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Explaining intervention in Southeast Asia a comparison of the Muslim insurgencies in Thailand and the Philippines

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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

EXPLAINING INTERVENTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A COMPARISON OF THE MUSLIM INSURGENCIES IN THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES

by

Scott A. Walgren

December 2007

Thesis Advisor: Michael Malley
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		*Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188*
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.		
1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	**2. REPORT DATE** December 2007	**3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED** Master's Thesis
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Explaining Intervention in Southeast Asia: A Comparison of the Muslim Insurgencies in Thailand and the Philippines		**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHOR(S) Walgren, Scott A.		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		**10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.		
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited		**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE**

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

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14. SUBJECT TERMS Intervention, separatism, Islamism, Southeast Asia, Philippines, Moro, MILF, Thailand, Malaysia, United States, terrorism.		**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 87
		16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE** Unclassified	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT** Unclassified	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** UU

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

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EXPLAINING INTERVENTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A COMPARISON OF THE MUSLIM INSURGENCIES IN THAILAND THE PHILIPPINES

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

Most ethnic conflicts occur within state boundaries, but few remain entirely domestic. Causal explanations commonly analyze how the historical identities of domestic actors translate into ethno-religious or ethno-nationalist political movements without regard to the interests and influences of neighboring states or regional organizations. When external actors intervene, domestic explanations of the conflict are rendered incomplete. Scholarship must then determine how and why external intervention occurred, providing a more complete analysis of the dynamics of ethnic conflict.

The Muslim insurgents in the Philippines and Thailand have long troubled their governments and affected people's lives. These ethno-religious minorities share similar histories to include forced assimilation, secularization, political marginalization, and repression. While insurgencies are nothing new to Southeast Asia, the conflicts in the Philippines and Thailand were redefined by the war on terror. Both countries became peripheral symbols of the broader international effort against militant Islamism. As a result, external actors took a vested interest in the evolution of each conflict. Strangely, the international or regional actors with parallel interests in each conflict have adopted divergent approaches in their involvement with activities in the Philippines compared to southern Thailand.

This thesis analyzes why significant international intervention has occurred in the Philippines but not in Thailand. Both nations are major non-NATO allies of the United States, illustrating the proximity of interests between Bangkok, Manila, and Washington. As the United States pursued a global struggle against Islamic extremism, the strategic agendas of the United States, Philippines, and Thailand seemed to align. However, the United States has contributed enormous financial and military assets to the Philippines yet remains uninvolved in Thailand. Similarly, the terrorist groups of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah have significant ties to Philippine insurgents but very limited

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interaction with Thai insurgents. On the regional level, Malaysia has taken an active role in peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, but has taken no definitive action to alleviate the explosive situation in neighboring Thailand. The reasons for which each of these external actors intervened in the Philippines appear equally applicable in Thailand, yet the reality remains significantly different. This thesis will attempt to explain these disparities.

B.   IMPORTANCE

This research effort offers a fresh comparative look at the theories of international intervention into ethnic conflict as it applies to the Philippines and Thailand. Existing literatures examine both insurgencies, but no recent effort explains the extensive intervention in the Philippines and the apparent international indifference towards Thailand. In the end, this comparison will offer new insights into how domestic and international interests affect intervention, and the resulting implications for regional stability in Southeast Asia.

U.S. policy towards the Philippines carries on the close relationship maintained between the two countries. Joint military exercises continue against Abu Sayyaf insurgents. American and Philippine forces have expanded counterinsurgency operations countrywide, mobilized by $70 million in U.S. Foreign Military Financing between 2004 and 2006. The Philippines received $2.7 million in 2004 from the International Military and Education and Training Program, the largest sum of any Asian country. USAID assisted the Philippine government in directing $23.2 million intended to heal tensions of conflict, improve the livelihoods for former combatants, and rehabilitate the economic conditions in poverty stricken Mindanao. Bilateral relations remain solid, anchored by Manila's loyal support of Washington's war on terrorism. President Bush designated the Philippines a major non-NATO ally in October 2003, and was among the initial countries to sign all 12 United Nations counterterrorism conventions.[1]

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[1] U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Philippines," U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2794.htm (accessed April 27, 2007).

Washington's traditionally close relationship with Thailand, another major non-NATO ally, has been strained since the September 2006 coup. Negotiations for a free trade agreement, which began in 2004, were suspended following the seizure of power. Funding for the International Military Education and Training and the Foreign Military Financing programs, which in conjunction with various other programs totaled $29 million, was also halted. While American forces assumed a leading role in Philippine counter-insurgency operations, they have remained distant from the deteriorating situation in southern Thailand. Thailand nonetheless provided troops in support of the Iraq war in 2003 despite the protests of domestic Muslim constituencies, and remains a strategic ally critical to security and stability in the region.[2]

C.   LITERATURE REVIEW

1.   Causes of Intervention

Academic explanations of foreign intervention in ethnic conflict vary widely. Motivations can be altruistic or defensive, opportunistic or diplomatic. Intervention can occur in two ways. First, activities on the national level can have effects or consequences on the international level. In this case, the ethnic conflict creates a situation which draws international attention and action. Conversely, events on the international level may influence the conduct of national conflict, thereby "lending ethnic conflict an international character."[3]

2.   Inaction or Indifference

While seemingly counter-intuitive, determining why intervention occurs does not automatically explain why intervention does not occur. "Inaction" must be carefully distinguished from "indifference," and requires explanation when taking the shape of

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[2] U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Thailand," U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2814.htm (accessed April 27, 2007).

[3] Rajat Ganguly and Raymond C. Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*, (New York: Longman, 1998): 68.

"indirect intervention."[4]   The actions of the United States, Malaysia, and international terrorist organizations deserve scrutiny in their differing approaches to the Philippines and Thailand. Having entered its third year, Thailand's southern insurgency "dwarfs any other conflict in Southeast Asia" according to area expert Zachary Abuza.[5]   Despite the compelling arguments which could justify external intervention, the conflict appears to remain entirely domestic. Thus, inaction as a deliberate policy deserves explanation. [6]

3.   Instrumental Intervention

When intervention occurs, third party interests can normally be identified and explained.   In their 1977 work titled *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* Astri Suhrke and Lela Garner Noble categorized motivations as "instrumental or affective."[7] Instrumental intervention is founded upon realist motivations in which external participation is driven by international political considerations, economic motivations, or domestic objectives.[8]   Underlying factors may be opportunistically exploitative,[9] or defensively containing,[10] but the "dynamic of the broader conflict is largely unrelated to the ethnic dimensions of the initial conflict."[11]   Conflicts that generate rising levels of internal violence are more likely to attract external mediation intended to stabilize the situation and prevent its development into a wider regional conflict.

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[4] Astri Suhrke and Lela Garner Noble, eds., *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977): 16.

[5] Zachary Abuza, "Wake Up Call: Six Months After the Thai Coup, Islamist Insurgency is Raging," *Counterterrorism Blog*, comment posted on March 20, 2007, http://counterterrorismblog.org/2007/01/three_years_after_january_2004.php (accessed April 27, 2007).

[6] Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 16. The explanation of "inaction as a deliberate policy" receives no explanation and contains no supporting evidence within Suhrke and Noble's research. In fact, the reference to "inaction" only occurs in a brief footnote.

[7] Ibid., 226.

[8] Realism is a theory utilized in the discipline of international relations. It assumes that the international system is anarchic and comprised of self-interested states that are inherently suspicious of one another and willing to forcefully defend national sovereignty.

[9] Michael E. Brown, "The Causes and Regional Dimensions of Internal Conflict," in *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, ed. Michael E. Brown (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996): 597.

[10] Stephen Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1995): 68.

[11] Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 12.

Instrumental approaches broadly shaped U.S. policies towards the Philippines and Thailand. Both the Philippine and Thai domestic situations remain troubled by militant Islamists seeking various level of autonomy or separatism. Despite the commonalities between the two conflicts, American military forces participate directly in Philippine counter-terrorism operations, yet in Thailand, where insurgent activity is much more extreme, U.S. participation is limited to intelligence collaboration. Why do such large policy differences exist towards the only major non-NATO allies in Southeast Asia? Is the explanation purely instrumental, or are other factors shaping American policy?

4.   Affective Intervention

Affective intervention is inspired by cross boundary ethnic loyalties. The potential for heightened levels of violence and international instability grow "for reasons directly related to ethnicity. Interventionist policies shaped by affective motivations are driven by calls for justice, humanitarian assistance, ethnic, religious, racial or ideological affinity with one of the disputants, or even personal friendships between top protagonists."[12] State boundaries separating ethnically homogenous communities also increase the likelihood of external intervention.[13] Groups sharing a common language, religion, and culture but separated by international borders are likely to align when one of the members is engaged in an ethnic dispute. These actions cannot be labeled "defensive," though interveners often use "defense" as their justification for the intrusion.[14] The stronger the historical ties, the more likely support will be provided.

Analyses of the Thai insurgency often include descriptions of the ethnic kinship between southern Thai Muslims and the Malaysian population. Thai Muslims originally sought irredentist support from bordering Malaysia, but when official support was limited, Thai Muslims instead pursued independence. While Kuala Lumpur's official policy remains anchored on non-interference, the affective connection between the two

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[12] Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1991): 52.

[13] Ganguly and Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*, 42; Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* 54; Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 12.

[14] Brown, "The Causes and Regional Dimensions of Internal Conflict," 597.

communities fuels considerable tension and suspicion in Bangkok. The common ethnic heritage also forces the national leadership in Malaysia to carefully balance domestics and international politics. Overt support for Thai Muslims could weaken Malaysia's regional credibility relating to norms of sovereignty, while inaction could unsettle its Muslim populous. Affective considerations are not limited to the border region. As the chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Malaysia's response to Thailand's Muslim insurgency is magnified within the global Muslim community. With Thailand's cycle of violence escalating, how long will Malaysia be willing to risk spillover of Thailand's conflict? How long can Malaysia gamble that Thai insurgents will not seek fundamentalist support in order to create a pure Islamic state in the border region?

Affective motivations must be considered when evaluating Manila's decision to invite American forces back to the Philippines under the guise of counter-terrorism in 2001. The GRP has been at war with Muslim insurgents since 1972. At that time, the United States maintained a robust navy and air force presence in the Philippines. The ongoing insurgency did not prevent Manila from closing the American naval and air bases there in 1991, after which Manila was considered to have shed the lingering patron-colony relationship with Washington. Why then did Manila resurrect the close military relationship with the United States following September 11, 2001? Was Washington's ambition to root out Islamic insurgents identified by the Christian dominated government in Manila as an opportunity to be exploited? Or were Philippine forces overwhelmed and in need of assistance against a renewed separatist offensive?

International terrorist groups also exploit religious affiliation to create global partnerships among militant Islamists. The tactic worked in the Philippines, where Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah networked with local insurgents. The alliance provided Philippine separatists with significant financial and military resources and created an opportunity for Southeast Asian jihadis to collaborate. The arrangement expanded terrorism's operational reach in the region while at the same time increasing capabilities through knowledge sharing and combined training opportunities. Thai insurgents, however, have not capitalized on the assets solicited by these same international

terrorists. No serious accusations have been made and little hard evidence has been gathered connecting Thai insurgents with international terrorists. So far, Thailand has only served as a meeting place for organization and coordination. Understanding why international terrorists have not exploited their ideological commonality with Thai insurgents is critical in dissecting the insurgency. As both the Philippine and Thai conflicts strengthen the Islamist agenda and undermine western interests in the region, how can the literature explain the robust assistance to Philippine fighters and the exclusion of Thai insurgents?

5. Sovereignty and Self-determination

Both supporters and opponents of intervention can marshal international laws or norms to their advantage. For example, the debate between sovereignty and self-determination highlights an interesting intersection of instrumental and affective motivations. Instrumentalists emphasize the threatening international environment in which state building occurs, while proponents of affective support describe the state building process as the fundamental reason that ethnic minorities rebel. "Self-determination is the central expression of the [affective] position on ethnic minority struggle against state building."[15] As a result, the struggle between sovereignty and self determination receives considerable attention throughout the literature as a primary source of tension and violence.[16]

The degree to which territorial integrity is threatened dictates the likelihood of instrumental intervention by supporters of the nation-state system. The principle of self-determination has been emphasized in policy statements and declarations to include the 1941 Atlantic Charter, Articles 1(2) and 55 of the United Nations Charter; in the 1966 Human Rights Covenants, and in Article 8 of the Helsinki Final Act.[17] Groups that have utilized these documents to legitimate their own self-determination efforts include Sinn

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[15] David Carment and Patrick James, *Wars in the Midst of Peace* (University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, PA): 260.

[16] Ganguly and Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*,42; Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* 54; Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 12.

[17] Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* 54.

Fein, the PLO, Tamil Tigers, and Turkish Cypriots. The hesitancy of nation-states to recognize such claims of self-determination is understandable, as it directly challenges states' rights regarding sovereignty. As such, the right of self-determination threatens the doctrine of sovereignty and attracts international scrutiny. Other nation-states are a natural ally of sovereign governments mired in domestic territorial disputes or secessionist activities, as both parties benefit by defending the legitimacy of the state system. Secessionists, who directly challenge the legitimacy of the state, then balance against the state's international support by seeking outside proponents of self determination.[18]

Malaysia shares a complex history of sovereignty disputes with both the Philippines and Thailand. While tensions with Thailand are the result of the porous border region and alleged Malaysian support for Thai separatists, bilateral disputes with the Philippines center on territorial disagreements surrounding the Borneo state of Sabah and the Spratly Islands. Despite the strained relationship between Kuala Lumpur and Manila, GRP officials invited Malaysian diplomats to mediate a settlement between insurgents and the GRP. The inherent irony is that Malaysia, weighted by its long standing territorial disputes with the Philippines, assists in mediating a settlement aimed at maintaining Philippine sovereignty. Malaysia extended the same deal of mediation recently to Bangkok, who quickly declined the offer. Can Malaysia really act as a neutral mediator in either conflict? Can Malaysia legitimately recommend autonomy for its Muslim brethren? Or will Malaysian officials support sovereignty as indicated by the literature? Malaysia's leadership will certainly be scrutinized by its domestic Muslim population at home as well as the OIC. The impact of Malaysia's mediation cannot be underestimated.

6.   Terrorism and Refugees

Rajat Ganguly and Raymond Taras add discussions of international terrorism and refugee flows. First, they suggest that ethno-nationalists utilize international terrorism as an instrument for elevating a domestic conflict into the international arena. Ethnic

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[18] Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 12.

protagonists lacking the resources to engage in conventional warfare often resort to terrorism. The tactic as part of a larger political goal is inexpensive and highly visible, quickly drawing international attention through globalized media sources. Due to the geographic orientation of both the Philippine and Thai insurgencies, international terrorism remains minimal. In the Philippines, insurgents have attacked targets in Manila and other Christian dominated sections of the country. However, in Thailand, terrorist attacks have been largely isolated to the southern provinces. Does the spread of attacks outside Muslim dominated areas in the Philippines explain the varied levels of international intervention?

Refugee flows internationalize conflicts by the massive flow of people from one state into another. This situation may cause the receiving state to condemn the actions of its neighbor's domestic situation which could destabilize the regional order or even lead to war.[19] In 2005, 131 Thai Muslims sought safe-haven in Malaysia, hoping to find refuge from the "harsh and indiscriminate persecution" reportedly imposed on Muslims by Thai authorities. Instead of repatriating the alleged militants at Bangkok's request, Kuala Lumpur allowed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to interview and screen the group. The effort was viewed by Bangkok as overt interference. Since then, only one of the 131 refugees has been returned to Thailand. Should violence continue to dominate southern Thailand, the possibility of continued refugee flows remains. The geographic construction of the Philippines is the only reason that refugee flows have not resulted in an enormous humanitarian effort there. The Philippine conflict has created more than 500,000 refugees since 1972.

7.   **The Effects of Intervention**

The literature overwhelmingly concludes that intervention by third parties into domestic conflicts negatively affects prospects for peace.[20] External support for one of

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[19] Ganguly and Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension,* 68.

[20] David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement: The International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation* (1996): 42; Carment and James, *Wars in the Midst of Peace*, 260; Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* 65; Brown, "The Causes and Regional Dimensions of Internal Conflict," 328.

the groups increases the level of violence and limits the likelihood of a political settlement. Examples include Serbian support of Serb rebels in Croatia and Bosnia, Indian assistance for Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka, and Iranian arming of Kurdish rebels in Iraq.[21] In each case, intervention decreased the probability of political compromise and increased the intensity of fighting simply by prolonging the conflict and enabling "weaker powers to challenge the stronger."[22]

Instrumental motivations are commonly perceived as "exploitative and lacking sensitivity to local issues. Sides may be taken and new issues introduced to the conflict."[23] If intervention is driven by affective stimulus, then third party participation is viewed as biased towards one side, costing the third party credibility and legitimacy in its effort.[24] In either case, intervention often results in counter intervention, producing the kind of security dilemma that escalates, rather than de-escalates conflicts. Evidence of such activity was witnessed in Lebanon, where Syrian and Israeli participation complicated the conflict, in Cyprus when Greek and Turkish forces resulted in the "de facto partitioning of the state," and in the Angolan Civil war in which South African intervention was countered by Cuban support for the Marxist government.[25]

The conflicts in southern Thailand and the Philippines provide interesting case studies in evaluating this body of literature as well. Southern Thailand has experienced little to no external intervention, as officials in Bangkok and insurgents have both labored to keep the conflict domestic. In the Philippines, however, intervention has occurred on both sides. The United States supported the Philippine government economically and militarily, while international terrorist organizations provided training, materials, and financial resources for Moro insurgent activity. Nonetheless, a peace process has been established in the Philippines, with the recent signing of a cease-fire agreement.

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[21] Brown, "Political Accommodation and the Prevention of Secessionist Violence," in *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, ed. Michael E. Brown (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996): 328.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* 65.

[24] Ganguly and Taras, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*, 117.

[25] Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations,* 65.

Meanwhile, the insurgency in Thailand continues to fester with little hope of relief in the near future. This comparison allows a balanced evaluation of the literature in attempting to determine where current explanations fail in explanatory capability.

8. Conclusion

The war on terrorism has transformed both southern Thailand and the southern Philippines from traditional separatist movements motivated by narrow ethno-political objectives to conflicts representing the interests of much larger international constituencies. As the "second front" in the war on terrorism, these insurgencies became symbols of the struggle between Islamists and the west.[26] As both conflicts affect regional stability, understanding why regional and international actors have pursued interventionist policies in only one contributes to the larger understanding of conflict intervention.

D. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Determining whether domestic conditions or international pressures provide the primary motivation for action is difficult given the subtle and fluid nature of Southeast Asian politics. Research will nonetheless attempt to demonstrate what international factors influence each conflict, and then analyze the effects of international influences on the domestic situations. Understandably, this does not suggest influences are one way. Care will be given to account for domestic conditions which cause international intervention, as well as interventionist activity which influences domestic conditions. Particular emphasis will be given to post-9/11 activities due to the widely controversial perspectives garnered by violent Muslim activities; however, historical trends in intervention will be framed in an effort to put international influences into context.

Primary source documentation of domestic policies which can be positively linked to intervention will be valuable; otherwise, this study will consist largely of

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[26] President George W. Bush, speaking for the State of the Union Address, on January 29, 2002. President Bush referenced the War on Terror's expansion to other fronts and identified the Philippines as an example. Southeast Asia thus became the "second front" of the war.

secondary sources. Scholarly articles, international think-tanks, and the Congressional Research Service provide recent analyses of the situations in both countries. News articles and press releases will provide the most current reports on activities relating to peace negotiations or violent activity.

II.   THAILAND

A.   A BRIEF HISTORY OF THAILAND'S MUSLIM INSURGENCY

After more than forty years of ineffective separatist activities, the Muslim insurgency in Thailand's southern provinces stormed back into action in 2004. The insurgents have been more successful than ever in their efforts to destabilize the country, arguably presenting the greatest risk to the regional stability of Southeast Asia. Insurgent efforts have severely degraded Thailand's political and economic situation, contributing to the motivations for the military coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and caused the deaths of more than 2,300 people in three years.

Having entered its third year, Thailand's southern insurgency "dwarfs any other conflict in Southeast Asia" according to area expert Zachary Abuza.[27] Despite the compelling arguments which could justify external intervention, the conflict appears to remain entirely domestic. The international actors with the most at stake, namely Malaysia, the United States, and international terrorist organizations, each have vested interests in Thailand's future yet remain clear of interventionist policies. Furthermore, each has motivations addressed by the literature on external intervention which suggests that the situation in Thailand warrants some form of intervention.

This chapter will analyze factors affecting Thailand's relationship with each. Analysis first explores the ethnic kinship between Malay Muslims and Thai Muslims, and how this relationship intersects with the broader political realities faced by Kuala Lumpur to produce policies averse to intervention. Secondly, Thai relations with the United States will be examined. Washington persuaded Bangkok to change its resistant posture to the Global War on Terror and adopt a more proactive and cooperative international position. Thaksin's decision was rewarded with the designation of major non-NATO ally, joining the Philippines as the only other major non-NATO ally the region.

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[27] Zachary Abuza, "Wake Up Call: Six Months After the Thai Coup, Islamist Insurgency is Raging," *Counterterrorism Blog*, comment posted on March 20, 2007, http://counterterrorismblog.org/2007/01/three_years_after_january_2004.php (accessed April 27, 2007).

Ironically, both countries are home to violent Muslim insurgencies, and while United States intervened in the Philippines, it did not in Thailand. Finally, this chapter analyzes why parallel objectives between Thai insurgents and international terrorist organizations have not led to closer cooperation. While increasingly sophisticated insurgent operations add to the suspicion of external terrorist assistance, no serious accusations have been made and little hard evidence has been gathered. So far, Thailand has only served as a meeting place for organization and coordination. Understanding why insurgents have not exploited their ideological commonality with global Islamists is critical in dissecting the insurgency.

B.   THAILAND AND MALAYSIA

1.   Ethnic Fault Lines

Like many of the Southeast Asian border disputes, the origin of conflict between Thailand and Malaysia stretches back hundreds of years. Thailand's southern provinces, which border Malaysia, share a common religion, ethnicity, and language with the Malay Muslims to the south yet have been politically incorporated by Thailand since the late 13th century. Thai control over the Malay Peninsula was solidified in a 1909 treaty with the British when Thailand relinquished control of the Malay provinces of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Trengganu and retained the Malay Muslim dominated provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun. "Although this resulted in the political segregation of the Malays, the broad cultural, commercial, and personal bonds between the Malay communities on either side of the border were sustained."[28]

The Muslims of southern Thailand view the border as artificial, and as such various organizations have led separatist and secessionist movements since the late 1940s. An opportunity to redraw the border followed World War II, and Thai Muslims pleaded with British officials to consider an adjustment which would unify Thai and Malaysian Muslims under the Federation of Malaya. Sentiments were divided in

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[28] S.P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage: Investigating the Nature of Conflict in Southern Thailand," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 28 no. 1 (2006): 51.

Malaysia. Officials in Kuala Lumpur distanced themselves from irredentist demands yet officials in Kelantan remained supportive of the Thai Muslim cause.[29] The final British decision did not unify Muslim ethnic groups and maintained the international border separating Thai Muslims from their Malay kin.   Following the British decision, Kelantan's dominant political party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), which had been overtly supportive of Thai Muslim's right of self determination, tempered their support to expressions of "concern and sympathy."[30] Nonetheless, suspicion festered in Bangkok that PAS continued covert support for the active separatist groups in the region.[31]

While PAS officials still dominate contemporary politics in Kelantan, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) maintains control over the national government. As a result, the Thai situation provides an excellent opportunity for PAS leadership to criticize rival UMNO for its own political benefit. PAS officials commonly reference the oppressed Muslims of southern Thailand, appealing to the ethnic kinship between Malay and Thai Muslims in protesting official Malaysian inaction.   UNMO leadership, constrained by international norms, is subtly accused of an unwillingness to help their Muslim "brethren" in Thailand.[32] Malaysian domestic realities and political rhetoric feed Thailand's suspicions of secretive partisan intervention.

Tensions manifest themselves through troubled relationships between national level leaders. For instance, when Thailand's insurgent activity resumed in 2004, Thaksin requested Malaysia's support in containing the conflict. The Malaysian government attributed the unrest to poor socio-economic conditions in southern Thailand, and negotiated a Joint Development Strategy to "improve economic linkages between Thailand's southern provinces and Malaysia's more economically developed northern

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[29] Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 201. Kelantan is the northernmost province in Malaysia and directly borders the Muslim dominated Thai provinces.

[30] Ibid., 202.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Joseph Chinyong Liow, "The Security Situation in Southern Thailand: Toward an Understanding of Domestic and International Dimensions," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (2004): 540.

states."[33]   When Thailand initiated its own brutal efforts to root out insurgents and inflamed extremist activity, Malaysia's cooperative attitude diminished.   Malaysia's Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, was disturbed by Thailand's strategy and expressed concern that the conflict could spread into his country.   In response, Thaksin blamed Malaysia for creating an environment where insurgents could organize and claimed that the Thai insurgents were being trained in the Malaysian jungles of Kelantan.[34]

Further complicating bilateral relations is Malaysia's role as the Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a position Malaysia filled from 2003 to 2006.[35]   In 2005, the world's largest Islamic organization expressed concern over the violent methods employed by Thai forces in the southern provinces.   The widely publicized criticism again met with a contemptuous and defensive Thaksin, who claimed the statement was inappropriate and a violation of Thai sovereignty.   The OIC was split in its support for Thai efforts.   Indonesia, Bahrain, Pakistan, Yemen, and Bangladesh maintained support for Thailand, yet Malaysia remained an outspoken opponent of Thailand's police actions.   Subsequently, Thailand sent a delegation to OIC headquarters in Riyadh "to explain the country's position" and lobby for support from Muslim leadership.[36]   Thai representatives succeeded in ensuring that a "conservatively worded report" on the Thai conflict emerged from the meeting, but did so without the support of Malaysian representatives.[37]   Some analysts allege that Malaysia is utilizing sympathy for Muslims in southern Thailand to "curry favor in the wider Muslim world."[38]

The height of tensions between Thailand and Malaysia occurred in August 2005 when 131 Thai Muslims sought safe-haven in Malaysia, hoping to find refuge from the "harsh and indiscriminate persecution" reportedly imposed on Muslims by Thai

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[33] Ian Storey, "Malaysia's Role in Thailand's Southern Insurgency," *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 5 (March 2007): 7.

[34] Storey, "Malaysia's Role in Thailand's Southern Insurgency," 7.

[35] Claudia Derichs, "Malaysia in 2005," *Asian Survey* 47, no.1 (January/February 2006):173.

[36] Jeerawat Na Thalang and Don Pathan, "Non-interference under the microscope," *The Nation* (July 25, 2005).

[37] Michael Vatikiotis, "Resolving Internal Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Domestic Challenges and Regional Perspectives," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28, no. 1 (2006): 40.

[38] Ibid.

authorities.[39] Instead of repatriating the alleged militants at Bangkok's request, Kuala Lumpur allowed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to interview and screen the group. The effort was viewed by Bangkok as overt interference. Since then, only one of the 131 refugees has been returned to Thailand. Since 2004, more than half of the casualties in southern Thailand have been Muslim, which could increase the likelihood of refugee flows into Malaysia. Insurgents no longer limit attacks to Thai Buddhists, and instead execute anyone suspected of collaborating or sympathizing with state officials. Unless the Thai government can effectively protect innocent Muslims in its south, flows of refugees may increase.

The language of Kelantan, Kuala Lumpur, and Malaysian OIC officials alike demonstrate lingering loyalties between Muslims in Malaysia and southern Thailand. While the official position of Kuala Lumpur is non-interference, considerations of domestic political survival, loyalty to the OIC, fear of refugees, and concern over Thai police actions create a litany of justifications for Malaysian interventionist policies. The dire situation for ethnic kin in southern Thailand complicates Malaysia's ability to disassociate affective links from its international agenda.

2. Malaysian Political Realities

Historical precedents of bilateral cooperation counterbalance Malaysia's ethnic and religious kinship with Thai Muslims. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Malaysian officials were mired in their own insurgency. Kuala Lumpur depended upon Bangkok's goodwill to defeat insurgent activity because the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM), having been driven from Malaysia, operated from Thai territory. Thai officials cooperated with Malaysian efforts to quell the communist insurgency, and in 1965 signed a bilateral border agreement allowing Malaysian security personnel to continue pursuit of insurgents into Thai territory. Thai and Malay officials further agreed to the establishment of a high level border committee which was to meet twice annually.

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[39] Storey, "Malaysia's Role in Thailand's Southern Insurgency," 7.

The border agreement was suspended in 1976 as a result of a major Malaysian operation into the Thai border zone, resulting in the cancellation of the "hot pursuit" clause, the removal of Malaysian police from Thai territory, and Bangkok's request for a revised border agreement. Bangkok's request reflected long standing suspicions about Kuala Lumpur's true intentions. "The clearly understood quid pro quo for the border agreement was Malaysia non-intervention with respect to the Muslim separatists," yet Bangkok was not convinced of Malaysia's good faith.[40]   In fact, officials in Bangkok suspected that Kuala Lumpur might use Thai separatists for its own ends, appealing to their ethnic solidarity in garnering support against the CPM.

Bangkok worried that a Thailand-Malaysia conflict would mobilize Thai Muslims in their own separatist efforts. The two countries finally reached a revised agreement in March 1977. Bangkok allowed Malaysian forces pursuit of CPM forces as well as basing rights in the border region, and Kuala Lumpur reciprocated with mutual pursuit privileges. Conflict between the Malaysian government and CPM was not ended until 1989, and would have been virtually impossible without Bangkok's cooperation. The example illustrates Thai-Malaysian capability to foster cooperative security frameworks despite mutual suspicions of intent. Officials in Kuala Lumpur seem genuinely interested in improving the current bilateral relationship, but the "the Malay Muslim political establishment" and entrenched Thai mistrust have made progress difficult.[41]

Another complicating aspect of the border is the 50,000 to 100,000 people "possessing identity cards from both Thailand and Malaysia."[42]   Not only does this facilitate border access for those with dual citizenship, but it also allows residents of southern Thailand to vote in Malaysian elections. Thus, those people deeply dissatisfied with the situation in Thailand can empower the Malaysian officials most likely to offer support, namely the PAS officials of Kelantan. The issue provides UMNO leadership in Kuala Lumpur considerable incentive to find a solution.

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[40] Suhrke and Noble, *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations,* 204.

[41] Vatikiotis, "Resolving Internal Conflicts," 39.

[42] Storey, "Malaysia's Role in Thailand's Insurgency," 8.

Malaysian fears of conflict spillover are warranted. Should regional or international terrorist organizations infiltrate the conflict, the porous Thai-Malaysian border would leave Malaysia vulnerable to subversive elements in its own Muslim population. Muslims in Kelantan are commonly recognized as the most conservative in Malaysia. Thai separatists' intention to create a pan-Islamic state in Southeast Asia is a popular Islamic notion which would find a receptive audience in Kelantan. Malaysian intervention could contain the Thai conflict while moderating Malaysian Islamist activity and ensuring domestic stability.

3. Explaining Malaysian Non-Intervention

In summary, relations between Thailand and Malaysia have been severely strained by the dynamics of the insurgency. Despite the number of ways in which the Thai conflict could destabilize Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur remains unwilling to intervene. Neither ethnic ties nor border concerns, threats of spillover or the possibility of terrorist infiltration has compelled Malaysia to act. Each affective consideration is tempered by a more politically significant instrumental interest. The most comprehensive explanation of this circumstance is Kuala Lumpur's fear of any legitimate accusation by Bangkok of interference.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remains rooted in its "unique set of diplomatic norms which includes the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states."[43] The first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, affirmed that Malaysia "would not, under any circumstances, extend any sympathy or support for the separatist movement in Southern Thailand," and since then all Malaysian governments have maintained the same strict policies dedicated to non-interference.[44] This fundamental tenet of ASEAN relations severely limits Kuala Lumpur's options to effectively engage Bangkok. If Malaysia intervened on a platform of alleviating the suffering of innocent Thai Muslims, Kuala Lumpur would be intensely

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[43] Hiro Katsumata, "Why Is ASEAN Diplomacy Changing: From 'Non-Interference' to 'Open and Frank Discussions,'" *Asian Survey* 44, no. 2 (2004): 238.

[44] Liow, "The Security Situation in Southern Thailand," 539.

criticized for violating the association's norms of non-interference. If Malaysia intervened by somehow collaborating with Thai counterinsurgency operations, Kuala Lumpur would inflame domestic Muslim constituencies and alienate political supporters at home. Thus, despite theoretically sound justifications for both affective and instrumental interventionist arguments, Malaysia maintains its neutrality in spite of deteriorating conditions in neighboring Thailand.

Thailand's seemingly paranoid but nonetheless persistent suspicions of Malaysian partisanship deserve consideration. Malaysia could easily delay cooperative efforts in the border region, furthering Thailand's domestic instability. Doing so provides Malaysia the upper hand in bilateral relations and maintains Kuala Lumpur's credibility with Malay Muslims. As the border region has been a source of tension for decades, any inability to resolve the dispute would hardly be suspicious. As long as the conflict does not spill over, inaction from Kuala Lumpur provides leverage against Bangkok in regional and international settings.

C. THAILAND AND THE UNITED STATES

1. The Significance of History

Thailand's close ties with the United States were founded upon the shared anti-communist policies of the Cold War. The United States has provided military aid to Thailand since 1950. Both countries signed the Manila Pact of the former Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954, which remains in effect despite SEATO's dissolution in 1977. A mutual defense agreement, known as the Thanat-Rusk communiqué, was reached in 1962. Bilateral relations have not always been smooth, and Bangkok distanced itself from Washington in 1975, largely due to the American defeat in Vietnam. Thailand balanced its relations with the United States by agreeing to a new alliance with China. By the 1980s, Thailand adopted a policy of "omnidirectionality," stating that security concerns were no longer sufficiently addressed "in relation to one

patron-protector (the United States.)"[45]   While the new policy direction indicated an evolution in Thai regional and international considerations, it did not fundamentally change its relationship with the United States. In 1982, the United States and Thailand initiated an annual defense exercise known as Cobra Gold which continues today as the cornerstone of bilateral defense cooperation between Bangkok and Washington.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United States declared war on terrorism. Afghanistan received the bulk of America's attention while the American intelligence apparatus sought out other Al-Qaeda areas of influence. Southeast Asia was identified as having a significant presence of international terrorists. On September 14, 2001, Thailand dismissed outright the possibility that terrorists organized within its borders and declared itself neutral in the war on terror.[46] The very next day, Thaksin publicly reversed the neutrality decision and declared support for U.S. efforts against terrorism, but the gesture clearly defined Thailand's sentiment toward the effort. Part of Prime Minister Thaksin's neutrality response was political. His successful campaign for Prime Minister was laden with "populist, nationalist, anti-foreign platforms." His landslide election demonstrated the popular support for his pro-Asian policies as he distanced himself from Washington.[47] The events of 9/11 occurred while Thailand still begrudged the United States for its response to Thailand's economic problems. Additionally, some officials believed that Thai support for the war on terror would reignite the quieted insurgency, preferring instead to maintain the status quo between the government and the separatist movement.

When coerced into participating, Thai officials became protective of the delicate domestic balance which they believed was aggravated by the war on terror. Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Thaksin requested that the Bush administration not publicly identify Thailand as a member of the U.S. led "coalition of the willing."[48]   When

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[45] Clark D. Neher, "The Foreign Policy of Thailand," in *The Political Economy of Foreign Policy in Southeast Asia*, David Wurfel and Bruce Burton, eds., (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1990): 193.

[46] Paul Chambers, "U.S. Thai Relations After 9/11: A New Era in Cooperation," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 3, no. 26 (December 1, 2004): 465.

[47] Ibid., 463-464.

[48] Ibid., 467.

identified by CNN as a "silent partner" in the effort, Thaksin evaded direct questions on Thailand's official position. He attempted to balance Thailand's loyalty to the United States against six million Thai Muslims. Maintaining a strong military alliance with the United States was popular with the Thai military, but the Muslim population represented a significant voting bloc and powerful lobby supportive of Thaksin's political party.[49] In the end, Thaksin not only declared support for the war on terror, but dedicated 443 troops to assist in Iraq in 2003. Thailand's support for the Iraq War reinforced the strong military relationship valued by both Washington and Bangkok, and contributed to Thailand's designation as a major non-NATO ally in October 2003.

Thaksin rode a tide of pro-Asian promises into the Prime Minister's office, but changed course following the events of September 2001 after receiving intense pressure from domestic and international sources to support the war on terror. Concentrated diplomatic efforts by Washington lobbied Bangkok to "both cooperate more fully against terror and to participate in Washington's campaign in Iraq."[50] The political momentum generated by the war on terrorism deteriorated the already tenuous relationship between Bangkok and Thai Muslims and contributed to the resurgence of separatist activity in the southern provinces. Thailand's decision to contribute troops to Iraq, as well as yielding to American requests to use U-Tapao Air Base to fight terrorism met harsh resistance from the Muslim community. Thai Muslims largely interpreted Thaksin's agreement to Washington's requests as a political ploy to become a major U.S. ally in the region.[51] The issue unified Muslim extremists and moderates in southern Thailand who identified themselves as the true targets in the war on terror.

2.   **Domestic Complications**

As Thaksin supported the war on terrorism internationally, domestic activities escalated. Several law enforcement operations in 2002 and 2003 forced Thaksin into acknowledging a terrorist presence in Thailand. Investigations discovered that the Bali

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[49] Chambers, "U.S. Thai Relations," 467.

[50] Ibid., 468.

[51] Ibid., 469.

bombings had been planned in Bangkok. Several law enforcement operations resulted in the arrests of Al-Qaeda or JI operatives in Thailand, and the arrests of Thai citizens working abroad for terrorist organizations. The string of events significantly altered Bangkok's approach to counterterrorism. Dismissive policies quickly gave way to aggressive counterterrorism operations. Thai security forces, no longer reluctant participants in the war on terror, instead began indiscriminate suppression of Muslim activities in the southern provinces, to include "large scale mass arrests and holding innocent individuals without charge."[52]

Two events in 2004 highlighted Bangkok's mistaken approach to insurgent violence. The widely publicized Krue Se Mosque and Tak Bai incidents embodied poor strategic responses by government agencies, and provided considerable influence for militants to rally support. As if these events themselves did not provide enough motivation for insurgents, Prime Minister Thaksin and several army officials worsened the situation through insensitive and ignorant statements to the press. Both Thaksin and his security forces grossly underestimated the effects from their missteps and reignited the smoldering insurgency. Thaksin's actions not only created animosity among domestic constituencies, but drew widespread criticism from regional and international sources to include the United States.

Insurgent activity from January 2004 to October 2006 weakened popular support for the Thaksin administration that appeared incapable of effectively handling the situation. Frustration with Thaksin's leadership culminated in October 2006 when a military coup removed the Prime Minister from office. The junta blamed government corruption and the erosion of democratic institutions for the growing cycle of violence in the Muslim provinces. Coup leaders proclaimed their intention to pursue peaceful negotiations with the insurgents in an effort to address historical grievances. The violence, however, has only escalated since October 2006, as the extremists take

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[52] U.S. Department of State, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Threat and Response," special report prepared for an international conference organized by the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies and Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism , U.S. Department of State, April 12, 2006.

advantage of the government instability. The pre-coup average of 1.65 killings per day spiked to two killings per day in the 90-day period following Thaksin's removal.[53]

Despite the intense escalation of violent Muslim extremism and Bangkok's complete inability to quell the violence, American counterterrorism operations within Thailand were limited to "joint CTIC-CIA activities."[54] The collaborative effort collected information on regional terrorist suspects, though focus shifted to the southern provinces with increased insurgent operations.[55] More significantly, Thailand did not request any U.S. military assistance in the south, whereas the region's other major non-NATO ally, the Philippines, used its Islamic insurgency to garner a ten fold increase in American aid from 2001 to 2002.[56] The United States also dedicated 200 forces to the Philippines for an annual joint exercise, and 190 Special Forces to train Philippines Army personnel in counterterrorism tactics. The robust American response to the Philippines stands in stark contrast to the situation in Thailand. The most reasonable explanation is constraints created by the domestic conditions in Thailand, which prevented Washington from taking a more proactive counter-insurgent contribution.

3.   Explaining U.S. Non-Intervention

The U.S. position towards Thailand has been controversial since 2001. Thaksin's "war on drugs" seriously complicated diplomatic relations. In 2003 the United States expressed concern regarding 2,274 people officially killed in counter-drug operations, culminating in an official letter of reproach to Thaksin requesting an explanation for the

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[53] Zachary Abuza, "Three Years after the January 2004 Raids, the Insurgency in Southern Thailand is Building Momentum," Counterterrorism Blog, comment posted on January 3, 2007, http://counterterrorismblog.org/2007/01/three_years_after_january_2004.php (accessed March 7, 2007).

[54] Chambers, "U.S. Thai Relations," 468. CTIC is a joint Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Center established in coordination with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in 2001.

[55] Shawn Crispin, "Thailand's War Zone," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 167, no.10 (March 2004): 13.

[56] Renato Cruz de Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relation: A Ghost From the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2003): 491. U.S. aid to the Philippines grew from a paltry $1.9 million in 2001 to $19 million in 2002.

killings.[57] Fortunately for Bangkok, these criticisms occurred at the same time that Washington pressured Bangkok to join the Iraq War coalition.

Washington's foreign policy goals for Thailand became increasingly confused. "A letter circulated by Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich among U.S. lawmakers read in part: 'Thailand is no longer the most democratic, open and free partner of the United States in Southeast Asia that it once was'."[58] But the Bush Administration had to temper its human rights concerns with the priority of combating terrorism. Thailand's participation in Iraq and strategic value in Southeast Asia took precedence over other concerns. Bangkok promised to conduct investigations into the killings, and Washington seemed content to focus on cooperation in the war on terror.

The next major complication for diplomatic relations was the 2006 coup d'état when the popularly elected Thaksin was forcefully removed from office by military officers. Prior to the coup, Thailand's government was respected as a democratic leader in Southeast Asia. Following the coup, Washington had to balance its emphasis on democratic institution building in the Middle East with an inconvenient interruption of democratic governance in a major ally. Fortunately for Bangkok, Washington was forced to look the other way in favor of maintaining support for its broader counterterrorism initiatives.

Washington's consideration for international Islamic opinion deserves mention as an additional impediment to American intervention. Unlike the situations in the Philippines and Indonesia where U.S. Special Forces provided assistance against identified terrorist organizations, Thailand has been strangely excluded from counterterrorist or counterinsurgent assistance from the United States. Concern exists among American officials that "any assistance, however passive, would be immediately misunderstood by the local population."[59] The American precedents set in Afghanistan in 2001, the Philippines in 2002, and Iraq in 2003 demanded that Washington's policy

[57] Chambers, "U.S. Thai Relations," 472.

[58] Chambers, "U.S. Thai Relations," 472-473.

[59] Benjamin Pauker, "Thailand: A Fire This Time," *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2005/2006): 85.

towards resurgent Thai separatists in 2004 exhibit a prudent and measured response. Any desire for overt intervention had to consider Thai public reaction as the domestic Muslim population was still angered by Thaksin's support for the Iraq War. The decision to avoid directly influencing Thailand's domestic response may have been a conscious effort to avert escalating moderate Muslims or inviting global terrorist involvement.[60]

These series of events demonstrate two points. First, Washington's priorities are anchored by instrumental considerations tied to the Iraq War. In supporting the coalition, Thailand secured steadfast American support. Secondly, domestic political turmoil in Thailand prevented a genuine opportunity for American support following the 2004 insurgent revival. Thaksin's inept handling of the situation inflamed public sentiment. Washington's intervention then would have encouraged and even prolonged Thaksin's autocratic behavior. Following the 2006 coup, Washington had to distance itself from Bangkok and maintain support for the ousted administration which, despite the backlash, was popularly elected. Thus, domestic problems in Bangkok effectively prohibited counter-insurgency assistance from the United States. Unless Bangkok officially requests assistance from the United States regarding its struggles with Islamic insurgents, Washington will remain clear and encourage Bangkok to address its own domestic issues.

D. THAILAND AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS

1. Thailand's Vulnerabilities

Thailand's accessibility provides an ideal place for international terrorist networking to occur due to its ease of access for people and money. Transnational criminals laid the groundwork for all kinds of subversive activity.[61] Thailand's notorious black market arms trade is supported by criminals and Thai military officials alike. Thailand's drug trade has perfected techniques of money laundering and corruption. It has lenient immigration and visa requirements and is surrounded by nations mired in their

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[60] Pauker, "Thailand: A Fire This Time," 85.

[61] Donald E. Weatherbee, *International Relations in Southeast Asia,* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc: 2005): 156.

own insurgencies and conflicts.[62] But with the exception of a few links between international terrorists and Thai collaborators, investigators have found no significant relationships between Thai insurgents and international terrorist organizations.

The lack of intervention by international terrorist organizations in southern Thailand stands out due to the parallel objectives between the groups. Al Qaeda's "strategic objective" is the "re-establishment an Islamic caliphate," and a demonstrated means to achieve this end is the exploitation of narrowly defined domestic conflicts like Thailand's. [63] Al Qaeda aims to cultivate domestic disturbances, and then sew them together "into the context of the wider global struggle."[64] As Thai insurgents fight to transform Thailand's southern provinces into an Islamic state governed by sharia law, their goals appear to align perfectly with Al Qaeda's agenda. Thai insurgents would undoubtedly benefit from the financial resources and expertise available from Al Qaeda, so why does a lack of collaboration between the two groups persist?

One proposed explanation is that Thai insurgents credit their successes to the currently employed strategy. The government is completely unable to govern the southern provinces.[65] Militants are free to choose the location and timing of their operations with little concern for getting caught. Government officials, army personnel, and police officers are seen as targets of violence and therefore shunned by the communities they hope to protect. The deteriorated situation in Thailand's southern provinces now allows the insurgents to focus on the development of an Islamic state governed by sharia law, contributing to the regional pursuit of a pan-Islamic state in Southeast Asia.

[62] Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003): 173.

[63] Zachary Abuza, "Three Years After the 2004 Raids, the Insurgency in Southern Thailand in Building Momentum," *Counterterrorism Blog,* January 3, 2007, http://counterterrorismblog.org/2007/01/three_years_after_january_2004.php, (accessed March 7, 2007).

[64] Michael D. Maples, "Threat Assessment," testimony for the Committee on Senate Select Intelligence, *Congressional Quarterly,* January 11, 2007.

[65] Anthony Davis, "Village Violence – Thai insurgents heighten communal tensions," Jane's Intelligence Review, June 1, 2007, http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/ janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2007/jir10164.htm@current&pageSelected=&keyword=&backPath=http://jtic. janes.com/JDIC/JTIC&Prod_Name=JIR&activeNav=http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC (accessed August 7, 2007).

2. Insurgent Transformation

Today's militants have accomplished what past Thai separatists were unable to by transforming the nature of the insurgency. Planning and recruitment largely began with youth who were contacted through Islamic schools. Historical attempts by government officials to secularize Islamic schooling created the fertile environment which insurgents targeted. During the 1960s, the Islamic schools were forced to supplement their religious curricula with secular subjects. Those schools unwilling to cooperate were closed. Islamic schools decreased from 535 in 1961 to 189 in the early 1990s. Since then, privately funded religious schools in Thailand have seen a remarkable resurgence. In 2004, Thailand had 500 registered Islamic schools, more than 2000 teachers, and over 25,000 students. In the last fifteen years, more than 2,500 Thai Muslims were educated in Saudi Arabia, and 2,500 more Thai students attended Islamic schools elsewhere in the Middle East and South Asia.[66] The domestic and foreign Islamic educational opportunities are largely financed through Islamic charities and other Middle Eastern organizations. The religious curricula are dictated by the financiers and are based on more fundamental types of Islam which are reshaping the identity of Thai Muslims. Students studying abroad often return to Thailand in search of jobs in education, providing a conduit to ambitious and vulnerable young Muslims open more fundamentalist types of Islam.

Today's Islamic schools provide insurgents ideal centers of organization and recruitment. Islamic clerics and teachers not only provide ideological mentoring but act as intermediate evaluators of student "piety, impressionability, and agility."[67] Students are recruited through a trusted teacher or cleric, normally through invitations to prayers

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[66] Aurel Croissant, "Unrest in South Thailand: Contours, Causes, and Consequences Since 2001," *Strategic Insights* 4, no. 2, February 2005, http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/index.asp (accessed January 16, 2007).

[67] Asia Report N°98, "Thailand Violence: Insurgency Not Jihad," (Singapore: International Crisis Group, 2005), http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3436&CFID=7585514&CFTOKEN=27923812 (accessed January 25, 2007).

meetings. Those choosing to join are sworn to secrecy, trained in weapons, sabotage, recruitment, or propaganda and expected to build an operational insurgent cell.[68]

In creating a youth movement to indoctrinate members and compel them to the radical ideology, insurgents have transformed the ineffective organization of past separatist movements. No longer a collection of disorganized and independent protesters, the insurgency is now comprised of a highly effective and exceedingly violent network of cells. The insurgents tend to organize into small groups known as RKK (Runda Kumpulan Kecil, small patrol groups) which number five or six people. The exceedingly flat network is suspected of reaching 500 of the 2,000 villages of the Southern Thai provinces, while the larger organization of the National Revolutionary Front - Coordinate stretches into 800 of those same villages.[69] Most RKK cells do not interact and rarely know the identities of their counterparts. Tactical decisions have been pushed increasingly to lower levels. The decentralized, small unit organization continues to baffle counterinsurgent efforts. Through the end of 2005, the Thai security presence swelled to between 20,000 and 30,000 army and police personnel within the Muslim provinces, creating a ratio of security personnel to insurgents of 30:1. Despite the overwhelming numbers, Thai intelligence and security officials failed to identify the participants or leadership engaged in terrorist activities.

The imposition of increasingly radicalized Islam on young Thai Muslims allows insurgents to capitalize on a larger trend emerging in Southeast Asia. The voices of tolerant and pluralist Muslims who historically dominated the region and their secular governments have been drowned by a dangerous and intolerant form of Islam emanating from the Middle East. Evidence of intolerance is seen in the shifting targets among Thai insurgents. Traditional targets were primarily Thai Buddhists and government officials whereas today's insurgents also execute uncooperative Muslims. Insurgents kill anyone who receives a paycheck from the government, teachers who support mixed curriculums,

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[68] Asia Report N°98, "Thailand Violence: Insurgency Not Jihad."

[69] *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, "Thailand's Rocky Future," (January 2007) http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jtsm/history/jtsm2007/jtsm5044.htm@current&pageSelected=&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC&Prod_Name=JTSM&iFrame=true&type=analysis&country=Thailand (accessed March 1, 2007).

Muslim clerics willing to perform burial rites for apostates, and other collaborators.[70] Incidents of beheadings have increased dramatically. Sixty teachers have been killed as state schools are often seen as tools for state assimilation. Some teachers were executed in front of their classrooms.[71] Many state schools in the south have been closed, and those which remain open are targets for arson or bombing, forcing Muslim youths to attend private Islamic schools.

The insurgency has succeeded in creating some Islamic institutions in the south to replace defunct government offices. "Ad hoc sharia courts" provide the only means of official conflict resolution. Insurgents have prevented women from giving birth in state hospitals. Beyond concern for the safety of mothers and children, wider concerns include unregistered births which prevent children from attending state schools and block accessibility to the state healthcare system. The examples portray an insurgency unconcerned about garnering widespread Muslim support in southern Thailand, and instead pursuing a religiously founded Islamist agenda.[72]

3.   Explaining International Terrorism's Non-intervention

Insurgent leadership is no longer driven by the political motivation of independence and autonomy. Instead, they have applied an Islamic fundamentalist approach to a Communist revolutionary model employed in Thailand years ago.[73] Insurgents utilized the same seven step process as Thai Communist revolutionaries to expand the organization, but then focused on religious motivation as opposed to a Communist economic and political agenda. The change demonstrates a tactical shift away any intention to "liberate Patani from Thailand" in favor of "liberating Muslims

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[70] Zachary Abuza, "Alternative Futures for Thailand's Insurgency," *Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 3 (January 2006), http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369876 (accessed March 7, 2007).

[71] Ibid.

[72] Abuza, "Three Years After the 2004 Raids." The theory of an Islamic insurgency is a minority view in the analyses of Thailand. Officials in Bangkok remain steadfast in their belief that insurgents are not religiously motivated.

[73] Thammanoon Maisonti, "A Proposal to Address the Emerging Muslim Separatist Problem in Thailand," (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), 25.

from the infidels."[74] Thus, insurgents are motivated by a puritanical from of Islam which has inspired pursuit of an Islamic state in southern Thailand regardless of Bangkok's position. In the three years since the insurgency reignited, they have realized widespread success. Having restructured and decentralized the organization, created effective institutions for recruitment, and employed an exceedingly violent but still low intensity

strategy, today's insurgents have accomplished what previous separatists could not. Most significantly, they have achieved success without allowing international terrorist organizations to intervene.

In essence, by preventing the incorporation of international terrorist networks, the insurgency has maintained its status as a domestic problem and avoided massive international intervention. As seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines, the presence of Al Qaeda personnel quickly results in international counterterrorism operations and participation by American or coalition forces. At this point, both the insurgency and international terrorists must be perfectly content with the situation in southern Thailand. Any assistance from international terrorists could just as quickly be detrimental to the insurgency's operation.

E.   CONCLUSION

The continuation of the Thai insurgency as a completely domestic struggle defies scholarship on conflict intervention. The escalating nature of ethnic violence, cross boundary kinship, and tragic loss of life all suggest that international actors should attempt to secure their own interests in southern Thailand. Yet, those parties with the most to gain or lose remain outside observers. This chapter has examined why the benefits of intervening do not outweigh the costs.

For Malaysia, longstanding ethnic ties with Muslims in southern Thailand cannot overcome ASEAN's expectations of non-interference. Neither kinship nor fears of conflict spillover have trumped this institutional norm. The ability of PAS officials in

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[74] Maisonti, "A Proposal to Address the Emerging Muslim Separatist Problem in Thailand," 25.

Kelantan to continually criticize UMNO inaction persists as a chronic vulnerability of the national leadership. Nonetheless, regional pressure to conform to the ASEAN mold has been institutionalized, exposing Malaysia to a dangerously unstable environment in southern Thailand. At this point, Malaysian intervention to assist Muslim victims may be more likely than support for insurgents. Hesitation on securing the border and allowing refugees access may demonstrate Malaysia's unspoken intentions.

The United States needs all possible international support for its controversial war on terror. Washington's priorities lie with efforts in Iraq, and those nations remaining supportive of coalition efforts will be rewarded for their solidarity. The balancing of democratic freedoms with enhanced security has not been resolved in the United States, so holding a close ally accountable for the same condition seems unlikely. Thailand's struggle between democracy and security is a byproduct of terrorism that Washington has political capital to accept. Simply stated, Thailand's strategic value to U.S. interests outweighs concerns for the simmering insurgency. Any intervention by American forces will occur only after receiving an official request from Bangkok.

Thai insurgents share sharply parallel interests with international terrorist organizations. Nonetheless, insurgents maintain the domesticity of the conflict by keeping international supporters away. In doing so, insurgents avoid attracting an overwhelming international coalition dedicated to defeating their Islamist movement. Up to this point, Thai insurgents have been extremely successful. Southern Thailand remains ungovernable and security forces are little more than vulnerable targets. Residents in southern Thailand have no faith in their government to provide protection or defeat the insurgency. As a result, insurgents are more than willing to continue with their strategy, which has achieved their domestic objective while remaining at a level which does not attract broader international attention.

III.   THE PHILIPPINES

A.   A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES' MUSLIM INSURGENCY

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) has battled against Islamic separatism for more than 35 years. The war, which began in 1972, has claimed more than 130,000 lives and generated more than 500,000 refugees.[75] The first modern organization to demand independence for the Moro people was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).[76] With the "tacit sympathy of Malaysia" and the "favor of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)," the MNLF initiated its deadly armed conflict against the government in 1973.[77] After only three years, the MNLF and GRP signed the Tripoli Agreement which granted autonomy to areas in which a Muslim majority resided. The government took an astonishing fourteen years to approve legislation enacting the agreement, and a final peace settlement was not signed until 1996.

The MNLF, which had initially sought independence yet settled for autonomy, was factionalized in its support for the agreement. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) separated from the MNLF in 1977 and competed politically with the MNLF for Muslim favor. Having rejected the Tripoli Agreement, the MILF continued to pursue independence militarily. A smaller but highly radical organization, known as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), rejected the agreement as well. ASG split from the MNLF in 1991 to pursue its own violent efforts to create a Muslim state in the southern Philippines. The Philippine government subsequently failed to implement its promises of development and economic growth for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Much of

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[75] Andrew Tan, *Armed Muslim Rebellion in Southeast Asia: Persistance, Prospects, and Implications*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 23(2000): 268.

[76] The term Moro is derived from the Spanish word for Moor, meaning Muslim. The Spanish began settling in the Philippines in 1565.

[77] Donald E. Weatherbee, *International Relations In Southeast Asia: The Struggle for Autonomy* (Lahnam: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005): 145.

the popular support for the MNLF diminished. Hopes for a renewed push towards independence became associated with the MILF and widespread loyalties shifted away from the MNLF.[78]

MILF led insurgent activity continued through the latter part of the 1990s. International awareness grew of MILF collaboration with the terrorist organizations ASG, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and Al Qaeda just as the MILF and the GRP agreed to a cease fire agreement in 2001.[79] While separatist activity in the Philippines was rarely isolated domestically, the presence of transnational terrorist organizations combined with a post–September 11 counterterrorism environment to redefine the Moro insurgency. As a result, external dimensions of the conflict grew. In leading the retaliation against the 9/11 attackers, the United States quickly developed a plan to assist Philippine forces combat embedded Al Qaeda terrorists as well as Moro insurgents.[80] Washington promised personnel and funding for Philippine efforts under the auspices of the Global War on Terrorism. Regional concern was represented by neighboring Malaysia, who for years was plagued domestically by spillover effects of Moro activity.[81] As a Muslim majority nation and an international leader in Muslim affairs, Malaysia was critical to the resumption of talks, guaranteeing Muslim representation as the facilitator of MILF and GRP negotiations.[82] In sum, intervention by international terrorists, U.S. counterterrorist operatives, and Malaysian settlement mediators continue to play an integral role in the Philippine conflict.

This chapter will analyze the intervention of Malaysia, the United States, and international terrorist organizations into the Moro conflict. Each has significant histories with the Philippines which influence its interventionist policy. Furthermore, each has an impact on prospects for peace. An understanding of the external dimensions contributes

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[78] Weatherbee, *International Relations In Southeast Asia,* 146.

[79] CRS Report RL31672, Terrorism in Southeast Asia, August 13, 2004, 18.

[80] CRS Report RL31265, Abu Sayyaf: Target of U.S.-Philippine Counterterrorism Cooperatoin, July 26, 2007, 11.

[81] Paridah Abd. Samad and Abu Bakar, *Malaysia-Philippines Relations: The Issue of Sabah*, Asian Survey 32, no. 6 (June 1992): 554.

[82] Weatherbee, *International Relations In Southeast Asia,* 146.

to a broader appreciation of the delicate balance which must simultaneously address the root causes of Islamic unrest, eliminate extremism, and establish domestic stability. Section one discusses Malaysia's role in the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Kuala Lumpur, an outspoken representative for Islamic issues and Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference from 2003 through 2006, must certainly be driven by religious unanimity with the Moro nation. However, its official position is complicated by lingering bilateral disputes with the Philippine government surrounding the state of Sabah on the island of Borneo. How Malaysia balances Islamic solidarity with ASEAN norms is critical in analyzing Kuala Lumpur's effectiveness as the primary peace facilitator.

Section two addresses the vastly improved U.S.-Philippines relations which followed the attacks of September 11. Philippine President Gloria Arroyo was reported to be "the first Asian leader to have called President Bush following the attacks."[83] In her show of solidarity with Washington and willingness to support the War on Terror, President Arroyo secured "$92 million in military equipment" as well as American forces to assist in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf Group.[84] American officials from the United States Institute for Peace participate actively in the peace process. Thus, Washington's influence is significant diplomatically and militarily in the conflict. Whether its humanitarian efforts or security initiatives are weighted evenly will influence American effectiveness in establishing stability.

Section three examines the complicating influence of international terrorist organizations for the peace process. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), al-Qaeda's regional affiliate, and the Abu Sayyaf Group are identified on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations and are known to have trained in MILF camps. The GRP has opposed labeling the MILF as terrorists, fearing the designation would impede negotiations. While the MILF

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[83] Mel C. Labrador, "The Philippines in 2001: High Drama, a New President, and Setting the Stage for Recovery," *Asian Survey* 42, no. 1 (January-February 2001): 147.

[84] Gaye Christoffersen, "The War on Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Searching for Partners, Delimiting Targets," *Strategic Insights*, March 2002, http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/index.asp (accessed January 28, 20007).

relationship with JI and ASG remains suspect, the mere presence of JI and ASG fuels doubt that a peaceful settlement with the MILF will end separatism in the Philippines.

B.   THE PHILIPPINES AND MALAYSIA

1.   Bilateral Tensions

The relationship between Manila and Kuala Lumpur has endured several disputes that underpin the current situation. The first controversy focuses on the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. A 1995 dispute regarding Mischief Reef, which had previously been limited to the Philippines and China, expanded to include Malaysia in June of 1999. Manila accused Kuala Lumpur of building structures on Philippine claims and threatened to build its own structures on disputed areas if the situation remained contentious. Malaysia denied that its buildings were on Philippine territory and proposed to resolve the issue through ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

Another problematic situation between the two countries concerned the strained relationship between national leaders. In 1998, Philippine President Joseph Estrada harshly criticized Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's treatment of his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim. Estrada's comments on the Malaysian domestic political crisis were labeled by Mahathir as "unacceptable conduct and an infringement on Malaysian sovereignty."[85] Estrada was a personal friend of Ibrahim and used his professional status as a platform to protest a perceived injustice. Estrada subsequently held a personal meeting with Ibrahim's wife and daughter, but backed away from further confrontation following guidance from his own political advisors.[86]

The oldest and most significant dispute surrounds the East Malaysian state of Sabah. The Philippine government believes that an 1878 treaty leased the territory to the British North Borneo Company, while the Malaysian government claims that the territory was purchased. In its 1963 expansion of the Federation of Malaysia, the British included

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[85] N. Ganesan, *Bilateral Tensions in Post Cold War ASEAN* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999) 48.

[86] Ibid.

the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak. The Philippines disputed Britain's legal claim to the territory, but received little international attention despite the severance of bilateral ties in 1963. The situation remains unresolved today, and Sabah's inclusion to the Federation of Malaysia is as much due to Philippine inaction towards Sabah as it is to any legal resolution.[87]

2.   Malaysian Precedents of Ethnic Intervention

In discussing the current relationship between the Philippines and Malaysia, the highlighted disputes provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of bilateral grievances. However, in analyzing the Philippines struggle against southern insurgents, consideration must be given to Malaysia's history of support of separatist activity. Sabah lies only ten miles from the Sulu archipelago. The geographic orientation of the area resulted in a population well suited to maritime trade and travel, and regular interaction occurred between ethnic groups in Sulu and Sabah. When separatist activity in the Philippines increased in the early 1960s, Sabah's political leader was Tun Mustapha, an ethnic Tausig, which is the same ethnic group from which the chairman of the MNLF came.[88] Allegations persisted of Sabah's "toleration, even assisting the provision of military supplies to the Muslim rebels and providing sanctuary for Moro fighters."[89] Further accusations followed that Tun Mustapha allowed Moro separatists to establish training camps, logistical supply points, and communication hubs in Sabah from which arms were smuggled to guerillas in Mindanao and to which casualties were returned for medical attention. The Malaysian government has never admitted assisting Philippine insurgents in their struggle for independence; however, experts assert that "Malaysian assistance gave the essential incentive to Moro separatists and enabled the Moros to elevate the level of conflict from a fight for equality and justice to a war of liberation, demanding self-determination."[90]

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[87] Ganesan, *Bilateral Tensions in Post Cold War ASEAN*, 48.

[88] Paridah Abd. Samad and Abu Bakar, *Malaysia-Philippines Relations: The Issue of Sabah*, Asian Survey 32, no. 6 (June 1992): 558.

[89] Ibid., 558-559.

[90] Ibid., 560.

Malaysian assistance for Moro fighters diminished in the late 1970s due to a transfer of political power in Sabah. New leadership reflected popular angst by non-Muslim Sabahans that the influx of Philippine immigrants tipped the balance of political influence. Policies of accommodation for Moro militants ceased in Sabah, but were replaced with effort to increase support for the Moro cause internationally. Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, promoted the plight of the Moro people to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. As the OIC's secretary-general from 1971 until 1973, he presented the situation to influential Muslim countries and secured OIC support for the southern Philippine Muslims. Ironically, motivation for gaining OIC visibility was not believed to have been driven by any religious or ethnic sense of duty, but instead as a coercive attempt at convincing the Philippine government to relinquish its claim for Sabah.[91]

3. Affective versus Instrumental Motivations

The main issue in Sabah today concerns an influx of Philippine Muslims from Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.[92] The area has been the home of sea gypsies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with little to no accountability for the movement of people between Sulu and Sabah. Today's Philippine immigrant population in Sabah has surpassed 600,000 people and wields considerable influence upon Sabah's domestic political agenda. Competition between Malaysian citizens and Philippine immigrants has grown more intense.[93] Legal Philippine immigrants who have resettled in Sabah harbor sympathy and support for those fleeing Philippines today in search of a better life. However, concerns surrounding the vast numbers of Philippine refugees are hotly debated in terms of security and public health.[94]

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[91] Paridah Abd. Samad and Abu Bakar, *Malaysia-Philippines Relations: The Issue of Sabah*, 560.

[92] Kamal Sadiq, "When States Prefer Citizens Over Non-Citizens: Conflict Over Illegal Immigration in Malaysia," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 1(March 2005): 105.

[93] Ibid., 116.

[94] Irwan Shah and Zainal Abidin, "What's Needed Is a Total Package," *New Straits Times*, July 6, 2007.

The presence of terrorists in Southeast Asia also generates demand among counterterrorism officials for improved accountability of the movement of people between the Philippines and Malaysia.[95]   The area between Sulu and Sabah remains a prime operating area for the Abu Sayyaf Group, drawing intense scrutiny from Malaysian and Philippine counterterrorism officials.   Additionally, the elevated levels of Filipino immigration to Sabah have driven Malaysian attempts to stop immigration completely. The sheer numbers of immigrants have strained the infrastructure in Sabah.   Fears surround the spread of infectious disease and the costs of caring for those awaiting deportation. [96]   Officials in Sabah responded to citizens' demands to deport illegal immigrants and repeatedly criticized the Philippine government for the perceived lack of cooperation repatriating its citizens.[97]

4.   Malaysian Mediation

Due to its effects across the archipelagic region and throughout Southeast Asia, the Moro insurgency could no longer be considered a Philippine domestic issue. In 2000, the Sipadan hostage crisis was closely followed by then Philippine President Joseph Estrada's "all out war" declaration against the MILF.[98]   Malaysian officials became increasingly concerned about the Philippines deteriorating security situation, which threatened Malaysia's tourist industry as well as regional counterterrorism initiatives. Dr. Kamarulzaman Askandar, Coordinator of Research and Education for Peace, School, and Social Sciences as well as the Regional Coordinator of Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network was quoted as saying, "the events in South Philippines have become part of our

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[95] Karl Wilson, "Weak Borders Add to Threat," *The Australian,* October 4, 2005.

[96] Irwan Shah and Zainal Abidin, "What's Needed Is a Total Package," *New Straits Times*, July 6, 2007.

[97] Government Denies Blocking Sabah Deportations, *Manila Standard*, April 5, 2007.

[98] The Sipidan hostage crisis refers to an Abu Sayyaf operation in which guerillas raided against a resort in Sabah. ASG operatives attacked the resort by boat, capturing 21 vacationers and staff personnel who were then held for ransom. Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism promised similar attacks would never happen again, yet only five months later hostages were seized in a similar operation from Pandanan Island.

national interest."[99]   In a separate academic observation, he noted that Malaysia would play an even larger role "because it is in the interest of Malaysia that the conflict is resolved. If the negotiations break down, Malaysia will do something to get it started again. It will want to do more. It is not just a Philippine problem but a Malaysian problem because of its effects."[100]

President Arroyo recognized Malaysian ambitions upon assuming the presidency in 2001 and created a central role for Kuala Lumpur in the Philippine peace process. Malaysian involvement was integral to Arroyo's peace plan because MILF officials conditioned their willingness to negotiate on the inclusion of the OIC or an OIC member. Thus, both sides of the Philippine negotiating table valued Malaysian participation, establishing Malaysia's role as an acceptable mediator.[101]

Malaysian participation in the Philippine peace process officially began in March 2001. A variety of titles exist for Malaysia's position, but descriptions of Malaysian involvement are consistent. First, Malaysia acts as the host for all sessions, "providing an atmosphere that is conducive to negotiations."[102] Malaysian officials are present for all discussions and limit support to administrative duties during straightforward deliberations. When contentious issues arise, Malaysian mediators assume a more central role, "providing advice" on difficult issues or "proposing a way around" the impasse.[103] "It is a referee's role," according to Secretary Eduardo R. Ermita, Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process. "The presence of Malaysia's representative is important as a witness to important commitments or understandings, some of which many not have been put in

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[99] Interview with Dr. Kamarulzaman Askandar, Coordinator, of Research and Education for Peace, School, and Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Regional Coordinator, Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network, on June 21, 2002 at USM, Minden, Penang. Quoted in Soliman M. Santos, Jr., *Malaysia's Role in the Peace Negotiations Between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front*, The Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network, 21 May 2003, 37.

[100] Santos, *Malaysia's Role in the Peace Negotiations Between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front*, 37.

[101] Ibid., 6.

[102] Soliman M. Santos, "Delays in Peace Negotiations Between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Causes and Prescriptions," East-West Center Washington, January 3, 2005, 23.

[103] Santos, *Malaysia's Role in the Peace Negotiations*, 6-7.

writing."[104] Malaysia's role is to ease tensions between two resolute parties, maintain forward momentum, and pursue conflict resolution issue by issue.

Any concern for Malaysia's balancing of its instrumental concerns for sovereignty and security against with its affective loyalties for Philippine Muslims was addressed early on by Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysian Prime Minister from 1981 to 2003. In a speech given on March 26, 2001, Dr. Mahathir told the MILF delegation that peace had to be achieved through a political settlement, suggesting to the MILF leadership that the war for succession be ended.[105] Later that same year, at the opening ceremony of the Second Formal Peace talks on July, 24, 2001, Malaysian representative Datuk Zakaria commented, "it is in the best interest of the Bangsamoro, the Philippine government and the region that any compromise would have to be based on the principle of no independence and respect for the integrity and sovereignty of the Philippine nation."[106]

5.   Explaining Malaysian Intervention

Malaysian facilitation of peace talks seems to be influenced by contradictory interests. As a Muslim-majority country and the Chairman of the OIC from 2003 until 2006, Malaysia harbors Islamic loyalties which seem to dictate a protectionist position for their religious brethren. Furthermore, the country's dominant political party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), has been the target of intense criticism by rival political parties for its perceived lack of support for Thai Muslims in their separatist action. Thus, the situation in Sabah provides another opportunity for Malaysian national leadership to support its Islamic brethren in the Philippines and improve Islamic solidarity with Southeast Asia.

Contrary to affective loyalties, the Malaysian officials participating in the Philippine peace process must maintain the trust of Manila as an impartial arbiter. Furthermore, consideration must be given that any suggestion to compromise Philippine sovereignty in favor of an independent Moro territory would seriously inflame the

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[104]Santos, *Malaysia's Role in the Peace Negotiations*, 7.

[105] Ibid., 9.

[106] Ibid.

lingering territorial disputes surrounding Mischief Reef and Sabah. Nonetheless, support for Philippine sovereignty directly counters the MILF separatist agenda.

The foundation of ASEAN norms provides a significant portion of the explanation of Malaysia's position. Malaysia clearly understands the degree to which it is limited in supporting Moro independence, and instead utilizes its leadership to deal with the root causes of the separatist movement. In doing so, Kuala Lumpur effectively addresses its own domestic concerns. First, by achieving a durable peace between the GRP and the MILF, Malaysian officials significantly alleviate immigration problems which have plagued its bilateral relations with the Philippines. Secondly, Malaysia can leverage its facilitation of peaceful settlement of Moro separatism with its claims to Sabah and the maintenance of its own sovereignty. Thirdly, ending Moro hostilities in the southern Philippines will considerably reduce the ability of international terrorists to find safe haven there, improving the security situation in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. Thus, Malaysia's desire for an end to the GRP-Moro conflict is driven as much by domestic concerns for security and stability as it is by concerns for its Muslim brethren. Improving the conditions in the southern Philippines will reduce the incentive for insurgent activity and increase the willingness of Moro people to integrate into peaceful and productive sectors of their communities.

C. THE PHILIPPINES AND THE-UNITED STATES

1. An Eroding Partnership

The 1991 decision by the Philippines not to renew American leases for Subic Naval Station and Clarke Air Force Base brought to an end nearly 100 years of American military presence in the Philippines. While the bond between Washington and Manila was forged under a colonial relationship, it blossomed during the Cold War into a strategic alliance valued by both nations. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States reevaluated security threats in the Pacific and considered a major regional realignment of forces "to stimulate greater collaboration among Asian allies and

friends."[107]   Consideration was given to reducing the American footprint in the Philippines for a more disperse distribution of forces throughout the region. Manila conducted its own strategic reassessment, and without a common security threat Washington's value was reduced to the income received which paid for American basing rights. The partnership between Washington and Manila reached an impasse, resulting in Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, the Philippine Senate's refusal to renew the base leases. The United States was given a three year timeline for withdrawal of all military forces, which Washington spitefully declined for an accelerated one year plan.[108]

Ties were not completely severed during the 1990s. The Mutual Defense Treaty remained intact, though American military leadership qualified their ability to respond without the resource infrastructure previously maintained on Philippine soil. The annual Balikatan exercise continued as did American ship visits. A warming of sorts occurred in the late 1990s due to the encroachment of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. Manila's appreciation of Washington's favor increased as the Chinese claimed a significant area of the South China Sea as well as Mischief Reef. Manila decided to revisit its ties with the Washington in order to balance against Chinese influence.[109] The situation allowed the United States to reaffirm its security commitment in the region while subtly reintroducing an American military influence in the Philippines.

2.   Common Ground

While the growing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia generated small opportunities to reestablish relations between Manila and Washington, the September 11 attacks exponentially improved diplomatic, economic, and military commitments between the two countries. The United States had quickly infiltrated Al Qaeda's safe haven in Afghanistan and commenced a global search to expose other areas where the terrorist organization had anchored its network. The Philippines became an area of

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[107] Renato Cruz de Castro, "The Revitalized Philppine-U.S. Security Relation: A Ghost From the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 6 (November-December 2003): 974.

[108] Ibid., 975.

[109] Cruz de Castro, *The Revitalized Philppine-U.S. Security Relation,* 978.

interest due to an eerily similar terrorist plot exposed years earlier. In 1994, Ramzi Yousef was an Al Qaeda operative who had established a terrorist cell in Manila. The cell was identified in 1995 by Philippine police, who discovered a scheme to plant bombs on twelve U.S. international flights as well as crash an airplane into CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.[110] The information was shared with American intelligence and law enforcement agencies, yet very little investigation followed Yousef's arrest in Pakistan in January 1995. He was subsequently extradited to the United States where his trail and life-sentencing for the 1993 World Trade Center attacks was celebrated as a victory for "a law enforcement system well equipped to cope with terrorism."[111] However, the events of September 11, 2001, put the Manila air plot into context and reignited the need to accurately identify Al Qaeda's infiltration of the Philippine Muslim community.

Soon after the attacks, President Arroyo declared unconditional support for U.S. efforts and stated that "her administration would go 'all out' to assist the United States."[112] Arroyo reopened Philippine seaports and airports to American military units, agreed to intelligence collaboration, and committed logistical support. She committed to cleaning up Philippine extremists by escalating the war on terrorism within her own country.[113] Arroyo insisted that the Philippine security situation was directly linked to its strategic relationship with the United States,[114] a position some analysts viewed as political opportunism rooted in domestic political ambition. The situation provided Arroyo an ideal conduit for permanently repairing relations with the United States, defeating domestic Islamic extremism, evicting Al Qaeda, and consolidating her hold on power.[115] Regardless of Arroyo's motivation, the Bush administration was fully prepared to reward Manila's loyalty and assist Philippine forces in eradicating Al Qaeda

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[110] CRS RL31265, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," July 26, 2007, 6.

[111] 9/11 Commission Report, 72.

[112] Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia,* 202.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Donald E. Weatherbee, *International Relations in Southeast Asia* (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005): 37.

[115] Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia,* 203.

and radical extremism from the Philippines. Washington dedicated $284.86 million in military aid between 2002 and 2004. Exercise Balikatan, a bilateral military training evolution which had fallen out of favor after 1996 was quickly restored, and 1,300 American troops, to include 160 Special Operations soldiers conducted joint operations during the first six months of 2002.[116]

American military leadership intended Balikatan 2002-1 as an opportunity to improve "U.S.-Philippine combined planning, combat readiness, and interoperability."[117] The effort demonstrated U.S. commitment for Philippine counterterrorism operations, but also contained opportunities to achieve broader counterinsurgency goals and regional security objectives. First, American and Philippine troops were largely successful in removing the Abu Sayyaf Group from the targeted area of Basilan. The military victory allowed increased levels of "humanitarian assistance and civic action projects" for communities of Basilan, which improved living conditions for the Muslim population and "restored a sense of peace and security in the province."[118] Secondly, the presence of American military troops in Southeast Asia provided a renewing of Washington's regional security commitment and was a critical step in demonstrating its resolve of confronting terrorism globally. The Philippine-American alignment was the first logical step in accomplishing regional security due to the "traditional role this relationship has played in the management of peace and stability in Southeast Asia."[119]

3. Multifaceted Intervention

American intervention in the Philippines was intentionally robust while at the same time strategically calculating in its objectives. Critics suggested that American actions were a Christian crusade to destroy the troublesome Muslim population of the southern Philippines, citing religious and political parallels between Washington and

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[116] Zachary Abuza, *Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* (Strategic Studies Institute, September 2005): 10.

[117] Eric Ramos, "RP-US Balikatan Exercises: A Peace Building Tool for Mindanao?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), 31.

[118] Ramos, "RP-US Balikatan Exercises," v.

[119] Rommel C. Banlaoi, *The Role of Philippine American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security*, Contemporary Southeast Asia 24, no. 2 (August 2002): 308.

Manila as evidence.[120]   Admittedly, the United States has a long and dynamic relationship with the Philippines. As a previous American colony, the Philippines political structure is similar in many ways to the United States. Furthermore, the population of the Philippines is 94% Christian and only 5% Muslim. The United States is both the Philippines largest trading partner and largest investor, resulting in more than "$16 billion in two way trade and greater than $6 billion in assets."[121]   However, the political, military, and economic interdependence of the two nations which allegedly bolsters the anti-Muslim charge fails to explain U.S. interventionist policies in the Philippines. Washington and Manila jointly agreed to militarily eliminate the Abu Sayyaf Group while pursuing a political reconciliation with the MILF.[122]   The groups share a number of common characteristics. Both existed in the Philippines long before the Global War on Terror, both have utilized terror as a means to achieve political objectives, and both have networked with the regional terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah as well as Al Qaeda. Understanding why the Bush administration has allowed two different tactics to engage each group assists in comprehending American motivations.

As previously mentioned, the MILF grew out of a dispute with the MNLF in 1977. Both groups claimed to fight for the Moro people of the Philippines, but pursued different political objectives in their efforts. The 1996 peace agreement signed between the MNLF and the Philippine government was not recognized by the MILF, who continued to demand independence.[123]   The Al Qaeda network, which exploits long running insurgencies for the enabling environment they create, recognized the separatist struggle in the Philippines as an ideal place to operate and established a presence in the southern Philippines for recruiting, training, funding, and organizing.   Philippine

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[120] James A. Tyner, *Iraq, Terror, and the Philippines' Will to War* (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

[121] U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Philippines," U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2794.htm (accessed April 27, 2007).

[122] CRS Report RL21265, Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation, July 26, 2007, 18.

[123] Benedicto R. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines," United States Institute of Peace Special Report, January 2005, 5.

Muslims fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s, and then returned to apply terrorist knowledge in Southeast Asia. Despite the history of interrelationships and common interests, JI and Al Qaeda maintain global objectives that do not coincide with the central motivation of the MILF. Following 9/11, the MILF intentionally distanced themselves from the Taliban and Abu Sayyaf and agreed to resume peace negotiations with the GRP.[124] Furthermore, the MILF agreed to assist Philippine efforts against terrorists by providing intelligence against JI, Al Qaeda, and Abu Sayyaf as well as denying safe haven for these same operatives. U.S. policy makers understand that a peaceful solution to the MILF conflict would eliminate Mindanao's potential as another Afghanistan-like operating area for the terror industry.[125] The strategy also slows the spread of Islamic militancy in Southeast Asia by demonstrating a willingness to resolve long-standing Muslim grievances.[126]

The Abu Sayyaf Group also split from the MNLF and has ties to Bin Laden stretching back to the Afghan-Soviet conflict. Unlike the MILF, Abu Sayyaf continued collaboration with regional and international terrorist organizations following 9/11. In fact, at the time of the September 11 attacks, Abu Sayyaf was holding two American missionaries for ransom, which resulted in the group's inclusion on the "first list of 27 individuals and organizations whose assets were frozen by the United States because of links to the Al Qaeda network."[127] Abu Sayyaf, not the MILF, provided the core explanation for restoring U.S. military cooperation with the Philippines. Incidentally, Abu Sayyaf's collaboration and networking with regional terrorist organizations have allowed it to remain a threat to the stability of the southern Philippines and the region.

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[124] Raissa Robles in Manila, "Philippine rebel leader denies link with regional terrorist network," *South China Morning Post*, June 23, 2004. The MILF did not meet Arroyo's demand of renouncing terrorism completely. Instead, MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat insisted that his renunciation of terrorism was unnecessary because terrorism violated Islam. He publicly repeated his "condemnation and abhorrence of terrorist activities."

[125] United States Agency for International Development, "USAID/Philippines Strategy FY 2005-2009," http://www.usaid.gov /locations/asia_near_east/countries/philippines/index.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

[126] Benedicto R. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines," United States Institute of Peace Special Report, January 2005.

[127] Abuza, *Balik Terrorism*, 9.

The divided approach to the MILF versus ASG clearly demonstrates that the Bush administration does not blindly target Muslims or Islamic insurgencies. Its goal is to eliminate forces "all too willing to use indiscriminate violence in pursuit of their radical agenda, and all too willing to form tactical alliances with transnational terrorist organizations."[128] American leadership has shown a willingness to distinguish between terrorists and separatists driven by legitimate grievances. In their support of peace negotiations between the MILF and GRP, the United States demonstrates an understanding that any accommodation and agreement which might end years of violent separatism depends on addressing the domestic issues which lie at the heart of the conflict.

4.   American Participation in Peace Process and Development

American intervention into the Philippines was not limited to bilateral military cooperation. Washington's commitment to peaceful reconciliation included funding for the development of impoverished Muslim areas as well as representation for the peace negotiations. The two American organizations most closely associated with this commitment are the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

In 2003, the U.S. State Department introduced USIP to the Mindanao peace process after receiving a request from President Arroyo for assistance in facilitating negotiations. The USIP is an "independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress."[129] The institute operates within conflict eras to "prevent and resolve violent international conflict, promote post-conflict stability and development, as well as increase conflict management capacity."[130] The Philippine Facilitation Project, part of USIP's Center for Mediation and Conflict, labored for four years in order to

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[128] Abuza, *Balik Terrorism*, 43.

[129] United States Institute of Peace, "Fact Sheet," http://www.usip.org/aboutus/index.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

[130] Ibid.

"create an equitable and durable peace agreement to foster reconciliation and stability in the Philippines and surrounding areas of Southeast Asia."[131]

Efforts by the U.S. delegation were in direct support of the government of Malaysia, which maintains the primary role as negotiation facilitator. The Philippine Facilitation Project representatives conducted research into the underlying causes of the dispute, built widespread public support for the peace process, and provided consultation in conflict management and resolution techniques. In fact, this was among the first instances when USIP representatives were designated as "on-the-ground" facilitators, which underpins the centrality both the MILF and GRP place on American participation with regard to reconciliation. Washington's support for the peace process grants international legitimacy to the effort, and is accompanied by promises of funding for the development of impoverished Muslim areas. The U.S. economic influence cannot be separated from the diplomatic support.

USAID works with both the Philippine government and targeted areas of Mindanao to "strengthen the foundation for peace" and provide development areas for the conflict affected areas of the island.[132]   Their efforts in the Philippines reflect the evolution of development strategies from pre and post 9/11 eras. Traditional focus areas included economic growth, governance, environmental degradation, family planning, and public health. Following September 11, the strategy of assistance to conflicted areas was redesigned in order to provide prospects of development complimentary to the peace initiatives. For instance, development strategies attempt not only to reduce poverty, but in doing so allow traditionally marginalized groups a more participatory role in economic and political life. Emphasis is put on "upward mobility and pluralism to help address the root causes of terrorism and violence, including perceived injustice, political alienation, and severe deprivation."[133]   USAID efforts have resulted in reintegrating more than 24,000 former MNLF combatants into the peacetime economy and prevented their return

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[131] United States Institute of Peace, "Philippine Facilitation Project," http://www.usip.org/philippines /index.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

[132] United States Agency for International Development, "Philippines," http://www.usaid.gov /locations/asia_near_east/countries/philippines/index.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

[133] Ibid.

to combat arms. These former separatists live in some of the most deprived areas of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The training and education provided by USAID for MNLF combatants provide a positive example of the types of U.S. development efforts which would be available following a successful agreement between the GRP and the MILF.

5.   Explaining American Intervention

American intervention in the Philippines contains elements of both military counterterrorist operations and humanitarian relief. The strategy confronts important challenges. First, not all insurgents in the conflict are prepared to lay down arms and negotiate. In fact, violent extremism in the Philippines remains as harsh reality exemplified in the July 2007 killing of fourteen Philippine Marines, ten of whom were beheaded.[134] The event, which created grave concerns for the peace process, demonstrates the influence that terrorist organizations wield on political reconciliation between the government and Muslim communities. Furthermore, the situation necessitates that "recalcitrant wings of the MILF and the ASG must be dealt with militarily. There is nothing to negotiate with these groups."[135] Secondly, the ability of the ASG members who conducted the attack to remain unidentified by the Muslim community indicates religious loyalty which can only be explained by a continued disaffection with the Philippine government. The only way to win the trust of those individuals who silently consent to atrocities out of hopelessness or fear is through the good governance and civic reconstruction of conflict affected areas. "Poverty and social injustice" which create opportunities for terrorists must be replaced with programs enhancing "access to basic needs, economic development, educational opportunities, and

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[134] CRS Report RL21265, Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation, July 26, 2007, 1.

[135] Abuza, *Balik Terrorism*, 43.

infrastructure rehabilitation."[136]   Humanitarian efforts which will eventually bring promise to communities and redistribute Muslim loyalties to those groups dedicated to improving lives.

D.   THE PHILIPPINES AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS

1.   Al Qaeda

The Philippines has been exploited by terrorists groups in the past to include the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Abu Nidal, Tamil Tigers, and Hamas. None of these previous actors, however, achieved the levels of integration and success realized by the Al Qaeda network, which has developed a complex and comprehensive operational presence in the Philippines. According to area expert Zachary Abuza, the Philippines was "thoroughly penetrated" by Al Qaeda, becoming a regional hub for recruitment, sanctuary, training, front companies, charities, money laundering, planning, and attacks.[137]   Al Qaeda was able to unite several groups who were focused on the realization of an Islamic state in Southeast Asia. The united front recently demonstrated vulnerabilities.   Since September 11, the MILF has publicly distanced itself from terrorist-type activities in pursuit of a peaceful reconciliation with the GRP while the ASG continues collaboration and operations with regional terrorist activity.

a.   Al Qaeda and the MILF

The degree of interaction between Al Qaeda and the MILF remains highly controversial. Zachary Abuza insists that "links" between the MILF and Al Qaeda were "highly established."[138]   Abuza offers examples of MILF interaction with Mohammed Jamal Khalifa as evidence of Al Qaeda connections, as well as intelligence reports of

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[136] United States Agency for International Development, "Philippines," http://www.usaid.gov /locations/asia_near_east/countries/philippines/index.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

[137] Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia,* 89.

[138] Ibid.

"heavy bearded men wearing turbans" discovered in MILF camps.[139]   Other analysts recognize that "direct contact to Al Qaeda may have existed, but doubt that these were "sustained links" or evidence of "operational cooperation."[140] While these two points of view suggest a fundamentally different relationship between the MILF and Al Qaeda, agreement exists that a connection between the two groups was established as a result of Bin Laden's interest in the region.

As with so many Muslim organizations, the fight between the Afghani mujahidin and the Soviet Union was a call to arms and the MILF was no exception. Some 500-700 MILF fighters traveled to join the mujahidin in their efforts. MILF candidates for the jihad were carefully selected for their leadership potential and prospective contribution in the Moro effort upon returning. The benefits gained by fighting alongside the Afghan mujahidin cannot be underestimated. MILF fighters were exposed to high intensity combat against a well disciplined enemy, trained in the use of explosives and bomb making, and developed skill sets for both guerilla and urban combat.[141]   Sending troops to assist the mujahidin became exceedingly expensive, and financial support was found from Osama Bin Laden who had established Al Qaeda in 1988.[142]

The association between the MILF and Bin Laden grew out of this connection. Bin Laden, already aware that the secular MNLF had abandoned the hope of jihad and agreed to negotiate with the Philippine government, recognized MILF commitment to building an Islamic state and deemed the organization worthy of Al Qaeda's time, effort, and resources. In order to best support the MILF, the decision was made to permanently establish a presence in the Philippines which would also act as a

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[139] Khalifa, the brother-in-law of Osama Bin Laden, was sent to the Philippines as a recruiter for the Afghan fight against the Soviet Union. His most significant contribution in the Philippines was the creation of several Islamic charities used to funnel money to insurgent and terrorist groups.

[140] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, *Moro Islamic Liberation Front*, (Jane's Information Group, Feb 2006), http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder /jwit/jwit0277.htm@current&pageSelected=&keyword=milf&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC& Prod_Name=JWIT&activeNav=http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC (accessed August 7, 2007).

[141] Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia,* 91.

[142] Bin Laden's organization was initially dedicated to helping finance Muslim travel to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets and building an international network.

regional base of operations. Al Qaeda's initial operative, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, created a network of Islamic charities throughout the Philippines which were initially utilized to build schools, mosques, and orphanages as well as provide food and shelter to war-torn areas. Khalifa was a respected member of the community who participated on several influential boards of directors and was instrumental in gaining Saudi support for his "charitable" work.

The goodwill generated by Khalifa's charity eventually translated into financial and training support for MILF operations. The MILF desperately needed the economic resources available through Al Qaeda. While it maintained several legitimate businesses to generate revenue, the MILF lost its largest source of foreign funding when Libya cut support during the 1990s. As a longtime supporter of Moro insurgents, Libya was conflicted when MNLF leaders signed the same autonomy agreement with the GRP that the MILF rejected. Libya's decision to cut its support for the Moros left the MILF desperate for a sponsor. Al Qaeda responded in kind, soliciting its vast resources and common devotion to the Islamist struggle.

MILF capabilities grew tremendously following Al Qaeda's commitment to Southeast Asia. Training was no longer limited to those who were sent to the Middle East terrorist camps. Instead, the MILF benefited from the arrival of Middle Eastern trainers in its own camps. The scenario introduced another generation of Moro insurgents to hardened mujahidin fighters who not only improved MILF tactical capabilities, but nurtured their spiritual connection to the broader Islamic revival.

Al Qaeda recognized their relationship with the MILF as more than an occasion to further separatist efforts in the Philippines. The MILF had the infrastructure Al Qaeda required to pursue the much more ambitious effort of uniting Islamic fundamentalists from around Southeast Asia. Al Qaeda's leadership created an opportunity to spread knowledge, and secure MILF bases provided a secure setting for regional networking. Furthermore, the Philippine government lacked the capacity to prevent terrorist collaboration as evidenced by its inability to quell its Moro insurgency. The situation provided an enabling environment built upon weak borders, sympathetic

locals, and an overwhelmed domestic army. As a result, Al Qaeda provided the incentive for the MILF, ASG, and JI to begin a closer association for training, fund raising, and joint operations.

b. Al Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, and ASG

The Soviet War in Afghanistan provided the opportunity for the Abu Sayyaf Group to create linkages to Al Qaeda. Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani emerged as the leader of another group of Philippine fundamentalists who traveled to Pakistan in the 1980s in support of the Afghan war. While alongside the mujahidin, Janjalani widely professed his intention to continue the jihad in the Philippines. His personal friendship with Osama Bin Laden facilitated the effort, and Janjalani benefited from the same organization of Islamic charities that fed the MILF. However, when expanding operations in Southeast Asia, Bin Laden keyed on ASG support due to the MILF's preference for conventional guerilla warfare over terrorism.

ASG established its reputation as a small but exceedingly violent group, due in large part to the resources accessed through Al Qaeda. ASG conducted series of domestic terrorist attacks during the early part of the 1990s, but fell into steady decline from 1995-2001. The connection with Al Qaeda was exposed which seriously limited its access to funds. ASG's commitment to jihad gave way to a string of kidnappings. Between 2000 and 2001, the group accounted for "16 deaths and 140 hostage takings, but no acts of political-religious terrorism."[143]

In 2003, the kidnapping operations by ASG have stopped in favor of a series of bombing campaigns. In March and April of that year, ASG members were implicated in an attack on the Davao airport and Sasa Warf which killed 48 people and wounded 204.[144] In March 2004, ASG conducted their deadliest attack to date, killing more than 100 people in a bombing of a SuperFerry. The sharp escalation in attacks and

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[143] Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 8.

[144] International Crisis Group, *Southern Philippine Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*, International Crisis Group, July 13, 2004, 23. Members of Jemaah Islamiyah and the MILF were also implicated in the bombings, though senior MILF commanders were cleared.

fundamental shift in operations was credited to the resumption of funding, this time from Al Qaeda regional affiliate, Jemaah Islamiyah. Furthermore, the focus on areas outside Mindanao indicated ASG intent to achieve, "a larger, geo-political regional impact."[145]

ASG leadership had labored for inclusion to training in MILF camps but was excluded due to their "nonreligious and non-ideological" kidnappings.[146] JI trainers who taught in MILF camps worked unsuccessfully to build a relationship between the MILF and ASG. When an agreement could not be reached, JI instead began its own coordination with ASG members both in the Philippines and Indonesia.[147] The renewed connection between JI and ASG subsequently turned into a triangular relationship to include the MILF, which maintained overall control of the southern Philippines.[148] As number of counterterrorism operations and arrests have highlighted the degree of interoperability achieved by the three organizations. Furthermore, "evidence suggests a cadre of first-generation Al Qaeda-trained JI leaders currently reside in Mindanao."[149] The implication is that ASG and JI members, who do not control territory in Mindanao, receive protection from the MILF and have entered into an interdependent relationship with the MILF. The ASG was able to secure JI the territory it needed to train and organize in return for inclusion to regional terror network and renewed ideology. ASG has emerged from its gangster days of ransoming hostages as a "reliable partner" whose "radical interpretation of Islam meshes with Al Qaeda's."[150]

2.   The Impact of International Terrorists on the Peace Process

Since the September 11 attacks, the MILF has come to view its relationship with Al Qaeda as more of a liability than a benefit. Senior MILF officials downplay ties to Al Qaeda as a means of financing humanitarian or social projects through Islamic charities.

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[145] Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 11.

[146] Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 22.

[147] International Crisis Group, *Southern Philippine Backgrounder*, 22.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 24.

[150] Ibid.

Instead of linking the future of the Moro people to Al Qaeda's jihadist movement, the MILF evaluated political reconciliation with the GRP as a more effective means to achieve their objectives. In essence, the MILF opted, at least publicly, for a political solution to its decades-long struggle against the Philippine government instead of choosing to continue its violent insurgency.[151]

This is not to say that the MILF has completely severed ties with all extremist organizations. Their connection with ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah remains a relationship of convenience and a hedge against the failure of the peace negotiations. Overwhelming evidence indicates that ASG and JI operatives continue to train in MILF camps and enjoy the protection of MILF commanders. Keeping JI and ASG around keeps AFP forces spread thin while at the same time providing MILF officials with "plausible deniability" when it does engage in terrorist activity. The MILF have renounced terrorism and signed a cease fire with the GRP. Permitting ASG and JI to remain operational in the southern Philippines grants the MILF a means to maintain its peaceful image, while at the same time employing ASG and JI operatives as a proxy for tactical engagements.[152]

Abu Sayyaf continues to benefit from the technical expertise and financial resources available from Jemaah Islamiyah.[153] It remains dedicated to a fully independent Moro nation, as well as a pan Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia. Should the MILF sign a peace agreement contrary to the terms of its hardliners, some members will simply pledge allegiance to Abu Sayyaf and continue the fight.[154] Should either the MNLF-GRP peace agreement or MILF-GRP cease fire break down, continued ASG activity will benefit Moro negotiators by maintaining pressure on the thinly spread AFP.[155] Thus, the viability of ASG as a spoiler for peace in the southern Philippines

[151] Benedicto R. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines," United States Institute of Peace Special Report, January 2005, 7.

[152] Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 16.

[153] Manny Mogato, "Philippine Rebels linking up with foreign jihadis," *Reuters*, August 31, 2005; Luige A. Del Puerto, "PNP: Alliance of JI, RP terrorists strong," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 20, 2005.

[154] CRS RL31265, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," July 26, 2007, 9.

[155] Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 16.

remains a distinct reality. As long as hope exists for continued violence against the Philippine government and its American ally, international and regional ties to terrorist organizations will persist.

Serious consideration must be given to an Al Qaeda threat beyond both MILF and ASG circles. The inroads created by Al Qaeda's initial networking efforts in the Philippines remain in place, independently coordinating with individual and organizations throughout the region.[156] Country characteristics that attracted Al Qaeda remain: ease of access, a sympathetic population, and corrupt officials, to name a few. These items require a considerable amount of time and effort toward institution building to correct. The end result is an environment that will remain vulnerable to terrorist operations for an indefinite amount of time and a tenuous peace process that cannot sustain setbacks.

3.   Explaining Al Qaeda Intervention

While the Moro struggle for independence influenced Al Qaeda's decision to establish operations in the Philippines, several other reasons attracted international terrorists. First, geographic orientation of the island nation allowed easy access.[157] Muslim areas in the south were well protected, providing a secure environment in which to recruit, train, and operate. The vast number of islands allowed terrorists and weapons considerable freedom of movement. The region harbored a number of Islamic movements vulnerable to Al Qaeda's message, and operations in the Philippines provided the opportunity to bring together the various organizations for a united push for a pan Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia.[158] Political and economic instability of the Philippines also attracted Al Qaeda. The government, army, and police forces were

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[156] CRS RL31672, "Terrorism in SE Asia," August 13, 2004, 3.

[157] Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, "Southeast Asia's tri-border black spot," (Jane's Information Group, April 23, 2007) http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/jtsm/doc_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/ content1/janesdata/mags/jtsm/history/jtsm2007/jtsm5067.htm@current&Prod_Name=JTSM (accessed May 8, 2007).

[158] Ibid.

riddled with corruption.[159] The economic deprivation of conflict affected areas created Muslim populations desperate for acts of goodwill and charity, which Al Qaeda could exploit for its own ends. Thus, on the surface Al Qaeda's motivation in the Philippines would seem to be influence by Islamic solidarity, but in reality it simply needed a vulnerable area for money laundering, recruitment, and training. Al Qaeda's motivation was only in securing personnel, equipment, and territory to continue its fight against the West and its allies.

E.   CONCLUSION

The international intervention in the Philippine conflict highlights not only its importance in the broader struggle against Islamic extremism, but the significant influence the Philippine conflict holds for Malaysia, the United States, and Al Qaeda. In each case, intervention occurred as a means for each actor to achieve its own objectives.

Malaysia's facilitation of the peace negotiations came in response not only to MILF requests, but also the Philippine government's request. Therefore, both the MILF and the GRP must believe Kuala Lumpur offers at best preferential opportunity to fulfill its political agenda, and at worst will remain steadfastly neutral. Malaysia has everything to gain in its participation. Should negotiations fail, Malaysia can hardly be faulted. Peace has remained elusive since 1972, and a continuation of violence in today's world of Islamic extremism would be no surprise to anyone. Should negotiations succeed, several items of concern on Malaysia's domestic agenda would be alleviated. The situation for Malaysia could only improve.

The United States continues its fight against Al Qaeda and its sympathizers with Philippine collaboration. It has a vested interest in eliminating terrorist activity and the root causes of Islamic extremism which create political vulnerabilities. Furthermore, its economic resources and international leadership provide the best guarantees for the

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[159] United States Agency for International Development, "USAID/Philippines Strategy FY 2005-2009," http://www.usaid.gov /locations/asia_near_east/countries/philippines/index.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

economic redevelopment of the war torn areas. Both the MILF and the GRP benefit from the stability provided by American support of the peace process.

Al Qaeda requires an area in which to train and organize. Maintaining instability in the Philippines accomplishes this end, and the possibility of derailing the peace negotiations would be a celebrated success. As such, it will continue its own operations in the Philippine attempting to support those Philippine organizations dedicated to terrorism and Islamic extremism. Al Qaeda will maintain its foothold in the Philippines as a means of continuing its jihad against America its sympathizers within the Philippine government.

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IV. CONCLUSION

A. INTERVENTIONIST MOTIVATIONS

Instrumental motivations outweigh affective ones in each of the three parties examined. While the actions of the United States were predictably founded in security and counterterrorism initiatives, the foundations of Malaysia's regional policies were surprisingly similar in instrumental principles. Even Al Qaeda, whose pursuit of an Islamic caliphate deceitfully lends itself to an affective categorization, seems more grounded in instrumental rather than affective stimuli.

1. Malaysia

Malaysian national interests are directly affected by the conflicts in both Thailand and the Philippines. As a result, the complicated histories between Malaysia and each respective neighbor led to similar interventionist attempts in both conflicts. As a leading Muslim nation in Southeast Asia and current chairman on the OIC, Malaysia offered to mediate negotiations between the governments of Manila and Bangkok and their separatist factions. Manila accepted the offer and developed a framework for peace talks between the GRP and the MILF, while Thailand declined assistance and continues its purely domestic effort.

Malaysian motivations seem to be intricately conflicted between instrumental and affective considerations. Significant precedents of ethnic ties exist between Malaysia and Thailand, as well as between Malaysia and the Philippines. As an influential Muslim nation and chairman on the OIC, Malaysian leaders feel they have a duty to protect the interests of Muslim groups globally. Their actions draw considerable attention from other OIC member states. At the same time, Malaysian politicians must balance concerns of immigration problems and anxieties regarding refugee flows from both conflicted areas. Furthermore, the continued growth of Islamic fundamentalism is detrimental to regional security, forcing Malaysia to leverage concern for Thai and Philippine Muslim separatists with policies that discourage extremism and punish terrorists. Sovereignty

disputes further complicate Malaysian bilateral relations with Thailand and the Philippines, which continue to influence the domestic considerations on each front.

The convoluted and multi-layered issues in existence between Malaysia and Thailand and Malaysia and the Philippines beg the question of which loyalties most directly influence Kuala Lumpur policy makers in mediation attempts. This thesis concludes that Malaysia's primary incentives remain rooted in instrumental principles, to include ensuring their own security, controlling fundamentalism, and maintaining domestic stability. Their concern for ethnic and religious brethren warrants mention as a component of Malaysian policies, but affective concerns are not equivalent in their value for Kuala Lumpur. In fact, affective aspects are a source of concern to Malaysian leaders who fear affective ties between Thai Muslims and Malay Malaysians might facilitate the spread of extremism into Malaysia.

In mediating peace negotiations between the GRP and the MILF, Malaysian officials clearly stated that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines would be upheld.[160] Thus, any support from Kuala Lumpur will be manifested in finding alternative solutions for MILF independence demands and structuring agreeable ways to address the root causes of Muslim unrest. Kuala Lumpur's approach was not developed to gain the diplomatic favor of Manila or out of neglect for the grievances sought by the Moro community. Instead, the ability of Kuala Lumpur to address its own domestic issues while simultaneously alleviating the long standing injustices imposed on Philippine Muslims drive Malaysian motivation. Successful intervention could realistically reduce the ability of terrorists to operate in the region, assist in the redevelopment and economic growth of the Southern Philippines, and thereby alleviate the immigration pressures on Sabah by Philippine Muslims.

The literature predicted third party intervention would negatively affect prospects for peace. In the case of the Philippines and Malaysia, just the opposite has occurred. The MILF were unwilling to negotiate without Malaysian mediation, which officials in Manila recognized and accepted as a necessary component of the peace process.

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[160] Santos, *Malaysia's Role in the Peace Negotiations*, 9.

Preexisting conflicts between Manila and Kuala Lumpur were set aside in the interest of finding a durable solution to the Moro insurgency.

The ability of Malaysian negotiators to find equally willing parties in Thailand remains doubtful. Offers of assistance from Kuala Lumpur continue to be declined by Bangkok, whose status quo policies have failed to quell insurgent violence. Then again, the identities of insurgent leadership remain unknown to officials in Thailand, and no demands have been forwarded by active extremist groups in the southern provinces. Thus, Bangkok cannot initiate dialogue with separatist leadership because those individuals remain unidentified.

2. United States

The primary interests of the United States rest unsurprisingly within instrumental guidelines. Preventing a reoccurrence of the events of September 11, 2001, provides the fundamental impetus for decision makers in Washington. When Southeast Asia became associated with Islamic extremism and Al Qaeda networking, strategic planners narrowed their focus on domestic Muslim insurgencies which international terrorists could exploit.

Thailand, a historic ally of the United States, was an initially reluctant coalition member, but significantly increased willing participation when its own domestic insurgency reignited in 2004. Bangkok's democratic struggles, embodied by the 2006 coup, impeded the continued material or financial assistance Washington might have offered against the Thai insurgents. Furthermore, American participation against Thai insurgents could potentially escalate an already dire situation. In the end, as long as Thailand's insurgency remains domestic and insurgent activity maintains its distance from international terrorists, U.S. policy will not directly engage. Washington needs Thai diplomatic backing for international counterterrorism policies and regional initiatives. The American military's ability for continued use of Thai bases will remain the key point in relations between Washington and Bangkok. Thailand continues to be a significant regional ally, and its continued support of American policies will allow bilateral relations to endure almost any domestic obstacles Bangkok faces.

In its significant history with the Philippines, Washington had long allowed Manila to address its Muslim unrest domestically with police and AFP forces. With the onset of the War on Terror, Washington suddenly had a vested interest in bolstering the Philippine military's capability to suppress Islamic extremism. Thus, U.S. interests in the Philippines are ultimately rooted in security issues and counterterrorism policies. Nonetheless, Washington has agreed to support Manila's strategy of peaceful reconciliation with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. In doing so, Washington provides an increased capacity to address humanitarian concerns and economic development within the marginalized Muslim areas central to the conflict. Having already lost credibility in the failed Tripoli Agreement, Manila's ability to secure American financing and diplomatic support for a negotiated peace generates heightened potential for promise and growth. Washington's willingness to pursue separate military and humanitarian responses to factionalized Moro separatists could make the difference in finally resolving the conflict in the southern Philippines.

3. International Terrorist Organizations

Al Qaeda's presence in Southeast Asia is well established. Their operational reach has extended well into both Thailand and the Philippines. The nature of Al Qaeda's organization and underlying religious ideals seem to support an affective type of loyalty to Islamic separatist groups. However, the religious and ethnic foundations of international terrorist organizations are still ultimately subordinate to instrumental factors of the conflicts.

First and foremost, Al Qaeda's interests rest with defeating the United States and its western allies. In order to accomplish this task, they require a place to train, organize, equip, and recruit. Southeast Asia, due mainly to its geographic orientation and historically destabilizing Islamic movements, provided an ideal setting in which to pursue its agenda. Al Qaeda's intention of assisting Southeast Asian separatists in their fight, therefore, was as much rooted in perpetuating an environment conducive to terrorist operations as in supporting Thai or Philippine Muslim grievances.

To date, Thai separatists have not taken advantage of the increased operational resources available from international terrorists. Their current success in destabilizing southern Thailand and establishing primitive Muslim institutions has not seemed to require outside assistance. Without a significant change from Bangkok in terms of counterterrorism initiatives or counterinsurgency operations, Thai separatists hardly need to change direction. Keeping Al Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations away would appear to benefit insurgent momentum by maintaining the low key, domestic character of the struggle.

At different points in time, the two primary Philippine separatist organizations embraced assistance from international and regional terrorist organizations. The MILF has subsequently distanced itself from such action in pursuit of a political solution, but ASG continues collaboration with Al Qaeda and JI and creates dramatic uncertainty for any peace processes. Al Qaeda's ability to blur loyalties between the MILF and ASG will feed doubts about a durable peace and weaken the already fragile hopes of the GRP. Should peace negotiations ultimately fail, the MILF and ASG are likely to benefit from the continued support and experience of hard line international terrorists, which is a scenario Al Qaeda will patiently await.

B.   IMPLICATIONS

The predominance of instrumental interests among the diverse group of interveners studied has significant implications for Southeast Asia. Most importantly, the alignment of extremists in one country with extremists in another is more likely to occur because of balance of power considerations as opposed to ethnic or cultural identity.[161] As a result, not all Islamic groups are susceptible to terrorist propaganda. Most Southeast Asian extremist groups focus their own narrowly defined domestic objectives. The extent to which these organizations ally or coordinate with other groups depends on the

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[161] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addisonn-Wesley, 1979). Balance of power theories attempt to explain state security behavior.

degree of assistance received in return. In essence, this is a cost-benefit analysis that depends on the return on the investment. Each organization is ultimately concerned with its own limited objectives.

Al Qaeda's targeting of the Philippines occurred due to the enabling environment created by longstanding ethnic strife. Al Qaeda did not assist Philippine Muslims because independence would improve their livelihood or hope for the future. The terrorist network assisted Philippine separatists because an independent Mindanao would create an ideally located base of operations. Furthermore, this strategy only worked because Philippine separatists were willing to accept Al Qaeda's support. In Thailand, separatists have not aligned with international terrorist organizations. Philippine Muslims and Thai Muslims both seek independence, but chose different strategic alignments to get there.

The divergent alignment decisions made by Philippine and Thai separatists brought about consequent decisions by the United States and Malaysia with regard to each conflict. The United States intervened in the Philippines because Philippine separatists collaborated with the Al Qaeda network, and the United States refrained from intervening in Thailand because no evidence indicated Thai insurgents accepted international terrorist assistance. U.S. counterterrorist policies responded to the Al Qaeda network as the primary security threat, and as such American military operations were limited to the Philippines.

Malaysian problems with spillover and refugee flows were generated by the Philippine conflict only. While threats of spillover from Thailand existed, no actual violence was generated on Malaysian soil as a result of the Thai insurgency. Thus, Malaysia's most immediate concerns were generated by the Philippine conflict. When the opportunity to assume a central role in peace negotiations arose, Malaysian officials seized the opportunity. By facilitating peace talks between the MILF and the GRP, Malaysia has the best prospect of improving its own domestic political agenda.

The Philippines conflict became central to U.S. and Malaysian security objectives because of the Philippines' strategic importance to international terrorists. Each actor

was ultimately driven by instrumental motivations. Accounting for the supremacy of instrumental objectives over affective obligations provides the international community a degree of predictability with complicated ethnic situations. Counterterrorism operations can attempt to determine which extremist organizations are most vulnerable to exploitation by international terrorists, and then focus efforts on alleviating those fundamental vulnerabilities. This strategy provides a framework to identify Islamic organizations inclined to accept outside assistance, and then develop a plan to prevent their co-optation by international terrorists.

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