Anatomy of Southern Thailand's Insurgency: Some Preliminary Insights

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1. Introduction

Graphic depictions of violence (often against civilian targets) coupled with a lack of information on the perpetrators of violence, led to numerous speculations on the causes of the conflict in Malay Muslim dominated Southern Thailand. Are Malays simply the victims of harassment or failed policies by the Thai Nation state? Is the insurgency only driven by an irrational desire for revenge or traditionalism?[1] In how far are Malay insurgents organised? Are they inspired by local nationalism or by transnational jihadist ideas?[2]

This article approaches these questions without using structural explanations such as econometrics or Political Opportunity Structure (POS) models.[3] Instead I try to take a more actor-orientated view that reduce the conflict to a perspective that is faced by every insurgent group that intending to use violence to pursue its aims against a state: how can one, staring from a position of weakness, achieve political objectives using violence and other strategies located in the military and political realms? In this sense, the current wave of violence in Southern Thailand is not an unplanned, spontaneous outbreak of popular will, but part of a long-planned local insurgency, i.e. "an organised, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control".[4] It is assumed that insurgents are able to learn and act rationally, though they might be bounded by irrational assumptions.[5] In

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[1] For the later view see, for example, Aeusrivongse, N 2005, *Understanding the situation in the South as a "millenarian revolt"*. Retrieved June 9, 2006, from http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.jp/issue/issue5/article_380.html

[2] For an alarmist jihad-centred account see Abuza Z 2009, *A conspiracy of violence: insurgency in Southern Thailand,* United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington. The International Crisis Group considers nationalism as the insurgent's ideology: International Crisis Group 2005, *Southern Thailand: insurgency, not jihad*, Asia Report N°98, Singapore. For a more balanced account of the political context of violence see McCargo, D 2008, *Tearing apart the land: Islam and legitimacy in Southern Thailand*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

[3] See, for example, McAdam D, Tarrow S & Tilly, C 2001, *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[4] Department of the Army 2006, *Counterinsurgency, FM 3-24*, Washington, DC.

[5] Elwert, G 2002, 'Weder irrational noch traditionalistisch. Charismatische Mobilisierung und Gewaltmärkte als `Basis der Attentäter des 11. September', in B Hauser-Schäublin & U Braukämper (eds), *Ethnologie der Globalisierung: Perspektiven kultureller Verflechtung*, pp. 125-154.

other words, we do not ask so much why Malay insurgents rebel in Southern Thailand, but rather how they do it.

First, I try to throw some light on the social and educational background of insurgents with the help of statistical evidence drawn from official interrogation records. These will also support the argument that BRN-Coordinate (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate) is the leading insurgent organisation in the South. Second, assuming this military dominance the article will then address the organisational structure, the ideology as well as the strategic planning of the group in a rather descriptive way. While the insurgency in Southern Thailand began in 2004, the area itself was systematically subject to BRN-Coordinate subversion probably from the mid 1980s onwards, a time when other groups gave up their armed struggle. We will also see that the group used a mixture of Islamic and nationalist elements to mobilize recruits and legitimate violence. This Islamo-Nationalism directly attacks Buddhist majority's claimed moral superiority and right to rule Southern Thailand on two fronts. On the one hand, it refers to the violent occupation once-independent sultanate of Patani. On the other hand, insurgents argue that the integration of the region into the Thai nation-state has led to the destruction Islam in the region. Both arguments are used to justify of a (local) jihad against the infidel Thai nation state.

Reflecting on these aspects of the insurgency, it becomes clear that BRN-Coordinate was able to learn from the last wave of failed insurgency in Southern Thailand and thus adopted some aspects of new terrorist organisations (e.g. not taking credit for their actions, hyper secrecy, proliferation of amateurs taking part in terrorist acts, attacks on civilian targets with greater lethality, supplementation of nationalism with jihadism).[6] Yet the group is basically not a network, but remains an organisation with more or less defined goals and a clear command-order-structure. For the sake of space some aspects of the insurgent organisation such as its economic dimensions, forms of violence and foreign influence have been neglected here.

Methodological note

Since BRN-Coordinate is a highly secretive group, information on it is sketchy and hard to confirm. Yet five years of constant attacks and state intelligence work has produced

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[6] Hoffman, B 1999, 'Terrorism trends and prospects', in I O Lesser, B Hoffman, J Arquilla, D Ronfeldt & M Zanini (eds), *Countering the new terrorism*, Rand Project Airforce, Washington, DC, pp. 7-38.

some knowledge that is, however, either inaccessible to scholars or avoided by them for moral concerns. The following information certainly contains flaws and misunderstandings, because it is based mainly on interviews with military and police specialist, who preferred not to be named. While most of the data come from security sources, they were counterchecked by interviews with five former rank-and-file as well as three high-ranking members of BRN-Coordinate, including two military commanders (at the district level) and one province-level political strategist.

2. Some statistical evidence

Interestingly, various state and non-state accounts on the violence in Southern Thailand assume that BRN-Coordinate is named as the leading insurgent group.[7] While other organisations may still have support and play an important media role, experience from failed peace talks, interrogations of insurgents as well as intelligence suggest that the key insurgent actor on the ground is BRN-Coordinate.[8] However, this hypothesis is hardly backed up by empirical evidence.[9]

Here we took 150 official interrogation records and analysed them for content as well as quantitative features. Of course, the fact that these records were produced by the state, in the interest of those who run and control the state, is a problem. However, the hyper-secrecy of the insurgents in Southern Thailand hardly allows for other forms of direct data gathering. It is important to note that rank-and-file, which were directly involved in violent attacks, are overrepresented in the sample. This is because high-ranking insurgents number less, are harder to capture and are seldom directly involved in violent acts. Our sample covered only those suspects who admitted during interrogation that they were involved in violent insurgent activities (ranging, for example, from being an observation post during assault on a police patrol, building explosive devices to murder). Suspects, who did not admit their crimes and suspects involved in crimes related to politics, illegal economy or personal conflicts, are not represented in the sample.

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[7] National Reconciliation Commission 2006, *Overcoming violence through the power of reconciliation*, Bangkok.
[8] Lt. General interview, September 14, 2009
[9] Field research on insurgents also poses an incalculable security threat and moral concerns to the researcher. Thus scientists, when talking about the insurgents, are mostly left to describe the local or national narratives on the insurgents rather than analyse the insurgents themselves. A notable exception is Marc Askew. Askew, M 2009, 'A tale of two insurgents', *Bangkok Post*, July 19.

Only few selective aspects drawn from the interrogation records can be shown here. Interestingly, the data showed that 58% of the suspects admitted having passed RKK (*Runda Kumpulan Kecil*) training curriculum. RKK is not a separate insurgent group, but an irregular military tactic based on the use of small group assault units. The term itself might be translated as small group patrol, or commando. A RKK unit usually consists of six fighters using irregular tactics, but according to the requirements of operations two or more teams can cooperate and, theoretically, all units can coalesce into a conventional force. However, the key tactical advantages of these commandos are speed and low visibility, which they loose, when more RKK units are assembled.[10] The fact that a majority of the sampled insurgents are trained through the curriculum is highly relevant, because, as far as police and military intelligence know, it was BRN-Coordinate that imported this tactical manual from Indonesia and it is only BRN-Coordinate that makes use of it.[11] Other statistical evidence that supports the assumed military dominance of the group is the fact that another 13% of the interrogated insurgents admitted to have passed a standardized pattern of basic military training that is used only by BRN-Coordinate as well. In other words, a great majority of insurgent suspects seem to be members of BRN-Coordinate. The sample gave no evidence that other insurgent organisation, such as Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), BERSATU or the Mujahideen Pattani Movement, were directly involved in the violence.

Around 30% of the suspects claim not to have passed any military training, while 7% were also trained as draftees by the Thai military. We can only assume that the knowledge they gained in the Thai military facilitated the insurgency. Especially commanders of BRN-Coordinate's military force are systematically trained in Bandung, Medan and Jogjakarta in training centres established by the group.[12] One suspect of the sample admitted to have passed artillery training in Libya; another passed out from an officer's school in Syria. In other words, although recruitment is confined to three provinces, BRN-Coordinate is embedded in state structures and international networks and the biographies of members are not confined to the "national arena".

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[10] Intelligence officers whom I interviewed suspected that RKK was developed as a counterinsurgency tactic developed by the Indonesian Military. BRN-Coordinate reversed the concept to use it against the state.
[11] Lt. General interview, September 14, 2009.
[12] Lt. General interview, September 14, 2009.

Similar to other armed conflicts the perpetrators of violence are young, unmarried males. The age of the insurgent sample ranged from 16 to over 50 years. Their median age is 26,6 years, but most have been insurgents for some years before being captured. Since most of the sampled insurgents are rank-and-file they are rather young, but if we look up higher into BRN-Coordinate's hierarchy, for example, the picture changes. The first generation of RKK instructors and commanders seem to be in their mid- to end thirties, while the DPP leaders are aged between 40 and 70.[13] In other words, while BRN-Coordinate's fighters are indeed a new generation the group itself consists of at least three different generations. BRN-Coordinate's oldest generation of leaders often originate from its predecessor organisation: BRN (*Barisan Revolusi Nasional*). They still command a significant degree of authority, because they founded BRN-Coordinate as a split-up group of BRN and re-organised it from a jungle-based guerrilla group, which was only one amongst others, to the village-based guerrilla-cum-terrorist group that currently dominates the insurgency.

Moreover, it seems that a significant part of the rank-and-file still live with their parents and thus are not too occupied with their economic survival. One of the key features that distinguish the old BRN from BRN-Coordinate is the shift from a professional guerrilla group to a part-time guerrilla-cum-terrorist group. This reflects a worldwide increase of amateurs involved in terrorist action since the 1990s.[14] Economically, troop supply is now much easier and costs are reduced, as part-time fighters can provide for their own livelihood. When members of the armed wing have free-time, they disappear from their civil life for some time in order to participate in military activities, only to disappear to their normal live in the villages afterwards. This new time economy coupled with the mingling with civilian population makes counterinsurgency so hard. In contrast to the past, the state can hardly isolate insurgents and hunt them down in the jungles.

Although women are not represented in the sample, BRN-Coordinate recruits members from both sexes. Women seem to be only indirectly engaged in military activities. Since wounded fighters cannot visit hospitals, women, for example, serve as self-trained nurses for the group.[15]

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[13] Colonel interview, August 12, 2009.
[14] Hoffman 1999: 20.
[15] Colonel interview, August 12, 2009.

With regard to education, the sample is very heterogeneous. There is no single pattern of an "uneducated" insurgent. Although most of them come from a rural background, 74 % completed secondary education. A quarter of them has only primary education, while a top 13% were enrolled in or even had a degree from tertiary educational institutions. All of them had attended universities in Thailand. One of the two Hat Yai bombers that killed at least four people on September 16, 2006, has, for example, a Master Degree from a university in Thailand.[16]

With regard to socioeconomic and generational background of the violence it is also important to note that insurgents can now draw on a large pool of two generations of students, teachers, academics as well as professionals who were fostered by the expansion of the educational system in the 1980s through Thai government programs and scholarship programs from Arabian as well as Middle Eastern oil-producing countries. This generation, often with degrees in Islamic subjects such as Islamic Studies, Islamic law etc., have access to Islamist knowledge and organisational resources such as communication techniques, access to the internet, libraries etc. At the same time this new middle class often lives in conditions of un- or underemployment.

Another question that often comes up in the discussion on the insurgency is in how far Muslim insurgents understand or misunderstand Islam. Considering the formal religious knowledge of the sampled insurgents there can be no straightforward answer to this. Islamic studies in Southern Thailand are ranked from level 1 to level 12, with 12 being the highest degree of religious studies. Suspects achieved an average 5 out of 12 and thus have at least a basic religious understanding. A handful of the sampled insurgents, especially those with a university degree, passed level 9 or even higher. In other words, this heterogeneous educational background, including highly educated insurgents even at the staff level, speaks against the argument that insurgents are stupid and susceptible to manipulation, although it has been shown that even high educational levels correlate with authoritarian personality structures.[17]

 It should also be noted, that contrary to what is often reported in the media or assumed by popular narratives, very few insurgents have a criminal background: only around 1%

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[16] Lt. General interview, September 14, 2009.
[17] Helbardt, S, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D & Korff, R 2008, 'Authoritarian Orientations in Thailand', *New Mandala: New perspectives on mainland Southeast Asia*. Retrieved November 11, 2008, from http://rspas.anu.edu.au/rmap/newmandala/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/authoritarianism.pdf.

of the sampled insurgents have criminal records with the Thai authorities. Two RKK commanders, I interviewed, also stressed that they would allow no drug-usage among their fighters, because drug-addicts are unreliable and thus unsuited for insurgent attacks. It seems as if the "crook" does not rank very prominently among lower strata of insurgents, which speaks clearly against, for example, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's assumption that attackers in Southern Thailand are only a bunch of criminals.[18] However, intelligence has, until now, gathered little information on possible link between the illegal economy and insurgents on a higher level.[19]

Unfortunately, the interrogation records contained no data on the income situation of the suspects; so their socioeconomic status can only be indirectly established via occupation. Here again we find a very heterogeneous picture. A majority of the sampled insurgents come from a rural background: 54% are peasants, with most of them probably owning their own field or working on the fields of their parents. Only around 1% said that they were unemployed. Another 5% are owners of small businesses, among them are owners of local minimarts, motorcycle garages, mobile phone repair shops etc. Close to 12% work in rather more precarious economic conditions, for example as hired labourers or in the agricultural industry or for construction companies. Only 2% of the sample works as religious teachers (ustadz). This number might be misleading, because within, for example the BRN-Coordinate hierarchy, ustadz as well as religious scholars seem to play important roles, as recruiters. Besides, they seem to dominate DPP: the suspected chairman of BRN-Coordinate, for example, is the owner of a Private Religious School in the South, while the suspected vice-chairman is an Islamic scholar (ulama) and member of an Islamic Council in one of the three provinces. BRN-Coordinate's leading figures, its general-secretary Sapeing Basoh and vice general-secretary Asae Chaelong also belong to this section of the middle class, with the former being the ex-principle of Thammawitaya Foundation Private Islamic School in Yala and the latter having established a local Pondoh school.[20] Another 8% of the sample work as employees for private as well as even state companies.

With regard to a possible rural-urban gap it should be noted that 88% of the suspects live in rural areas, while merely 12% live in the urban context of Yala, Narathiwat or

[18] McCargo, D 2006, 'Thaksin and the resurgence of violence in the Thai South: network monarchy strikes back?', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 39-71.
[19] General interview, September 25, 2009.
[20] Colonel interview, September 28, 2009.

Pattani city. Therefore "psychosocial models" which argue that, for example, urban migrants are susceptible to the propaganda of violent groups, because they are cut off from their rural backgrounds and experience a different value system in the urban context, seem not applicable here.[21] Moreover, none of the insurgent suspects were born outside the three provinces and the four insurgent districts in Songkhla province. Thus the insurgency is still clearly defined spatially to the local recruits.

Clearly more detailed analyses are needed on the socioeconomic context of insurgents, nonetheless the data allows for some tentative conclusions. They seem to confirm Srisompob and Panyasak who, using macro-economic indicators, argued that poverty and violence do not clearly correlate in Southern Thailand.[22] Grievance or a lack of education seem not be at the core of violence, although different strategic groups might have an interest to suggest this.[23] Another more subjective argument might support this view. Interestingly, none of the five RKK-fighters and commanders, I interviewed, personally considered himself "poor". When I asked them to describe their economic status in their own words, all of them answered, in separate interviews, that they considered themselves neither "rich" nor "poor", but rather as "normal income farmers" and that their motives were clearly more political and religious than economic.[24]

3. How is BRN-Coordinate organized?

If we assume that BRN-Coordinate is the leading insurgent group in the South, the question of its internal structure comes up. Generally speaking, BRN-Coordinate is a territory-based insurgent organisation whose goal is to attain an independent Islamic state of Patani using Islamo-Nationalism as their legitimizing ideology. In other words, it seeks to effect meaningful political change, within the borders of an imagined nation-state, through the reference to vocabulary, symbolism and historical understanding based on Islam. It also aims at implementing the sharia (i.e. Quran and Hadith) in everyday life (see below). BRN-Coordinate emerged as a split-up group after its predecessor organisation BRN (*Barisan Revolusi Nasional*), that was found in 1961,

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[21] Hafez M M & Wiktorowicz, Q 2004, 'Violence as contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement', in Wiktorowicz, Q (ed.), *Islamic activism: a social movement theory*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, pp. 61-88.

[22] Srisompob Jitpiromsri & Panyasak Sobhonvasu 2006, 'Unpacking Thailand's southern conflict: the poverty of structural explanations', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 95-117.

[23] Politicians, bureaucrats and local Malay elites, such as local school owners, can get their piece of the pie, if the state invests enormous sums in development projects. Who can say anything against these honourable aims?

[24] Insurgent interview, November 12, 2009.

broke up in the early 1980s. The homeland imagined by BRN-Coordinate comprises Thailand's provinces Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani and the four Malay-Muslim dominated districts of Songkhla province (Thepa, Channa, Sabai Yoi and Nathawi). These areas that are considered to be the core areas of the former independent Islamic Sultanate of Patani[25], which was annexed and divided between the Kingdom of Siam and the British Empire in the late 19th and early 20th century.[26]

The following figure illustrates the basic structure of BRN as far as it is known by Thai intelligence:
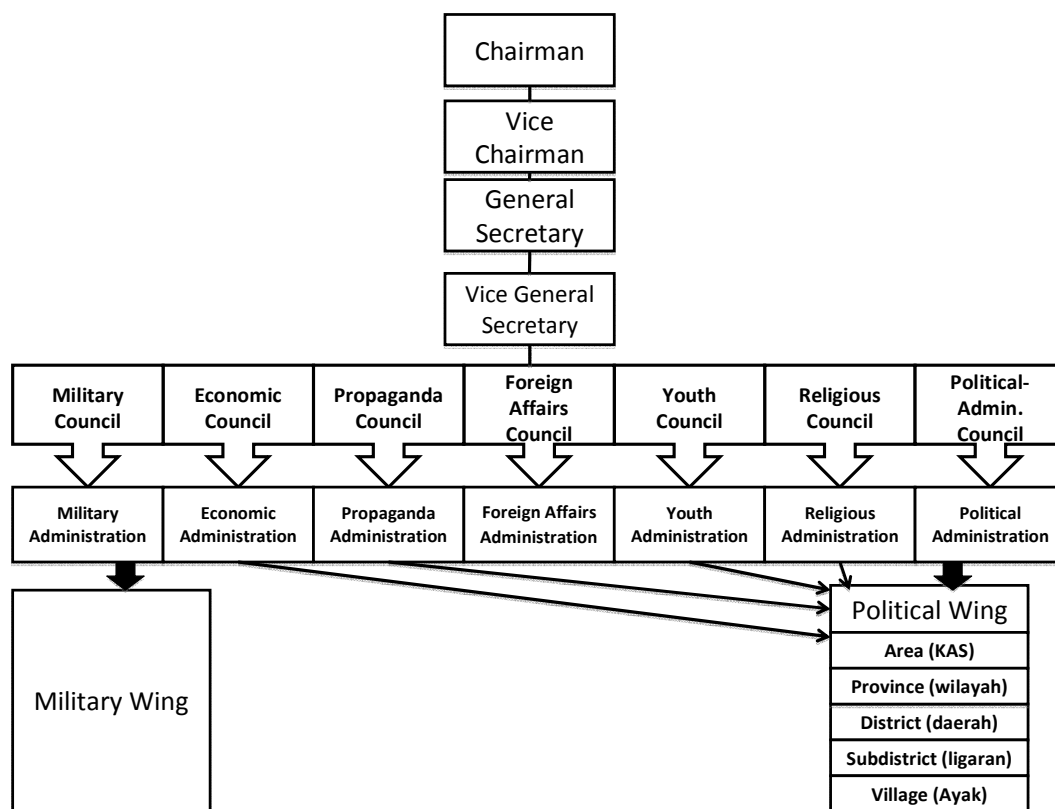

Figure 1 Organisation of BRN-Coordinate

The highest authority of the BRN-Coordinate is vested in a ca. 30-member Party Leadership Council (*Dewan Pimpinan Parti*, or short DPP), within which a council

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[25] Pa*tt*ani, written with two „t"s, refers to the province within the Thai nation state, while Pa*t*ani, written with one „t" is used here to refer to the area of the former independent Sultanate.

[26] At least two of BRN-Coordinate's leading figures at the provincial level have admitted that they also consider bordering parts of Terengganu and Kelantan part of the imagined homeland, but, as Malaysia serves as a safe-haven for BRN-Coordinate (and other Patani insurgent groups), the question of the Malaysian territory of an independent is currently considered politically dangerous and thus avoided. Insurgent interview, July 15, 2009; Colonel interview, July 17, 2009.

chairman, vice council chairman, a general-secretary, a vice-general-secretary, at least three (less important) assistant secretaries and seven different councils form the executive. Thai intelligence suspects that Sapeing Basoh, the BRN general-secretary and his deputy, Asae Chaelong, are the leading persons of BRN, although they are formally subordinated to the chairman and the vice-chairman. Both had to flee authorities in Thailand and now reside in Malaysia. While DPP has around 30 formal positions, some single members hold double or even triple positions within the organisation. Sapeing Basoh, for example, is the general-secretary, the head of the military council (legislative level) and the head of the military section (executive level – below the DPP-council). In addition to the leading figures DPP consists of seven councils that reflect the main functions of any conventional insurgent organisation: military council (militer), economic council (ekonomi), youth council (permudo), foreign relations council (depulo), propaganda council (propaganda), religious council (ulama) and finally the political-administrative council. Each council consists of a minimum of two members, but many of them have probably more. Meetings on the DPP-level take place regularly (at least several times a year). In the meetings the current situation of the group is discussed and policy guidelines are passed, usually on a yearly basis.[27] The basic guideline for these policies is a "seven-step" insurgent strategy that has been implemented probably since the mid 1980s (see below).

Below the governing body we find seven administrative sections mirroring the functions of the seven councils (economy, propaganda etc.). These sections implement the policy guidelines as laid down by the DPP executive. However, the administrative sections do not reach down to the local level independently, because such an extensive organisational structure could be easily detected and destroyed by the Thai state. Below the centralized DPP structure the administration of the group thus divides into two separate wings: a political and a military one.[28] While the later is only responsible for military activities, the former subsumes all other functions of the group, i.e. propaganda, economic administration, religion etc. Since foreign relations are not implemented on the local level, it is the only function that remains at that level. The two wings serve as a link between leaders and the general population at the village level. Since mass support by the population is the precondition of military activity as well as of the overall success

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[27] Insurgent interview, July 15, 2009; Colonel interview, July 17, 2009.
[28] Colonel interview, September 3, 2009; Insurgent interview, September 6, 2009.

of any guerrilla organisation, the primary aim of the group is that the administrative wing gains control over the population and destroys the state's legitimacy amongst Malays in the region by continued subversion. Thus we can also speak of the primacy of political over military activities.

This dual organisation can be found at different spatial echelons. At its highest levels we find the so-called *kawasan* (KAS), which is Malay for area. The imagined homeland is divided into three KAS, which only partly reflects the administrative structure of the Thai state. One of the three KAS, for example, includes Songkhla's four districts Thepa, Channa, Nathawi and Saba Yoi. Below the KAS, the political and military wing are organised at the provincial level (wilayah), the district level (daerah), the subdistrict level (ligaran). Most importantly, however, is the village level of the political wing that is referred to "Ayak" in BRN-Coordinate terminology, which can be translated from Malay as invite, induce or persuade.[29] One of the key lessons of the failed Patani insurgencies in the past was that guerrillas must not be based in the detached jungles, where it could easily be hunted down, and that politicization of the population must not be neglected.[30] In other words, only when military activity is coupled with focused mass subversion in the villages, it can generate political leverage. Therefore it is now on the Ayak-level that indoctrination, recruitment, tax collection etc. takes place. At the top of the village cell is the Ayak chief or Ayak head. In at least one village in Narathiwat the Ayak chief also had a deputy; it is not clear if every Ayak chief has a deputy. The Ayak chief coordinates the main activities of the group on the local level, which is, again, divided into different sections: economy, youth work (permudo), religious activities (ulama) and guard/watchman activities. Other members in the village head these functions. BRN-Coordinate tries to win local leaders such as Imam or ustadz for the ulama section or to be Ayak Chief, while local traders are, for example, preferred as head of the economic section. However, for the sake of clandestineness of the group BRN-Coordinate limits the number of Ayak operatives to 12 people. The economic section is responsible for raising the group's income by taxing its members 30 Baht per month, but it can and should generate further income by, for example, establishing a local minimart or engaging in other economic activities. Religious activities (e.g. Friday prayers) and indoctrination is organised by the ulama section. To protect the secrecy of the armed wing, new members

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[29] Field Commander interview, August 13, 2009; Insurgent interview 13, 2009.
[30] Insurgent interview, September 20, 2009; Lt. General interview, September 15, 2009.

are only recruited by the political wing or by local schools. If the local ulama is weak, the Ayak chief can also ask BRN-Coordinate operatives at higher levels to send specialized indoctrinators to the village in order to support indoctrination at the local level. Recruited youth are that then administered by the youth section (permudo). They pass through ideological indoctrination (see below) and receive basic military training. While one part of the recruits remains with the political section, others are chosen to switch to the military wing, where they receive RKK training. One Ayak from Patani's Panarae district told me that the political wing (Ayak) and local RKK units had an ongoing conflict over the control of recruited youngsters, because only few village youth were willing to join the organisation. Another key function at the Ayak level is the organisation of local guards who exert population control, i.e. ideally, they observe 24 hrs per day and 7 days a week who is entering or leaving the village. Besides, the watchmen gather intelligence on strength and movements of security forces and they observe alleged government spies within the village. While in some villages in the South BRN-Coordinate could not recruit enough members to run the Ayak cells, in other villages local population was so strong that the Ayak structure has additional sections such as a nurse section, in which female members organise medical support for wounded members of the political wing.

In addition to recruitment, the military depends on the political wing in other regards as well. As the members of the military wing avoid operating in their home villages due to high risk of being recognized by locals, they need assistance in their area of operation. It is thus the task of the local political wing to provide maps, information on targets, intelligence on strength and movements of state security forces as well as other forms of logistics.[31] RKK-fighters, for example, usually leave their weapons on the getaway after an assault, where members of the local political wing, mostly youth members with basic military training (permudo), pick them up and transport them to a temporary safe place. As the political wing subverted larger areas after its establishment in 1994 (see below), the flow of recruits and intelligence for the military steadily increased. In this way, the military wing could also cover an even wider area. Herein lies an important difference to

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[31] Insurgent interview, September 12, 2009.

cellular forms of terrorism, or leaderless jihad, in which small groups of terrorists operate independently.[32]

Another organisational feature of BRN-Coordinate is its hyper-secrecy. One of the key lessons BRN-Coordinate leaders learned from the last wave of insurgent violence in the 1970s and 1980s is that the Thai state is able destroy insurgent groups, once it has identified them. In contrast to, for example Central African states, Southern Thailand is deprived of a hinterland where armed group could form and hide without state surveillance. In the past, Patani insurgent groups claimed responsibility for violent attacks, because they competed with each other in order to gain prestige, members and international support.[33] This practice proved fatal in the long run as it provided evidence to state security agencies and it was thus given up. But secrecy also means that communication is avoided and, if necessary, shortened in vertical and horizontal direction within the group. Face-to-face contact is avoided and phones (mobile as well as public) are used for communication. Often the real name of superiors or even fellow RKK unit members is not known. Secrecy reaches even to the point where rank-and-file are not told the name of the group in order to confuse state prosecutors, in case they are arrested. Before the outbreak of violence in 2004 this secrecy successfully prevented BRN-Coordinate's subversion from being detected and, presently, it still prevents observers from realizing the full extent and sophistication of BRN-Coordinate's organisational structure, without which such an insurgency would not be possible.[34]

4. BRN-Coordinate's Programme

While BRN's former core ideology centred on what members call NASOSI, an ideological blend of nationalist, socialist and Islamic elements that was, in the past, also popular in other Muslim countries. BRN-Coordinate, got rid of the socialist element, and instead focuses on a dogmatic duo comprised of nationalism (nationalis), Islam (islamis). This ideological change to Islamo-Nationalism partly reflect the end of the cold war, internal struggles over ideology coupled with the transnational rise of charismatic jihadist thought that is now at the centre of the group's legitimacy. In other words, BRN-Coordinate seemed to have changed from a rather secular politically rebellious agenda

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[32] See for example, Sageman, M 2007, *Leaderless jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
[33] Interview with former insurgents, August 29, 2009.
[34] Insurgent interview, July 25, 2009; Lt. General interview, September 14, 2009.

(NASOSI) to religious conservativism, although they remain socially rebellious. This switch also hints at the structural environment of the insurgency: it is not the call for food or the call for land that mobilizes peasants as in the times of communist insurgency, but rather the exploitation of a continuous Patani nationalism, the feeling of being ruled by foreigners, reloaded by a global rise in Islamism which enables to make sense of the current social change. As a former Ayak chief from a village in Yala told me: „*It's not economic arguments that help to mobilize the people in my village, but people join us, when we talk about religion and how cruel the Thais treat the Malays.*"

4.1. Indoctrination

In order to understand BRN-Coordinate's programmatic appeal, it might be useful to look at their indoctrination technique. At its core is not so much an ideology, but a narrative consisting of analytically different, but practically intertwined, elements that are given a coherent meaning by the most important aim of the group: independence. What follows is a condensed description of a typical indoctrination process that every new member after he or she was ritually introduced into the group by a vow of fidelity, or supoh in local Malay. It is based, partly, on the oral account of Ismail, a KAS-level BRN-Coordinate member of the political wing, who indoctrinated and trained indoctrinators of the group for almost 10 years. Besides, this account draws on the mentioned interrogation records as well on five interviews the author had with members of the group's armed wing.

4.1.1. History and the constitution of the Patani Nation

History is one of the key elements to constitute and legitimize nationalism. BRN-Coordinate also begins its indoctrination of members with history, yet indoctrinators do not lecture on Patani history in great detail (except the new members wants to). Instead they all draw on existing historical knowledge and use this to trigger a historical awareness of nationalistic difference. To introduce the narrative on history, indoctrinators would confront members with a seemingly simple question: "*How was Patani in the past?*" According to Ismail most Patani Malays, even those with little education, could answer this question. They would respond that Patani was once an Islamic state, i.e. a country that was based on Islamic principles. After listening to his recruits view on Patani history, Ismail will stress how well known Patani's Islamic scholarship was in the Islamic world and that trade with the Arabian region made Patani

one of the most prosperous countries in the region. Ismail and other indoctrinators would then emphasize that Patani Malays were highly devout, strictly followed Islamic principles in everyday life, because state and society (in contrast to the present-day) would allow them to do so.

In this narrative, non-Malay aspects of Patani history such as pre-Islamic Malay culture or the multiethnic nature of Patani as a former international trading place that included Indians, Europeans, Chinese, Siamese etc. are omitted with intention. So is the pre-Islamic history. The relevant past begins with the Islamisation of the Patani in the early[35], or mid 15th century[36].

BRN-Coordinate's historical narrative also stresses the painful subversion of Patani by Siamese colonisation. Siamese colonisation is remembered not only as an end to national sovereignty and a truly Islamic way of life, but as a painful humiliation of the Malay body. Indoctrinators tell youngsters how their great grandmothers were raped by Siamese soldiers, how their great grandfathers were tortured and killed or kidnapped. An example that is regularly raised in this context is that Patani Malays were captured at the beginning of the 20th century and had to dig Bangkok's Saensaep canal with their bare hands. According to Ismail BRN-Coordinate's indoctrinators are able describe to these events in such a graphic language that some of the candidates begin to cry or, in other cases, candidates hatefully turn to their indoctrinators and tell them "*I want to kill these pigs* (i.e. the Siamese, S.H.)." This narrative is also linked to the physical training of the armed wing. When fighters are apparently physically exhausted by military training, their instructors try to motivate them by linking their own physical suffering to that of the imagined Malay body: "*You are already tired, but just imagine the pain that your own grandparents had to endure under the Siamese.*"

In other words, in the quasi-colonial cognition of history, violence becomes constitutive for the Patani nation in a retrograde way. Similar to almost all European nationalist movements which referred to phases of foreign rule, real and alleged historical violence by aliens is a structuring element of the present-day cognitive structure. Interestingly, it is not common for BRN-Coordinate recruiters to make explicit reference to any heroic

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[35] Syukri, I 2005, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani*, Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, p. 15.
[36] Gilquin, M 2002, *The Muslims of Thailand*, Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, p. 11.

figures who defended Patani against the Thai invaders, although locally such memory might play a role as Arafat Muhammad stresses in his research.[37]

Following the question of how Patani was in the past, Ismail asks the candidate what he thinks about "*What Patani is in the present? Is it how it was in the past?*". Again, the main implication of this question is a consciousness of the fact that Patani, now ruled by unbelieving Siamese, has lost its sovereignty. Moreover, the present-day consequences of this foreign rule are stressed such as economic exploitation, political corruption and moral decay, which imply the probably most important, of all consequences of foreign rule: the destruction of the Islamic way of life and apostasy.

As a third and conclusive step in the historical narrative Ismail raises the question of how Patani should be in the future in order to link the historic narrative with the mobilisation of action. He finishes his indoctrination with an appeal: "*Be with us. We have to fight to regain control of our history!*" Then Ismail leaves the candidate alone for a week before continuing the indoctrination.

4.1.2. The construction of ethnic differences

The subject of the second step of indoctrination is the raising of a Malay national consciousness. Again recruiters refrain from long scientific recourses to the ethnography of Malays, which would only bore the new members. Instead they raise two seemingly simple questions: First, "*What is Malay?*" and, second, "*What is Siamese?*" To ask these questions Ismail, if possible, meets his recruits in a place where, for example, there are both Thai Buddhists and Malays. They sit down drinking coffee and Ismail simply asks his candidate to compare Malays and Buddhists on the streets. "*Do they were the same cloths as we do?*", "*Do they speak the same language as we do?*", "Are they relatives?", "*Do they have the same customs?*" etc. These rather rhetorical inquiries serve two purposes: First, they are to make members conscious of their own identity by stigmatizing and stressing cultural differences to other groups, something that social anthropology refers to as "othering".[38] Secondly, the inquiries not only function to discredit practices of interethnic coexistence, but to choose one side and foster hatred against the other. Therefore Ismail and other BRN-Coordinate recruiters continue to

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[37] Muhammad, A 2007, `Memories of martyrdom and landscapes of terror: fear and resistance among the Malays of Southern Thailand', M.A. Thesis, National University of Singapore.

[38] See, for example, Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G & Tiffin, H 2007, *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts,* Routledge, New York.

associate all present negative social phenomena in the region with the ethnic Thais. Prostitution, drug addiction, corruption, alcohol, crime or whatever else at hand are externalized and blamed to be part of the alien Thai culture. Buddhism, a key constituent of the Thai nationalism, it is often said to be a weak, or inferior religion not only because it does not recognize Allah, but also because it does not demand a strictly devout lifestyle from its lay members – a lifestyle that is, together with the corresponding political order, central to the constructions of Muslim modernity. However, the stigmatisation of the Thai Nation as morally corrupt and weak is not so much about misrepresenting the essence of Buddhism, but "*that is it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting*".[39] The master narrative of the Thai nationalism claims that the ethnic Thais legitimately rule Thailand, because of their ability to lead the nation into civilized modernity without being colonized. For the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, for example, the Siamese government published a catalogue which speaks of different "Subdivisions" to the "great Thai race": the "Shan", "Laos" and the "Lu", but the Siamese "*alone have assimilated Western civilisation and maintained an independent position among the nations of the world.*"[40] Insurgents try to reverse this stigmatisation of ethnic minorities in Thailand and the power differentials associated by pointing out the negative effects of ethnic Thai rule.[41] To illustrate his narrative Ismail then, for example, takes his candidate on a motorcycle ride through Pattani city and shows him karaoke bars, pubs and other places that are considered detested symbols of moral decay and corruption. After that he would ask the candidate if these places and practices are compatible with local Malay culture or not and whether they were the Malays or the Thais brought these influences to the Malay land. Ismail summarized the purpose of the indoctrination as follows: "*It is all about showing that this place is ours, while the home of the Siamese, the oppressors, is somewhere else. And it is better for us to keep that separated.*"

4.1.3. Disciplinary Code

Similar to other armed groups BRN-Coordinate has a disciplinary code for all its members. As a third step of the indoctrination process the new member is taught the 10

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[39] Said, E 1978, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient*, Penguing Books, London, p. 273.
[40] Streckfuss, D 1993, 'The mixed colonial legacy in Siam: origins of Thai racialist thought, 1890-1910', in L Sears (ed.), *Autonomous histories: particular truths*, University of Wisconsin, Madison, p. 143.
[41] Elias, N & Scotson J L 1993, Etablierte und Außenseiter, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M.

provisions or articles that he or she has to adhere to. The code consists of the following provision:

1. Uphold religion and the faith in Allah
2. Cooperate with and work for the group
3. Keep the secrecy of the group
4. Uphold the principle of resistance
5. Avoid doing anything that is of disadvantage to the group
6. Act according to religious principles
7. Be obedient to the leaders
8. Be on time
9. Ready to give their lives and property whenever necessary
10. Accept divergent opinions

The ranking reflects the priority of the different provisions, although the ranking shown here might not be exact. In different intelligence documents and interrogation records the ten provisions might appear in a slightly different order and with slightly different content. However, they may also allow us to throw a light on the question of why members join the group: members of the youth organisation permudo also have to pass the physical exercises and paramilitary training as was already hinted above. During the training in the political and military wings of BRN-Coordinate, which often takes months or even years, regular praying and a devout lifestyle are stressed as trademark of insurgents. As the disciplinary code outlines every member shall not adhere to this worldly desires and subject his or her life to the organisation. In other words, the indoctrination wants to transform an imperfect individual into a disciplined devout fighter.[42] Strict codes of behaviour are not only to be applied within the organisation, but also to the private realm such as family life or interpersonal relations: ideal BRN-Coordinate members buy at BRN-Coordinate shops, such as minimarts that are run by other members, where they can be sure that the group receive parts of the shop's profit; they visit special schools or Imams that reproduce strict religion and the narrative of the group and spend their free time with the group. As other fundamentalist groups, BRN-Coordinate rejects an artificial border between the public and the private realm. The

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[42] Schröter, S 2008, *Postkoloniale Dimensionen von Islamismus und islamischen Fundamentalismus*, Draft, Passau.

strict lifestyle of the group anticipates life in the imagined Islamic state of Patani: A state that unites the god-given otherworldly order with a this-worldly order. In other words, the group not only reacts to the political religious threat of the Siamese, but also offers orientation in a world full of seduction and apostasy.

4.1.4. Religion

The role of Islam in the conflict in Southern Thailand is a widely discussed issue, especially the question, in how far the insurgency is fuelled by (international) Islamist or (local) nationalist ideologies. However, an either-or perspective might not be helpful. As is shown here, both elements go indeed together. If we want to understand the religious appeal of BRN-Coordinate, as with most violent Islamist groups, we should not ask for the theological content of its teaching or the logic of the arguments, but according to Ismail religion for BRN-Coordinate is about motivating people to act. At the core of BRN-Coordinate's religious narratives is the idea of the holy Islamic war or jihad. Indoctrinators tell the new members that the fight to free Patani from Thai rule is a jihad as outlined in the holy Quran, because the Thais invaded Muslim land and because they also persecute Muslims. It is argued that the infidels, who are referred to as *kafir*, invaded holy land with the aim to destroy Malay Muslim culture in order to replace it with the national culture defined in Bangkok, which is a Buddhist-dominated culture. Doing this the Thais are intelligent enemies: instead of killing Muslims directly, they want to melt down Islam and let the young Muslims take over Thai culture. Although, according to indoctrinators, the Thai Buddhists allow the Muslims to superficially follow their faith (e.g. praying in Mosques), they eventually aim to destroy Islam through the "Thai-ization" programs and establish the sole rule of Buddhism. Government programs are to slowly extinguish Malay Muslim culture by spreading Thai customs and Thai language, with the latter being taught obligatorily in government primary schools that all Thai citizens have to attend. Schools, once a cradle of Islamic culture and centre of local identity, are thus forced to become a means of the enemy's attempt to destroy local culture. Not mentioned is the fact that BRN-Coordinate members are often employed in secondary Private Islamic Schools that are financed by the Thai government. At the frontline of this crusade of cultural destruction are Thai government teachers. This also explains that they are a favoured aim for insurgent attacks.

According to the recruiter's narrative a second more indirect strategy to destroy Islam is the spread of Thai media, drugs, prostitution etc. with the consent of the Thai government in order to destroy the Malays and their culture in the South. According to the narrative Muslims spoiled and begin to drink alcohol, have premarital sexual intercourse etc. For BRN-Coordinate the jihad is part and parcel of a larger struggle against the decay of religion. Ismail tells their recruits that:

> "(…) *the immoral rule of the Siamese led to the apostasy amongst Muslims. The prophet said: 'Jihad is your duty.' It is the holy duty of all Muslims to free their land from the rule of the infidels. Every breath you take under the rule of the infidels is a sin.*"

The first dimension of the religious narrative refers to the suffering and humiliation of the Muslim Community in the three provinces, while the second dimension revolves around the responsibility of the individual member to act. In this way, the fulfilment of the holy order on earth is put into the hands of every recruit, even if he or she fights as an individual against the Thais. Thus in order to defend the sanctity of Islam the recruit has to act now – not acting is a sin. Jihad is not presented as a means to an end (independence), but as an end in itself; it is not only legitimate, but a holy duty for every Muslim in Patani.

In contrast to de-territorialized Islamist groups like Al Qaida that reject the idea of nationalism and instead embrace the idea of the worldwide community of Muslims (*umma*), BRN-Coordinate pictures the Patani nation as religious sacred community, or Patani Darulsalam. Indoctrinators try to intrinsically link the historical, nationalist and religious elements of the narrative through the connection with the Patani territory. Referring to the territorial dimension jihad BRN-Coordinate also explain why the holy war must only be fought in the three provinces and not, for example, by Muslims in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. Here indoctrinators introduce an additional term that is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and which is central to BRN-Coordinate's religious narrative: darulkuffar. Darul is Arabian meaning land, while kuffar refers to the unbeliever. In other words, Patani is an Islamic land that has fallen under the rule of the unbeliever and thus all Muslims are obliged to liberate the darul from it in order to re-institutionalize the rule of Islam. In order to support their call to jihad BRN-Coordinate's ulama also issued a fatwa (Islamic legal ruling) in 2004 or 2005 that stated that Southern Thailand is a darulharbi, land of religious conflict, or darul jihad.

Although BRN-Coordinate seemed to have standardized their phased indoctrination, the indoctrinators have room for adaptations according to their own background. Moreover, BRN-Coordinate tells its indoctrinators to distinguish their audiences. Ismail teaches his indoctrinators that cruel depiction of violent Thai atrocities against Patani Malays (such as in Tak Bai) helps to arouse and mobilize younger people, while the elderly prefer to listen to stories from the past.

The group's narrative has different functions: a) socialisation of new members into the group, b) mobilisation of action and, related to the later, c) legitimatization of violence. Since BRN-Coordinate does not offer payments to its fighters, but, on the contrary, calls on its members to donate, people join the groups on grounds of the group's ideology, or better narrative.

However, with regard to the role of religion and the legitimate use of violence there seems to be no unity within BRN-Coordinate. A member of the group's ulama told me that a number of clerics left BRN-Coordinate after 2004, because they did not agree that the insurgency was a jihad, because, as they argued, the Thai state did not systematically persecute Muslims nor forbade the practice of Islam in the South. Besides, intelligence officers assume that there is a significant conflict within DPP on whether to attack targets outside the three provinces (e.g foreign embassies or hotels in Bangkok). This is related to the question of whether the jihad in Patani is only directed against Bangkok or embedded in the global jihad against the West, especially the United States and Israel. Older members of DPP tend to view the insurgency as a local jihad and thus want to restrict targets to the area in the South. Probably this DPP fraction also fears the involvement of the United States into the conflict. In contrast, younger leaders, including Sapeing Basoh and Asae Chaelong, who were socialized after the Islamic revolution, hope that the internationalisation of the conflict would increase support from other Muslim countries and jihadist organisation such as Jemaah Islamiyah.

Using religious narratives the group can also draw on the Southern Thai "religious infrastructure" (basic religious knowledge, cognitive plausibility structures, networks of mosques and religious schools etc.) in order to mobilize the population. According to Charles Tilly the capacity for mobilisation is a major factor in inter-group conflicts. He stresses pre-existing linkages of persons and groups and shared ideologies as key

factors for the intensity and course of the politics of contention.[43] BRN-Coordinate recruiters also try to involve Imams, as well as other local community leaders, in order to use Mosques for recruitment and political sermons. Recently, the state-sponsored growth of Private Religious Schools has become another main pillar in BRN-Coordinate's strategy of recruitment.[44] Recruitment in schools is also explicitly mentioned in the "seven-step" (see below). Besides, Islamic scholars have been at the forefront of Malay Muslim resistance against the Thai state for a long time.[45]

6. BRN-Coordinate Strategies

Insurgent strategies can follow very different forms. Che Guevara's military-focused strategies stressed that, in an environment of economic grievances, an insurrection in rural areas itself could create the conditions to overthrow the government without the need for sophisticated insurgent political structures. The most successful insurgent strategy is that of the "theory of protracted warfare" as laid out by Moa Tse-tung and applied in China as well as in Vietnam and Algeria, although with different adaptations.[46] Mao has argued that subversion, i.e. the mass mobilisation of the population, must precede any military action, while military resistance is organised into different phases. It is this theory that probably had a significant influence on BRN-Coordinate's strategic thinking, although they adapted it, too. The most famous document that gives a hint to BRN-Coordinate's strategy is a hand-written paper found in the home of an ustadz, called Masae Useng on May 1, 2003. On November 30, 2004 the same document was found at religious school called Pondoh Jihad in Pattani's Yaring District, whose owner is assumed or head of BRN-Coordinate's political wing in Pattani.[47] Inspired by Mao Tse-tung's idea of a "protracted warfare" it outlines, in Jawi, a "seven-step" politico-military strategy that leads up to the final cause: independence. The first five steps make up the subversion:

Phase one aims to mobilize the (Malay) masses by constructing a (political) consciousness. Short remarks on the document also give us some hints on what different narrative means BRN Coordinate uses in order to foster such awareness: "religion",

[43] Tilly, C 1978, *From mobilization to revolution*, Addison-Wesley, Boston.
[44] Anthony Davis 2004, `School system forms the frontline in Thailand's Southern Unrest´, *Jane's Intelligence Review* November 2004, 10-17.
[45] See, for example, Surin Pitsuwan 1982, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand*, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
[46] Tse-tung, M 2007, *On guerrilla warfare*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL.
[47] Colonel interview, September 3, 2009.

"Malayness", "Patani" history and/or state, the idea that "Siam invaded Patani" and, finally, the necessity to "resist". These terms broadly correspond to the indoctrination narrative mentioned above.

Phase two centres on the integration of specific institutions into the mass subversion, amongst which are named: places of "Religious teachings", "Tadiga" (elementary Koranic schools for young children), "Pondoh" (Islamic religious boarding schools teaching Koranic studies and Arabic language), "councils","samakom" (clubs). It is not clear to which councils the document refers. It might be Islamic councils, village councils or the local mosque councils. All three would make sense in this context, but claims of insurgent activities in these institutions are hard to substantiate. It is only in *phase three* that BRN-Coordinate planned to systematically integrate its members in a mass-based political resistance organisation. This allows them, for example, to gather intelligence and erect a stable system of income by taxing its members. While short-term needs (e.g. acquisition of weapons) can be satisfied by plunder or assault, any organisation has a natural need for a steady source of income. Thus BRN-Coordinate established the mentioned principle of taxing its members 30 Baht per month. Based on the political organisation the military organisation is built up *phase four*, which basically means the recruitment and training of resistance fighters. The content of *phase five* is not totally clear. It is only described with the ominous headline "nationalism" and seems to be the final mobilisation of a Patani "national consciousness" for the preparation of phase six and seven which is the insurgency, with *phase six* being the final military preparation and *phase seven* being the revolution itself. Phases six and seven are not described in detail in the document, so we must draw on other evidence to shed light on these crucial last stages.

When and how was the plan really implemented? Initially, Thai intelligence assumed that BRN-Coordinate began to implement the plan in 1992, because the year was referred to on the document, but recent interrogation of high-ranking insurgents in autumn 2009 suggest that it was already launched earlier in 1984.[48] However, within the first ten years from 1984 to 1994 the group seemingly restricted its subversions to the indoctrination of the population and the recruitment of members (phase one). Magnitude and success of these during the first decade are still unclear. Probably the group needed some time to re-organize and develop its strategy in detail on the

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[48] Insurgent interview, August 17, 2009; Colonel interview, July 7, 2009.

operational as well as the tactical level. Intelligence officers suggest that the political and military arms were established in the second decade (1994-2004), while the mass mobilisation of phase one continued.

Importantly, the document found with Masae Useng states a number of 3000 and 30,000 fighters; both numbers probably refer to the amount of guerrillas that are considered necessary for the revolution. It is very likely that the amount of 3,000 fighters refers to the main military force, RKK, or commandos, while the 30,000 might be ordinary village youth members (permudo) with basic military training. Two high-ranking BRN Coordinate members, on the company level of the political wing in Narathiwat and Ismail, claim to have indeed successfully trained around 3000 RKK soldiers (that is 1000 for every province) as planned by 2004.[49] Based on the number of captured insurgents, interrogation and statistical evidence of violence patterns, intelligence officers also consider these numbers realistic.[50] Much harder to verify is, whether the group successfully trained 30,000 regular fighters. Yet even if BRN-Coordinate has this amount of trained military personal at its disposal, it is highly unlikely that the 30,000 juwae are sufficiently supplied with weapons, even of small calibre. Finally, the document also gives a number of 300 "experts" or officers, who most likely function as instructors and commanders of the military wing. Again, based on the limited information available from captured BRN-Coordinate members and calculations by informed Thai intelligence officers such numbers are considered highly probable.[51]

Obviously, DPP had long planned to start the insurgency in 2004. It is, however, a matter of speculation of what convinced the DPP leadership to consider a number of 3,000 commando fighters (plus a 30,000 permudo with basic military training) as sufficient for a successful revolution, having in mind that the Thai military has around 400,000 troops. Besides, the group lacks the hinterland to transform its guerrilla units into a conventional force to fight the Thais on a conventional basis as imagined by Mao Tse-tung's phased approach.[52] Military intelligence suspects that DPP has two different, but compatible pathways to independence:[53]

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[49] Insurgent interviews, October 2 and October 10, 2009.
[50] Colonel interview, September 2, 2009.
[51] Colonel interview, August 2, 2009.
[52] Tse-tung, M 2007, *On guerrilla warfare*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL.
[53] Insurgent interview, August 12, 2009; Field Commander interview, August 9, 2009; Lt. General, 14 September, 2009.

First, similar to the Algerian War BRN-Coordinate seems to involve the Thai government in a protracted "anti-colonial independence warfare", in which the involvement of a third foreign actor is to substitute for the lack of military power on the insurgents side. Insurgents attempt simply have to stay alive and upgrade the conflict to the international level, with the hope that international community will see the Malay as a suppressed minority that is unjustly ruled by Bangkok. One BRN-Coordinate's key strategy is to target Buddhist civilians on an everyday basis in order to provoke a civil war or open confrontation between Buddhists and Malay Muslims in the region. In this hoped-for scenario the Thai Army will side with Buddhist population or, at least, be unable to control such a confrontation and thus an international actor, preferably the United Nations or the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), must intervene directly on the side of the Malays. On the side of the military leadership of the Thai army there is a real fear of such intervention (e.g. in the form of blue helmets), because it is seen as an end of Thai sovereignty in the South and would bring the insurgents closer to their aim.

Second, any protected warfare wants to demoralize its enemy's government, its population and/or its army. Modern counterinsurgencies often failed not due to a lack of material or personal resources, but, as with the Americans in Vietnam, the reigning regime lost its political will to defend a certain area.[54] Raymond Aron put the logic of the anti-colonial protracted warfare into a simple formula: what the guerrilla needs is not a military victory, as in Mao Tse-Tung's type of protracted warfare, but he simply needs to stay alive *militarily* in order to win *politically*.[55] The longer the insurgent is not beaten militarily, the higher is his chance to win politically, because, on the one hand, the enemy might not withstand the moral dilemma of strong state "fighting" a weak enemy, not to speak of civilian deaths.[56] On the other hand, the longer a counterinsurgency lasts, the higher is the number of civilian and military victims a government has to take. In other words, for the insurgents the Thai state in Patani is a colonial power and they therefore consider the will to defend the three provinces of the Thai government and/or its people subject to "moral attrition".[57]

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[54] Van Creveld, M 2008, *The changing face of war: combat from the Marne to Iraq*, Random House, New York, p. 224.

[55] Aron, R 1986, *Krieg und Frieden: Eine Theorie der Staatenwelt*, Fischer , Frankfurt am Main, p. 47.

[56] Van Crefeld 2008: 226.

[57] Herein lies an important difference between anti-colonial and "non-anti-colonial" guerrilla wars: While Mao's enemy fought for their only homeland and thus equated military with political defeat, the colonial powers could distinguish between a political and a military defeat: they always had the option to

In whatever way DPP planned the revolution, it is clear that the "seven-step-plan" was a long and meticulously planned and executed mass-based endeavour that covers a time-span of more than 20 years, which is not to say that it is not flawed. Therefore it was not Thaksin who triggered the outbreak of the insurgency with his misguided and violent politics on Southern Thailand. Indeed, the Thai state has a sad record of human rights violations and cultural repression in the South, which is one of the structural conditions for the insurgency, but the events in Tak Bai and Kru Se were also the best propaganda that insurgents could possibly hope for. Both seemed to prove the insurgent's image of Siam as the "ruthless colonial suppressor" of the Malays in front of the world's public, and they did so at exactly the right point of time. Ismail and various intelligence officers even insist that the demonstration at Tak Bai was instigated by BRN-Coordinate in order to trigger state suppression of the protestors.[58] For the same purpose the group organised another wave of local demonstration against arrests by Thai officials in 2006, but this tactic of provocation was given up, because the Thai military avoided a "second Tak Bai" and thus avoided dissolving these demonstrations violently. Other evidence supports the thesis that the insurgency was planned for 2004: Conventional guerrilla strategy has it that shortly before the beginning of the insurgency, the insurgent movement must prepare by capturing more weapons, ammunition etc.[59] And indeed in 2003, one year before the outbreak of the insurgency, there was an increasing attack on isolated police and military installation, with the April 2004 raid on Chulaporn Camp in Narathiwat only being the climax.[60]

7. Conclusion

If we want to make sense of the violence, we have to look behind the images of cruelty and fear, and understand that the violence cannot solely be explained by state suppression, economic, or other structural factors, which exist in other parts of Thailand, as well. These explanations have their validity, but they should to be supplemented by a perspective that tries to understand the inner logic and rationality of insurgents as autonomous actors, who, in Southern Thailand, do not fit into a

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withdraw from the foreign land, i.e. find a political solution without a military decision. Münkler, H 1992, *Gewalt und Ordnung*, Fischer, Frankfurt, p 116.

[58] Colonel Interview, July 23, 2009.

[59] Thompson, R 1966, *Defeating communist insurgency: experiences from Malaya and Vietnam*, Chatto & Windus, London, p. 29.

[60] Colonel Interview, July 23, 2009; หนังสือพิมพ์แนวหน้า (nangsuepim naeowna) 29 April 2003, retrieved from http://wbns.oas.psu.ac.th/shownews.php?news_id=2157.

homogenous socio-economic pattern. Similar to the situation of companies in a free market, insurgent organisations have to adopt and innovate constantly. If they want to be successful, insurgents must develop new violent and non-violent strategies to undermine state legitimacy and mobilize the masses. They have to innovate their ideological repertoire in order to gain charismatic appeal, but doing so they must stay within what is culturally acceptable. The cost of failing can be much higher for insurgents than for companies: in the best case, they simply fall by the wayside, in the worst case, they get killed in significant numbers without achieving their political objective. This article attempted to show that BRN-Coordinate is the leading insurgent organisation in Southern Thailand, because it proved to be astonishingly capable of learning and long planning. Whereas other groups gave up their military struggle in the mid 1980s, BRN Coordinate went through an incredible transformation which had at least two dimensions. Firstly, violence was now based on part-time guerrilla-cum-terrorist fighters instead of full-time guerrilla hiding in the jungle. Secondly, the group introduced *village-based* mass indoctrination using a mixture of nationalism *and jihadist* thought that became globally prominent at the time. In this quasi-colonial cognition of history, violence by the Thai nation-state becomes constitutive for the Patani nation in a retrograde way and coupled with the idea of jihad, legitimizes the use of insurgent violence. At the same time insurgents successfully concealed the extent of their subversion by acting hyper-secretly, which, until today, obstructs our understanding of the conflict.

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