
**MUSLIM SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS IN THE
PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND**

THE MORO INSURGENCY

Separatist violence in the southern Philippines centers around the activities of the Moros,¹ the Muslims on the islands of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago that have historically constituted a stronghold of Islam in Southeast Asia. Four main factors underscore Moro separatist sentiment. First is fear of having religious, cultural, and political traditions weakened (or possibly destroyed) by forced assimilation into a Catholic-dominated Philippine Republic. Second is resentment of Catholic transmigration from the north. This has not only dispossessed many Muslims of what are considered to be ancient and communal land rights, it has also reduced the Moro population to a minority in their own homeland. Third is frustration with Mindanao's lack of economic development. Currently, 15 of the Philippines' poorest provinces are located in the south, which additionally has the country's lowest literacy rate (75 percent) and life expectancy (57 years).² Fourth is a tradition of warlordism, banditry, and blood feuds.

Ever since the Spanish colonization of the Philippines in the mid-1500s, governments in Manila have aimed at both political domination and religious conversion in Mindanao. An integral part of this

¹Spanish for "Moors," a term sixteenth-century Spaniards extended to Muslims in the Philippines and elsewhere.

²Peter Chalk, "The Davao Consensus: A Panacea for the Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1997, pp. 80-83.

effort has been transmigration, something that was particularly evident during the early 1900s when Christians from other parts of the Philippines were encouraged to settle in the south. These programs altered the ethnic and religious balance in Mindanao—from an overall Muslim majority in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago at the end of the nineteenth century to less than 17 percent of the population today—and precipitated bitter conflicts over land distribution and ownership. These demographic changes engendered a deep sense of resentment that has since been compounded by integrationist policies that have largely ignored local cultural, religious, and political traditions.³

Exploitative economic policies and uneven investment flows, which have mainly benefited industries in the northern Philippines, have exacerbated disparities between Catholics and Muslims, further fueling perceptions of local alienation and deprivation.⁴ It is against this sociopolitical and economic context that the separatist Islamic insurgency in the southern Philippines has been fought since 1971.

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the largest of the Moro armed organizations, which historically served as the main focus for armed Islamic resistance to Manila in the southern Philippines, made peace with the Philippine government in 1996.⁵ The agree-

³Muslims retained a majority in some parts of their traditional territory—for instance, the Sulu archipelago remains predominantly Muslim. Michael A. Costello, “The demography of Mindanao,” in Mark Turner, R.J. May, and Lulu Respal Turner (eds.), *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promise*, New Day Publishers, Quezon City, Philippines, 1992, pp. 40–41. See also R. J. May, “The Wild West in the South: A Recent Political History,” in Turner, May, and Respal Turner, p. 128; Daniel Lucero, “The SPCPD: A Breakthrough Towards Peace,” *Office of Strategic Studies (OSS) Digest* (July/August 1996), p. 5; and Dynamic Research and Media Services, *A Study of the New Developments on the MNLF Secession Movement in Relation to AFP Plans*, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Quezon City, Philippines, 1989, p. 2.

⁴Islam, “The Islamic Independence Movements in Patani of Thailand and Mindanao of the Philippines,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 5, May 1998, p. 452.

⁵The MNLF was founded by Nur Misuari, a Tausug, in 1971. The group defined itself according to three main beliefs: First, that the Moro people constitute a distinct *bangsa* (nation) that has a specific Islamic historical and cultural identity. Second, that the *bangsamoro* have a legitimate right to determine their own future. Third, that the MNLF has both a duty and obligation to wage a *jihad* against the Philippine State. For further details, see Mark Turner, “Terrorism and Secession in the Southern Philippines: The Rise of the Abu Sayyaf,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 1,

ment established the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and gave MNLF a stake in the Philippine political process. Two separatist groups remain active in the southern Philippines: the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

The MILF was formally established in 1980 as a splinter movement of the MNLF. The group is far more religiously oriented than its parent movement, emphasizing the promotion of Islamic ideals rather than the simple pursuit of Moro nationalist objectives.⁶ The avowed political objective of the MILF according to its leader, Hashim Salamat, is the creation of a separate Islamic state in all areas where Muslims are a majority in the southern Philippines.⁷ The essential purpose of this polity, to be known as the Mindanao Islamic Republic (MIR), is to establish a system of government that upholds and applies *sharia* (Islamic law) in all aspects of daily life. Such a goal is to be achieved through a combined strategy of *da'wa* (Islamic preaching) and *jihad* (holy war).⁸

According to Philippine National Police (PNP) and military intelligence estimates, MILF's current strength is between 8,000 and 11,000, although some independent analysts have put the total num-

1995, p. 10; P. B. Sinha, "Muslim Insurgency in the Philippines," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 18, No. 5, 1995, p. 638; and A. Misra, "Guerrillas in the Mist," *Pioneer*, July 11, 1994.

⁶Indeed, the original incorporation of "Islamic" in the group's name was a deliberate move designed to set the organization apart from the more secular orientation of the MNLF.

⁷These areas are defined as central Mindanao, parts of the Zamboanga peninsula, Davao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan.

⁸"The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)," unpublished paper prepared for the Philippine National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), p. 5; Alfredo Filler, "Muslim Militancy: A New Threat to Security and Stability, a Philippine Viewpoint," unpublished paper prepared for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, July 1995, p. 20; Concepcion Clamor, "Terrorism in the Philippines and Its Impact on National and Regional Security," paper delivered before the CSCAP Working Group on Transnational Crime, Manila, May 1998, p. 8; "Held to Ransom," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 25, 2000; "Rumble in the Jungle," *The Australian*, March 23, 1999; Sheikh Abu Zahir, "The Moro Jihad," *Nidal'ul Islam* 23, April-May 1998, p. 11; "Commissar of the Faith," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 23, 1996; "Crescent Moon Rising: The MILF Puts Its Islamic Credentials Upfront," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995; and "Rebels Without a Pause," *Asiaweek*, April 3, 1998.

ber of fighters as high as 15,000.⁹ MILF fighters are organized into a military wing known as the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), which is composed of at least six separate divisions. The troops are trained mostly by veterans of the Afghan war and rotated through the organization's 13 major camps. All of these were linked to the MILF's central headquarters at Camp Abubakar until its capture by the Philippine army in July 2000.¹⁰

Traditionally, most of the MILF's violent activities have taken the form of orthodox guerrilla warfare with hit-and-run attacks directed against the Philippine military. Generally speaking, the group has not emphasized indiscriminate violence against civilian and non-combatant targets. Such "self-restraint" has been used to distance the MILF from the activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group and is very much in line with the group's own self-image as a revolutionary military (as opposed to terrorist) force.¹¹ Nonetheless, terrorist-type tactics have been periodically used against Christian communities, employees of companies who have refused to pay "revolutionary taxes," or local government and police officials.¹²

Abu Sayyaf (literally, "Bearer of the Sword") is a self-styled fundamentalist insurgent movement whose birth can be traced to 1989.¹³ In 1999, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Southern Command estimated Abu Sayyaf's overall support base at 1,148, with a regular armed component consisting of approximately 330 fight-

⁹The MILF, itself, claims an armed membership of 150,000. See Mike Winchester, "Mindanao," *Soldier of Fortune*, September 1998, p. 66; "Philippine Left Announces Ties with Islamic Rebels," *CNN Interactive World Wide News*, March 29, 1999.

¹⁰Correspondence with Philippine National Police Directorate for Intelligence, Camp Crame, Manila, June 1998. See also Anthony Davis, "Islamic Guerrillas Threaten Fragile Peace on Mindanao," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 10, No. 5, May 1998, pp. 32-33; and "Rebels Without a Pause," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 3, 1998.

¹¹Clamor, "Terrorism in the Philippines," p. 8; Filler, "Muslim Militancy," p. 20.

¹²See, for instance, "A Hostage Crisis Confronts Estrada," *The Economist*, May 6, 2000; "Philippine Officials Link Bombings to Muslim Rebels, as Third Hostage-Taking Unfolds," *CNN Interactive World Wide News*, May 3, 2000; and "Military Finds 2 Beheaded by Philippine Rebels," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2000.

¹³The group's original name was the *Mujahideen* Commando Freedom Fighters (MCFE). The MCFE renamed itself first the *Jundullah* (literally, "Servants of Allah") in 1992 and then the ASG in 1993. The group is also occasionally referred to as the *Al Harakat Al Islamiyya* (AHAI).

ers.¹⁴ The group is governed by an Executive Committee headed by a *Caliph* and eight other religious leaders. Together these constitute the so-called *Minsupala* Islamic Theocratic State Shadow Government (MIT-SG).¹⁵ Abdurajak Janjalini represented the supreme power within the organization until he was killed in a shootout with the police in December 1999. Since then the group has been effectively leaderless, although its members have stated their determination to regroup under a new *Caliph* as soon as a suitable successor can be found.¹⁶

In terms of revolutionary political violence, virtually all of Abu Sayyaf's activities are terrorist in nature. In March and April 2000, the group abducted 50 elementary school teachers and children on the island of Basilan and took 21 hostages, including foreign tourists, at a diving resort in Malaysia. At the time of writing, 31 hostages had been released, four had been beheaded, and another 15 rescued by the Philippine military.¹⁷

The overall objective of Abu Sayyaf is the establishment of an independent and exclusive Islamic state in Mindanao. Whereas the MILF merely aims for independence, the Abu Sayyaf additionally espouses violent religious intolerance, advocating the deliberate targeting of all southern Filipino Catholics. Abu Sayyaf also sees its objectives in Mindanao as intimately tied to an integrated effort aimed at asserting the global dominance of Islam through armed struggle and an

¹⁴Correspondence with PNP Directorate for Intelligence, Camp Crame, Manila, June 1998.

¹⁵Clamor, "Terrorism in the Philippines," p. 5; Filler, "Muslim Militancy," p. 16; "Briefing on Terrorism," briefing paper prepared by the Philippine National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), January 1996, pp. 6–9.

¹⁶See "Abu Sayyaf to Regroup, Gov't Warns," and "Kidnappings to Continue in South," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 22, 1998.

¹⁷"A Hostage Crisis Confronts Estrada," *The Economist*, May 6, 2000; "Philippine Military Begins Assault on Muslim Rebels," *CNN Interactive World Wide News*, April 22, 2000; "Philippine Forces Hit Rebel Stronghold," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2000; "Gunmen Take Foreigners Hostage in Malaysia," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2000; and "Military Finds 2 Beheaded by Philippine Rebels," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2000.

extreme religious fervor not generally shared (at least overtly) by the MILF.¹⁸

Ethnic identification tends to underlie support for the different insurgent groups. The Tausugs, the politically dominant group in the Sulu archipelago, backed the MNLF. The bulk of the MILF's members come from the 1.6 million Maguindanaoan tribe (who are scattered throughout central Mindanao), the 1.9 million Maranaos (a trading community from Lanao del Sur), and the Iranos from North Cotabato and Basilan. Most of Abu Sayyaf's active backing is concentrated in Zamboanga, Basilan, and Sulu (where the Abu Sayyaf's main training camp is situated). However, pockets of residual support are also thought to exist throughout the southern Philippines, notably in the poverty-stricken regions of western Mindanao. The majority of the group's members are Muslim youths, with many of the older cadres reportedly veterans of the Afghan war.¹⁹

Both the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf Group are thought to retain and benefit from well-established links, both regionally and internationally. Intelligence sources within the Philippines believe that MILF leader Salamat maintains close relations with *ulamas* (many of whom were his classmates at Cairo's Al-Azhar University) heading fundamentalist Islamic organizations in a number of other countries, including Pakistan, Egypt, and Afghanistan.²⁰

Apart from financial assistance, external backing is also thought to take the form of religious instruction and military training. The Philippine National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) maintains it has concrete proof that foreign nationals are currently residing in MILF camps, providing a variety of "educational" services ranging from theology classes to basic weapon-handling seminars.²¹

¹⁸Clamor, "Terrorism in the Philippines," p. 5; Filler, "Muslim Militancy," p. 16; and "Validation of the Existence of the ASG," unpublished paper prepared by the Philippine National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), February 14, 1997.

¹⁹Correspondence with PNP Directorate for Intelligence, Camp Crame, Manila, June 1998. See also "Held to Ransom," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 25, 2000; "Zambo Blast Coverup for Weak ASG," *The Manila Times* (Internet edition), January 5, 1999; and Filler, "Muslim Militancy," pp. 16–17.

²⁰Correspondence with intelligence representatives from the PNP, NICA, and AFP, Manila, June 1998.

²¹Correspondence with the NICA, Quezon City, June 1998.

Moreover, Philippine authorities claim to have evidence that extremists and mercenaries from the Middle East and South Asia have traveled to Mindanao to train MILF cadres in the fundamentals of assassination, bombing, sabotage and, possibly, suicide attacks.²²

MILF cadres are additionally alleged to have benefited from military training abroad, particularly in camps run *ex-Mujahideen* fighters located along the Pakistani-Afghan border. According to NICA officials, recruits travel to South Asia on the grounds that they are taking theological courses at the University of Pakistan. Once there, however, they are diverted to regional camps where they receive intensive instruction in unconventional warfare techniques.²³ Of particular importance in this regard is a group known as *Al-Afghani*, a “freelance” organization that is alleged to have been providing external training for MILF (and Abu Sayyaf) cadres since at least 1994.²⁴

The pertinence of international and regional linkages applies equally, if not more, to the Abu Sayyaf Group. Philippine military and police intelligence both assert that Abu Sayyaf members have benefited from overseas training, primarily in camps located in Pakistan and Afghanistan. As with the MILF, it is believed that the freelance *Al-Afghani* plays a critical role in this regard. Indeed, according to Philippine authorities, the Afghan influence is one of the strongest external influences currently being exerted on Abu Sayyaf. Officials with the Police Directorate for Intelligence believe this to be a legacy of the Abu Sayyaf leadership’s intensive involvement in the Afghan war during the 1980s—a role which, at least in relative terms, was far more intimate than that of the MILF.²⁵

²²Correspondence with police and military intelligence, Manila, June 1998.

²³It is also believed that a certain amount of MILF external training takes place in camps located in Sudan and Egypt, with MILF cadres, again, traveling overseas on the grounds that they are undertaking theological courses at foreign institutions. Correspondence with PNP Directorate for Intelligence, Manila, June 1998.

²⁴Meetings with representatives from the AFP and PNP Directorate for Intelligence, Manila in September 1996 and June 1998. See also “March of the Militants,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 9, 1995; “Filipino Terrorists Using Pakistan as a ‘Base of Operations,’” GMA-7 Radio Television Arts Network, Quezon City, April 16, 1995; and “Islamic Terrorism Tied to Pakistani University,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1995.

²⁵Correspondence with PNP Directorate for Intelligence, Camp Crame, Manila, June 1998.

In addition to overseas training, there is also evidence to suggest that Abu Sayyaf established formal operational and financial links with international terrorists and extremists. Philippine military intelligence believes that Abu Sayyaf, possibly in conjunction with renegade elements of the MILF, has facilitated local logistics for transnational Islamic organizations wishing to operate out of the Philippines, something that fits well with the group's international self-identity.²⁶ There is also concern that Abu Sayyaf has been instrumental in developing regional networks with radicals in Malaysia and Islamic rebels operating in Aceh and southern Thailand.²⁷ Fears of mutually supportive arms links have been further heightened in the wake of increased instability in Aceh, with regional threat assessments now focusing on the possibility of Cambodian arms shipments being trafficked to northern Sumatra, southern Thailand, and Mindanao.²⁸

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Prospects for peace in Mindanao received a major boost in September 1996 when the MNLF signed the Davao Consensus, agreeing to end its campaign of armed violence and reintegrate into the mainstream of legitimate politics.²⁹ The accord provides for the

²⁶See Peter Chalk, "Political Terrorism in Southeast Asia," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1998, pp. 126–28; Clamor, "Terrorism in the Philippines," p. 10; "The Shadow of Terrorism," *Asiaweek*, April 28, 1995; and "The Man Who Wasn't There," *Time*, February 20, 1995.

²⁷Personal correspondence co-author Peter Chalk and Pinkerton's Risk Assessment Services (PRAS), November 1996.

²⁸Correspondence with Dr. Alan Dupont, Australian National University, Canberra, November 1999. Similar comments were made during interviews with intelligence representatives from the Australian Office of National Assessments (ONA), Canberra, November 1999.

²⁹Other than the Davao Consensus, there have been two other attempts to negotiate an end to the insurgency in Mindanao. The first was the Tripoli Agreement, which was signed in Libya in 1976 and provided for the creation of an autonomous enclave of all the (then) 13 provinces and nine cities of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. The MNLF ultimately rejected the deal largely because Marcos failed to fully implement its autonomy provisions. The second was the Republic Act 6734, introduced into legislation by President Corazon Aquino in 1987. It aimed to fully implement the 1976 accord, but made the establishment of a Muslim enclave subject to referendum. Four provinces subsequently voted for inclusion (the same four provinces included in the

creation of an MNLF-led Council for Peace and Development to implement and coordinate peace and development projects throughout the 14 provinces in the southern Philippines as well as the creation of a separate, limited, four-district Muslim autonomous region. A referendum on the extension of this enclave is due in 2001.³⁰

Although the Davao Consensus was instrumental in securing the endorsement of the MNLF, the MILF and Abu Sayyaf both categorically rejected the agreement. The MILF renounced the accord on the grounds that it failed to satisfy fundamental Muslim aspirations, particularly in regard to creating an independent Islamic state.³¹ The uncompromising attitude of these two groups has been reflected in a southern Philippine region that continues to be wracked by incessant violence, with bombings, shootings, kidnappings, and, at times, full-scale military clashes.³²

Given the present political context in the Philippines, any notion of granting independence to the south is out of the question. The existence of a Catholic majority (both within and outside Mindanao), which firmly upholds the vision of a fully unified and integrated Philippine Republic, ensures that no government would receive an electoral mandate to accede to the secessionist demands of a largely isolated Islamic minority. Most analysts concur that the best hope for effecting such an outcome lies with implementing a sustained economic development program. Achieving this would not only undermine the civilian support base of the insurgents, it would also

1996 agreement), an outcome that the MNLF rejected. For further details see Chalk, "The Davao Consensus," pp. 82–85.

³⁰Chalk, "The Davao Consensus," pp. 85–86; Islam, "The Islamic Independence Movements in Patani of Thailand and Mindanao of the Philippines," p. 450.

³¹Correspondence with NICA, Manila, June 1998. See also Chalk, "The Davao Consensus," pp. 88–91; "The Moro Jihad," p. 12.

³²James Clad notes that this incessant violence also reflects warlordism and gang competition as much as religiously targeted terrorist violence. It represents a type of continuity, Clad observes, with the practices of traditional leaders, from precolonial times, who routinely indulged in kidnapping, hostage-taking, slave-trading, and the like. Personal communication, January 2001.

remove both groups' *raison d'être*, necessarily forcing each to adopt a more pragmatic and conciliatory negotiating line with Manila.³³

Little progress has been made in this direction, however, Mindanao's enormous economic potential notwithstanding.³⁴ Investment has also all but ground to a complete halt. The Manila government has been preoccupied with the fallout of the Asian economic malaise, which has undercut its own plans for macroeconomic reform and infrastructure development. And while foreign companies and corporations might be attracted by the southern Philippines' abundant supply of natural resources, the continuing lack of law and order in the region detracts from its reputation as a safe, long-term investment opportunity.³⁵

MUSLIM SEPARATISM IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Separatist violence in southern Thailand centers on the activities of the Malay Muslim population in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narithiwat, which historically constituted part of the former Kingdom of Patani.³⁶ Three main pillars underscore Malay separatist

³³Correspondence with Professor Aprodicio Laquian, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, July 1998. Professor Laquian refers to this as "the developmental strategy" for conflict resolution. See also "Held to Ransom," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 25, 2000. The example of the Paglas Corporation, a company that operates a US\$35 million banana plantation in Maguindanao, can be offered in support of the "development strategy" thesis. According to the corporation's director, Ibrahim Pendatum Paglas, the plantation currently employs 2000 people, over half of whom are former MILF members.

³⁴Mindanao has vast timber, agricultural, and mineral deposits at its disposal, not to mention substantial oil reserves.

³⁵See "Philippines 'Achilles Heel' Threatens Its Economic Prosperity," *The Australian*, February 20, 1996; "Poor Little Dragon," *Foreign Report*, 2385, February 1996, pp. 5-6; "Campaign to Wipe Out Kidnappers in Philippines," *New Sunday Times*, March 13, 1997; "Southern Discomfort," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 19, 1998; and "When Travelers Are Targets: The Growing Threat of Kidnapping Abroad," *Washington Post*, July 12, 1998.

³⁶This is the Malay spelling of Pattani. In Thai, the province is spelled with two "t"s. Muslims represent approximately 80 percent of the population in these three provinces. Malays also constitute a majority in the province of Satun, although in this case, Thai integrationist policies have been more successful, for two reasons: first, most people in Satun speak Thai in their everyday lives and, therefore, have not felt aggrieved by a sense of linguistic alienation. Second, the province's main links of

identity in this region. First is a belief in the traditional virtues and “greatness” of the Kingdom of Patani (*Patani Darussalam*). Second is identification with the Malay people, itself reinforced by repeated cross-border contacts with ethnic kin in the northern Malaysian province of Kelantan. Third is a religious orientation based on Islam.³⁷ These three ingredients are woven together in the principle of *hijra* (literally, “emigration in the ‘cause of God’”), which asserts that all Islamic communities have both a religious right and duty to “withdraw” from any form of persecution that is serving to place their survival in jeopardy.³⁸ It is on the basis of this religious edict that Malay Muslim-instigated civil disobedience and separatist violence have been both justified and exonerated.

Ever since the Kingdom of Patani was brought under effective Siamese rule in the late 1700s, repeated attempts have been made to “Siam-ize” the local culture, language, and religion by enforcing uniformity in language and social behavior. Although such integrationist designs have not been directed solely at the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand, they have clearly constituted a direct threat to the region’s particular ethno-religious identity.³⁹

The underdeveloped nature of southern Thailand relative to the rest of the country merely compounded the sense of regional dissatisfaction, further fueling separatist designs and aspirations.⁴⁰ Two principal militant groups remain active in southern Thailand: PULO and New PULO. PULO is the largest and most prominent of the

communication are northward to Thailand, while road and rail access south to Malaysia is minimal.

³⁷Connor Bailey and John Miksic, “The Country of Patani in the Period of Re-Awakening: A Chapter from Ibrahim Syukri’s *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani*,” in Andrew Forbes (ed.), *The Muslims of Thailand*, Volume II: *Politics of the Malay-Speaking South*, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Bihar, 1989, p. 151.

³⁸Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia*, p. 133.

³⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thai Muslims*, Bangkok, 1979, pp. 5–6; Muthiah Alagappa, *The National Security of Developing States: Lessons from Thailand*, (Acorn House, Massachusetts, 1987), pp. 204–07; R. J. May, “The Religious Factor in Three Minority Movements,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1992, pp. 403–04.

⁴⁰R. J. May, “The Religious Factor in Three Minority Movements,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1992, p. 403; Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia*, pp. 187–88; David Brown, *State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 166–70; and Michael Liefer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 35.

various Malay Muslim groups that have operated in southern Thailand since the 1960s. The group sanctions violence as part of its secessionist struggle and recognizes the need to intensify international publicity on the plight of Pattani's Malay Muslims. Militant insurgent actions are carried out by a separate armed wing known as the Pattani United Liberation Army (PULA), which has claimed responsibility for several bomb and arson attacks against government establishments in the south.⁴¹ Perceived symbols of Thai cultural dominance have also been periodically targeted, including schools and Buddhist temples.

The New PULO emerged as a dissident faction of PULO in 1995. The group has pursued the goal of Pattani self-autonomy through less dramatic but more consistent actions than its parent organization. To this end, the focus has been on minor attacks that are intended to repeatedly harass and pester police and local government authorities.⁴² The choice of this particular *modus operandi* probably reflects a desire on the part of the New PULO leadership to conserve limited operational resources. It may also be indicative of an attempt to enhance the perceived legitimacy of the separatist Islamic struggle in the south by minimizing the scale of violence directed against people.

In general, PULO and New PULO have been largely unwilling to coordinate their operational activities, essentially because they have differences in strategic outlooks.⁴³ Nonetheless, the organizations did agree to form a tactical alliance in mid-1997 in an attempt to re-focus national and regional attention on the "southern question." Operating under the name of *Bersatu* (Solidarity), the two Pattani groups carried out a series of coordinated attacks (code-named "Falling Leaves") aimed at killing off state workers, law enforcement

⁴¹Peter Chalk, "Thailand," in Jason Isaacson and Colin Rubenstein (eds.), *Islam in Asia: Changing Political Realities*, (AJC and AIJAC, Washington, D.C., and Melbourne, 1999, p. 166.

⁴²Correspondence with Thai Military Intelligence, Bangkok, July 1997. See also "Terrorist Suspect Has Violent Past," *The Sunday Nation*, January 25, 1998.

⁴³Correspondence with Thai Military Intelligence, Bangkok, July 1997. See also Alagappa, *The National Security of Developing States*, 213; and "The Story Behind the Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Pattani," *The Bangkok Post*, January 18, 1998.

personnel, local government officials, schoolteachers and other perceived symbols of Thai repression.⁴⁴

The external dimension of the PULO/New PULO separatist struggle essentially relates to backing from Islamic militants in northern Malaysia. Thailand has repeatedly alleged that the two groups have benefited from the provision of safe haven in the State of Kelantan and that support has come with the sanction of the province's ruling Islamic Party (PAS) as well as the official indifference of the Kuala Lumpur government. Somewhat more serious have been periodic charges that radicals in Kelantan are facilitating the transshipment of weapons from Cambodia to avail terrorist operations in southern Thailand.⁴⁵

The question of external Malaysian support assumed increased prominence in late 1997 following the initiation of "Falling Leaves," an operation that Thai intelligence maintains could not have taken place in the absence of PAS support. This assessment was instrumental in heightening diplomatic tension between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, with the Thai government specifically warning that closer economic ties would be curtailed if cross-border cooperation against PULO and New PULO was not considerably stepped up.⁴⁶

Concerned that this would jeopardize the much-touted Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand Growth Triangle (MITGT), Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir acceded to the Thai demands and personally sanctioned joint police raids against secessionists thought to be hiding in northern Malaysia. The resulting collaboration proved to be a success, leading to the arrests of several PULO and New PULO

⁴⁴Between August 1997 and January 1998, no fewer than 33 separate attacks were carried out as part of this effort, resulting in nine deaths, several dozen injuries and considerable economic damage. See Chalk, "Political Terrorism in Southeast Asia"; "Chronology of Southern Violence," *The Bangkok Post*, February 1, 1998.

⁴⁵See, for instance, "Minister: 'Southern Separatists Receive Foreign Training,'" *The Nation*, January 6, 1995; "Malaysia Denies Thai Terrorist Claims," *The Australian*, January 6, 1998; and "Malaysia 'Not Training Ground for Thai Rebels,'" *The Straits Times*, January 5, 1998; "Worse to Come," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 29, 1999.

⁴⁶Correspondence with Tony Davis, Specialist correspondent with *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Canberra, September 1998. See also "PM: Peace in South Vital to Growth Triangle," *The Bangkok Post*, January 21, 1998.

leaders in early 1998. Strategically, this represented a major blow to both groups, encouraging many cadres to “give up the struggle.” Indeed, in the months following the joint raids, over 900 militants from PULO, New PULO, and various other smaller groups voluntarily joined a government-sponsored “rehabilitation” program, pledging to become active participants in peaceful national development.⁴⁷ More significantly, several key leaders fled abroad.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding these developments, it is still too early to conclude that armed separatism is at an end in southern Thailand. Malaysia always has the option to put pressure on Thailand by taking a less proactive role in blunting natural Malay sympathies for co-religionists in the southern Thai provinces. Although absolute growth rates are increasing, the region remains underdeveloped relative to other parts of Thailand, with an average per capita income of at least 7,000 baht less than in neighboring provinces. In addition, the south still exists against a backdrop of perceived linguistic and religious discrimination, and Muslim participation in local business is minimal. Both of these factors continue to feed at least residual feelings of discontent and frustration, hindering the prospects for true national reconciliation.⁴⁹

⁴⁷“50 Southern Separatists Surrender,” *The Bangkok Post*, March 12, 1998; “Southern Rebels Surrender,” and “Southern Rebels Meet Deadline to Surrender,” *The Bangkok Post*, March 10, 1998.

⁴⁸“Separatists in Malaysia Flee Abroad,” *The Bangkok Post*, February 22, 1998; “Separatists Flee ‘Haven,’” *The Bangkok Post*, February 26, 1998.

⁴⁹Peter Chalk, *Grey Area Phenomena in Southeast Asia*, Strategic Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, Australia, 1997, p. 62; “Ties of Faith,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 11, 1996; and Ladd Thomas, “Thailand” in William Carpenter and David Wiencek (eds.), *Asian Security Handbook*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1996, pp. 242–43.