"NOTHING NEW IN THE SOUTH?" – ANALYTICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCES OF THAILAND

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It is now six years that the historic conflict has been going on in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani, southern provinces of Thailand, and it has already caused more than 4,000 deaths. The beginning of the escalation dates to January 4th, 2004, when Muslim youths got away with nearly 400 machine guns in a barracks hijack. Since then, militant groups have been committing bomb attacks and aggressive acts almost on a daily basis in these three primarily Malay Muslim provinces. Bomb attacks on security staff and state establishments and targeted murders of representatives of the Thai state as well as administration staff and teachers create a spiral of violence. But Muslims are also targeted if they are said to work with Thai institutions. This conflict is one of the bloodiest in South-East Asia, but is not being given the regional, national or international attention that would be necessary to end the conflict without violence.

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DISTORTED PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT

When the first acts of violence occurred at the beginning of the millennium, the Thai government under Thaksin Shinawatra tended to categorize the conflict as local crime. In 2002, Prime Minister Thaksin emphasized that it was not separatism or ideological terrorism, but simply ordinary "bandits." For a long time, this judgement represented the official view of the outbreak of violence in the south. Again and again, government representatives spread the message of local clan and trade crime, especially in the context of the drug trade.

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But within a very short time the Thaksin government recognized that it had underestimated the potential danger. The attacks became more systematic and took on dramatic attributes. Under the impression made by the "global war on terror" after September 11th, 2001, and its after-effects, the Thai government at that time began to present the rebellion in the country's south as a local front of internationally active Islamist terrorism. Finally, in January 2004, the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat were placed under martial law. Radical Islam suddenly stood as the center of perception as the cause in the conflict of the southern provinces.[1]

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This international terrorism once again became a sole offense, as the world's public appeared to perceive it. Even a quick look at the reports in the German media on the events in south Thailand makes it clear that we can, at best, only speak of a vague perception. The problem in Thailand's South seemed to be lost in the global comparison due to distance and "insignificance" alone.

There is certainly also a national interest in Thailand in keeping the conflict "invisible": In recent years, the Thai governments have successfully played down the drama of the situation, primarily to avoid an "internationalization" of the conflict. In this context it was possible to create a not entirely unbiased construct in which the weight of local rivalries or religious terrorism distracts from the actual cause of conflict.

A RELIGIOUS CONFLICT?

Thailand is a thoroughly pluralistic country in its religions, even if we cannot overlook a certain congruity. 94% of the population profess to Buddhism. The proportion of Muslims is calculated at around five percent nationwide, whereby the Muslims show a number of cultural and geographical distinctions. The Muslims can be summarized

1 | Cf. S. P. Harish, „Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand," in: *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (2006): 28, no. 1, 48-69, here: 60

in three groups.[2] In the three provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat lives a Malay majority that is clearly different in ethnicity from the rest of Thailand's population. Malay-ethnicized Islam is practiced. The Muslims in these three border provinces represent approximately 80% of the total Muslims in Thailand's population. They speak a Malay dialect (Jawi). The second group of Muslims is formed by Thai Muslims who live primarily in the provinces of Satun and Songkla as well as in the upper south. Finally, a third group can be identified, which is however both geographically and structurally much more differentiated: namely, the multi-ethnic Muslims of central and northern Thailand.[3] The third group is largely dominated by immigrants who moved to Thailand over the course of history for economic or private reasons. The last two groups are not involved in the current conflict at all – the conflict is limited to the three predominantly Malayan Muslim-inhabited provinces in the far south, and a few neighboring districts in Songkla.

A further argument against the significance of religious tendencies in the southern conflict is also found in the relationship between Islam and Buddhism.

There are five provinces with a Muslim majority population: Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkla and Satun. The difference between the first three and the last two is that the bloody disputes do not affect Songkla and Satun – certainly not a geographical coincidence. Rather, the reason for the lack of violence in Songkla and Satun can be found in the fact that although the majority of the population is Muslim, only ten percent of them are ethnically Malayan.[4] Therefore, Islam as a central religion is not a problem for communal living with Buddhists, either in the north of the country or in Bangkok.

A further argument against the significance of religious tendencies in the southern conflict is also found in the

2 | Cf. Imtiyaz Yusuf, „The Ethno-Religious Dimension of the Conflict in Southern Thailand," in: Imtiyaz Yusuf and Lars Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2006): 169-190, here: 171

3 | Cf. Imtiyaz Yusuf, „The Southern Thailand Conflict and the Muslim World", http://www.bangkokbiznews.com/2006/special/south /pdf/southern 01.pdf (accessed February 18, 2010).

4 | Cf. Joseph Chinyong Liow, Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines: Religion, Ideology, and Politics (Washington: East West Center, 2006): 26 et seq.

relationship between Islam and Buddhism. From a purely formal perspective, no potential for conflict can be derived from an encounter between Islam and Buddhism as a religion or worldview. Neither religion shuts itself off against other worldviews and there is therefore nothing to prevent mutual acceptance. Especially Buddhism, with its very individually spiritual religion, little institutionalization, and tolerant character, offers no explanation for a religiously motivated conflict between Buddhists and Muslims. Additionally, in Thailand there exists a freedom of religion which must be taken seriously, which is capable of marginalizing such an approach.[5]

Basically, a religious transformation process can be observed in south Thailand, but also in the entire South-East Asian area. Traditional everyday Islam is increasingly being overshadowed by the conservative variety of Wahabism.

Even if the outbreak of violence is not directly connected to religious motivations, religion is playing an increasing role in the conflict. Islam represents a central identity factor in the self-understanding of the Malayan Muslims. In many areas, ethnic origin is mixed with the religion.[6] Religion is a foundational factor connected with nearly all sociopolitical and social components of Muslim life in the south, which leads finally to an obligatory participation of the religion in the "defense" of Malayan culture.

However, developments and causes can be summarized that led to the religion today having developed into a very sensitive regulator for the events of the conflict in the south of Thailand: Ethnic assimilation through suppression of the Malayan, widespread religious education in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Pakistan, as well as the use of religious places to recruit militants.[7] Basically, a religious transformation process can be observed in south Thailand, but also in the

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5 | Cf. Gothom Arya, „Local Patriotism and the Need for Sound Language and Education Policies in the Southern Border Provinces," in: Imtiyaz Yusuf und Lars Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2006): 17-51, here: 24.

6 | Cf. Imtiyaz Yusuf, „The Ethno-Religious Dimension of the Conflict in Southern Thailand," in: Imtiyaz Yusuf and Lars Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2006): 169-190, here: 175.

7 | Cf. Haris 2004, 58 et seq.

entire South-East Asian area. Traditional everyday Islam is increasingly being overshadowed by the conservative variety of Wahabism.

In recent years, the rebels also increasingly used Islamist symbols and rhetoric, in close context with the creeping Islamization of society. However, there are no clues to support the claim that the southern conflict is connected to the global Jihad movement. Another fact upholds this: Militant groups in southern Thailand, unlike other organizations such as the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah, act according to goals which are primarily narrowly limited to geographical areas and have only been noticed regionally and internationally by way of more modern media reporting.[8]

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THE ROOTS RUN DEEP – A FACTOR ANALYSIS OF CAUSES AND BACKGROUNDS

HISTORICAL DIMENSION

This conflict did not arise only recently. Rather, it has a long history. The tensions have run since the early 20th century in cycles with highs and lows. The first violent attacks came after the Kingdom of Siam annexed the previously independent Sultanate of Pattani in 1902 after years of tug-of-war with the British colonial power. The "Anglo-Siamese Agreement," signed in 1909, promised the control of the Sultanate to Siam.[9] The prior Sultanate was divided into three provinces, in which we can today localize the

8 | Cf. http://www.aies.at/download/2009/fuker-suedostasien.pdf (accessed April 20, 2010).
9 | Cf. Gothom Arya, „Local Patriotism and the Need for Sound Language and Education Policies in the Southern Border Provinces," in: Imtiyaz Yusuf und Lars Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2006): 17-51, here: 22.

core of the conflict: Pattani, Yala, Narathwat. The fact that Pattani was not an insignificant Sultanate, but primarily in the 16th and 17th centuries was a political and religious center of influence in South-East Asia, is still embedded deep in the collective awareness of the Malayan Muslim population in the southern provinces of Thailand.

In 1932, the newly founded constitutional monarchy of Thailand and its central government followed a centrali-

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zation and assimilation policy which of course was implemented at the cost of the ethnic and cultural identity of the Malayan population. "Thainess" was the Thai version of national state development; a unified national state interest and thinking in Thailand was to be built up, which resulted in forced suppression of ethnic, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. The three great national state pillars: Nation, Religion (Buddhism) and King, had unlimited priority. At the same time, the central government implemented a settlement policy aimed at increasing the proportion of Thai inhabitants.[10]

The homogenization policy was implemented especially excessively under the government of Field Marshall Phibun Songkram (1938-44 and 1948-57). The culture of central Thailand was raised to the level of an exemplary culture and Theravada Buddhism was declared the national religion. This political line of assimilation was also pursued by the successive governments. Certain decrees met with huge resistance from the Malayan Muslims, such as the introduction of compulsory schooling with Thai as the exclusive teaching language, the cancellation of Muslim holidays, the prohibition of wearing traditional clothing in public, and the effort to dispose of Islamic law.[11] These decrees were later revoked, however, Thailand continues to resist the recognition of the ethnic and cultural identity of the Malayan Muslims in the south.

10 | Cf. Thanet Aphornsuvan, „Nation-State and the Muslim Identity in the Southern Unrest and Violence," in: Imtiyaz Yusuf und Lars Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2006): 92-127, here: 112.
11 | Cf. International Crisis Group (ICG), "Southern Thailand. Insurgency, not Jihad", in: *Asia Report* no. 98 (Singapore and Brussels: ICG, May 18, 2005): 3.

In this context, we can say that the lack of cultural self-determination together with "local patriotism"[12] is the most important factor for the conflict in southern Thailand. In the 1950's there were already rebellions and unrest, and the first armed protest movements arose: the *Kumpulan Melayu Raya* (KAMPAR) shortly after World War II, the *Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Pattani* (BRN) in the 1960's, and the *Pattani United Liberation Organisation* (PULO) in 1969.[13] Especially in the 70's and 80's, militant groups fought for independence from Thailand. In the 90's, the violence eased off. Then from 2001, the attacks increased again, particularly against state organizations and security staff. But those events pale in comparison to the continuing saga that began in 2004.

ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Besides the ethno-religious aspect, the structural aspects of the conflict also include economic, educational policy, and legal factors. The southern provinces belong to the regions in which the country's general economic progress barely arrives. The south of Thailand is characterized by agricultural production, similar to the far north. The population lives mostly in small villages with tightly-woven social networks and they connect family life with work life. Technical progress and industry are barely present, if at all. As is usual in agricultural regions, the people feed themselves from their harvest, and work in agricultural highlands and lowlands, fishing, forestry and animal breeding.[14] It is from precisely these careers and social living standards that poverty, hopelessness and disadvantages arise within the population of Thailand.

Beyond that, there is a huge gap in the distribution of income in the southern provinces. Buddhist ethnic and Chinese-origin Thais have a significantly higher income and assets compared to the members of the Malayan

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12 | „Local patriotism is particularly strong when the population speaks another language, practices another religion and has different historical narratives as compared to the national mainstream." cf. Arya (2006): 17.
13 | Cf. Aphornsuvan (2006): 104.
14 | Cf. Duncan McCargo, „Introduction: Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence," in: *Critical Asian Studies*, 38 (2006), no. 1: 3-10, here: 10.

minority. While Buddhist Thais in particular tend to occupy administration, and those of Chinese origin control large sections of the economy, many Malayan Muslims live with low incomes from agriculture and fishing.

A comparison with neighboring provinces having similar economic structures shows that the three border provinces have the lowest per-capita income in the whole of the south.[15] For example, Krabi and Phuket are only a few hundred kilometers away geographically, but they are among Thailand's richest provinces. The three provinces come off equally badly in a comparison with the neighboring provinces of Songkla and Satun. The border provinces have barely profited at all from the Thai government's elaborate development programs. According to the *Deep-South Watch*, 470,000 of the approx. 1.3 million Muslim inhabitants of the border provinces are living below the poverty line.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The economic underdevelopment goes hand in hand with unequal chances at education. Language barriers, discrimination, quotas for official jobs, and low mobility also contribute to the intellectual and employment isolation of the Malayan Muslim Thais in the border provinces.

The prevailing educational system represents a double-edged sword with regard to the conflict. On the one hand it limits the opportunities of the Malayan Muslims to access education and careers, on the other it contributes to an increase in separatist tendencies. This is closely connected with the complicated structure of the educational institutions in the south. As well as state schools, there are state-recognized Islamic private schools and also the traditional *Pondoks*. While state schools offer no classes on Islam, this gap is filled by the state-recognized private schools which teach both religion and the state curriculum. However, state schools and their teaching have been repeated victims of attacks by separatists, who see these

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15 | Cf. Aurel Croissant, „Muslim insurgency, political violence and democracy in Thailand," in: *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19 (2007): 1-18, here: 6.

schools as a means of cultural assimilation by the Thai state. So many Muslims send their children to the *Pondoks*, which originated in the time of the Pattani Sultanate and are thus considered part of the Malayan Muslim culture. They are financed largely by donations, including from the Arabian nations. Additionally, a large number of the teachers have been trained in Islamic states in South-East Asia and the Middle East.

The *Pondoks*, where the teaching is in Jawi (a Malayan dialect with an extended Arabic alphabet), lead unavoidably to disadvantages for the local population as regards educational opportunities. These lacks in education, along with the high entry requirements at universities and especially the difficulty of self-expression in the Thai language at university level, result in there only being a few students of Malayan origin. The Thailand Human Development Report 2007 gives the proportion of people with a university degree at 7% for Pattani, 6.5% for Yala, and 4.2% for Narathiwat.

DRACONIAN LAWS

The drastic security measures, which often lead to violations of basic human rights in the region, strengthen the feeling of injustice within the local population and drive the uninvolved into the arms of the militant rebels. A vicious circle arises where violence and security measures feed each other.

After the escalation of violence in 2004, Thaksin had declared martial law, replaced by an emergency status decree in 2005, which has been renewed every three months to this day. After the military coup in 2006, martial law was reinstated in the three provinces – in addition to emergency status law. This gives security forces wide-ranging authority without the provision of civil control.

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often, the two security laws are implemented in combination, which leads to the formula "30+7." Suspects fall first under martial law for seven days and then under the emergency status law for a further 30 days in detention. International organizations like Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group point out this problematic practice again and again.[16] The drama of indiscriminate arrests is reflected in the statistics. Up until mid 2009 there were 6,758 cases, of which only 1,318 led to a court hearing. But only 205 cases led to a guilty verdict.

On October 25th, 2004, a protest in the border town of Tak Bai ended with the death of 85 people. Around 3,000 people had gathered in front of the local police station to call for the release of six members of a local "security group" who had been accused of giving weapons to militants.

Overall, human rights violations are part of everyday life in the south. Cases of targeted killings are also known. Since the outbreak of the violent conflict in 2004, not one single security officer has been called to account for accusations of human rights violations. Again, this increases resistance against the Thai state and serves primarily as a powerful means to recruit militants.

The *Tak Bai* incident in particular has engraved itself on the memory of the local people. On October 25th, 2004, a protest in the border town of *Tak Bai* ended with the death of 85 people. Around 3,000 people had gathered in front of the local police station to call for the release of six members of a local "security group" who had been accused of giving weapons to militants. The protest escalated and 1,300 protesters were arrested. 78 of them suffocated while being transported to a military camp 130 km away in Pattani, their hands cuffed behind them, stacked on top of one another in military transports. Meanwhile, the Thai government has apologized for the incident and paid out approximately €1.2 million in compensation to the bereaved. But to this day, no one has been made to take responsibility for the incident and the deaths of 76 people.[17]

All Thai governments since 2006 have recognized that the feeling of injustice is a significant factor in the increase of violence. Their statements say that the lack of justice

16 | Crisis Group Briefing, Thailand: Political Turmoil and the Southern Insurgency: 12-14.
17 | Human Rights Watch, Thailand: Serious Backsliding on Human Rights, January 20, 2010.

in the border provinces is one of the main causes of the troubles. However, to this day no concrete steps have been taken to improve the justice system.

THE GOVERNMENT COUNTS ON THE MILITARY

Since the violent escalation of the conflict in 2004, five different governments have been in power. All promised in their rhetoric to solve the conflict peacefully, but in reality the upper hand in the south has been left to the military. In spite of various announcements and approaches, military strategy dominates as it always has. No serious political initiative is apparent on the part of the Thai government.

In hindsight we can determine that the government of Thaksin Shinawatra carries particular responsibility for the escalation of violence. The Thai security forces proceeded against the separatists with extreme brutalilty and mostly outside of the legal state framework. Apparently "black-lists" and blood money practices were used, said to have led to the murder of supposed terrorists. Accordingly, the already latent antipathies of the local people were strengthened against the central government and the Thai state. Under Thaksin, the special administration for the border provinces, the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC) was also dissolved. It had no wide-reaching authority or resources, but had a symbolic meaning as a dialog forum.

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But it was also Thaksin who instigated a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) under the leadership of an earlier Thai Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun, in order to work on suggestions to solve the situation in the three border provinces. The report of the commission confirmed self-critically that the measures used by the central government since early 2004 have not solved the regional problem, but rather the military operations have led to a worsening of the situation. The commission suggested beginning a serious dialog with the Islamic forces. To meet the Islamic population halfway, it was suggested to permit parts of Islamic law and Jawi as an official language in the southern provinces. The NRC also suggested recognizing the cultural identity of the people in the southern provinces, in an

appropriate manner. However, the NRC report disappeared in the turbulence of the internal political conflict which eventually led to the coup.

After the military coup, the interim government under Surayud Chulanont set some positive signs. The most significant of them are: Surayud's public apology for attacks by the army and compensation for the 84 victims of the arrest incident in *Tak Bai*, as well as amnesty for all accused; a new investigation of the massacre in the Kru Se mosque and the disappearance of human rights lawyer Somchai; doing away with blacklists of civilians suspected of terrorism; and the recognition of Jawi as a working language. Beyond that, however, the special administration (SBPAC), made up of security forces, civil authorities and Islamic dignitaries, was revived. But there was no significant improvement in the situation – particularly because the measures were more symbolic in meaning and were not aimed at solving structural causes for conflict.

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Now as before, the political agenda in Bangkok is dominated by the battle for internal political power between supporters and opponents of ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra – pushing the violent conflict out of the center of attention. This means that the necessity to replace the military strategy with a political one has slipped into the far distance. Experts also suspect that the governments leave control in the south to the military so as to ensure its goodwill in Bangkok.

The current Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva stated several times that he is seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict while recognizing the cultural and linguistic particularities, and that additional tax money should be used in the development of the south. So in 2009, the development budget for the southern provinces increased by 50% to around €1.3 million for the next three years.

This means that regional development is to serve as the solution for the conflict. This development plan intends to improve the quality of life and increase the per capita family income from 64,000 baht to 120,000 baht. Beyond that,

the security measures and the justice system are to be improved. The plan also aims to encourage reconciliation and peaceful cohabitation, as well as improve economic performance, investments and administrative structures.

The violence in southern Thailand continues – in spite of these constructive initiatives by governing Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Even though the Muslim provinces are receiving more state support than before, the call for independence is not silent.

WHAT DO THE SEPARATISTS WANT?

In recent years, separatist groups in south Thailand have increasingly pursued a policy of violence against the Thai central government and its representatives. The radical groups carry out guerrilla tactics with targeted attacks on institutions and persons connected with the central government.

In the southern provinces of Thailand, a number of organizations are active in profiling themselves as violent and aggressive. The largest and most active, and the most important according to the Thai government, is the *Barisan Revolusi National-Coordinate* (BRN-C). The youth organization *Pemuda* also counts as part of it. The operative arm of the BRN-C is the *Runda Kumpulan Kecil* (RKK). Other organizations include *Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani* (GMIP) and the *Patani United Liberation Organisation* (PULO), which are

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said to have made an agreement in 2009 on unifying their troops. Since then, PULO has been a political mouthpiece for GMIP also. Beyond this, the agreement includes the founding of a shared military arm, the *Patani Liberation Army*.[18]

The particularity of the separatist organizations in the southern border provinces is that they cannot be grasped. Now, as before, it is unclear which group is behind the attacks, and to what extent. None of the various separatist organizations has ever claimed to have carried out an

18 | PULO and Mujahidin join forces, http://www.patanipost.com/ PM090816.html (accessed May 20, 2010).

attack. It is only suspected that the BNR-C might have a coordinating role.

This means that the security forces are facing an invisible opponent. There is no reliable information about the leadership and structure of the organizations. But experts assume that the organizations act primarily in independent local cells. These cells appear now and then to carry out coordinated and parallel attacks. Terrorism experts believe that the leaders of the organizations only have a small amount of influence on the individual resistance cells. Obviously, secrecy regarding the organizational structure has the highest priority. According to information from the security forces, the religious schools in particular serve to recruit militants, since they escape state control.

A further characteristic of the organizations is that there has never been a clear declaration with political demands from any side. It is only considered proven that the rebels want to regain the independence of the former Sultanate of Pattani.

This vagueness is desired, according to the estimates of analysts. The organizations have so far been successful with this strategy. But the fact that no one has taken responsibility for the attacks also has to do with a deep-seated fear, according to the International Crisis Group: in the past, rebel leaders were killed as soon as they agreed to discussions and made themselves known. There are no indications of any significant support from other countries. It is suspected that the rebels procure their own weapons and money themselves, in Thailand – by robbing solders and village militias, and by imposing taxes in the areas they control. According to the security forces, the rebels have infiltrated around 800 of the 2000 villages in the region, and they control several hundred already.

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authority. The operative leaders of the rebellion appear to be largely unknown to the Thai authorities. To date, willingness to engage in dialog has been signaled primarily by leaders living in foreign exile. However, their influence on the terrorist activities in the region is considered low.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION

In the existing circumstances, it is unrealistic to imagine a short or medium term solution for the conflict. Since 2006 the political crisis in Bangkok has overshadowed all discussion about a political solution in the south. Accordingly, political action in the south cannot be expected before the "government fiasco" in Bangkok is cleared up. However, there are countless debates in the academic and civil society sector, bringing forth serious approaches for solving the southern conflict.

The basic requirement on the way to solving the conflict is the necessity of dialog between all parties involved in the conflict. The understanding must also catch on that there can only be one solution to negotiation. This includes not only the government, but also the local representatives, civil society figures, and the military. Above all else, the dialog should be aimed at including the Muslim population and religious representatives, to seek solutions together. Experts also primarily recommend including representatives from rebel groups in the dialog, so as to defuse the potential for violence. Cooperation with the local people and acceptance of religious and ethnic diversity are of great importance, as is the self-perception of the Malayan Muslim population in the south.

Economic stimulation programs, local education centers and high financial budgets are certainly important parts of the conflict's solution, however these alone will never solve the basic problem, which is of a purely political nature. Therefore, it is urgently necessary to replace the military strategy applied thus far with a political one. A first step would be a strict civil control of the military, which could work against a further escalation of the conflict. The authority of the military regarding administrative and partly legal jurisdiction would have to be limited and merge into a regional civil-military cooperation. The military

should understand and accept its role as a stabilizer for the situation, but not as the government of the south. In 2009, Prime Minister Abhisit had declared that he would remove power from the military in the south, however to date there are no apparent concrete measures to this effect. Here we must also state that prior attempts by civil society to create cooperation and responsibility have failed due to the unwillingness of the military.

The desire for an independent form of local administration in the south is as old as the conflict itself. But the lack of willingness to give the south a kind of "autonomous special solution" has existed for just as long.

The solution favored by experts is the introduction of a form of autonomy or decentralization of the state administration. A wide-reaching self-administration such as already exists in the cities of Bangkok and Pattaya could in fact be an important element in laying down the conflict. However, a debate on the topic is still taboo in Thailand for the most part.

The desire for an independent form of local administration in the south is as old as the conflict itself. But the lack of willingness to give the south a kind of "autonomous special solution" has existed for just as long. Even if Prime Minister Abhisit is not currently convinced regarding an administrative reform as a conflict-solving mechanism in the south, other ways could be sought to provide appropriate representation for the Malayan Muslims within the administrative structure in the south. The basically subsidiary model of self-administration would mean primarily a fairer and equal-rights representation of their interests for the people in the south, because the region itself can react to its own special needs.

The attempts at solutions to date, largely supported by security measures, have proved counterproductive. There is a real danger that the violence could gain further ground and tension could increase in the communities between Muslims and Buddhists. Therefore, it is urgently necessary for the government to instigate a political package taking into account the ethnic and cultural realities in the south. In doing so, reforms must encompass not only the administrative structures, but also the justice and educational systems. Such a reform can only be implemented if political initiatives are worked out with participation from civil society in the southern border provinces.