ISLAM, RADICALISM, AND VIOLENCE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Berjihad di Patani and the 28 April 2004 Attacks

Wattana Sugunnasil

ABSTRACT: Violence in Thailand's deep South centers on Muslim unrest, which has been simmering since World War II. What was once a low-level secessionist insurgency has now developed into a full-scale conflict and violent campaign that has claimed hundreds of lives in the three southern border provinces. This amounts to the most serious political violence in recent Thai history. The main argument of this article is that the separatist struggle, which was initially based on a Malay national liberation struggle, has taken on undertones of a radical Islamist ideology, and the discourse of the separatist struggle has significantly shifted to that of radical Islamist politics by calling for a jihad against the Thai state, its local agents, and their Muslim allies. This shift is exemplified by a document entitled *Berjihad di Patani*, which appears to have helped inspire the violent incidents of 28 April 2004. To a large extent, what is happening in southern Thailand follows similar developments elsewhere, both at the regional level and in other parts of the Muslim world. Factors affecting the changing discourse and practice of the separatist politics are both external and internal: the failures of secularist development projects in the past decades, the influence of Islamic radicalism abroad, and the Islamic resurgence and fragmentation of religious establishment at home.

Violence in Thailand's deep South centers on Muslim unrest, which has been simmering since World War II. Yet what was once a low-level secessionist insurgency has now developed into a full-scale conflict and violent campaign that has

A Thai soldier looks on as a Muslim woman crosses the street in the southern Thailand city of Bacho (November 2004). In July 2005, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government issued a decree giving him special emergency powers to combat a violent insurgency in Thailand's Muslim-dominated South. Thaksin's action came after a daring nighttime raid by militants in the provincial capital of Yala, Thailand. (AP Photo/David Longstreath)

claimed hundreds of lives in the three southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The recent spate of violent attacks is a result of an escalation of campaigns by Muslim militants launched in early 2004. Acts of sporadic violence have given way to an unprecedented and sustained wave of terrible incidents, often involving direct confrontations between security personnel and militants. This amounts to the most serious political violence in recent Thai history. This article emphasizes the need to understand that there have been some significant changes in Muslim separatist politics. Not only have attacks grown increasingly sophisticated, there has also been a radical shift in the discursive practice of separatist groups. The relationship between separatism and Islamism may best be characterized as a shifting one, in a state of flux.

Several factors underscore the dissatisfaction of Muslims in this part of Thailand.[1] First is a widespread perception that local Muslims have not benefited from development programs implemented since 1960s. Second is resentment at government attempts to impose Buddhist social, cultural, and economic domination. Third is a rejection of the secular orientation of the Thai state, which is seen as incompatible with the region's devoutly Muslim ways. Fourth — and probably most important over the last decade — is fear and distrust of

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1. For discussions of the historical background to the conflict, see Surin 1985; Che Man 1990; and Thanet 2004.

the security forces, whose activities in the region are viewed as heavy-handed and repressive.

In the 1970s and 1980s, most separatist violence took the form of orthodox guerrilla warfare, typified by hit-and-run attacks directed against members of the military. Hundreds of militants gave up their arms in the 1980s in response to an amnesty policy. More recently, serious violence has moved into the urban theater, bombs have become more prevalent, and militants have melted into the civilian population. In addition to political violence, old separatist groups have also engaged in criminal activities, including kidnappings and extortion. Generally speaking, these groups have not emphasized indiscriminate violence against civilian and noncombatant targets. However, since 2004, terrorist-type tactics have become prominent. These new forms of violence have been increasingly directed against police officers, government officials (including Muslims), people suspected of being government collaborators and informers, and even against monks and symbols of Buddhist tradition. A sustained campaign of high-profile violence has been carried out, including almost daily killings, and the launching of well-organized raids on army and police depots, in addition to serious bomb attacks in commercial locations of urban areas.

It is tempting to see the current violence in southern Thailand as essentially a continuation of a separatist struggle for self-determination that flared up as soon as Western colonization of Asia began to collapse after World War II. However, the main argument of this article is that the separatist struggle of the 1970s and 1980s, which was initially based on a Malay national liberation struggle (similar to other independence and socialist or nationalist movements elsewhere in Asia), had by the late 1990s and especially in the early 2000s taken on undertones of a radical Islamist ideology. For the first time the discourse of the separatist struggle shifted to a radical Islamist call for a jihad against the Thai state, its local agents, and their Muslim allies.

What gave rise to this unprecedented escalation of violence in the region? To the casual observer, the Thai government's investment and development programs during the past few decades undoubtedly resulted in greatly improved infrastructure, education, and standards of living. These changes were accompanied by the liberalization of Thai politics symbolized by the new "people's constitution" of 1997. This led some observers to argue that the democratization of Thai politics greatly helped the de-radicalization of Malay-Muslim opposition in Thailand.[2] Yet subsequent developments have confounded such optimistic readings.

Development, Democracy, and the Muslim Predicament

State development policies and plans focusing on improving economic conditions in the southern border area began in the late 1950s.[3] These efforts reflected a strategy adopted by the government to improve living conditions

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2.   See, for example, Suria 1998, cited in Omar 2005, 12.
3.   Nantawan 1976.

among Muslim communities in the border areas, and to lessen deep-rooted political mistrust between the Muslim population and Thai government officials. Moves to show greater sensitivity to the lack of economic and administrative development in the southern border provinces were intended to lessen bitter memories of past discrimination, such as restrictions on the use of the local Malay language and limited access to government jobs and educational opportunities. The authorities hoped that this, in turn, would help reduce popular support for armed separatism. Substantial budgets allocated by the Thai government, coupled with technical support from foreign countries, facilitated infrastructural construction and improvements in the region, especially the construction of important highways. As Srisompob and Panyasak show, the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat have lagged behind the rest of the South economically, yet were not especially poor by the standards of Thailand as a whole.[4] Nevertheless, Malay Muslims in the three provinces had legitimate grievances in terms of their limited access to educational and employment opportunities, notably in the public sector. In sum, despite decades of economic development and expanded educational opportunities, perceived and real inequalities continue to exist between the three predominantly Muslim provinces and provinces in other parts of Thailand.[5]

Another related development that would have a significant impact on Muslim politics can also be observed. By the late 1990s, Muslims were holding unprecedentedly senior posts in Thai politics. Wan Muhammad Nor Matha, a prominent Malay-Muslim politician from Yala, served as the president of Parliament from 1996 to 2001, later becoming deputy prime minister, communications minister, and eventually interior minister during the first Thaksin government. Only a few years earlier, the idea of a Muslim as head of Thailand's local administration and domestic security structures would have been unthinkable. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, another Muslim from the Upper South, served as foreign minister of Thailand from 1997 to 2001; and during Thaksin's first term (2001–2005) there were fourteen Muslim members of parliament and several Muslim senators.[6] In the deep South, Muslims dominated provincial legislative assemblies, and several southern municipalities had Muslim mayors.[7] In this milieu of increasing political liberalization and institutionalized democracy, Muslims have been able to voice their political grievances more openly and enjoy a much greater degree of religious freedom. Muslim girls and women may now wear the *hijab* in government educational institutions and offices, Muslim names may be officially used, Muslim prayer rooms have been created in public places, and Friday prayers may be held on university campuses.[8]

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4. See Srisompob and Panyasak 2006.
5. For a fuller discussion, see ibid.
6. Omar 2005, 11.
7. Ahmad 1997, 313, cited in Omar 2005, 11.
8. Prince of Songkla University, Pattani, was the first to build a mosque on its campus in the late 1990s.

These constructive developments have no doubt improved the lives of Muslims who are now able to secure greater freedom, more rights, and better opportunities. However, it would certainly be naïve to expect that this enhanced political and social participation would address all the economic, cultural, and political grievances of the Muslim community, especially in the Malay-Muslim–dominated areas of the three southern border provinces.

A parliamentary report also proved problematic for local and national Muslim politicians in that it implicitly linked them with the network of illegal activities, including drug trafficking, cross-border smuggling, organized crime, and the activities of "influential groups."[9] Illegal businesses have thrived with tacit support and help from some senior government officials and even from some elements of separatists. Some violent incidents in the 1990s, including arson and bomb attacks, were believed to have been staged by these groups to either protect or further their vested interests.[10] This is a region where, as one commentator puts it, "bandits, good and rogue police officers, good and rogue soldiers, corrupt officials and remnants of Muslim separatist groups have long associated with, robbed and occasionally killed each other."[11] To make matters worse, Najmuddin Umar — one of the very same constituency MPs mentioned approvingly by Omar — was officially charged with involvement in the insurgency, and accused of being to be one of the "masterminds" behind the recent violence.[12] Another problem was that in the face of growing violence during 2004 and 2005, Muslim politicians remained conspicuously silent, so eroding their political legitimacy and support. This cost them dearly in politics: in the 2005 general election, all but one of the eleven incumbent Muslim MPs who stood for election were voted out of office.[13]

Moreover, in spite of an increase in political liberalization and a more concrete representative democracy, police harassment and malpractice in the region remain a big problem. Records from the now defunct Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) report that 60 percent of harassment and malpractice complaints filed by local Muslims named police officials as the main culprit. The police were seen as more abusive than other government officials.[14] Abuses and brutal acts committed by the authorities continue up to the

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9. Parliament Secretariat Office 1999.
10. McCargo 2006.
11. Kavi 2004.
12. In March 2004, Narathiwat MPs Ariphen Uttrasin and Najmuddin Umar, and prominent Pattani senator Den Tohmeena, all Muslims, were accused of involvement in the 4 January 2004 military camp raid. Only Najmuddin subsequently faced charges, however. He had been implicated by an informant, the reliability of whose testimony has been questioned. Najmuddin was close to Masae Useng, an alleged Barisan Revolution National member and secretary of Najmuddin's Pasuka (*tadika* or kindergarten religious school association) before Useng fled to Malaysia (International Crisis Group 2005, 19–20). Najmuddin's trial for treason opened in October 2005, but was immediately adjourned.
13. *Thai Rath*, 8 February 2005.

present as talks of security forces involvement in "disappearances" (the police practice of taking suspects away and making them disappear) and extrajudicial killings have been increasingly echoed among local Muslims in just about every community. According to one report, since the violence accelerated in early January 2004, at least forty to fifty Muslims have disappeared in the three crisis-hit provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala.[15] The most controversial case in this regard was the disappearance of Somchai Neelaphaichit, a well-known and highly respected human rights Muslim lawyer, though not a Southerner.[16] He was reportedly abducted in Bangkok by the police in March 2004 while working to defend four southern Muslims. Among the four was Dr. Waemahadi Wae-dao, a Muslim doctor well known for his grassroots-related activities. Wae had been arrested on charges of planning bomb attacks on Western embassies with the regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyya (JI), as well as nine individuals suspected in connection with the January 2004 arms raid.[17] Apart from protesting against the alleged torture of the suspects, Somchai was also extremely active in leading a campaign calling for the repeal of martial law in the South. The four Muslims accused of JI links were recently acquitted, but Somchai remains missing, and is presumed dead.[18]

Positive trends toward greater political integration within the national democratic framework have failed to eliminate the economic and social predicaments that southern Muslim communities face. Widespread drug addiction and drug trafficking, unemployment, low educational achievements, poverty, deprivation, social disparity, criminal gangs, and injustice continue seriously to trouble Muslim communities in the region.[19] It is argued here that these failures provide the backdrop — rather than a full explanation — for a discursive shift from a separatist insurgency, toward a more overtly Islamist militancy.

Berjihad di Patani and Cultural Violence

A crucial juncture for political violence in the deep South took place on 28 April 2004, when one hundred and five Muslim militants were killed and seventeen arrested, after launching attacks against security forces at eleven locations in Pattani, Yala, and Songkla. As the International Crisis Group (IGC) notes, "the perpetrators were quite different: young, deeply pious, poorly armed, and willing to die for their cause."[20] According to ICG sources, an Islamic teacher known as Ustadz Soh had assembled a group of at least ten other *ustadzes* in their late

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14. Parliament Secretariat Office 1999, 4–5.
15. Davis 2004a.
16. Somchai's disappearance created an uproar within the Muslim community, particularly in the deep South. One popular Muslim restaurant in Pattani still displays a poster asking about his whereabouts.
17. *Jak Haji Sulong thung Somchai* 2004.
18. *The Nation*, 9 July 2005.
19. For local narratives on negative impacts of development projects, see also Piya Kittaworn et al. 2005.
20. International Crisis Group 2005, 21.

thirties and forties, and trained them in Kelantan. Each *ustadz* then recruited between five and twenty men, most of them in their late teens and early twenties, from religious schools. These young militants trained in jungle areas of Songkla and Yala, taking vows of silence, and undergoing ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation. Early in the morning of 28 April, they launched simultaneous attacks on police stations and checkpoints. For the most part, the militants were armed only with machetes, and their actions were essentially suicidal.[21] In addition to the one hundred and five militants who died in the attacks, one civilian and five members of the security forces also perished. Most media attention focused on the siege at the historic Kru-Ze mosque, where thirty-two militants were killed, many of them at point-blank range.

Since the beginning of 2004, the nature of violence in the deep South has drastically changed following the emergence of radical Muslim militants who have espoused the cause of total war with the Buddhist *kafirs* (infidels or non-believers) and brought with them a highly selective interpretation of Islam. This development was most clearly seen in the tragic events of 28 April 2004, which shed some light on the previously overlooked phenomenon of radical Islamist movements in the deep South of Thailand. On that day, a document, written in 2002 in the Malay language's *Yawi* script, entitled *Berjihad di Patani* (The struggle at Patani),[22] was found on the body of one of the militants killed by Thai military forces at Kru-Ze. Although the document apparently originates with the group responsible for the suicide attacks on 28 April, as part of the justification for their actions, its significance arguably extends beyond the light it sheds on this group of Muslim militants. *Berjihad di Patani* is the only authentic and detailed statement of radical Muslim militant views in the deep South currently available.

The discourse of jihad, *shahid* (martyr), and *takfir* (accusing other Muslims of being kafirs or *munafiks,* that is, hypocrites or betrayers of Islam) has come to the fore in the political rhetoric of *Berjihad di Patani*. These Arabic and religious terms, previously regarded as part of the vocabulary of religious elders, are the most visible and radical shift in the language of Muslim and separatist politics. Insofar as its message strikes a sympathetic note in many Muslim minds, the document points to an element in present-day Muslim separatist politics that is potentially very troubling.

To a large extent, what is happening in southern Thailand is not unique. Events there follow more or less similar developments elsewhere, both at the regional level and in other parts of the Muslim world. Two important factors have come to play a major role in the changing discourse and practice of the sep-

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21. Five assault rifles and a grenade launcher were used by the large group of militants who retreated inside the Kru-Ze mosque.

22. The document, which was translated into Thai and English, provides the best available evidence regarding the radically religious ideology of Muslim militant groups in the deep South. The following discussion of *Berjihad di Patan*i is based upon both the Thai and English versions. For a full translation of the latter, see Gunaratna et al. 2005, 118–45.

aratist politics: the influence of Islamic radicalism abroad and the Islamic resurgence and fragmentation of the religious establishment at home.

Berjihad di Patani presents, as then deputy prime minister Won Muhamad Nor put it, a "very well written" radical worldview with a "persuasive power."[23] Even if the suicide attacks had not been committed by the 28 April groups, *Berjihad di Patani* would still be invaluable for its insights into a mind-set that has probably existed for some time, and that will not be easily eradicated by any measures available to the Thai state. The document is written in a style difficult for nonspecialist readers to understand, but has a tone of unquestionable authority. This authority is invested with a religious power that is reinforced by countless injunctions taken from the Qur'an. The document apparently had two authors, Ismael Jaffar, alias Ismael Yameena or Poh Su, a Kelantan native, and Abdul Wahub Data, imam of Tarpia Tulwatat Mullaniti Islamic boarding school in Yala.[24] Abdul Wahub confessed to writing it and expressed great regret; Poh Su was arrested by the Malaysian authorities but later released without charge.

Accusing the Thai government of oppressing the Muslim population in the South, the authors of *Berjihad di Patani* proclaimed a jihad against the Thai government and those who work with and support it. Without explicitly claiming responsibility for the violence, the document nevertheless provides a rationale for it, and for the attacks that were to follow. It urges Muslims to take up the armed struggle to fight for separatism:

> We should be ashamed of ourselves for sitting idly and doing nothing while [Siamese] colonialists trampled our brothers and sisters. The wealth that belongs to us has been sullied. Our rights and freedom have been curbed, and our religion and culture have been violated. Where is our commitment to peace and security for our people? Remember, O *Wira Shuhada* [martyrdom fighters] brothers! Our late parents, brothers, and sisters sacrificed their lives for the land as warriors; they left behind a generation with warrior blood flowing in their veins. Today, let us make a call, so that the warrior blood will flow again and the generation will emerge again, even we have to face pain and sorrow. With the blessings of the martyrs, the blood will flow. On every battlefield, they echo in the heart of every soul with "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet. Allah is the Greatest" in them.[25]
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> [...]
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> Sons and daughters of *Patamala*!...Know that in every struggle, there are always sacrifices to be made, especially in the fight for Allah and the Prophet. This is a struggle to liberate us from continuous oppression by the disbelievers and their alliances. They will never be pleased with the presence of Muslims who uphold the teaching of Islam, because they will

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23. *The Nation*, 2 June 2004.
24. Gunaratna et al. 2005, 59.
25. Ibid., 120.

not feel free to do what they like. Our struggle is also for the liberation of our beloved country, one which is continuously under occupation by heretic imperialists and their alliances. That is why we need the support and sacrifice of the believers. Thus, quickly provide your support according to your capability. Listen to what has been commanded by Allah with regards to the obligation to provide support and sacrifices.[26]

For the authors, Patani[27] is Dar al-Islam (the land of Islam) and it has been invaded by the Siamese or the central Thai government — the infidel state. Therefore it is legitimate to call a jihad of defense against infidel (nonbeliever) or kafir invaders. Drawing a parallel between present separatist struggles and the religious warfare that raged in the time of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century C.E., the authors exhort Muslims to wage a jihad and to rise up against the injustices inflicted upon them by the enemies of Allah.

Come, fight in the path of Allah until He grants us victory, which is, either we depart this life as martyrs or we defeat our enemy and the enemy of Allah. Know that the martyr blood flows in every one of us fellow Muslims who believe in Allah and the Prophet, which inherited from our ancestors who had sacrificed their lives in the path of Jihad. This blood is eager to spill onto the land, paint it red, and illuminate the sky at dawn and dusk, from east to west, so it will be known that the Pattani land produces Jihad warriors. Both male and female warriors will shout out "*takbir*" in all directions, while facing and attacking the enemy, *Allahu Akhbar…Allahu Akhbar…Allahu Akhbar* [Allah is the greatest]. Such chanting will arouse life in the weak and pampered. The sound vibrates with anger and vengeance, answering the call of Jihad.[28]

[…]

You must truly believe in Allah's support and have faith that the victory will be ours. March forward and look for the enemy, day and night, in every place and also in your neighbouring countries, and kill them. Let the disbelievers know that Muslims are strong in this world.[29]

The document thus calls upon Muslims to unite in a fight against infidels or kafirs and bring back the great glory of Islam. Other enemies are specifically described:

My brothers *Wira Shuhada*!…Though it is difficult for the believers to identify who our enemies, the real hypocrites, are, eventually there will be a way in which Allah will guide the believers. The believers can identify

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26. Ibid., 130.
27. The term "Patani" as used in *Berjihad di Patani* apparently refers to the historical Patani kingdom, which covered the whole present three southernmost provinces, before the Siamese integration in the early twentieth century. The Romanized spelling of the word is fraught with political meaning: with two "t's" it refers to the modern Thai province of Pattani, whereas writing the name with one "t" evokes a deeper, pre-Siamese history.
28. Gunaratna et al. 2005, 123.
29. Ibid., 139.

> them [the hypocrites] easily. Allah has elucidated with clear words to the believers that…those who take and support disbelievers as their leaders with the intention of seeking their favour or to destroy our honourable Islam are hypocrites. They are the most dangerous enemies of Allah. They are our enemies, too, because they live among Muslims.[30]

In other words, the authors view Muslims who do not accept their uncompromising viewpoint as infidels: either the enemies of God, or unbelievers who deserved to die. Those who sacrifice their lives fighting for justice and defending Islam or its ideals hold a special place in Islam and are to be regarded as shahids.

> Let us realize, *Wira Shuhada*, how glorious we will be if we fall as warriors of our land. Brothers, understand! When martyrs are killed, they are not dead but alive next to God. Allah places them to rest temporarily. Allah will place them in the most honourable place. They will continuously receive sustenance from Allah. They will watch and listen to every piece of news to see if their children will follow in their footsteps. My brothers! Are you afraid that you are going to die? Never think that! Know that death will come to each of you when it is destined, even if you try to hide.[31]

The authors pay careful and lengthy attention to the question of martyrdom and the reaping of benefits to be had via jihad. They assert that martyrdom and eternal rewards and blessings are the goals that the Muslim should bear in mind and should form the intent behind participation in jihad. The authors cite as evidence numerous Qur'anic verses discussing the glories to be had in carrying out jihad and reaping its rewards.

Drawing upon classical Islamic ideas and the experience of the recent past to reach the radical conclusion, the authors call for Muslims to take up arms in fulfillment of their religious duty to submit to the will of God. Restoration of Muslim power and prosperity requires a return to Islam, the creation of a more Islamically oriented state and society. To achieve this goal, the authors combine militancy with messianic vision to inspire and mobilize an army of God whose jihad they believe will liberate Muslims. *Berjihad di Patani*, in essence, seeks to cast the separatist struggle in explicitly religious terms. Attacking the Thai government as the oppressor of Islam and some local Muslims as betrayers of Islam, the authors have injected their polemics against the government and other Muslims with traditional Islamist concepts such as jihad, kafir, munafik, and shahid. In the document, jihad is invoked to urge Muslims to take part in war against government of kafirs with the belief that someone who is killed (a shahid) will go directly to paradise. Martyrdom is a powerful theme in the document and the promise of martyrdom is stressed to motivate militant members. It is in this document that the boundary between the militants and others is redrawn along strictly religious lines: nonmilitants are accused of being kafir and munafik (hypocrites or those who betray Islam) and thus can be legitimately killed. "Those who are against the teachings of Allah are not only named as '*Munifi-*

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30. Ibid., 125.
31. Ibid., 122.

Army encampment at a government school in Narathiwat. A key factor in explaining Muslim dissatisfaction "is [their] fear and distrust of the security forces, whose activities in the region are viewed as heavy-handed and repressive." (Duncan McCargo)

koon,' they are also cruel. It is a pity to know that those who have intelligence could live happily under control of oppressors."[32] The document reveals the mind-set of the militants and the way they frame their enemies and victims culturally. Using the concept of munafik to justify killing Muslim civilians is a new and significant development in the discourse of struggle in the deep South.[33]

The exact ideological nature of the jihad carried out by the 28 April 2004 attackers remains unclear. The use of magic by the assailants suggests that their thinking was strongly influenced by Sufism. The alleged leader of the group, Ustadz Soh, claimed to have supernatural powers, and trained his recruits to perform *zikir* (reciting Allah's name) and offer special prayers to protect them from knives and bullets.[34] Some recruits were given sacred water that was supposed to make them invisible. Another cell leader ordered magic sand to be sprinkled on roads in Songkla, to prevent military vehicles from traveling to Kru-Ze. Chaiwat Satha-Anand has suggested that the militants' belief in magic offers a partial explanation for the way in which they died.[35] While the tactics used by the militants during many of the 28 April attacks might be seen as suicidal, it would be wrong to equate them with, say, *salafi jihadi* suicide bombers in Indonesia or Iraq — these were people who had been chanting for days on

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32. Ibid., 126.
33. The importance of this development has been confirmed in interviews with young Muslims in Pattani and Narathiwat, and with older exiled leaders in Kelantan. Personal communication, 24 October 2005.
34. International Crisis Group 2005, 22.
35. See Chaiwat 2006.

end and drinking magic water, in a vain attempt to make themselves invulnerable. Significantly, however, Ustadz Soh himself did not take part in the attacks, and simply disappeared on 28 April. It appears that he did not have complete faith in the potency of the magical practices he preached. In this sense, the superstitious elements of the 28 April attacks could be seen as tactical rather than ideological, as part of a process of recruitment and indoctrination. In the end, we do not know enough to be sure.

Islamic Radicalism and the Local Politics of Jihad

The discourse of jihad and the practice of takfir are certainly not unique to Thailand's Muslim separatist militants: its leaders have borrowed from other radical Islamist movements that have flourished since the 1990s.

Jihad is a defining concept or belief in Islam, a key element in what it means to be a believer and follower of God's will. Its importance is rooted in the Qu'ran's command to struggle (the literal meaning of the word jihad) in the path of God and in the example of the Prophet Mohammad and his early companions. While jihad is about much more than martyrdom, martyrs who sacrifice their lives to establish or to defend Islamic ideals also hold a special place in Islam. The Qur'an has many passages that support the notion of martyrdom and that comfort those left behind. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the terms jihad and martyrdom have gained remarkable currency. They are used by Muslims around the world to legitimate their causes and motivate their followers, including those who die for their faith or in the defense of Muslim territory in "just" causes in places ranging from Palestine, to Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kashmir, the Philippines, and southern Thailand. To elaborate on this, a brief excursion into the development of Islamic radicalism is necessary.

When the authors of *Berjihad di Patani* and other militants examine contemporary events, they follow common Islamic practice by citing ancient authorities. Although many non-Muslims would expect believers to refer to the Qur'an and Hadith (Sunnah of the Prophet) for guidance, most would be surprised by the extent to which the ideas of past Muslim theologians, thinkers, and movements still directly impact upon the minds of militants and other Islamic activists and the Muslim world today.[36] Both modern reformers and radical extremists draw, often selectively, on the teachings and examples of early Islamic revivalist thinkers and activist movements to justify their contemporary jihads. Present-day Muslim radicals or militants, including the authors of *Berjihad di Patani*, often link their radical jihadist worldviews to famous earlier interpretations of jihad, for example, that of prominent medieval theologian and legal scholar Ibn Taymiyya, or that of another influential modern thinker, Sayyid Qutb. Arguing that devout Muslims should not accept a ruler as a true leader only because he claims to be a Muslim, in the fourteenth century Ibn Taymiyya asserted the right to revolt against rulers who transgressed or repudiated Is-

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36. Esposito 2002.
37. Marin-Guzman 2003.

lamic law. This doctrine has become the intellectual foundation for Islamic radi-
calism in modern times.[37] It was a doctrine much favored by modern Islamists in
Egypt, especially Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood's influential ideologue
who was executed by Egyptian authorities in 1966 for allegedly conspiring to
overthrow the government; and later by Muhammad Farag, a member of the
radical organization Islamic Jihad, the assassins of Egypt's president Anwar
Sadat in 1981. The role played by Qutb, a "godfather and martyr of Islamic radi-
calism,"[38] in the reassertion of militant jihad and radical Muslim movements
around the world should not be underestimated. Qutb, who spent most of his
last years being tortured in prison, is recognized today as "a towering figure in
the world of modern political Islam."[39] Significantly, Qutb's pioneering and
most inspiring work, "Signposts on the Road," widely known as "Milestones,"
was translated into Thai by Banjong Binkason, a prominent Muslim scholar, and
published by Al-Jihad in 1981.[40]

Another radical expression of the new jihadist doctrine and its indebtedness
to the past can be found in the writing of Muhammad Farag, a member of the
radical organization Islamic Jihad, who articulated its ideology in the pamphlet
called "The Neglected Duty."[41] Some of Farag's radical views on jihad can be
summarized as follows: devout Muslims should declare a jihad against the gov-
ernments and countries whose laws were created by infidels; any cooperation
with an infidel government that claims to be Muslim constitutes a sin and the
punishment for all such rulers is death; the continuous jihad against the infidel
state is the highest obligation; armed struggle is the only acceptable form of ji-
had, but it should be employed only for religious reasons and not for the sake of
national of secular motives; and all Muslims must learn about jihad and should
not look for excuses to avoid the practice of jihad.[42] And, since jihad is an "indi-
vidual duty,"[43] it is not necessary for young people to obtain parental permission
to take part in jihad. In other words, jihad, an obligation considered since the
ninth century to be a collective duty that is satisfied if a sufficient number of
Muslims respond to its call, is transformed into an individual duty to be exe-
cuted by all.[44]

In the works of the Muslim thinkers and activists above, the meaning and
practice of jihad, as formulated by classical jurists and kept dormant since the
tenth century, are given its most radical and influential articulation.[45] Arguing
against classical doctrine and subsequent exhortations by several prominent ju-

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38. Esposito 2002, 56.
39. Bouzid 1998.
40. Banjong Binkason 1981.
41. Jansen 1986.
42. Marin-Guzman 2003.
43. There is a difference between the classical view, which regards jihad as only
       a collective duty and not a pillar of Islam and the view of the modern
       jihadists, for whom jihad is both a pillar of the faith and a personal duty
       (Roy 2004, 295).
44. Albertini 2003.
45. Euben 2001.

rists to endure unjust Muslim rule, they assert that jihad is an urgent imperative that applies to both the relations between Muslims and the unbelieving West, and between Muslims and so-called Muslims who betray the precepts of Islamic supremacy and open the door for foreign corruption. In doing so, their works marked a significant departure from antecedent doctrine and prevalent practice regarding the scope and purpose of jihad.[46] This global emergence of a new radical jihadist's worldview and its mixture with the Malay nationalist ideology of the early separatist movements serve as a backdrop for events surrounding the recent escalation of violence in southern Thailand.

Development of the content and form of Muslim politics in Thailand and elsewhere has been influenced by external events. While Islamic resurgence and militancy were on the rise from the 1970s onwards, attempts to mobilize Muslims all over the world for a jihad in one area of the world such as Palestine or Kashmir were unsuccessful until the 1980s. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a turning point, as it revived the concept of participation in jihad to expel an infidel occupier from a Muslim country as a personal duty for every capable Muslim.[47] The success and experience of *mujahidin* in Afghanistan in the late 1980s undoubtedly helped popularize the radical meaning and practice of jihad in many Muslim societies.[48]

At a regional level, the radicalization of Islamist politics worldwide had given birth to new, more radical Islamist movements and parties in Southeast Asia: whereas the Muslim opposition politics of the 1960s and 1970s in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines was led mostly by secular-educated leaders, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the emergence of more radical movements whose networks were increasingly expanded and ideologies and discourses more heavily colored by the ideas and values of religion.[49] Even in countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, where Muslim politics had long been moderate, the 1990s saw efforts by jihadi militants to expand their radical networks. In southern Thailand since the 1990s, the rise of Islamic radicalism has helped revitalize a flagging separatist movement, which also received a much needed boost from veteran Afghan mujahidin.[50] The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the continuing presence of foreign troops in many Mus-

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46. See also, Esposito 2002, 26–70.
47. In his famous work "Join the Caravan," Azzam, the key Islamist who was a leading Afghan anti-Soviet *mujahidin* and mentor of Osama bin Laden, states that jihad comes just after *iman* (faith), which makes it a pillar of Islam, but maintains the difference between "offensive" jihad, which is *kifaya* (collective), and "defensive" jihad, which is *ayn* (compulsory for individuals). However, he considers de facto that contemporary jihad are all defensive (Roy 2004, 295).
48. Gunaratna 2002.
49. Noor 2003; Hefner 2002; van Bruinessen 2002.
50. In 1995, a new Muslim separatist group in the deep South, the Islamic Mujahidin Movement of Patani (GMIP), emerged. Founded by local Afghan veterans, GMIP was reported to have distributed leaflets calling for jihad and support of Osama bin Laden in 2001 (International Crisis Group 2005, 13).

lim societies have further radicalized many Muslims in Thailand and increased their awareness of global Muslim grievances.

From 2001 to 2003, militant groups in Thailand had begun a new round of coordinated attacks using more sophisticated tactics.[51] Local militants fighting for their ethnic and religious autonomy had apparently evolved into something more menacing, as ideas of radical jihad were incorporated into local separatist movements. Admitting that Muslim extremism had taken root in the region, Bhokin Bhalakula, then minister of interior, publicly asserted that "radical ideas brought over by Thai Muslims who had fought in the Afghan War against the Russians in the 1980s have helped provide the ideological basis and inspiration for the ongoing campaign in the South by a new generation of militants."[52] The conflicts were also described by General Sirichai Thanyasiri, then head of the newly established Southern Border Provinces Peace-building Command, as "wars of ideologies" in which the political contest for hearts and minds was paramount.[53]

Along with a set of political and economic grievances,[54] many Malay Muslims in the South felt a sense of malaise,[55] a feeling that their community had slipped, gradually but inevitably, into decline, losing its hold upon religious principles and its pride when confronted with the encroachment of secular modernity. As one informant put it, he was confronted by:

> a world dominated by corrupt politics and a group of elites, secular and religious alike, concerned solely for their personal political and economic interests, rather than spiritual development or other deeply felt religious matters. It is a world soaked in Western culture in dress, music, television, and movies and subjugated to vices and materialistic values.[56]

On the other hand, a new self-confidence and consciousness, partly reinforced by global Islamic resurgence and by conflicts in other Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, reflects the pride of Thailand's Malay Muslims in the glories of Islamic civilization, history, literature, philosophy, as well as theology.

The resulting sense of decline and nostalgia raises profound religious and political questions. What has gone wrong? Why have Muslims fallen behind? How are Muslims to respond? For many Muslims, despite all development programs and formal democratization of contemporary Thailand, these questions

GMIP's Malaysian cousin, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) was also set up by Afghan veterans in 1995.

51. International Crisis Group 2005, 15–16.
52. *The Nation*, 8 June 2004.
53. Davis 2004b.
54. The economically driven and western-oriented development of today's Thailand, with its sexual services, alcohol consumption, and drug abuse, poses real affronts to Islamic teachings and sensibilities.
55. Interviews were conducted with seven Muslims in their 20s and 30s for opinions regarding problems and prospects confronting their community in July 2004. Their comments and ideas suggest a rather pervasive sense of malaise and alienation among many, if not most, of their peers.
56. Conversation in July 2004 in Pattani.

and issues remained to be addressed. Rhetorical appeals to the power of Islam and the radical concept of jihad have become important elements of separatist politics. Militants could more readily recruit followers by reciting a litany of Muslim grievances against oppression and mistreatment on the part of kafir or Thailand's Buddhist government to justify their violent actions. This rhetoric further enabled them to build more broad-based local support, and to foster a new generation of Muslim militants more attuned to radical notions of Islam and jihad than was previously the case.

Islamic Resurgence and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority

Militants have also been able to take advantage of the growing religious consciousness within the Muslim community, as the 1980s and 1990s saw a strong Islamic resurgence in Thailand. The primary characteristic of the religious resurgence that swept the Muslim community was not political; rather, it took the form of a growing piety among Muslims who were showing an increasingly strong interest in the ritual demands of their faith and in their religious life. This resurgence can be seen in the growth of mosque attendance, religious education, Muslim radio and television programs, Muslim newspapers and publishing, and a plethora of translated Islamic literature.

An upsurge in manifestations of religiosity and religious awareness could also be seen, ranging from private exercise in personal piety and devotion, involving a detailed observance of the prayers, fasting, and personal morality, to public rituals and behaviors, including a marked increase in the number of women donning the *hijab*, men wearing beards, and in the numbers of Muslims making the haj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Although the resurgence was for most Muslims a matter of personal religiosity, it nonetheless benefited the radical militants in two important ways: it provided the opportunity for religious symbols and meanings to be increasingly manipulated for political purposes, and simultaneously contributed to the further fragmentation of Muslim religious authority.

Because the resurgence brought Islamic ideas and institutions such as mosques and Islamic schools into public prominence, separatist groups could exploit related political and cultural contestations for the purpose of mobilizing support. While Islamic resurgence is certainly not the same as religious fanaticism, there is a tendency among government officials, academics, and religious leaders to downplay the religiosity of the militants: yet they certainly take their religion seriously, and seek recruits from the ranks of the pious.[57] Some of the militant groups began to work on their ways to recruit new militant members

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57. Investigations and reports following the 28 April attacks revealed that, far from being petty criminals and drug addicts, a large proportion of the youths killed had passed through the private Islamic schools and most were regarded by their families and communities as devout, promising youths (Kavi 2004).

58. The role of such teachers as "the recruiting sergeants and field commanders of *jihad*" in the radicalization of large numbers of the region's Muslim youth has been such that, as one commentator puts it (Davis 2004b): "The Royal

via ustadzes (religious teachers).[58] Although the extent of militant infiltration of the Islamic schooling system is difficult to quantify, evidence seems to indicate that since the mid to late 1990s, an alliance of groups, including former separatists, newly arrived jihadists, and some ustadzes, systematically targeted the education system.[59] The spread of a new radical separatist ideology in the education system, particularly in the private Islamic schools, was far greater than previously suspected. Militant infiltration and recruitment in these schools apparently reflected the activities of numerous politically radical, well-educated ustadzes in their late twenties, thirties, and forties, many of whom had returned from overseas studies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, or Arab countries.[60] In the process, the new separatist politics were developing and the political meanings and practice of jihad, as embodied in *Berjihad di Patani*, were to be understood and subsequently used in their most violent forms. The new militants advocated a sustained and relentless violent struggle against the kafirs, broadly construed. The jihad became a focus of attraction, the solution for the Muslim community's ills, and even one of the pillars of Islam.[61]

This assertion has tragic consequences. If jihad is classified as an individual obligation or duty, together with praying and fasting, young Muslims who may be swayed by radical ideology and decide to join militant groups do not need to ask the permission of their parents. In a society where parental authority is often important, this is a significant development. *Berjihad Di Patani* clearly states: "Do not take your fathers, brothers and sisters as leaders if they incline towards disbelieving and rejecting true faith."[62] As a result, parents of many of those militants who were either killed or captured on or after 28 April 2004 were reported to have had no knowledge of their sons' participation in violent activities.[63]

The view of Islam advanced by *Berjihad di Patani* has seriously challenged the authority of the official religious establishment and its leaders, and set the parameters for an ideological contest that is presently being disputed within the Muslim community and beyond. In a "white paper,"[64] intended to clarify the allegedly false or "distorted" teachings of *Berjihad di Patani*, fifteen experts on

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Thai Army's (RTA) Southern 4th Army command now refers to the unrest as the 'Ustaz rebellion.'"

59. Davis 2004b; International Crisis Group 2005, 18–19, 21.

60. Kavi 2004; Davis 2004b.

61. "O Believers! Migrate or fight in the path of Allah with your wealth and your life. It is known that firstly, based on Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 216, it is clear that fighting to uphold the truth is a compulsory obligation, *fardu ain*, that every one must fulfill" (Gunaratna et al. 2005, 134).

62. Ibid., 137.

63. See, for example, Phumibutra 2004.

64. This Thai-language paper entitled "Chijaeng khotaejing kanbit buen kham son satsana itsalam nai ekasan *Berjihad di Patani* [Facts about the distortion of Islamic teachings in the document *Berjihad di Patani*] was commissioned by the Sheikul Islam, or the Chularatjamontri's Office. It was distributed to mosques and religious schools throughout the country in early December 2004.

the Qu'ran, appointed by the Office of the Sheikul-Islam or Chularajmontri, set out to correct the document's misrepresentation of religious issues, and to demonstrate that it was not a religious work, but simply a political pamphlet or militant handbook.[65] The Chularajamontri, who heads the highest Islamic body in Thailand, is officially designated as the country's official Islamic spiritual leader. Although the Chularajamontri and his office are supposed to be nonpolitical, they are widely seen by southern Muslims as instruments of the central Thai state.

In the paper issued by the Chularajamontri's office, the authors of *Berjihad di Patani* are accused of not following the classical prescriptions for addressing questions such as jihad. Instead of making a detailed elaboration of legal arguments or proposing solutions for potential solutions, they argue, the stress should be on moral justification and the underlying ethical values. The white paper argues that the meaning of the word jihad in the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition is not limited to fighting. Military jihad, the white paper asserts, is essentially defensive and subject to rules that lay down that violence should be proportionate, which excludes terrorism and which demands that violence should end when the enemy seeks peace. Moreover, military jihad is only the lesser jihad: the greater jihad is the struggle against one's own failings. This view invalidates much of the *Berjihad di Patani*'s argument.

The fifteen religious experts also attempted to find precedents in the history of Islam for the *Berjihad di Patani*'s way of thinking, and they saw strong similarities with the *kwawarij*, the earliest of the religious sects of Islam, who regarded other non-kwawarij Muslims as kafir and thus enemies of God who had to be killed. The experts viewed this as a ludicrous opinion, and urged readers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, to regard *Berjihad di Patani* and its doctrine of jihad and the accusations of kafir as equally preposterous and dangerously misleading. In other words, its authors' accusation that other Muslims were kafirs or munafikin was beyond the pale of Islam. Drawing evidence from Qur'an and jurists' opinion, they further emphasized that Islam is a religion of peace, understanding, and tolerance. *Berjihad di Patani* had distorted these profound teachings of Islam and encouraged the practice of intolerance and violence.

Not surprisingly, *Berjihad di Patani* has also drawn strong reactions from other mainstream Muslim religious leaders. A leading member of the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand was quoted as saying:

> *Berjihad Di Patani* is not a Qur'an. It is not even an Islamic textbook, or *keetab*. It is in fact a manual for outcast warriors to mobilize popular support in order to destroy Islam.…Whoever possessed or came across copies of the book should burn them right away.[66]

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65. Some publicly denounced the author of *Berjihad di Patani*, saying he was not an Islamic scholar with a true understanding of the Qur'an (*The Nation*, 3 June 2004).

66. *Bangkok Post,* 11 June 2004. Ironically, in one incident copies of the Sheikul-Islam's white paper were burned instead. The incident was aired on February 2005 on a late-night news program of the Nation channel, but was

Another member pointed out, "In the Qur'an, a jihad is committed to protect Islam. It is not to harm others in the name of God."[67]

This view of the *Berjihad di Patani* illustrates the potential for religious scriptures and tradition to be interpreted, reinterpreted, and misinterpreted, or "distorted." While Islamic radicalism and militancy should not be conflated — most radicals are not militants — the rise of both phenomena in southern Thailand is distinctly worrying. Nevertheless, the fact that a sizeable number of young men could be readily recruited for the 28 April attacks suggests that within the Muslim community there are people with misgivings about the authority and legitimacy of existing religious organizations. The expansion of Islamic private schools, mass literacy, and

Muslim women examine the destruction in the interior of the historic Kru-Ze mosque, in the aftermath of a Thai military siege that resulted in the deaths of thirty-two militants, many of them at killed at point-blank range. (May Tan-Mullins)

almost universal modern school education, and the greater access to higher education among some sections of the Muslim population, have gradually marginalized the traditional role and authority of religious leaders or *ulama*. This has given rise to a newly prominent role for ustadzes, most of whom do not espouse radical Islamist ideologies, but at least a few of whom clearly do.

Further, the traditional form of Islamic knowledge transmission has been increasingly complemented by a range of media, including books and journals, radio and television, videos, VCDs, and the internet. There is now in effect an emerging multiplicity of authoritative voices — the traditional religious ulama, radical Islamists, secularly educated Muslim intellectuals and activists, official Islamic elites, militant separatist leaders, among others — all of whom compete to define and to control the practice and meanings of Islam. In other words, Is-

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not publicized in newspapers. (Personal communication with a colleague in Bangkok who watched the program, which was broadcast only around Bangkok and its vicinity.)

67. *Bangkok Post*, 16 June 2004.

lamic knowledge and practice have become objects of interest for growing numbers of people, at the same time that religious scholars have lost their monopoly on discursive power.[68] The resulting fragmentation of religious authority illustrated the emergence of competing claims over cultural authority of religion, particularly as many Muslims with no religious training took it upon themselves to decide upon the meanings and practices of Islam. The works of Muslim thinkers and activists like Qutb and Farag, both of whom had no formal religious training, have nonetheless influenced and inspired many militants in the Muslim world and beyond. During the 1990s, Osama bin Laden, one of the world's leading Muslim fundamentalists, had issued several fatwas (legal edicts or religious rulings), calling for a jihad against the United States and its allies, even though he had no authority to issue a fatwa, let alone declare jihad.[69] Yet, during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, some Muslim students in the deep South, like their counterparts elsewhere, spoke of their admiration for bin Laden, seeing him as a Muslim leader, a hero, and *mujahid* (fighter). The fact that bin Laden also quoted the struggle of Muslims in Pattani in one of his fatwas was, they argued, indicative of his concern with the fate of Muslims worldwide.[70] The authors of *Berjihad di Patani* similarly advanced "distorted" notions of jihad that appear to have captured the imaginations of many Muslim youths who died in the doomed attacks on 28 April. Importantly, most of the militants who perished in the Kru-Ze mosque were reportedly buried as shahids.[71] Nevertheless, official religious leaders and modernist Islamic scholars, while pointing out how the authors of *Berjihad di Patani* and Muslim militants have strayed

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68. Echoing the continuing disintegration of the *ulama*'s monopoly or exclusive jurisdiction over religious matters, Maududi (1969) argues, "Nobody can… claim in Islam to enjoy spiritual monopoly, and the 'Mullah' or 'Alim' is not a titular head claiming any inherent and exclusive rights of interpreting religious laws and doctrines. On the contrary, just as anybody may become a judge or a lawyer or a doctor by properly qualifying for those professions, similarly whosoever devotes his time and energy to the study of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and becomes well-versed in Islamic learning is entitled to speak as an expert in matters pertaining to Islam" (Mandeville 2001, 79). This analogy is actually rather misleading, since there are standard criteria for entering the legal and medical professions, but no such clearcut criteria for becoming an ulama.

69. A passage from his "farewell massage" after 11 September 2001 is particularly revealing. It reads: "The *jihad* (fighting in the way of Allah) has become *fard-ain* (obligatory) upon each and every Muslim. We advise the Muslim youth not to fall victim to the words of some scholars who are misleading the *ummah* (Muslim community at large) by stating that *jihad* is still *fard-kifayah*. The time has come when all the Muslims of the world, especially the youth should unite" (Albertini 2003).

70. Personal communication with a Muslim colleague who is a lecturer at a college in Yala.

71. Another source reported that Muslims killed by security forces over the past year, including the protesters who died in the Tak Bai incident, were buried as Muslim martyrs (*The Nation*, 22 November 2004). These protestors were entirely different from the 28 April militants — seventy-eight of whom died

from the correct path, have never issued a fatwa condemning the 28 April attacks, or any subsequent attacks with religious overtones. In many ways, this controversy and its subsequent ambiguity can be seen as a symptom of the reigning confusion about where moderate Muslims should stand on the link between Islam and politics of violence.

In these cases, two features stand out. First, Muslims are increasingly unclear about the political use of Islam; second, they lack a credible and acceptable institutionalized central control of religious authority. Muslims in the South tend to regard the Office of Sheikul Islam or Chularajamontri as an inherently co-opted religious bureaucracy. Although an overwhelming majority of Thai Muslims are Southerners, there has never been a Chularajmontri from the deep South. This and other differences make it difficult for the Office to command much legitimacy and credibility in the region. Overall, this fragmentation and delegitimation make the competing interpretations, claims, and accusations of groups, movements, and organizations within the Muslim community difficult, if not impossible, to assess and evaluate, even for Muslims themselves. The existence of difference and fragmentation within the Muslim community, publicly a nonissue but privately acknowledged to be an issue by many educated Muslims, has yet to give rise to open debate over the status of ideological, cultural, and organizational cleavages within the community. Unfortunately, internal divisions may have serious consequences, given the apparent weakness of the established religious authorities both at local and national levels in dealing with the violence in southern Thailand.[72] Altogether, the internal divisions, the ambivalence of the Muslim establishments in the South and the absence of a legitimate fatwa from official Islamic authorities were sources of frustration to the Thai government in the wake of the escalating violence in the region since 2004.[73] In this respect, the rise of new Muslim militant separatist movements was not an isolated phenomenon, something appearing out of a social and cultural vacuum, but reflected the confusion and fragmentation already present in the Muslim community.

Concluding Remarks

Politics and violent struggle over the definition of religious symbols and meanings are most evident in the politics of jihad in the deep South, where conflicts with state authorities, debates on the proper understanding of Islam and peace,

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after being suffocated in army trucks following their arrest. The same source also quoted one leading local Muslim as saying: "It is believed that for every martyr, a thousand more will replace him."

72. Echoing this problem, one leading and highly respected ulama in the deep South shared his concerns with the NRC as follows: "Presently nobody [in the Muslim community] seems to listen to anybody anymore" (Personal communication with NRC member, September 2005).

73. High-ranking security authorities kept repeating their calls for Islamic organizations to issue a fatwa to all Muslims that killing others is against the principles of Islam (*Bangkok Post*, September 2004; *Thai Rat*, 26 April 2005), but to no avail.

and disputes over the Islamic conception of jihad have all intersected — and where violence, killing, and dying have become both new forms of cultural discourse and political practice. This phenomenon of Islamic radicalization in the deep South is part of something much deeper and bigger. Despite its importance, however, Islamic radicalism is little understood by outsiders, particularly by state security officials, academics, and the general public.

The images and words of Muslim militants in the violence on and after 28 April 2004 seem to embody jihad: a concept with multiple meanings, used and abused throughout Islamic history, and deeply influenced by social and political contexts. The meanings and practices of jihad may become increasingly politicized and seriously destabilizing where ethnic tensions, mistrust, corrupt politics, and social disintegration have undermined the established social and political structures and created a desire for radical change. In southern Thailand, the goals of the militant groups have never been in doubt; they certainly intended to strike fear into the hearts of their opponents and enemies in order to win political autonomy. The moral justification of power for these jihadist militant movements, however, was not couched in political terms, but was based on Islamic religious sources of authority and religious principles. By appealing to deeply ingrained religious beliefs and daily lived religious, social, and political discourses, Muslim militants succeeded in motivating their members and creating for them a religious environment that provides moral sanction for their actions.

Whether the current level of militant activity in the Thai South could turn into a mass-based Islamist movement or even a regional jihad is beyond the purview of this article. Yet focusing too much on the logistical connections of southern Muslim militants with external like-minded organizations at the regional level, trying to establish the extent to which they form part of a regional network, could prove futile.[74] Whether or not such connections exist, the importance of radical Islamist ideologies and a new articulation of jihad have become increasingly de-territorialized in this modern globalized world — a world in which ideas, symbols, meanings, and images are more freely and widely circulated and dispersed than ever.

In many respects, separatist militants seem to have successfully grafted the concept of radical jihad onto the old, relatively secular, Malay nationalist independence struggle. In fact, a closer look at the articulation of some of the most influential Muslim thinkers and activists discussed earlier, one can easily understand the appeal of the radical jihad to separatist militants in the deep South, and given the changing of and deepening interaction between international, regional, and domestic settings, it takes no great leap of one's imagination to apply such radical articulation and interpretation of jihad to the local situation of Thailand's Muslim-dominated southernmost provinces. This was exactly the approach of the authors of *Berjihad di Patani*.

As a result, what started as a post–World War II secessionist struggle for independence led by various groups of secular, ethnic, socialist, and nationalist

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74. See, for example, International Crisis Group 2005.

ideologues[75] and became much more self-consciously Islamic during the 1980s has been transformed into a radical-style jihad against Thailand's Buddhist-dominated state. Judging from what happened on 28 April 2004, where over a hundred Muslim assailants were killed, including thirty-two of them in the historic Kru-Ze mosque, it is difficult to overestimate the power of this new discursive shift and practice of jihad politics that captured the imagination, hopes, aspirations, and intentions of the many Muslims who died that day and in the days, weeks, and months of violence that have ensued. Given the lack of sufficient demographic data about those involved in violent activities, it is impossible to say that jihadist Muslim militants are to blame for all the southern violence.[76] Nevertheless, the religious and cultural dimensions of violence in the region must not be overlooked, because these give the violence its unprecedented intensity and deadly character. A brief look at some statistics is in order.

The death toll from political violence in the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat from 1979 through 2003 was 233. From January 2004 to June 2005, however, the number increased to 917, including 106 who died after attacking security forces on 28 April, and 85 who died at the hands of military during and after the Tak Bai protest on 25 October. Of the 917 who died, 726 of the deaths remain officially unaccounted for. In other words, the death toll from January 2004 to June 2005 increased almost fourfold beyond the number of deaths throughout the three earlier decades.

What is remarkable about this increase is that, during the same period, the deaths of local Muslims also increased dramatically: from 53 killed during the past three decades to 294 between January 2004 and June 2005, a staggering increase of more than five times in less than two years. While the role of security officials in these incidents cannot be ruled out, a recent study based on a very extensive survey indicates that, of the more than one thousand violent incidents in the three provinces classified as "individual violent attacks" committed between January 2004 and May 2005, more than 80 percent were committed by militant groups.[77] These sobering figures indicate the militants' intent and practice: their targets are no longer just kafirs; now they attack civilian and local Muslims[78] who they believe are government collaborators and informers — or in *Berjihad di Patani*'s term, "munafik." Government officials, liberal academics, and moderate Muslim scholars in Thai society tend to assume that political, social, and economic causes underpin the current militancy, and that if these causes are properly addressed, the problem will go away. If the roots of the problem are to some extent ideological, however, it would be naive to expect

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75. Surin 1985; Che Man 1990.
76. Other than the persistent allegations of extrajudicial killings (*The Nation*, 31 July 2005), the southern violence has also been described by former interior minister Chidchai Vanasatidya as a mixture of Islamic radicalism and local "influential groups" involved in illegal activities (*The Nation*, 16 June 2005).
77. Srisompob and Panyasak 2006.
78. "Local" Muslims means Muslims in the three southern provinces, as opposed to officials sent from elsewhere, who happen to be Muslim.

political gestures and other measures for social and economic improvement to change the hearts of radical militants and their supporters. Attempts to deal with the violence in the deep South as if it were divorced from its intellectual, cultural, and religious foundations must be viewed with great caution.

Notwithstanding socioeconomic and political development programs, the government's counter-violence policy and measures must take the religious and ideological aspects of violence into serious consideration and adopt appropriate measures. They must also be based on an in-depth understanding of the religious justifications of radical Islamist militancy and the development of appropriate responses.

In the local Thai press and other media, Muslim militants are most often seen as mindless terrorists or religious fanatics and anti-Buddhist militants, longing for the past. They are almost always evaluated in harshly negative terms with little or no effort made to seriously comprehend the discontents and the thinking and ideological justification that have provided their support. The success of radical militant groups in the recruitment, posting, and ideological maintenance of sleeper members, with few defectors, demonstrates the deep ideological nature of the phenomenon. Like it or not, people do not undertake violent militant actions without compelling reasons. To ignore the inspiration, mindsets, and motivations of the militants, is to put up an insurmountable barrier to understanding them.[79]

Studying the activities of militant groups is inevitably very challenging during a low-intensity conflict such as the current struggle in the Thai South. Nevertheless, more and better information about the dynamics and threats of contemporary Muslim separatist politics is urgently needed for academics, government officials, and even for the general public, in order to frame wise and appropriate responses.

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79. Alas, such a refusal is rather common among peace-building advocates, subscribers to conspiracy theories, and liberal academics and commentators in today's Thailand.

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