Urban Terrorism and Political Violence in Southern Thailand: The Case of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat

Antonio L. Rappa, SIM University, Singapore, rappa@unisim.edu.sg

ABSTRACT

Urban terrorism is gaining greater salience because of the unpredictability and adaptability of terrorists in the changing urban-built environment. Higher population density also increases opportunities for terrorist activities. This paper uses three models to explain political violence in Thailand's southern provinces with a focus on Pattani. I conclude that the proximity to violence begets deeper potential for urbancentric conflict.

Keywords: Thailand, terrorism, military, political violence, urban terrorism, Southern Thailand

Introduction

Globalization has generated greater access to news and information in a breath of an instance. But rather than making the world more tolerant through understanding, globalization has made more people less tolerant of religious, economic, social and gender issues. People appear to be less forgiving despite living in a world that has generated more information about human life and activities than previous civilizations. Urban terrorism is gaining greater interest because of the unpredictability of the urban environment. The higher the density of an urban population increases the likelihood as a target for urban terrorists. Urban terrorism is a central feature of modernity and such urban violence has its roots in the late 19th century's formative development of political ideology. The enmeshing of political ideology and religion, as well as culture and religion, has created a keg of unpredictable violence.

There are many interesting models that try to explain urban terrorism, too many to include, but sufficient in number to add salience to the topic of urban terrorism and political violence. In this paper, I highlight three useful models that explain different aspects of such violence.

West and Orr's model that was modified – without permission – in order to capture a trait not commonly found in other theoretical models in security studies and political science. The idealist Urban Democratic Model (UDM) is one that attempts to capture impressions and the impact of violence across all forms of social media, both virtual and real. This model is based on the four freedoms of expression, movement, opinion, belief, and voluntary non-participation/right of refusal. Another model introduced in this paper is the Proximity Attack Model of Urban Violence (PAM) Model, which was designed to capture the fear, and anxiety that emerges when a proximate or regional centre is attacked by terrorists. This model suggests that there is a fear that an attack in one place increases the chances of attack in another place that is close by.

THE CASE OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

The case from which observations were made between 1987 and 2012 involves the Kingdom's provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani. Insurgent leaders celebrate the fabled 14th century Islamic Pattani Sultanate with roots that some scholars have traced back to the late 19th century by which time the Sultanate was already known to be a vassal state of Siam. The primary language used in these three provinces is Yawi, which sounds very close to Malay language and may be a derivation of the Javanese Jawi-influenced Empire across the Strait of Malacca. The word 'petani' is the Malay word for rice farmer. The region is known for its rice-yielding soil. Historians have used the words Patani, Pattani, and Petani to describe the place, culture, and politics. "Thailand has faced secessionist movements since it annexed the independent sultanate of Patani [Note: Thailand's annexed sultanate is spelled "Patani"; the country's southern province is spelled "Pattani"] in 1902, making the area the southernmost tip of the country. A policy of forced assimilation enraged the ethnically Malay Muslims, who represent the majority in the region. Many of the region's Muslims adopted Thai names and the national language. But local traditions were secretly cultivated, and between the 1940s and the 1980s separatists staged a series of opposition
uprisings. The insurgency is largely confined to the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat and five districts of Songkhla province—Chana, Thepa, Na Thawi, Saba Yoi, and Sadao. The geography of the south ranges from hilly jungles to open coastlands and sparsely populated farmland on undulating terrain. The major concentrations of all the terrorist activities have been in the rural areas but most of the targets have been located in built-up areas as well as urban centers such as towns and cities.

At the height of the British Empire in Malaya, the Siamese king had forged a reconsolidation of territories. Siam had not intervened with the occupation and takeover of Singapore in 1819, then a tributary state to the Kingdom, by the Johor Sultanate. But politics changed a century later especially since the Pattani Sultanate was contiguous to the Kingdom. The Siamese king decided to exert greater control from the north. Before the start of World War I, moves were made to develop greater diplomatic ties and by 1909 the Anglo-Siamese Treaty that created the boundaries that separated the Thai provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat and the British-controlled Malayan states of Kelantan, Perak, Kedah and Perlis. Note that it was not named Malaysian till 1963 when the Federation of Malaysia was formed. Up till then it was known as Malaya. The Malaysian factor remains a key variable in the restive Thai South:

In Thailand, the main external actor associated with the conflict has been its neighbor Malaysia. But because of the historical role and affinity of Malaysia to the Pattani Malays, the country's involvement seems to be tenuous and unsustained. It must be remembered that a territory of 15,000 square miles once part of the domain of the Pattani sultanate was ceded to Britain in 1909. Furthermore, the last sultan of Pattani Tengku Abdul Kadir Kamaradin and his sons, particularly Tengku Mahmud Mahiyuddin, operated from these Malaysian states in their campaign to regain or re-establish their sovereignty over the areas annexed by Thailand. There have also been two major incidents of Malay Muslims fleeing across the border to Malaysia in 1981 and 2005 that caused strained relations between the two countries.

**Four Phases**

There were four broad phases that may have contributed to the rise of the insurgency in Pattani (as well as Yala and Narathiwat). The cultural roots of contemporary residents of Pattani are also said to go back to 1390 when the fabled Pattani Sultanate was 'founded'. The first ruler, Sultan Ismail Shah was said to have converted to Islam. But the Portuguese records of the period have different historical accounts. Nevertheless, the first Pattani Sultanate was finally annexed by Siam in 1771. This meant that it had significant autonomy including the use of its 'own' choice of language and the practice of religion.

The second phrase was the consolidation of political power in 1909 by the King of Siam. The ending of the Pattani Sultanate did not end the practice of Islam.

Additionally, the ending of the Pattani Sultanate did not weaken the local people's attachment to their sense of history. Nevertheless, the power consolidation was followed by an attempt to assimilate the local cultures into the Siamese one. Most nonThai historical accounts suggest some degree of resistance against Siamese political Assimilationism especially those accounts written from the Islamic perspective. Western accounts tend to be less imbalanced than those from the Siamese and Malay worlds but the literature is vast and needs more researching. Nevertheless, the end of World War I saw political machinations and moves made by the Siamese King to assimilate the Southern provinces and replace
Islamic religion with Buddhism and Thai culture. Quite naturally, this was what most states had done in
the past. A farreaching historical example would be the Christening of the Roman Empire or the later
unification of Malacca under Islam before first contact with the Portuguese.

The third phase was a resurgence of the Siamese assimilationist policies that included the
Western-influenced Compulsory Primary Education Act (1921) that required compulsory education in
Buddhism and Siamese culture for all children. That was the kind of policy enforcement that made the
locals even more resistant against the state (Bangkok).

A fourth phase was after the 1939 coup when Siam was renamed Thailand and a new nationalist
sentiment saw the imposition of marshal law on the Southern provinces that resisted assimilation.

Post War Era

After World War II, there was growing concern about nationalist sentiments among the Islamic
populations in Thailand's Southern provinces and Malaysia's Northern States. This prompted the Thai
authorities to introduce a number of measures to appease the Malay Muslims — like permitting the use
and application of Islamic Sharia Law within the provincial administrative structures.

Patronage of Islam Act

The Patronage of Islam Act (May 1945) generated state-friendly ThaiMuslim (Thai first, Islam
second) institutions in order to gain the cooperation of Muslim Ulama. The act revived what western
observers perceive as the chularajamontri, the highest Islamic authority in the country. The
chularajamontri was responsible for the religious affairs of all Muslims in Thailand. The problem was
that the choice of the chularajamontri from the Sunni would not be acceptable to the Shi'ite Muslims.

Between 1946 and 1948 the political relationship between Bangkok and the Malay Muslims of
Pattani deteriorated significantly. The political battles and urban violence resulted in the creation of the
Pattani People's Movement (PPM) in early 1947. That was the period of heightened nationalism and
national fervor that was sweeping the entire Southeast Asian region. That was also the end of diplomacy,
at least any chance of it, between the state and the restive provinces.

The PPM demanded autonomous, self-rule in the South, language and cultural rights, and
reintroduction of the Islamic Sharia Laws. Bangkok refused. This resulted in greater political violence
that spread deeper into the rural Southern provinces as confrontation between the Thai authorities and
Malay Muslim groups such as the PPM escalated with untold numbers injured and killed on both sides.
Innocent Muslim and Buddhist children also fell victim. The rise of charismatic leaders such as Sulong
Haji Abdul Kadir of the Provincial Islamic Council in Pattani (PPIC) and Mohammad Haji Abdul
Rahman (Tengku Bira) merely made the situation worse. They paved the way for the emergence of the
Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) in the mid to late 1960s. Abdul Rahman was also being
observed by members of the Special Branch (Malaya) and he remains influential in shaping the politics
of the insurgency till he was believed to have been killed in 2008. At the height of its power, PULO had
close to 5,000 armed full-time combatants who were trained and equipped by Syrian forces. Global
Security reports that Tengku Bira conducted business in Sweden before his death. There are unverified
reports of Tengku Bira being poisoned by Thai intelligence but it is more likely to be a rumor perpetrated
by his followers to make him into a martyr. The distinction between the four and five star PULO is a
myth. However, Thai military intelligence may be credited for destabilizing PULO by the end of 2008.
Yet PULO leaders managed to reorganize themselves by merging with other splinter groups from the
larger disaffected ones. PULO itself was a clever “political compromise” program between the BNPP
and the BRN to appeal to most of the modern Muslims while appeasing the harder right wing locals.

Muslim insurgents were sent to train overseas in Indonesia, the Middle East and the Southern
Philippines. Some Pakistan ISI agents now retired had revealed that he had known (and eaten dinner
with some) Malays from Thailand. The King of Thailand had appointed a native southerner, General
Prem Tinsulanonda, to resolve the southern problem.

PM Prem masterminded a brilliant plan to recover the lost political ground and found a way to attain a new peace initiative among the fragmented and warring groups on one hand and the military security agencies on the other. Most Thai and foreign scholars of Thai politics note that it was only in 2005 when PM Thaksin enforced an emergency decree that the violence erupted again. This is widely known as the Executive Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation (EEDPAES). The EEDPAES empowers Bangkok to take offensive and coercive action against the insurgents without recourse for the latter. Apart from the tri-monthly renewal of the EEDPAES, the whole region remains under the jurisdiction of the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC), the ISOC (Field and Command HQs in the South) and the local administrative offices in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani.

In March 2012, Pattani province remains the primary focus of insurgent attacks totaling over 5,090 deaths across three provinces. Two more deaths occurred in July 2012 and like the others, no group or party claimed responsibility. Even religious buildings are not safe. The following month unknown assailants attacked a small mosque but no one claimed responsibility: “Pol Lt-Col Manit Panthong, chief of the Pattani forensic police, said 16 spent AK47 cartridge shells were recovered from in front of the mosque at Ban Na Phrao in tambon Panare”. Some observers believe that the EEDPAES has loopholes, which heighten the risk of arbitrary detention and the potential for the cruel treatment of detainees. Some liken it to martial law with no accountability. The decree is renewed every three months and was renewed in April 2012.

However, in September 2012 a truce was established between the military command, ISOC, and the main insurgent groups in those three provinces. This is a positive testament to Yingluck Shinawatra’s government since the levels of political violence escalated after General Prem Tinsulanonda stepped down as Prime Minister (PM) and then again later and quite ironically when Thaksin Shinawatra, Yingluck Shinawatra’s eldest brother became the PM and was democratically re-elected. As of early October 2012, only the locals know for sure which groups had been responsible for the 5092 deaths. The actual body count of the number of deaths in the three provinces is illustrated in Table A that follows.9

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7 See for example, “Three slain leaving Pattani mosque” Bangkok Post 12 April 2012.
8 See also RSIS Commentaries and Thailand’s political issues in the Singapore Institute for International Affairs.
9 Note that while the total death toll since the 1950s appears to be high, and hence begs the question what price human life? Ironically, the Thai case pales in comparison with the insurgency in the Southern Philippines. The Moro and other rebellions in the Philippines Southern provinces resulted in over 120,000 fatalities.

Table A:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Cumulative Death Toll</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1950-1968</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Islam ic gro up s fo rm ed an d d o th er righ t t w in g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1970-1980</td>
<td>1395</td>
<td>Killin g an d stab b in g b y so ld iers o f yo u n g s tere o n a P attan i b ridge; P rotests b y o v er 3 ,000 stu dents an d facu lty fro m T ham masat, Ch ula longk orn, Ram kh am h aen g, M ah id o n, an d C hiang Mai o n D ecem b er 1 2 , 1 9 7 5,10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1981-2003</td>
<td>2034</td>
<td>Total n um b er o f in ju red p eo p le p asses th e 8,000 m ark ; m o re sp lin ter gro u p s fo rm er an ti-state in su rgen t gro u p s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2004-2007</td>
<td>2595</td>
<td>Kru e S M o sq u e e; F all o f T h ak sin ; ex ile o f T h ak sin ; raid o n N arath iw at arm o ry an d th eft o f 40 0 w eap o n s an d am m u n itio n .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are three theoretical models that help shed light on the Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat cases of terrorism. These models have been introduced to explain political violence in these Thai provinces. The models provide a useful handle on the decades’ old confusion, chaos and uncertainty. The current residents of these three provinces are themselves descendants of Buddhists and Muslims who were killed since the 1950s. Some might be able to trace their roots further back to the time of foreign intervention. The three models are the Modified Conversation Model (MCM), the Urban Democratic Model (UDM), and the Proximity Attack Model of Urban Violence (PAM). These models are briefly discussed in the following section.

**West and Orr's Modified Conversation Model (MCM)**

The MCM is based on logical and emotional responses to urban terrorism. West and Orr argue that at least two independent variables impact perceptions/responses of/to urban terror. At the heart of their model is the importance of “conversation” which includes a mixture of subjective impression as well as verifiable fact. One could interpret this model as an attempt to account for the impact of “personal conversations” on violence and terror in urban centres. More often than not, conversations between two persons at the very least contain both logical and emotive questions, statements, and answers. The speaker and the receiver exchange ideas and opinions that are logically reasoned or subjective and emotive. This has led to the problems of discerning quid pro quo in quotidian situations between for example terrorists and hostages, counterterrorist agents and officials, as well as among insurgents. It is only through a deconstruction of these narratives that we can ascertain the logical and emotive divide. The MCM has been modified for (sustainable) political development fieldwork. The MCM is itself based on three premises: (1) what a male speaker says is dependent on his physical strength; (2) what a female says is dependent on whether she has children; and, (3) both men and women are shaped by their religion. There are three considerations while applying West and Orr's modified Conversation Model as follows: (1) every utterance must be entered into the original language database including pauses; (2) only political items used in conversation are tagged; and, (3) the dataset of political items must be updated yearly. Note that the modifications hope to achieve three goals: (1) Profile individual participants from the characteristics of their conversations; (2) deconstruct the individual conversations in the context of the original
languages; and, (3) simplify their conversations for a linguistic database in the original language (e.g. Standard Thai).

Table B-1: West and Orr’s Modified Conversational Model (MCM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise</th>
<th>Male/Physical Strength</th>
<th>Female/Children</th>
<th>Men/Women/Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consideration</td>
<td>Utterances in Original Language</td>
<td>Tag only political items</td>
<td>Annual updates to dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Conversational Profiles</td>
<td>Deconstruction</td>
<td>Simplify Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Violence in the three restive provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala</td>
<td>High: the presence of more males leads to higher levels of urban terrorism and political violence</td>
<td>Low: the presence of more females leads to lower levels of urban terrorism and political violence. Children and offspring define women.</td>
<td>This is dependent on how many males/men or females/women are present. More religious males = greater violence; more religious females = lower violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Modified by Author based on West and Orr's original work.

The MCM was used to understand the kinds of conversations that were made in the process of interviewing the respondents in Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala. The conclusions made of the various recordings of the respondents are captured in Table B. The conversations were made in simple Standard Thai and simple English between the Principle Investigator, the interpreters and the respondents. The MCM classified the Level of Violence as High during conversations where there were more religious-minded males present as compared to females in a given population. The MCM classified the Level of Violence as Low during conversations within populations where there were more females and children.

Urban terrorists in Thailand are interested in getting media attention but these groups are not interested in claiming a name for themselves or their organizations. This model was discovered to be useful in proxy interpretations of the 2010 Songkran riots and the Red Shirt siege across the urban space centered at Langsuan, Ratchadamnoen, and Ratchadapisek. The emotive responses and narratives were captured by fieldworks conducted before, during and after the widespread demonstrations where over 91 Thai people including 2 foreigners were killed. West and Orr's model was particularly useful because it could capture the shards of rhetoric of the Red Shirt supporters, Yellow Shirt supporters and government officials who crossed over to the Red or Yellow sides. I discovered that the importance of “gossip” arising out of personal conversations used through hand phones were the primary organizational modes of those within and outside the siege compounds. I also discovered and confirmed that the watermelon soldiers – those who were Red Shirts at heart and who usually had relatives from the Isan region to the northeast of the country – green on the outside and red on the inside were those least likely to shoot at Red Shirts. All those interviewed claimed that they “went slow” when instructed or commanded to disperse Red Shirt supporters and also claimed that they pretended to shoot or shot their weapons at a different height when ordered to open fire.

Rappa's Urban Democratic Model (UDM)

There are three main premises in UDM which are: (1) democracy is the most popular choice among most nations; (2) liberty through democracy; and, (3) freedom through wealth. The main
consideration is that democracies tend not to go to war with other democracies (after the Kantian democratic peace proposition).

UDM focuses on the multiple applications of virtual and real public spaces as sites of expression and articulation of the four freedoms. Minetos et al cite Rappa's theory of mass consumption that generates a chasm between people and the (urbanbuilt) environment. In this model, terrorism is extrapolated as a multidimensional urban-centric series of power bases that emerge and submerge at different points in late modernity. The four freedoms goals in this democratic-values model are: (1) The freedom of expression in any language through any medium including the internet, radio, television, satellite, hand phones, and any other form of social media or new media that broadcasts opinions and beliefs in a non-violent, and peaceful manner. (2) The freedom of movement to any place or space at any time as long as it does not trespass or violate another individual's or common right to privacy; (3) The freedom of expression of opinion through religious and cultural beliefs and belief systems that do not violate other's rights to the same and are expressed in a non-violent and peaceful manner. (4) The freedom of voluntary non-participation in any act, expression, ideology, politics, religion, culture, society, regime or state that violates or has proven to violate any of the four freedoms.

Europe from 1981-1991. The insecurity model appears to be most effective in explaining post-blast activities as well as globally impactful events such as 9-11, London, Madrid, Jakarta, and the Bali bombings. However this model is not valid for long-time insurgencies such as those in Palestine (1949-2009), Moro (1972-present), Iraq (1959-1990) and the three provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani (1970spresent). Based on the (2008-2012) survey (of unidentified citizens) that was conducted in northern Malaysia along the Thai-Malaysian border, there remains an irrational fear that an attack in Yala increases the chances of attack in Narathiwat and Pattani. The results show that the respondents who have lived and worked in these three provinces all their lives have a constant fear that they will be the next victims of sudden, unpredictable and violent attack. This survey showed that such an irrational fear cuts across ethnic identity and national identity; it also cuts across gender, religion (Buddhism, Islam) and (Thai, Malay) culture.

CONCLUSION

There are three main conclusions made in this paper: (1) higher levels of violence are associated with the presence of disproportionately larger numbers of religious-minded males as to females in Pattani and Narathiwat; (2) linguistic freedom, freedom of movement, freedom of opinion and voluntary non-participation in political activities are positively correlated with low levels of political violence. In Pattani, the absence of linguistic freedom, the curfews placed on civilians and the muzzling of local protestors are positively correlated with high levels of political violence; and, (3) the absence of a logical explanation or rational explanation for the political violence and urban terrorism in Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala provinces of Southern Thailand. The level of urban terrorism and political violence tended to range from “high” in places where the freedom of language expression was concentrated as opposed to “low” in places where there was freedom of mobility and greater
Table B-2 Urban Democratic Model (UDM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise</th>
<th>Popular Democracy</th>
<th>Liberty through Democracy</th>
<th>Freedom through Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consideration</td>
<td>Democracies do not go to war with other democracies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Freedom through Language</td>
<td>Freedom of Movement</td>
<td>Freedom of Opinion and Belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Urban Terrorism and Political Violence</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's original work.

This model was useful because it could account for the multidimensional applications of virtual and real public spaces as sites of expression and articulation of the four freedoms. Minetos et al cite Rappa's theory of mass consumption that generates a chasm between people and the (urban-built) environment. In this model, terrorism is extrapolated as a multidimensional urban-centric series of power bases that emerge and submerge at different points in late modernity. The UDM is perhaps more accurate in mature democracies rather than ones still undergoing the democratic transformation as appears to be the case for Thailand. The third and final model used in this paper is the proximity attack model.

Rappa's Proximity Attack Model of Urban Violence (PAM)

The PAM assumes that man is irrational by nature and has to be educated to think logically and rationally. Man's political insecurity is biologically based and stems from the fear that an attack in one place increases the chances of attack in other places. The creation of anxiety among citizens in a state is common in the literature (Bar-Tal and Jacobson, 1998; Wilkinson, 2006; Sorkin, 2008; US Department of Homeland Security, 2011). This model is a post-cursor to the garrison state mentality where defence was the best form of attack and where the common good was about providing fortress-like protection for all citizens. The advancement of the post-cursor to the garrison state model in this case involves the use of advanced garrison state perspectives used in Vietnam and in notions of forward defence such as NATO in wealth/lower poverty. The Thai case has seen the net number of people living below the poverty level swing widely from between 310,000 in the 1950s to over one million in the late 1970s. The possibility of political violence increases with the proximity of people to violence prone areas. The higher the concentration of people the greater the likelihood of terrorist activity. This is because urban terrorists tend to target people first and buildings second.

The paper began with modest observations in 1987 and over the course of those many years; the paper had taken its final shape only after the 2008 survey and later incarnations. Various parts of the restive South were surveyed, mainly in Pattani Province, but the survey also included other provinces such as Songkhla Province and Trang Province as well as the northern Malaysian states of Perlis, Kedah, Perak, and Kelantan. The Southern political problems can neither be political, military nor economic alone. Neither can the Royal Palace and its courtiers solve the problems. The way to sustainable political peace in the South is through complete disarmament of all rebel and insurgent troops. There must also be a reduction in corrupt activities and drug-related ones. All weapons must be serialized and controlled only by security forces. No weapons must be allowed to go missing, be stolen or traded. Wages for all security personnel must be increased by 30% and administrators must not be resistant against policy changes. Local democratically elected officials must learn to abide by the sovereign principle that no
nation in modernity can afford to breakup internally or to lose its outer lying territories or provinces. Thailand is no exception.

SELECTED REFERENCES


