the Iberian colonizers had never held full sovereignty over these territories (Che Man, 1990, p. 23).

As new colonial masters, the Americans introduced policies aimed at incorporating the Bangsamoro into the Philippine state. But what was portrayed as greater tolerance towards the Muslim ethnic groups, the Moros experienced as encroachment of their Islamic identity (Abreu, 2008, p. 13; Che Man, 1990, p. 23). The most pervasive change in this regard consisted of the new landownership laws, which were fundamental for the land-grab of untitled ancestral land by American companies and transnational corporations (Abreu, 2008, p. 14; Rodell, 2007, p. 228). Sporadic Moro uprisings did not prevent resettlement schemes that brought Christian Filipinos to the region and substantially changed the demographic make-up of Mindanao (Tan, 2003, p. 5).

The Philippines achieved independence in 1946, but for the Muslims of Mindanao this meant just another transfer of colonial mastery. Continued internal migration aggravated the situation and gave rise to increasing tensions between traditional landowners and new settlers, between local Muslims and migrant Christians. By 1970, the Moros only made up a mere 21 percent of the population of Mindanao (Rodell, 2007, p. 228). Finally, the Jabidah Massacre[3] in 1968 sparked the political establishment of the Moro Independence Movement which preceded the foundation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1972. The aim of the MNLF was to fight for Bangsamoro independence and for the return of ancestral lands. The group received support from the international Islamic community and was granted observer status in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation[4] (OIC) (May, 2013, pp. 222–223).

While it seemed impossible to effectively counter the militant movement, President Marcos declared martial law in September 1972. The fighting continued in the early 1970s, killing several thousands and triggering massive refugee flows (May, 2013, p. 223). After the situation reached a stalemate in 1975, peace negotiations facilitated by Libya and the OIC led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 that stipulated an area of Muslim autonomy for 13 provinces. However, tensions within the MNLF caused an internal split and led to the establishment of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Unlike the secularist MNLF, the MILF propagated a religious turn in the separatist struggle and, unsatisfied with the reached compromise, pushed for the continuation of militant struggle. The MNLF itself later disagreed with the Philippine government on the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement and continued fighting as well.

After the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the new Aquino government reopened negotiations with the MNLF, which culminated in provisions for an Au-

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3 During the Jabidah Massacre on 18 March 1968, at least 28 Muslim soldiers of the Philippine army that had received training for an invasion of Sabah were killed. The resulting scandal drew international attention and caused frictions in the relationship with Malaysia (Guiterrez, 2000, p. 309; Rodell, 2007, p. 229).

4 The OIC was formerly known as Organization of the Islamic Conference.

tonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Successive Philippine governments have since repeatedly tried to negotiate and implement the ARMM but, faced with a fractioned separatist movement, all these efforts have not brought lasting peace to Mindanao (May, 2013, pp. 224–226; Rodell, 2007, p. 241). It was estimated in 2011 that since the 1970s, around 120,000 people have been killed in violent clashes and about 2 million people have been displaced by the separatist conflict (May, 2013, p. 230).

The 1990s saw the emergence of another, even more radical group. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has close ties to the network of Al-Qaeda and stresses the notion of a jihad against the Christian world rather than mere Bangsamoro separatism. After 9/11, the MILF eventually distanced itself from the ASG and was willing in 2002 to continue the peace talks with the government that had started in 1997. These difficult and often interrupted negotiations were concluded in late 2012 with a framework agreement between the MILF and the Philippine government. Both parties agreed to establish a Transition Commission with the task to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law that would provide for a Transition Authority. A final peace agreement was signed in March 2014, providing a roadmap for the ongoing transition process that aims to have the MILF participate in the 2016 elections. Even though this latest agreement can be seen as a historical breakthrough, its validity can only be proven by successful implementation and strong political commitment from both sides (Esquerra & Burgonio, 2014).

STRUCTURAL SIMILARITIES

Political Environment

At first glance, the conflict areas of Patani and Mindanao share striking similarities in terms of their geographical distance relative to their national centers of political power. Both regions are situated in the southern periphery of their respective states; this constrains direct control and influence by the central governments. Both regions are regarded as poor and underdeveloped compared to the rest of their countries (Che Man, 1990, pp. 24–36; Funston, 2008, pp. 6–8; Rivera, 2008, pp. 33–35). It has often been argued that socio-economic grievances strongly influence and perpetuate separatist movements. Unequal development and economic marginalization introduce the perception of internal colonialism, which further fuels resentment against the central political system (Che Man, 1990, p. 113; Diaz, 2003, pp. 44–45; Gutierrez, 2000, p. 331).

It is remarkable that both separatist movements emerged in the political context of the 1960s and 1970s and underwent profound fractionalization processes. On the one hand, the various splinter groups in each movement created a messy and complicated setting, which makes it difficult to voice clear demands and poses obstacles to official peace negotiations. On the other hand, the central governments may not be considered solid institutions either. Both Thailand and the Philippines experienced various political shifts over the past few decades, which repeatedly changed the governmental actors and the overall political environment in both conflicts (Chalk, Rabasa, Rosenau, & Piggott, 2009, pp. 37–40; Hussin, 2003, pp. 14–15; McCargo, 2009, pp. 55–56).

The aims of both separatist movements are not internally coherent either. Their demands range from outright independence to mere greater autonomy (Funston, 2008, pp. 42–43). In contrast, the position of the central governments is clearly aiming at protecting national sovereignty. Neither Bangkok nor Manila has ever signaled approval for letting their violence-prone southern regions create independent states. The protection of sovereignty, national territory, and its borders is of paramount importance to them (Gutierrez, 2000, pp. 307–309; McCargo, 2009, p. 60; Santos, 2005, pp. 55–57).

Finally, it should be highlighted that in both nation states the structures for political participation have severe shortcomings, especially with regards to the inclusion of ethnic Muslim minorities into the broader political system. In Patani, for example, the centralized apparatus of Thai bureaucracy has brought about major political grievances for the local Muslims as they feel misunderstood and discriminated against by non-local Thai government officials who do not speak their language and originate from a different religious and cultural background. Efforts to install a more representative bureaucracy have failed because Patani-Malays that entered government service adapted to the bureaucratic culture and were often seen as "traitors" by their own communities (McCargo, 2009, pp. 57–59; Pitsuwan, 1982a, p. 210). In Mindanao, the Bangsamoro had to make an equally disenchanting experience with the administrative body of the ARMM which, established in 1990, "quickly became a massive and inept bureaucracy, a hindrance to, rather than an effective tool for, the delivery of services" and "an additional layer of government between Manila and the existing provincial structure" (Collier, 2005, p. 168). In short, the mismanagement of political participation sets a vicious cycle into motion: As the Muslim minorities feel disregarded and oppressed, they resort to violence and are consequently mistrusted even more by the political system (Diaz, 2003, pp. 23–30; Funston, 2008, p. 10; Pitsuwan, 1982a, pp. 269–271).

Ideological Frames

The construction of a specific identity is vital for any secessionist movement because it provides the lines of argumentation that are used to contextualize, justify, and legitimize the separatist struggle and its leaders' moral authority (Hafez, 2003, p. 20). Imagining an 'alternative community' opposed to the existing nation of the dominating state thus lies at the core of every form of separatism (Collier, 2005, pp. 155–160; McCargo, 2012, pp. 112–116). When comparing the Patani and the Bangsamoro cases, there are two powerful social constructs that significantly shape the separatists' identity and meaning. Ethnicity and Islam are undeniably the most important cornerstones here, constituting identity markers with both internal and external aspects (Che Man, 1990, p. 2, p. 12–14).

Ethnicity is a social construct based on, among others, shared history, geography, culture, language, traditions, and beliefs. It serves as an underlying justification to demand an independent nation state because ethnic groups themselves can be regarded as "candidates for nationhood" (Suhrke & Noble, 1977, p. 4). Gutierrez (2000) for example concludes after examining the emergence of the Bangsamoro identity in Mindanao, "They are thus a nation within a nation, aspiring one day for their own

state but content for the moment to accept the limitations of the historical conditions they cannot change" (p. 335). A similar statement could easily be made for the Patani-Malays of Southern Thailand. For both minorities, ethnicity is a political tool to establish their ethno-cultural divergence as opposed political identity vis-à-vis the Thai/Filipino nation state (Gutierrez, 2000, pp. 312–314; Pitsuwan, 1982a, pp. 8–11). A shared history of violent struggle and enduring resistance against forced assimilation plays a significant role in this context because the perception of the Patani/Bangsamoro ethnic identity being threatened by outsiders fuels the separatist movements (Che Man, 1990, p. 74). The aspect of ethnicity links both separatist movements to the wider Malay world of Southeast Asia. Both conflict areas border on nation states dominated by ethnic Malays (Malaysia and Indonesia). Besides the idea of a pan-Malayness, historical ties of ethnic kinship cross national borders and thus forge connections that are essential to influence and sustain the separatist movements in Southern Thailand and Mindanao (Pitsuwan, 1982a, pp. 259–262). However, a distinction between both cases has to be made with regards to ethnic identity. Unlike the Patani-Malays, the Bangsamoro are not a homogeneous ethnic group and have only been constructed as an ethnic identity with the political rise of the separatist movement since the 1970s. The subgroups of the Bangsamoro may share a history of struggle against foreign rule but they are still distinct from each other and do not speak a common language, for example. This is one of the main reasons for a deeper fractionalization among the Bangsamoro separatists (Gutierrez, 2000, pp. 321–323).

Islam is in fact closely intertwined with both ethnic concepts of Patani and Bangsamoro because it has pre-colonial, historical roots in the areas and constitutes a dominant aspect of practiced culture. Nevertheless, it can be seen as its own dimension in the ideological framework because the aspect of religion distinguishes the separatist minorities in both cases from the dominant national identity. As religion is politicized and "provides an ideal 'blueprint' for the development of an informal political organization" (Cohen, 1969, p. 210), its ideological influence on both separatist movements is preeminent. Transmigration that brought in settlers of different ethnic and religious background has aggravated communal tensions in both cases, which are often interpreted in religious terms and fuel fear and anxiety on both sides of each conflict (Kamlian, 2005, p. 101; McCargo, 2012, p. 47; Yusuf, 2009, p. 212). Islam then does not only provide the overarching moral justification to fight against non-Muslim 'oppressors' but also connects the separatists to the global Muslim community, or *ummah*, which has Muslim countries offering recognition and support for the Muslims of Patani and Mindanao. Besides that, pan-Islamic and Islamic reformist influences from abroad have also substantively shaped the ideologies of both separatist movements (Lingga, 2005, pp. 84–86; Pitsuwan, 1982a, pp. 262–265).

Cross-Border Effects and Regional Significance

The conflicts in Southern Thailand and Mindanao have both transcended national borders and are affecting the region of Southeast Asia at large. As religious and ethnic ties connect the Malay-Muslims of Malaysia with the minorities in Patani and Mindanao, Malaysia as the closest neighboring country has been involved in and affected by the development of both separatist conflicts. Violence in the conflict ar-

eas has caused displaced people to cross the borders into Malaysian territory (Che Man, 1990, pp. 139–140; Pitsuwan, 1982b, pp. 34–38). Also, border security remains an issue until today. Transboundary crimes such as human trafficking, smuggling, sea piracy, and gunrunning are symptoms of 'porous borders' that pose a threat to national security (Funston, 2008, pp. 20–23; Miani, 2011, pp. 142–145; Vatikiotis, 2006, p. 28). Issues like these have strained bilateral relationships between Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok/Manila on several occasions throughout the past few decades. Malaysia has been repeatedly accused of harboring or supporting separatists by both sides (Bajunid, 2006, p. 216; Pitsuwan, 1982b; Tan, 2003, p. 109; Wadi, 2007, p. 22).

Over time, the two separatist conflicts have affected the wider region as well. Transnational crime, as manifested for example in the illegal Sulu arms market, profits from ongoing armed conflicts in the region and threatens regional security (Miani, 2011, pp. 5–8). Besides, there is the looming fear in the region that international terrorist networks are exploiting the scenes of protracted separatist conflicts. In fact, this threat cannot be disregarded: Links between Al-Qaeda's network and the regionally operating Jemaah Islamiyah are undisputed. The ASG as a splinter group of the Bangsamoro separatist movement has been associated with both terrorist networks; the closeness between the MILF and global terrorism is questionable but cannot be dispelled completely (Chalk et al., 2009, pp. 26–29; Funston, 2008, pp. 34–36; Williams, 2003, pp. 93–94). As a complex security issue, "[t]errorism is not merely a danger to some innocent lives and to property. It is a threat to the economic well being of ASEAN countries because terrorist incidents affect the tourist industry and undermine investor confidence" (Singh, 2003, p. 202).

COMPARING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

The Domestic Sphere – Political Responses to Separatism

Thailand's policies towards the southernmost provinces have been focused predominantly on integrating the Patani-Malays into the Thai nation state. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Patani people have repeatedly been affected by Thai national policies of forced assimilation, especially in terms of culture, language, religion, and identity. These policies gave special attention to education and the role of the local Islamic schools (Aphornsuvan, 2007, pp. 56–57; Che Man, 1990, pp. 163–164; Pitsuwan, 1982a, pp. 188–191; Pramungkas, 2004, p. 81). Besides, Islam as religion has been integrated into the body of Thai administrative structures. A system of provincial Islamic councils is headed nationally by the *Chularajmontri*, "the advisor of the King on Islamic affairs" (Dubus & Polkla, 2011, p. 30). This effort to nationalize Islam through institutionalization was aimed at diffusing Malay nationalist tendencies, but proved to be futile. The Patani-Malays do not see themselves represented through this body (Che Man, 1990, p. 165; Funston, 2008, p. 12). Another feature has been the notion of facilitating economic development, based on the assumption that socio-economic grievances constitute the root cause of the separatist insurgency. However, economic development schemes alone have not been successful in curbing the grievances of the Patani-Malays.

   The government of General Prem Tinsulanonda in the 1980s created the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), which was tasked with coordinating the provincial administration in the Deep South while cooperating with local leaders and religious bodies. Also, an inter-agency security body was created, the Civilian-Police-Military task force 43 (CPM43) (Dubus & Polkla, 2011, pp. 31–34; Funston, 2008, pp. 15–18). These two new administrative structures combined with a nation-wide democratization process, amnesty policies, and overall economic development in Thailand gradually improved the situation. By the end of the 1990s, the insurgency was reduced to such a minimum that many observers regarded the issue as solved to a great extent. However, when Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra took office in 2001, government policies in the South changed profoundly. Thaksin dissolved the SPBAC and the CMP43 in 2002 and declared the unrest as "criminal" in essence, rather than politically motivated. The re-emergence of violence in 2004 is thus not a coincidence and can be interpreted as a result of political mismanagement (Dubus & Polkla, 2011, pp. 56–59; McCargo, 2009, p. 9; Melvin, 2007, pp. 28–31). Thailand's regimes have frequently changed in the recent past. Nevertheless, the general attitude of the government remained unchanged: First, Bangkok is vehemently opposed to political autonomy or allowing any decrease of state sovereignty in this regard; secondly, the Thai government insists that the conflict in the South is a domestic issue and tries to minimize any internationalization of the conflict. Only very recently has Thailand accepted Malaysia's help as facilitator in peace negotiations with one of the insurgent groups (Lamey, 2013, p. 8; Rustici, 2013).

   In contrast, the Philippine government has reacted to the separatist insurgency in Mindanao quite differently. Since the 1970s, there have always been peace negotiations including third parties. Political autonomy for Mindanao has been the main item of negotiation right from the beginning, but its successful implementation has been overshadowed by the fractionalization of the separatist movement and a prevalent lack of genuine commitment from the central government.

   A recurrent point of contestation has been the government's insistence on the use of plebiscites to determine the territorial extent of the ARMM. Due to demographic changes, the Bangsamoro now constitute a minority in most parts of Mindanao. Therefore, a plebiscite would substantially weaken the structure of the ARMM. Another critical feature about the agreed autonomy is the issue of ancestral domains and land ownership rights. Unaddressed landlessness among Muslims in Mindanao remains a root cause for prevailing poverty and socio-economic grievances (Gutierrez & Borras, 2004, p. 41). Thus, even though the installation of the ARMM should theoretically accommodate the separatist demands, its viability is greatly challenged by executive restrictions, lack of funding, political discordance, and institutional inefficiency (Bauzon, 2008, p. 105; Mastura, 2007, pp. 130–132; Rivera, 2008, pp. 39–40). Nevertheless, with regard to the overall conflict management approach adapted by the Philippine governments, it can be concluded that the prevailing willingness to negotiate with the help of third parties has greatly benefitted the process of conflict resolution (May, 2013, p. 231). Unlike the Thai government, Manila has been open towards the political compromise of autonomy. However, the case of Mindanao has also shown in the past that the signing of formal peace agreements alone does not automatically solve the conflict situation on the ground. As long as underlying prob-

lems pertaining to identity remain unresolved, separatism continues to exist and can reemerge in violence (Glang, 2003, p. 73).

Involving the Neighbor? Malaysia's Role

Malaysia's Influence on the Conflict in Southern Thailand

Malaysia was dependent on Thailand's support in combating the Communist insurgency after World War II (Pitsuwan, 1982b, pp. 6–8). During the 1960s and 1970s, both countries had close military cooperation along the shared border. Nevertheless, the bilateral relation between Malaysia and Thailand in this regard was always marked by mutual distrust as Thailand simultaneously suspected Malaysia of harboring and supporting Patani-Malay insurgents (Che Man, 1990, p. 160; Pitsuwan, 1982b, pp. 9–12). Suhrke (1975) describes this apparent solidarity as a "trade-off pattern whereby support for, or acquiescence in the existence of, one rebel group was incompatible with a similar attitude toward the other rebel group" (p. 197).

With the end of the Cold War era and the surrender of the CPM, this balanced "trade-off pattern" in managing security between the two countries no longer exists. Indeed, Thailand's mistrust with regards to Malaysia's attitude towards the Muslim insurgents grew in the 1990s. Mostly, the issue of dual citizenship continuously sparks the anger of the Thai government. The number of Muslim Malays that hold Thai-Malaysian dual citizenship is estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000 and with its connections on both sides of the border, this particular group has indeed gained noticeable political leverage (Bajunid, 2006, p. 218; Funston, 2008, p. 22). Thailand's recent step to accept Malaysia as facilitator for peace negotiations clearly represents a shift of position with regards to Malaysia's role in managing the Patani conflict. A possible explanation could be Malaysia's obvious success in helping to mediate the conflict with the MILF in Mindanao (Rustici, 2013).

Malaysia as Mediator in the Mindanao conflict

In contrast to the case of Southern Thailand, Malaysia has had a much more active role in the process of managing the separatist conflict in the southern Philippines. This has two apparent reasons: First, the Philippine government has always been very open towards peace negotiations involving third parties facilitators; secondly, Malaysia's stake in terms of security has much more weight and persistence in the bilateral relationship with the Philippine neighbors. The influx of refugees from Mindanao into Malaysian territory has been much more considerable and furthermore the Philippine territorial claim of Sabah substantially predisposes Malaysian-Filipino relations. Whereas the threat of Communist insurgency in Malaysia has dissolved completely, the Sabah claim has never entirely vanished over the decades.

As such, Malaysia is not a neutral third party to the Bangsamoro conflict. During the 1970s, Malaysia was actively providing training and support to the separatist movement in Mindanao. At the same time, Malaysia was also lobbying for the Bangsamoro cause in the OIC. Being recognized on this international platform increased the political bargaining power of the insurgents against the Philippine gov-

ernment. Simultaneously, by supporting the Bangsamoro separatism, Malaysia could portray itself internationally as a concerned Muslim nation and gained political leverage against the Philippines' Sabah claim (Che Man, 1990, pp. 138–140). With Malaysia's commitment to ASEAN, these foreign policy tactics have gradually subsided, but security concerns still remain on the forefront of Malaysia's motivation for engagement, especially the rising threat of terrorism in the region. The Sipadan hostage crisis[5] in 2000 and several bombing attacks in the following years demonstrated a drastic need for closer security cooperation (Lingga, 2007, pp. 44–45; Mastura, 2011, pp. 10–11; Wadi, 2007, p. 22).

Malaysia stepped in as mediating party after 2001, brokering the negotiations between Manila and the MILF. The goal was primarily to reach a win-win situation based on the principle of non-independence under the emphasis on unity, moderation, and the urgent need for economic development (Santos, 2003, pp. 8–9). Still, the Malaysian-led negotiations reached a deadlock and finally faltered in mid-2003, mainly due to disagreements on governance structures and ancestral land rights (Camilleri, 2008, p. 77). After several setbacks, negotiations resumed with Malaysian help in 2010, leading to a framework agreement between the government and the MILF in 2012 (Muzaffar, 2012), and culminating more recently in the signing of the peace agreement in 2014 (Esquerra & Burgonio, 2014).

Other External Actors

ASEAN's 'Non-Role'

ASEAN's non-interference principle as embodied in the diplomatic culture of the 'ASEAN Way' prevents the regional body or its member countries to intervene in state-internal issues such as separatism. However, it has been demonstrated that both conflicts at hand have repercussions on the wider region and therefore cannot be seen as purely domestic issues. Malaysia's role as stakeholder reemphasizes this aspect.

It can be argued from a constructivist viewpoint that the mere existence of ASEAN in Southeast Asia has deterred the escalation of separatist conflicts so far. After all, the non-interference principle effectively protects and strengthens state-sovereignty for all member states and good bilateral relations have so far proven paramount to the ethnic or religious ties in the mosaic of Southeast Asian diversity.

ASEAN as an international organization is more than the mere sum of the bilateral relations among its members. Even though it has not played a proactive role in managing the separatist insurgencies in Southern Thailand or Mindanao so far, it still provides an intergovernmental platform that has at least in theory the capacity to influence the two conflicts. The ASEAN Charter for example includes a chapter on dispute settlement and does not distinguish between inter-state or intra-state con-

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5   In 2000, the ASG raided a Malaysian tourist resort on Sipadan Island in Sabah. Twenty-one foreign nationals were taken hostage and three persons were killed. Libya finally paid 15 to 20 million USD as ransom. A similar incident occurred in 2001 when a beach resort on Palawan Island in the Philippines was raided: Twenty tourists were taken hostage, four were killed, three of whom were beheaded by the ASG (Means, 2009, p. 206; Wadi, 2007, p. 17).

flict scenarios. Here, it instructs all ASEAN members "to resolve peacefully all disputes in a timely manner through dialogue, consultation and negotiation" (ASEAN Charter, Art. 22(1)). Besides, the Charter also stipulates that any "[parties] to the dispute may request the Chairman of ASEAN or the Secretary-General of ASEAN, acting in an ex-officio capacity, to provide good offices, conciliation or mediation" (ASEAN Charter, Art. 23(2)). ASEAN's role as a mediator in conflict management is thus possible in theory (Vatikiotis, 2009, p. 32).

However, there have been no official statements by ASEAN on the conflicts at hand or their progression. Also, neither Thailand nor the Philippines has called upon ASEAN's capacity as mediator or provider of good offices. This clearly reflects the weakness of ASEAN in the field of conflict management. The organization neither has nor is expected to have the capacities for managing conflicts. Against the backdrop of the aspired Security Community and closer regional cooperation, it is however necessary to develop such expertise. A potential role model in this context could be the OIC.

The OIC

Just like ASEAN, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is an international organization that works on an intergovernmental basis. The OIC, established in 1969, today comprises 57 Muslim countries and consequently considers itself "the collective voice of the Muslim world" (OIC, 2013). One of its objectives is "to safeguard the rights, dignity and religious and cultural identity of Muslim communities and minorities in non-Member States" (OIC Charter, Art. 1 (16)). As such, the OIC is an important stakeholder in the conflicts of Southern Thailand and Mindanao.

Indeed, the OIC has played an important role in both conflicts providing an international political platform for Muslim interests. Its influence is particularly remarkable with regards to the case of the Bangsamoro. The OIC accepted the MNLF as observer in 1977 and thus gave the separatist movement international recognition and political leverage. The initial peace negotiations between the MNLF and the Philippine government in the 1970s were facilitated under the auspices of the OIC, mediated by its member state Libya (Lingga, 2007, pp. 47–49). With regards to the capacities of the organization as an actor of conflict management, Santos (2005) observes:

> The OIC can only exert moral suasion, such as through its resolutions. But it has no real power as OIC. ... Still, the OIC has the *"trust factor"* for Muslims like the MNLF and MILF, and the *"fear factor"* for governments like the GRP in terms of leverage over OIC member-countries as petroleum exporters and as employers of Filipino and other overseas labor. (p. 98)

A similar point could be made for the case in Southern Thailand, although the role of the OIC is much less pronounced there. The Patani-Malay separatist movement is not represented in the OIC; however political pressure by the Muslim world is still felt by the Thai government. Thailand has tried to improve its relations with Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East, and was recognized as an observer country to the OIC in 1998 (Yusuf, 2009, pp. 209–210). In 2005, an OIC delegation

was invited for an observation and assessment mission to the Patani region and "concluded that unrest in the south was neither the result of religious discrimination against Muslims nor was it rooted in religion itself; instead, it could be traced to culture and historic neglect of the south" (Sharqieh, 2013, p. 166). The secretary-general of the OIC has also repeatedly urged the Thai government to launch a peace dialogue with the Patani insurgents (ICG, 2010, p. 7; Sharqieh, 2013, p. 167).

Separatists or Terrorists? The US and the Global War on Terror

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent global war on terror has drastically changed the landscape of geopolitical security. Globally, it has certainly heightened the awareness for the urgency to combat terrorism. In the academic discourse on the insurgencies of Southern Thailand and Mindanao, there have been several re-examinations with regards to international terrorism links (cf. Connors, 2007; Storey, 2009; Wheeler, 2009). This renewed attention coupled with the Asian pivot in US geostrategic concerns has influenced the dynamics of both conflicts to various degrees since the early 2000s. However, the US officially recognizes that these separatist insurgencies in Thailand and the Philippines are domestic issues and was never directly involved in any mediation efforts (Santos, 2005, pp. 98–101; Wheeler, 2009, p. 179). In the context of its war on terror, the US is nevertheless very concerned about both conflict situations as domestic grievances could be exploited and co-opted by international terrorism (Storey, 2009, p. 139).

Both Thailand and the Philippines have pledged alliance to the US in its global war on terror and have both become "Major Non-NATO Allies" to the American superpower (Tuazon, 2008, p. 77; Wheeler, 2009, p. 184). The Philippine government under Arroyo asked for US assistance in combating terrorists in 2001 and the Philippine army has since officially received special training by the US (Kane & Rodriguez, 2006, pp. 191–200; Lingga, 2007, pp. 51–52; Santos, 2005, p. 100). Also, the global war on terror caused the MILF to re-enter peace negotiations with stronger commitment – mostly for the fear of being listed as an international terror organization. The MILF even started to cooperate with the government on combating the ASG in Mindanao (Rodell, 2007, pp. 240–241; Tuazon, 2008, p. 82). Thailand, on the other hand, was initially quite hesitant to pledge alliance to the crusade against global terrorism, but did so in 2003 under Prime Minister Thaksin, primarily to mend bilateral relations with the Americans. The US has been very cautious not to get too overtly engaged in the conflict of Southern Thailand, but has provided support and training to the Thai army (Pongsudhirak, 2007, p. 272; Wheeler, 2009, pp. 182–184, 192–195).

Leaving aside the question of whether links between international terrorism and domestic separatism are real, constructed, or merely whipped up to justify US influence in the wider region, it still needs to be asked whether this form of internationalization is really helping to address both conflicts effectively. Regarding Southern Thailand, Connors (2007) argues that the focus on terrorism may simply deter attention from settling the actual grievances of the Patani-Malays (pp. 163–164). Surely, it can be argued that separatism and terrorism breed in the same environment of socio-economic grievances and take up similar ideological frameworks for justification; but security measures and military presence alone can never attend to their root causes in a holistic way (Almonte, 2003, pp. 236–40; Tan, 2007, pp. 110–112).

CONCLUSION

The analysis in this paper on the state-internal conflicts of Southern Thailand and Mindanao has underlined the complexity of both conflict cases. First, the structural similarities of both separatist movements were elaborated on, which not only makes them comparable but also offers valuable insights into the emergence of separatist conflicts in general. Socio-economic grievances as well as inequity of modernization and development can be seen as material root causes for insurgencies. However, the factor of identity is of pre-eminent importance for the emergence of separatism. Based on history, language, culture, and religion, an identity is constructed and consequently leads to an alternative 'imagined community' in the sense of Benedict Anderson (1991), which is distinct from the dominant nation of the state (pp. 6–8). Thus, if this issue of the distinct identity is ignored or sidelined in conflict management, it can never be possible to address separatist conflicts effectively.

The comparison of conflict management approaches by different actors has further exemplified the complex scene of conflict resolution efforts. It may be argued that separatism is primarily a domestic political issue that concerns the nation state. However, the analysis in this paper has found that state-internal conflicts in this form cannot be regarded in an isolated way. They have indeed implications on the bilateral, regional, and global sphere and thus concern and involve more stakeholders than just the respective national government. In this regard, there are several aspects that can either support or disrupt successful conflict resolution. It is noteworthy that internationalization through involvement of third parties in mediating peace negotiations has shown positive effects on the resolution process of state-internal conflicts. This in turn should be a strong incentive for ASEAN to explore its potential as regional actor in conflict management. The OIC as another intergovernmental organization could serve as a role model here as it already has considerable experience in managing state-internal conflicts in Southeast Asia. Also, it would be in ASEAN's interest to play a more significant role in managing conflicts within its own region in order to prevent the unilateral intervention by external powers such as the US.

With reference to Pitsuwan's statement quoted in the beginning, it can be confirmed that the days when domestic issues could be seen as strictly separated from the regional sphere are certainly over. In an interdependent and closely connected region that seeks to be an integrated community, state-internal conflicts do indeed concern all members and therefore need to be discussed in a regional setting. It clearly remains a challenge to ASEAN to adapt to these changes. Only by embracing new and more progressive forms of regional cooperation can ASEAN evolve into a community that is able to play a proactive role in conflict management.

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