

CHAPTER II

DYNAMIC OF CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

A. The Geographical Situation of the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand

Malaya is a peninsular which stretches southward from and is situated at the southeastern part of the continent of Asia, processing an extensive area. Beginning in the north, it stretches from the Kra Isthmus to the top of Malaysia, including Singapore to the south. In the north this peninsular joins Siam which is located between two kingdoms, on its left the kingdom of Burma and the right the kingdom of Annam which is called French Indochina. The kingdom of Siam, Annam and Burma are located in a large peninsular, the peninsular of Indochina.

The peninsular of Malaya has two parts, the northern part and the southern. Its northern part begins at the Kra Isthmus and reaches to the provinces (jajahan) of Setul, Singgora, Yala, Pattani and Benggera. Currently the people of these provinces are included among the subject of the kingdom of Siam or Thailand. A large number of the inhabitants of the northern part of this peninsular are Siam-Thai, but the six provinces of Setul, Singgora, Yala, Pattani and Benggara the majority are Malays. The Malays were the last people to settle and reside the peninsular after it had first been inhabited by several other people. The first people to inhabit the peninsular of Malaya, according to information in history books, were people of a primitive type. Later it was settled by Hindus who came from India, after which was ruled by the Siam-Asli who came from Siam. Only later did the Malays arrive.

The provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala form the bulk of the Thai remnants of Pattani Darul Makrif, the

independent Malay Sultanate of Pattani.¹ Pattani is the Malay spelling and refers to the former Sultanate while Pattani is a province of Thailand in the area included in the Sultanate of Pattani. Over seventy-five percent of the populations in the three provinces² or forty-four percent of the overall Muslim population in Thailand³ are ethnic Malay Muslim. This minority shares, neither the unofficial Thai religion, Buddhism, nor the Thai language with the majority of the country. Instead the language of common use is Jawi, a Malay dialect that is not used in any of the local schools or in the conduct of official business in Thailand.

B. The history of the southern border provinces of Thailand conflict

1. Pattani Vassal State

This ethnic Malay Sultanate was founded in 1309⁴ in the pre-Islamic period on the Malay Peninsula. About the same time that the Pattani elites converted to Islam, the kingdom of Siam began to assert its influence⁵. This early suzerainty allowed the native Malay rajas to remain in power in Pattani as long as they continued to pay tribute⁶. This early association was not without its tension. The Pattani rajas were focused toward Malacca more than

¹ Shukri, Bailey, and Miksik, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Pattani*

² Melvin, *Conflict in Southern Thailand*, vi.

³ Imitiyaz Yusuf, *Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand*. Working Paper, (Washington: East-West Center Washington, 2007)

⁴ Melvin, *Conflict in Southern Thailand*, 1.

⁵ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand." *Cornell University South East Asia Program Post-Secondary Teaching Materials*. January 16, 2013, 12, <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/southeastasia/outreach/resources/MuslimThailand.pdf> (accessed January 16, 2013).

⁶ Harish, op cit, p.4

toward Siam. Unfortunately the Portuguese defeated the Malaccan Sultanate in 1511 so Malacca was unable to assist Pattani in throwing off its obligations to Siam.⁷ Throughout the Ayutthaya period in Siam and into the Bangkok period, Pattani proved a troublesome vassal. Whenever Siam seemed weak, Pattani would, at the very least stop paying tribute and at the most revolt. Revolts occurred in 1564 when a Pattani unit, called to assist Siam against the Burmese, instead seized the King's palace.⁸ Other uprisings occurred in 1630, 1633 and 1767 after the Burmese ransacked Ayutthaya.⁹ Throughout this period the Siamese government took an indirect "divide and rule" approach to the governing of Pattani, splitting the territory up and cultivated rival elites to administer the separate pieces under the observance of the administration of a southern Thai city. This approach succeeded in keeping Pattani mostly divided and a vassal of Siam for five centuries.¹⁰

2. Inclusion into Thailand

In 1785, King Rama I, the founder of the current Thai dynasty, enacted a campaign to incorporate Pattani as well as the Malay sultanates of Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu into the Siamese Empire. Rama sidelined the ruling elites and elevated leaders loyal to Bangkok in their place.¹¹ Further uprisings against Bangkok occurred in 1789-91, after which Siam deposed the Pattani raja, and 1808 after which Pattani was carved into seven smaller "muang" or provinces in a repeat of the "divide and rule"

⁷ Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 4.

⁸ Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand, p13.

⁹ Haris, Op. cit. p4.

¹⁰ Aphornsuvan, op cit. p12.

¹¹ Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 4.

tactic.¹² This did not stop the seven provinces from rebelling against Siamese rule, but the rebellions resulted only in Kedah being subdivided into two parts. The rebellions during the Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods were mainly conflicts among elites over the control of manpower and wealth in Malay provinces of Siam.¹³ Matrimonial bonds between the Siamese and Malay elites focused the conflict in the area to an aristocratic struggle for power, not a nationalist or religious struggle. A united opposition to Rama I's incorporation in the early 19th century showed signs of a Malay identity, but there was no popular solidarity or resistance against Siamese rule.¹⁴

3. Modern Thai Rule

At the end of the nineteenth century King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, accelerated his hold on Southern Thailand in the face of British expansion in Malaya. He converted the traditionally semi-autonomous principalities into provinces under direct rule from Bangkok.¹⁵ In the case of Pattani and her sister states, this occurred under the creation of the "Area of Seven Provinces" administrative body in 1901 followed by the official annexation of Pattani in 1902 and consolidation through 1906.¹⁶ This move alienated the Malay rajas and nobility, but, aside from the then-Raja of Pattani, this was easily smoothed over by

¹² Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand," 13.

¹³ Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

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¹⁴ Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 5.

¹⁵ Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

14.

¹⁶ Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 5.

reparations from Bangkok.¹⁷ The British opposed the Siamese rearrangement of sovereignty requiring the Siamese to sign the Anglo-Thai treaty of 1909 whereby the government in Siam ceded the provinces of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Perlis to Great Britain in exchange for recognition of Thai control of Pattani and Satun.¹⁸ In 1902, King Chulalongkorn's decreed, in an effort to unify the code of law in Thailand, that "no law shall be established" without specific royal consent. Up until then the local rajahs enforced Sharia law and the backlash from the religious community forced Chulalongkorn to strike the compromise that the state would refrain from intruding into the sensitive areas of inheritance and family relations, following the common British colonial practice. This allowed the locals to create a court system, "the Qadi's court," but the government got to pick the Ulama who presided over the court.¹⁹ Where the centers of Malay Muslim life had been the mosque, where rule and law were administered as well as religion, and the pondok or religious school. Under the new order central governance and secular law replaced local customs and religious laws. The mosque was no longer the center of the village. To further exacerbate the changes, while family and inheritance laws were administered in accordance with Sharia law, these decisions could be overturned by a secular Thai judge on appeal.²⁰ In the southern areas there was little formal education amongst the Malay children. In

17 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

14.

18 Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 5.

19 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

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20 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

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most of the country, government education officials and Buddhist monks implemented the reforms. In the southern areas where, if there was any opportunity for education, it was limited to memorization of the Quran, the reforms were implemented by the government without local or religious assistance.²¹

As school reform spread through Thailand in the early twentieth century, the government implemented four years of compulsory education in public schools.²² The 1921 Education Act enacted compulsory attendance and required schools that wished to receive public assistance to meet minimum requirements including administering education in the Thai language. King Rama VI campaigned intensely to consolidate a Thai national identity. School reform and a common national curriculum was one of his best tools. In 1922 a serious rebellion occurred. Whereas most rebellions had been the province of the elites or some of the hajjis, religious leaders, protesting the new law structure, the 1922 rebellion had a much wider base including many Malay nobility and hajjis, as well as the former Pattani raja. In 1923 reforms issued for the south included the repeal of compulsory education, alteration of the tax code to ensure Thai Malays were not taxed more than British Malays, and the assignment of more agreeable Thai administrators.²³

In 1932, a coup ended the absolute power of the Thai monarchy and ushered in an era of liberal democracy. Greater Pattani, consisting of the modern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, elected Muslims to both the National Assembly and the Senate in 1932 and again in 1937. The province of Satun, never a part of the Kingdom

21 Ibid.

22 Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 6.

23 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand," p.17.

of Pattani itself, was the only majority Muslim province not to send a fully Muslim slate to Bangkok.²⁴ Unfortunately, the democratically elected bodies exercised little control over the Thai bureaucracy. Little progress toward integration occurred prior to the reemergence of nationalism under Marshal Phibul Songkam in 1938. The ultra-nationalist pan-Thai agenda²⁵ of Songkam was off-putting enough for the Malay Muslims, but he also undertook a series of modernity initiatives that, while aimed at Thai society as a whole, especially offended Malay Muslims. These initiatives included the requirement to take a Thai surname which Thais did not traditionally use. Also Songkam encouraged men to kiss their wives in public and required western dress, including westernized women's hats; in public.²⁶ These regulations forced the Malay Muslim population to forego traditional Muslim dress and deportment. They overturned the special status of Islamic law over inheritance and family matters. They even required the use of forks and spoons as the "national cutlery".²⁷ To many Buddhist Thais these were an affront to their traditions, but to Malay Muslims in Pattani it was an affront to their religion as well.²⁸

Against the backdrop of the rule of nationalist Songkam in the newly renamed Kingdom of Thailand in 1939, was the run up to war in Southeast Asia. The elites of

24 Ibid., p.18.

25 Melvin, *Conflict in Southern Thailand*, p.13.

26 Elliot Kulick, and Dick Wilson. *Thailand's Turn*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.27.

27 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

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28 Ibid., 18.

Thailand backed the Japanese while the elites in Pattani backed the British and petitioned the British to liberate Pattani from Thai rule.²⁹ Thailand capitulated to the Japanese and did nothing to hinder their run toward Singapore. In return the Japanese restored the provinces of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Perlis to Thailand. Northern Malay resistance to the Japanese was largely organized by Tengku Mahyiddin, the son of the former raja of Pattani who had moved to Kelantan in British Malaya after his ouster in Pattani.³⁰ Mahyiddin hoped that the British would assist in liberating Pattani in exchange for his efforts against the Japanese.³¹ Unfortunately British reversals in Malaya left them unable to project power or extensively affect the post war order on the Johor Peninsula. The British needed the help of Thailand to counter the post-war armed Malayan nationalist and communist movements, so there was no real question of liberating Pattani from the Thais. Phibun Songkram left power in 1944 with the slumping fortunes of the Japanese and a more moderate leader arose.

Prime Minister Kwang Aphaiwong attempted to calm and reconcile the restive southern provinces by issuing the Islamic Patronage Act to restore “pre-Phibun conditions” in the four southern provinces.³² The Islamic Patronage Act also re-created a redefined Chularajmontri. Originally the Chularajmontri, the senior Muslim advisor to

²⁹ Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 7.

³⁰ International Crises Group, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*. Asia Report, (Brussels: International Crises Group, 2005), 4, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3436&l=1> (accessed January 16, 2013).

³¹ *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, 4.

³² Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

the King focused on the foreign trade of Siam. These Chularajmontri were chosen from Persian Shiite Muslims that had married into the Thai nobility, successful traders and administrators. The Islamic Patronage Act defined his formal position as the king's advisor in matters relating to Islam.³³ After the 1947 coup reinstalled Phibul Songkam as leader of Thailand, the new Chularajmontri, still a Sunni like the Malay Muslims in Pattani was to be the senior Muslim and the head of all Muslim affairs in Thailand.³⁴ Phibul Songkam's choice for Chularajmontri was a Bangkok based religious teacher without ties to the southern provinces or a strong voice in government.³⁵ He served from 1947 to 1981.

The Islamic Patronage Act of 1945 also created the National Council of Islamic Affairs (NCIA) and the Provincial Council for Islamic Affairs (PCIA). The NCIA is officially responsible for the administration of mosques and religious teaching in Thailand. The PCIA is responsible to oversee the individual Mosque committees and advise the provincial level governments about Muslim affairs. After the Royal of 1948 that redefined the status of the *Chularajmontri*, the Provincial councils were also responsible to elect the Chularajmontri to a life term. The Mosque councils administered the individual mosques in accordance with Islamic and state law. They also maintained the registration of the mosques with the state. This registration, while not compulsory, was required for state aid. The great majorities of mosques were and still are registered.³⁶

33 Ibid., 19.

34 Melvin, *Conflict in Southern Thailand*, 14.

35 Yusuf, *Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand*, 14.

36 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

In spite of the steps taken by the moderate government of Thailand from 1945 to 1947, violence in the southern provinces intensified. Rioting in Narathiwat in 1946 was followed by the formation of the Pattani People's Movement (PPM) in 1947 by the leader of the Pattani Provincial Islamic Council, Haji Sulong. Southern Muslims looked on Haji Sulong as their de facto Shaikh al-Islam, religious leader, as opposed to the Chularajmontri whom the Thai government installed to take that role.³⁷ Educated in Mecca, Haji Sulong aspired to political autonomy within a federal system in order to preserve the unique Malay Muslim culture.³⁸ Haji Sulong summed this up saying:

*We Malays are conscious that we have been brought under Siamese rule by defeat. The term "Thai Islam" with which we are known by the Siamese government reminds us of this defeat and is therefore not appreciated by us. We therefore beg of the government to honor us with the title of Malay Muslims so that we may be recognized as distinct from Thai by the outside world.*³⁹

To this end, Haji Sulong presented a list of seven demands from the PPM to the Thai government in 1947.⁴⁰ Some of the demands made by the PPM were that the government has a high ranking southern Muslim elected by Malay Muslims to govern the southern provinces, that eighty percent of the administrators of the southern province be Malay Muslims, and that Yawi have the same

37 Yusuf, *Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand*, p.13.

38 Yusuf, *Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand*, p.14.

39 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand," p.22.

40 Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, p.8.

official status as the Thai language in the southern provinces. The demands were deemed too radical and unacceptable to the Thai government, but there was no chance for negotiation as Phibun Songkram came back to power in a coup shortly after the list was received in Bangkok. Haji Sulong and some of his compatriots were arrested by the Songkram government and jailed for three and a half years. Haji Sulong was released in 1952, but disappeared under mysterious circumstances in 1954. The popular belief related by histories of Haji Sulong, and a rallying point for Malay Muslim grievances, is that Haji Sulong was drowned by Thai police.⁴¹ The riots associated with the detention of Haji Sulong in 1949 focused international attention on Pattani for the first time, including from the Arab League and the United Nations, and demonstrated the power of concerted effort in the south. In 1948, a 250,000 signature petition was delivered to the U.N. from Malay Muslims asking that the U.N. oversee the transfer of the Southern Thai provinces to the Federation of Malaya. Under international pressure Phibun Songkram made some reforms, but they were few and only grudgingly implemented.⁴² The events of 1948 and 1949 are considered the birth of the modern form of the Pattani insurgency.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, 5.

⁴³ Melvin, *Conflict in Southern Thailand*, 14.

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They were presented on 24th August 1947 by Haji Sulong, on behalf of the Malay-Muslim population of the South to a commission sent by Bangkok to investigate the complaints of Malay Muslim about the abuses of power by local government officials. The petition made

The first militant organization constructed around the Pattani cause was the Association of Malays of Greater Pattani (GAMPAR). The group was led by Tengku Mahmud Mahyiddeen, the son of the deposed raja of Pattani and central figure in resistance to the Japanese in WWII in Northern Malaya, and other elites marginalized during the consolidation of Pattani. The group was based in northern Malaysia and focused on uniting all Malay Muslims in the Federation of Malaya, as well as assisting each other and preserving Malay Muslim culture.⁴⁴ Unfortunately GAMPAR decided to ally with leftist Malay nationalist parties which brought it into conflict with Great Britain. Without British support GAMPAR could gain no traction militarily or politically.⁴⁵

Three armed groups took over from GAMPAR and the PPM during the late 1950s and 1960s. As the leadership of GAMPAR and the PPM died in 1953 and 1954, the membership looking to be active was collected and formed into the Pattani National Liberation Front (BNPP), the first group to call for full independence of Pattani. The BNPP tended to recruit from Islamic schools and had bases of power in the Middle East as well as Malaysia and Indonesia. The BNPP came to be associated with conservative Islam and the elites of the former sultanate.⁴⁶ Later, in the mid-1960s, a second group, National Revolutionary Front (BRN) formed to advocate for the formation of an independent socialist Pattani as opposed to

clear that its intention was not to violate the Siamese constitution but to create better conditions of living for the Malay Muslims.

⁴⁴ Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁶ *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, p.7.

the BNPP which wanted to restore the sultanate. The BRN was divided over the subject, but tended to associate with communist insurgent groups operating in the Thai/Malaysia border region.⁴⁷ The third major armed group to form in support of Pattani independence was the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO). PULO occupied the middle ground between the BNPP and the BRN. It was the largest of the three groups with between 200 and 600 fighting men and enjoyed extensive patronage in the Middle East. Based in Mecca and Kelantan, Malaysia, PULO focused on recruiting Thai Muslims outside of Thailand on Hajj or studying abroad. Training and support was secured from the PLO, Syria or Libya. PULO had the best trained fighters of the three armed groups as well as the most stable funding.⁴⁸ All three groups operated along similar tactics: extortion, kidnap and murder.⁴⁹ All three groups remained active throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s. PULO became more focused on its Islamic character as time went on. By mid 1970 it could successfully reframe its activities as a conflict over Muslim grievances vice Malay grievances. In 1975, PULO turned out 70,000 to protest the extra judicial killings of five Muslim, not characterized as Malay, villagers. In 1980, PULO stopped a bus in Narathiwat and killed all the Buddhists aboard while letting the Muslims go free.⁵⁰

The Thai government's approach from the 1960s on was a combination of development projects and reconciliation in an attempt to integrate the southern

47 Ibid., 8.

48 *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, p.8.

49 Ibid., p.6.

50 Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, p.13.

provinces into the Thai national identity.⁵¹ After Phibun Songkat was deposed in a coup in 1957, a more moderate military government came to power under Marshal Sarit Thanarat. The Sarit government introduced development programs focused on alleviating poverty in sensitive areas. In 1961, this government introduced the Pondok Educational Improvement Program which infused the traditional Islamic Pondokos with an additional secular curriculum in exchange for government support.⁵² This had several effects. It elevated the education of the students attending the Pondokos allowing them to integrate better into official Thai society, but it undercut the Islamic credentials of the Pondokos and encouraged Malay Muslims to go abroad to the Middle East, Indonesia or Malaysia to study. While studying abroad Malay Muslims were sometimes radicalized before being sent home as part of the insurgency.⁵³ The Sarit government went one step further by building the first state university in the south. This would help educate southern Muslims for lucrative state jobs, the lack of access to which was an old grievance, as well as private white collar employment.⁵⁴ The result of this activity was that from the early 1960 to the early 1970s the opportunity for southern Muslims improved greatly. The efforts of the government paid off in the reduction of support for the militant insurgents. However, this success tended to radicalize the irreconcilable elements within Malay Muslim society. These irreconcilables pointed out that Islam and politics, government, or education should not be separated. Many leaders, especially religious

51 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand," p.24.

52 Ibid., p.24.

53 Harish, *Changing Conflict Identities*, 12.

54 Aphornsuvan, "History and Politics of the Muslims in Thailand,"

leaders, rebelled against the government tampering with their culture and power base.⁵⁵

By the 1990s when the Thai government was labeling the remnants of the militant separatist groups as bandits, some general social grievances remained. Malay Muslims remain under-represented in civic and political administration of the country. This is in part due to the underachievement of Malay Muslims in educational attainment and mastery of the Thai language, a prerequisite for high-status employment. The southern provinces remain underdeveloped both in infrastructure and in economic development compared to the rest of Thailand.⁵⁶

Islamic education in southern Thailand can generally be divided into three types. The first type is the government-sponsored school. This type of schooling offers Islamic education in conjunction with the national curriculum. The language of instruction is Thai. The second type is a private Islamic school. In some areas, this school is referred to as a madrasah. The private Islamic school may offer non Koranic subjects such as science and math, as well as the teaching of foreign languages (Arabic and English). These schools are usually registered with the government. The third type is a pondok. This school is very simple in structure; generally, it is attached to a mosque. The name, pondok, refers to the huts that the boys stay in while pursuing their studies. A pondok school is deeply personal and intimate, and is traditionally built around its teacher, the local imam, or its founder (who could be both). The language of instruction at many pondoks is Malay. The teaching of Malay and Jawi are important features of the cultural heritage of Islamic education in southern Thailand. At all the Islamic schools in Thailand, it is required that

55 Ibid.

56 Melvin, *Conflict in Southern Thailand*, 18.

girls wear hijab, or headscarf. Boys are expected to wear kopiah, or caps.

The conflict in Pattani is due to several factors: injustice, discrimination, mistrust each other, the differences of culture, media propaganda, political conflicts and interests. The impact of conflict on the education system in Southern Thailand is the reduction of school hours, the decline of student achievement and teacher performance, the uncertainty caused by the changes of government's policy on conflict resolution, and the school should be off abruptly during the conflict. While the impact of the conflict resolution toward Islamic Education System in Southern Thailand is the increased quality of teacher performance, the growth of the spirit of educators in the learning process, and a culture of effective and conducive learning in Southern Thailand.

This prolonged conflict brought many victims, the Ulama, Ustadz, teachers and Muslim students and students were arrested and Islamic educational institutions were closed, while the schools were still running. More than 100 teacher have been killed in Thailand's three southernmost provinces since an Islamic insurgency erupted in 2004. The militants mainly target security forces but also kill others, including teachers, who are perceived as representatives of the government in predominantly Buddhist Thailand.