

## Muslim Insurgencies in Southeast Asia: Intractability, Security Dilemma, and the 'Islamic Factor'

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*Muslims constitute almost a half of Southeast Asian population, yet studies on the subject done by political scientists are still few. Students of political science tend to perceive Islam as merely a thin veneer of the more real characteristics of Southeast Asian societies, and that it has played little role in the political dynamics of the region. Closer analyses show that Islam does play—at least three—significant roles in the conflicts. First, it gives those Muslim communities historical identities, that they were politically independent communities fell under colonial occupations and then trapped as parts of secular nation-states. Secondly, Islam supplies concepts and terms that are very effective to mobilise mass support, i.e. that the insurgencies are not only political and economic conflicts against unjust and oppressive governments but rather a holy war Jihad—against the enemies of God. Finally, Islam provides international networks that enabled the insurgencies internationalized their causes. Given the fact that Islam contributes several factors to the insurgencies among Muslims in Southeast Asia, every effort to solve the conflicts must take Islam into consideration.*

*Keywords: muslim insurgencies, armed conflict, intractability.*

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## Introduction

In Southeast Asia, Muslims constitute a significant portion of the community. More than 243 millions out of about 581 millions of the total Southeast Asian population are Muslim. Although geographically Muslim communities concentrate in two countries—Indonesia and Malaysia—there are Muslim groups in every southeast country. Considering their number in the region, the situations of Muslim communities in Southeast Asia will inevitably influence the political dynamics of the region.

**Table 1**

### **Southeast Asian Muslim Populations 2006**

| <b>State</b> | <b>E Population.Muslim</b>         | <b>%</b> | <b>E Muslim</b>    | <b>SEA in %</b>                    |
|--------------|------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Indonesia    | 245,452,739                        | 88.22    | 216,538,406        | 89.05539998                        |
| Vietnam      | 84,402,966                         | 0.85     | 717,425            | 0.295054306                        |
| Philippines  | 89,468,677                         | 5        | 4,473,434          | 1.839781901                        |
| Thailand     | 64,631,595                         | 5        | 3,231,580          | 1.329046575                        |
| Burma        | 47,3 <sup>8</sup> 2,633            | 4        | 1,895,305          | 14,729,058 <sup>16</sup> 057595945 |
| Malaysia     | 24,385,858                         | 60.4     |                    | 0.779479152                        |
| Cambodia     | 13,881,427                         | 3.5      | 485,850            | 0.199814721                        |
| Laos         | 6,368,481                          | 1        | 63,685             | 0.026191549                        |
| Singapore    | 4,49 <sup>2</sup> , <sup>1</sup> 5 | 16       | 718,744            | 0.295596682                        |
| East Timor   | 1,062,000                          | 4        | 42,511             | 0.017483463                        |
| Brunei       | 379,444                            | 67       | 254,227            | 0.104555724                        |
| <b>SEA</b>   | <b>581,908,747</b>                 |          | <b>243,450,226</b> | <b>100</b>                         |

Until quite recently, unfortunately, few Studies on Islam in Southeast Asia have been undertaken either by international Islamic scholars or Southeast Asian scholars. Robert Hefner, an American anthropologist from Boston University, refers to this situation as a double marginalization. Muslims in Southeast Asia were neglected both from international Islamic studies and Southeast Asian studies. For the former, it was because historically Southeast Asian region was among

the latest to join the caravan of Islamic civilization. As a result scholars inclined to chose Middle Eastern Muslim as arguably the older Islamic traditions and regarded as the more original. While for the latter, social as well as political scientists of Southeast Asian studies considered that Islamic culture was just an outer veneer of the more real characteristics of Southeast Asian society (Hefner, 1997: 2 -3).

Recent developments, nevertheless, have brought Southeast Asian Muslims into the spotlight of international media and scholarships. On the one hand, two successful elections in Indonesia, during which Muslims played a pivotal role, have led observers and analysts to refer to Indonesia as an empirical example of a democratic Muslim country (Carter, 2004). On the other hand, several violent acts carried out by Muslim extremists have invited others to warn that Indonesia, and Southeast Asia in general, is a potential hotbed for global terrorism (Abuza, 2004).

In line with the development, this article will highlight the armed conflicts among Muslims in Southeast Asia—Moro in the Philippines, Aceh in Indonesia, Patani in Thailand, and Rohingya in Myanmar --- because this phenomenon also seemed to be missed by the international coverage of conflict resolutions. Few, if any, international mediations was arranged to help to solve the disputes.

Three main points will be elaborated in the following discussion. *Firstly*, I would like to explain the chronology of the conflicts and at the same time reveal their intractable natures. *Secondly*, I will analyze the cause of the conflicts in term of security dilemma: whether the conflicts were triggered by real or assumed causes? *Thirdly*, I will address the specific "Islamic" factors of the conflicts, which have been denied by Southeast Asian governments to be among the feature of the conflicts, and propose a more appropriate approach to this issue in order to reduce the intractability of the conflicts.

### **Characteristics of Intractable Conflicts: A Chronological Account**

To put it simply, intractable or protracted conflict is any conflict which is very difficult to solve. Among other explanations, Bercovitch (2003) lists some characteristics of intractable conflicts which include:

**1. In terms of actors, intractable conflicts involve states or other actors with a long sense of historical grievance, and strong desire to redress or avenge these.**

This point is clearly applicable to the armed conflicts among Muslims in Southeast Asia. Although these conflicts are commonly seen as problems of post-colonial Southeast Asian states, the historical root of the conflicts were dated back to the colonial or even pre-colonial times. Typically, all of Muslim groups involved in armed conflicts were independent religious-political community—in the form of kingdoms, or vassalage—which were torn by Western colonialism and finally ended up as parts of secular states (Christie, 1996: 129 -137).

In the Philippines, Muslim preachers arrived in the archipelago as early as the 13th century. Because of the typical characteristic of the spreading of Islam in Southeast Asia, which was without violence and without state coercion behind it, Muslims were able to live in peaceful coexistence with native people for centuries. Only after the arrival of European power, did Muslims launched massive campaigns to proselytize local people as many as possible (George, 1980: 19 -20).

Historians sometimes speculate—some with frustration, others with relief—that if the Spaniards reached the archipelago a few years later than when they actually did, the Philippines today would have become a Muslim country like their neighbors, Indonesia and Malaysia (*Ibid*: 21). But the Spaniards proved their military as well as political superiority vis-à-vis Muslim. The Spaniard armada reached Cebu at 1565 and involved in bloody fights with Muslims for the next 350 years. They called Muslim people "Moros" in association with Muslim Moors who had once occupied Spain for several centuries. In 1889 the Philippines was handed over to the US, and in 1906 a special Moro province was created and in 1940 the US colonial abolished completely the sultanate systems and brought Moro territories under direct control of Manila. This situation continued after the Philippines' independence in 1946 (Islam, 2003: 96 -200).

In Indonesia, the history of Acehnese Muslim kingdoms is even older than that of the Philippines. The Kingdom of Perlak in the north tip of Sumatra Island was started in 9th century. And the greater kingdom, Samudra Pasai, was developed since 12th century and already became a great kingdom when the Venetian (Italian) explorer Marco Polo visited Pasai in 1292. The centre of Islamic civilization also witnessed the emergence of great Muslim intellectuals—theologians, mystics and

poets—such as Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin Sumatrani, Abdurrauf Sinkel, whose works have been read across Muslim world until today. Although the European powers had arrived in Malacca since the 16th century, it was not until 1873 that the Acehnese were in direct conflict with European colonizers represented by the Dutch. The Aceh war was officially ended by 1903, but the Acehnese continued to fight guerilla war up to the Second World War when Indonesia declared themselves a secular state after the Japanese occupation in 1945 (Christie, 1996: 140-145).

Meanwhile Muslims in Southern Thailand also have a long communal history, dated back to the kingdom of Patani in the 15th century which reputation is often compared with Aceh. Since the 18th century Patani was in conflict and eventually conquered by Siamese (Thai) kingdom. However the Siamese at the time exercised a kind of protectorate over an intact Patani state. Therefore Patani cultural and religious identities were protected and guaranteed. This situation was sustained by the fact that state-borders were not so clearly defined in Southeast Asia in which Patani Muslims were still in close relationships with their Muslim fellows in neighboring Malay kingdoms.

The turning point was in 1909 when the Siamese kingdom made a border adjustment with the British colonial which ruled Malacca. The Siamese had to cede its Malay tributaries of Kelantan, Kedah, Trengganu and Perlis, while it retained Patani and Satun provinces. Since that time, Malay Patani Muslims had been trapped in the wrong side of the border, separated from the other Malay-Muslim communities. The Muslim community in Patani became a minority group in the predominantly Buddhist state of Thailand (Christie, 1996: 173-177).

Lastly, the long history as once an independent Muslim community which was then colonized and ended up as part of non-Islamic state, was also experienced by Arakan people in Northwest Myanmar. Muslim from Bengal who had occupied Arakan Hill since the 10th century founded Mrauk-U sultanate at 15th century. In the 19th century, the British colonial separated the administration of Burma from India and included Arakan area into the former. When the Islamic state of Pakistan was declared in 1946, there was an open requirement to include Arakan into Pakistan, but it was to no avail (Christie, 1996: 167-168).

## **2. In terms of duration, intractable conflicts take place over a long period of time.**

Current armed conflicts in Southeast Asia also went through a stretched period of time. The current armed movements among Moros in the Philippines started in 1968 when Muslim Moros declared Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) as a reaction against the more-and-more repressive policies of Marcos's administration. The government responded by co-opting elite Moros into the high level of government administration, which generated discontents among younger generation. This young generation then went to form Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari.

MNLF was in constant conflicts with the Philippines authority until 1976 when—mediated by Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)—the two parties signed Tripoli agreement, in which Marcos's administration promised an independent area of Muslim Mindanao which included 13 provinces and nine cities in return of MNLF withdrawing its demand of a complete independence.

This agreement generated another disappointment among younger and educated generation, which then went to form Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) led by Hasyim Salamat to continue pursuing Moro as an independent region. Another break up from MNLF occurred in early 1980s, when a faction under Abdul Razak Janjalani split and formed the infamous Abu Sayyaf group (Islam, 2003: 200 -207).

In Aceh Indonesia, the armed movement against Indonesian government started in 1953 when the Acehnese people—under the leadership of Mohammad Daud Beureueh—joined *Darul Islam* rebellion against Indonesian central government demanding an Islamic independent state in four provinces (the others were West Java, South Sulawesi and South Kalimantan).

*Darul Islam* movement in Aceh ended when Daud Beureueh accepted Jakarta concession of a special province for Aceh under the Indonesian Republic. But the armed movement started again in 1976 under the banner of Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM or The Independence Aceh Movement) led by Hassan di Tiro, who then lived in Sweden since 1979, because of the domination of Javanese people in Acehnese political and military administrations (Christie, 1996: 156 -158). In 2004 GAM signed a conclusive agreement with Indonesian government following tsunami disaster which claimed more than **130.000** Acehnese.

In Thailand Patani, armed resistance against central government started 1111945 when Muslim leaders under the organization of GAMPAR (which stand for *Gabungan Melayu Patani Raga* or League of Malay of Greater Patani) wrote a petition, led by Mahmud Mahyidin and Haji Sulong, to the British colonial ruler in Malaya asking for help to freed them from Thai occupation, but did not succeed. Despite what was called as 'high points' in late 1960s, mid 1970s and between 1979-1981, Muslim Patani never posed serious threats to Bangkok (Christie, 1996: 186-189).

Recently, in the post-9/11 era Southern Thailand showed a heated escalation when several clashes occurred between Muslim Patani groups and the Thai military authority. A number of terrorist attacks against military as well as civil targets have lured analysts to think of Al-Qaeda operating in the region. Heavy handed responses from the Thai government were also infamous, especially in October 2004 *Tak Bhai* tragedy when 78 Muslim Patani were suffocated to death after being arrested and put in trucks by the Thai military.

Meanwhile armed resistance among Muslim Arakan started in 1948 when Muslims gained control militarily in Northern Arakan in a *ji had* movement while the central government was preoccupied with national consolidation. In 1954 the central government was able to put an end to this rebellion. Since then the situation of political movement among Arakanese Muslim was rather dissidence instead of rebellion. But since Myanmar, then Burma, military tended to perceive all Muslims as potential threats there were many political and military repressions which triggered more resistances. In its report, Amnesty International alleged Myanmar military regime as doing ethnic cleansing against the Muslim minority (Amnesty International, 2004),

**3. In terms of issues, intractable conflicts involve intangible issues such as identity, sovereignty, values and beliefs.**

Armed conflicts among Muslim in Southeast Asia were not only caused by economic or political interests. These conflicts were fiercely fought because these Muslim communities felt their religious and ethnic identities were threatened. In the Philippines, not only did the central government exploited economically the wealth of the southern region (George, 1980: 107-128), but also carried mass migration of Catholics from the densely populated north region, which eventually made Muslims virtual minority in Mindanao (Islam, 2003: 201). These had strengthened the feeling of Moro people that the Catholic state went to exterminate their religious and ethnic identities. And this was

the report that arrived at the fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign ministers (ICFM) which then issued a resolution to the Philippines government to stop repression and mass -extermination, and to protect Muslim people in the country (Islam, 2003: 204).

In Indonesia, the Acehnese were among the fiercest to fight against Dutch colonialism and supported Indonesian independence. Even the first civil airplane owned by Indonesian government was bought by the sAcehnese fundraising. The resentment was mounting among Acehnese people because—although granted a special status—Aceh was always under direct control of Jakarta and never be able to implement Islamic policies. The hatred towards Jakarta was even higher when under the New Order administration (1965-1998) Aceh political and military administration was dominated by Javanese administrators—which commonly were not devout Muslims. It was, therefore, common among Acehnese to call Indonesia as Javanese -Indonesia, which meant not only that Indonesia was in fact too much dominated by the Javanese ethnic group, but also implied that the Acehnese did not see themselves as part of Indonesia.

A similar plot was also witnessed in Southern Thailand. It sounds plausible when analysts said that the new Nation -States tended to value their peripheral territories above their peripheral populations . In Thailand, Malay Muslims were often referred to as *khaek* or 'foreigners', which imply that Malay Muslims in Patani were not part of Thai people (Christie, 1996: 192). The feelings of being under deliberate oppression from the Buddhist Thai government seemed to be supported by the fact that economically three dominantly Muslim provinces are lagged behind other regions.

In Myanmar, the situation of Muslim Chitagong is perhaps the worst in all cases. The Amnesty international mentioned alleged ethnic cleansing was carried out by Myanmar military regime. According to Myanmar Law 1982, Rohingya are not among recognized ethnic groups in Myanmar, therefore Rohingya people are ineligible for full citizenship. Their mobility is strictly restricted. Rohingya people need to get permission from local authorities to be able to travel even to nearby villages, which badly paralyzed their livings. They have to pay 50-100 \$ to get permission to marry, which is too much for almost everyone, and they can only have no more than two children. They are also subjects to compulsory sentry duties at nights and forced labors during the days for the government especially to build or maintain public infrastructures. And last but not least, Rohingya religious

expressions and activities are also under tight restrictions (Amnesty International, 2004; Refugees International, 2006).

#### **4. In terms of geopolitics, intractable conflicts usually take place where buffer states exist between major power blocks or civilization.**

The characteristics of buffer region could be applied to Southeast Asia. The history of Southeast Asia was in fact of the arrival of major civilization which exercised their influence and constituted the regions' identity. The first major influence came from Indian civilizations. Hindu and Buddhist cultures had influenced social, economic and political history in the region since the early Christian century. The next major influence came from Islamic civilization which swept the region since the 8th century, and dominated coastal areas. Thirdly, since the 15th century Western civilization and religions started its influences to the region. Finally, although in a more limited scope Chinese civilization was also exercised a constant influence to Southeast Asian societies.

The history of Southeast Asia, in short, was heavily under the effect of the dynamics of global politics. With regard to the conflict among Muslim in Southeast Asia the influence of global politics and balance of power could not be neglected. At least four global events could be put forward: Colonialism, World War II, cold war; War on terror. The arrival of European powers in Southeast Asia had a paramount impact to Muslim politics in Southeast Asia. Before the arrival of the Europeans, Islamic communities, cultures and politics were mainly in the coastal areas. Major Islamic kingdoms were coastal kingdoms, from Mrauk-U in Bengal Gulf, to Patani and Malacca in Malay Peninsula, to Aceh in top-tip of Sumatra Island, eastward to the Philippines Archipelago as well as southward to Indonesian Archipelago--all Muslim palaces were located near the sea.

When the Portuguese took control over Malacca, a major Muslim port, the reactions of Muslim kingdoms in the region were immense. Even Demak Sultanate in north-coast of Central Java Indonesia sent his Armada to help Malacca against the Europeans. European conquering of formerly Muslim territories caused deep anxieties among Muslims which led to two important developments in Southeast Asian Islam. *Firstly*, European military and technological might urged Muslim rulers to spread Islam deeper into the inlands beyond coastal areas, in order to have as more reserve forces and resources as possible.

*Secondly*, the introduction of new politics of Pan-Islamism brought by returned pilgrims to Mecca, which gave colonialism a new meaning, as a global war between Islamic world and the western World. The World War II (Pacific War) marked another important phase for Muslims in Southeast Asia. The end of colonialism and the rise of nationalist movements, the formation of independent nation-states, shaped Southeast Asian politics in new and permanent form. States territories which left behind by colonialism trapped formerly independent Muslim communities, and locked them as parts of secular states. The inhabitants of Muslim kingdoms in Sulu in Jolo now became minority communities in the republic of the Philippines. Aceh became a province of secular Indonesia. Malay Muslims in Patani became part of predominantly Buddhist Thai kingdom. And Rohingya Muslims became part of Myanmar.

Lastly, current American led war on terror once again drags Southeast Asian Muslims into the stream of global politics. Many analysts will agree that Southeast Asia has become a new arena of proxy war between America and Al-Qaeda. The story began at the Cold War Era, when many Southeast Asian Muslims were involved in a *jihād* against Soviet invasion in Afghanistan—which was fully backed up by the US technically and militarily. Subsequently, alumnus of the Afghan war maintained their networks not only with their Southeast Asian fellows, but also with *jihadis* across the world—from Sudan, to Chechnya, to Indonesia. When global political constellation changed, especially after the Gulf War I when many Arab states seemed more and more dictated by the US—especially when the Saudi ruler invited US military to base in Saudi soil which was the holy land of Muslim World—which triggered resentment and irritation among *jihadis*, Southeast Asian *jihadis* were more than ready to join. Post 9/11 international politics and the discourse global war on terror put new dimensions and agendas to the conflicts among Muslims in Southeast Asia.

### **Real or Assumed Revolts: Intra-State Security Dilemma**

In this stage it seems important to have a closer look at the armed conflict among Muslims in Southeast Asia in terms of security dilemma: whether the armed resistances among Muslims in Southeast Asia against their respective governments were caused by real or illusory threats. Terminologically security dilemma originated in studies of international politics, refers to the situation when conflict or military tensions occurred between two or more states where none of

those involved desired such an outcome. The tension and conflict were caused by the nature of inter-state relations, where states live in self-help anarchy situation of international politics, trapped in arm-races and saw their own conduct as benign intention of self defense purposes while perceiving others doing exactly the same things as threatening. In other words, security dilemma is a situation where conflicts could be produced between two powers both of which were desperately anxious to avoid a conflict of any sort (Collins, 2000: 4).

Although it was initially to describe inter-state politics, scholars also apply the concept of security dilemma for intra-state conflicts. Intra-state conflicts might be caused by security dilemma when a party's non-expansionist or self-defensive action (state or intra-state group) is perceived by others as threatening their, these others, security. The essence of security dilemma is a tragedy that is unknown to either participant that their incompatibility, while appearing real, is actually illusory. This means—we need to bear in mind—that when the conflict is caused by deliberate actions by any party to threaten or to harm others then this is not a security dilemma situation.

In the Philippines's case, the MNLF was formed as a reaction to the government's co-optation of Moros elites, by giving them high positions in governmental administration. This co-optation, in turn, was intended to contain mounting resentments among Moros after "Jabadilah Massacre," when the Philippines army trained a group of Muslim to be deployed in borderline-conflict with Malaysia but—with unknown reason—these trainees were murdered.

Seen from the latter context, Moro armed resistance against the Philippines was not a product of security dilemma, because government action indeed harmed Moro community. Seen from the former context, however, the antagonism was possibly caused by security dilemma, because MNLF resentment was two-fold, i.e. toward the co-opting government as well as toward the co-opted elites. The consent of Moro elites to accept government's concession was multi-interpretable. On the one hand it could be an opportunistic decision for the elites' own interests; or on the other hand it could also be a moderation policy to the Moros' struggle. This situation was repeated again, when MNLF sign an agreement with Manila, and triggered the formation of the more militant MILF and Abu Sayyaf groups.

In Indonesia, when the Independent Aceh movement (GAM) started revolting against Indonesian government, the security dilemma situation is more apparent. When the revolt was declared in 1976, the

main reason was Jakarta's systematic exploitation of Aceh's rich resources, and undermining Acehnese Islamic identity. Meanwhile from the government point of view, strict and centralistic political and military policies were intended to ascertain and maintain the authority of the central government and to prevent any subversive movement, due to the government and the military trauma of Muslim insurgence. The similarly strict policies were also applied, at the time, to other regions which have historical record of armed revolt against the central government. This was a perfect example of intra-state security dilemma, when Indonesian government wanted to make sure that their sovereignty and authority were in place by applying strict policies in provinces which have historical records of armed insurgences, the policy was perceived from the provinces point of view as an unjustified systematic exploitation and undermining of their resources and identity.

Furthermore, Indonesian government's respond to the revolt made the bad situation worse. To uproot GAM movement—which was actually a semi-military militia group whose members are live among wider Acehnese society—Indonesian military took heavy handed actions especially in 1980s when it applied martial law and treated the whole Aceh province as a Region of Military Operation. This un-proportional military measure made further resentment among Acehnese people, and made GAM's accusation that Jakarta was unjustifiably colonizing Aceh become more real. Rather than reducing the resistance, the military operation indeed strengthened GAM's position among Acehnese.

In Southern Thailand, where the armed conflicts are much smaller in scale compared to the Philippines and Indonesian cases, the security dilemma also shadowed the conflict, especially with regard to the more recent phase of the conflict. After in dormant for quite a while, armed conflict in Southern Thailand broke again following the war on terror declared by the US against Al-Qaeda and its networks. The Tek Bhai incident in 2004, for instance, was another typical plot for an intra state security dilemma. The Thai government, a close ally of the US in Southeast Asia, conducted security operation to tract and crack-down the existing al-Qaeda networks or operatives in the country—that is, in predominantly Muslim provinces—which was perceived by Muslims as another package of oppressive policies against Muslims. There was, in fact, a three-partite conflict. On the one hand, there was a purposive security operation against Al-Qaeda networks, and on the other hand there was also a side effect of escalation among Patani Muslim in general, because of the way Thai military carried out its operation. The

indiscriminate nature of the security operation, in turned, was caused by its very objective, namely to unearth a shadowy and underground organization whose members were living among, and difficult to be differentiated from, the wider Muslim society.

Lastly in Myanmar, the conflict between Muslim Rohingya and the Myanmar Government apparently involved no security dilemma. In fact, after a struggle for independence state failed in Arakan region, Rohingya Muslim pursued for a greater autonomy for their community. However Myanmar military junta deliberately persecuted Rohingya people along with other minority groups. Because ethnically they are Bengali stock, many Rohingya people tried to cross the border as refugees to neighboring Bangladesh.

### **Islam: The Denied Factor**

In discussing armed conflict among Muslim in Southeast Asia, it is interesting to note how the governments tended to deny "Islam" as among the factor involved in the conflicts. In the Philippines, in an effort to build dialogue between conflicting parties, the government referred to Muslim Mows only as a cultural, but not as a religious, group (George, 1980: 185-186). In Indonesia during the New Order Regime the Indonesian government called Free Aceh Movement as a Security Disturbance Movement (Gerakan Pengacau Keamanan), which implies that the movement was no more than a band of criminals or gangsters and not a bit represented Muslim Aceh. In Thailand, the authority tended to see conflicts with Southerners as merely security problems and thought as if these conflicts could be solved with military approach (International Crisis Groups, 2005). Even in Myanmar, in response to a report of human rights abuses, the government stated that it was not in conflict with any religious minority groups (Human Rights Watch, 1997).

In the first glance, the policy to exclude religious factors from the agenda to solve the conflicts seemed smart. *Firstly*, the governments did not want to be trapped in theological issues. *Secondly*, they did not want to trigger sentiments from the whole Muslim communities. In a closer observation, however, this was a miscalculated strategy which was caused by these governments' ignorance of Islam and Muslims. By setting aside the Islamic factors, the governments missed one of the very sources of energy, motivation, and inspiration of the insurgencies. Islam had played, at least, three simultaneous factors for those Muslim

insurgences. Firstly, Islam gave a sense of historical, cultural as well as political identity. For these Muslim groups, Islam is not only a set of beliefs and rituals, but also a historical, socio-cultural and political framework by which they could refer to themselves as well as to differentiate themselves from other people. More importantly, Islam gave these people moral and spiritual legitimacy of what they are and what they have done. In short, Islam is the political ideology of these insurgencies.

Thirdly, Islam also provided an effective means for a mass mobilization. Indeed, although they share the sufferings and discontents of the whole ethnic communities, the insurgence groups were always initiated by a small number of people trying to pursue a violent way to end the political oppression and discriminations the communities had endured. Usually, they would justify their conduct using religious symbols and languages. In Islam there is a doctrine on "struggle" or *Jihad*. By assigning their struggle as *jihad*, **these** insurgence groups tried to encapsulate their struggle not primarily as political movements but rather as moral and spiritual ones against not only a political power and institutions, i.e. the states, but rather against the enemy of God. The abstraction of political interests using religious languages and values was effective in mobilizing wider support from the community. This was because a religious language was more familiar for the ordinary people in the Muslim communities. Explaining the insurgencies in terms of *jihad* against secular and anti-Muslim states was simpler and easier for the people to understand than describing them in political, judicial or economic terms. Moreover, in expressing their struggle in religious terms, insurgence groups were able to put higher values to their causes and to what they were doing. In political and military terms, a struggle could have two possible ends: success or fail. Therefore, for sure, there are many people who did not support the insurgencies because they did not want to risk themselves to become losers. But in term of *jihad* the two possible ends equally mean success: when you win you would be the victors, when you die you would ascend straight away to the eternal Paradise.

Lastly, Islam provided for the insurgences an effective means of internationalizing their cases. In Islam there is a concept of supra-state universal Muslim brotherhood or *Ummah*, in which Muslims across the globe are described to constitute a single religious community bounded by a common faith and religious identity. Furthermore, it was said that Muslim community should help each-other similar to a single human body, when any single part of the body was hurt the whole body

would feel the pain. These doctrines were other valuable ammunition provided by Islam to the insurgencies. The benefit was political, moral, and material. Politically, these insurgence groups were able to appeal helps from international Muslim organizations or communities. An intervention from Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) was able to put pressure to the Philippines government to sign an agreement with the MNLF. Conflict in Southern Thailand was also utilizing international Islamic sentiment for their cause, and attained a considerable success. The conflict in Patani has become a serious concern of OIC, and even the Thai government sent their delegates to OIC headquarter in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) to explain the Thai government programs for Southern provinces as well as to build a better relationship with OIC and its members. Morally, continuous contacts with other Muslim insurgence movements in the world gave Muslim insurgents in Southeast Asia a constant moral and psychological support and motivation to continue their struggle. And finally, utilizing Islamic sentiments Muslim insurgents in Southeast Asia were able to get financial support from international Muslim communities, especially from richer countries in the Middle East.

Given that there were many factors Muslim insurgents took from Islam-as religion, political ideology, and cultural system—it seems unwise for the governments to exclude Islamic factors from the agenda to solve the conflicts. As was mentioned earlier, the decision to deny Islamic factors was due to the governments' ignorance of Islam and Muslims. Typically, they regarded Islam as a single entity, which is unitarily or equally professed by all Muslims. In other words, they tended to see Muslims as unitary groups which profess exactly the same system. These governments were afraid, therefore, that by addressing the insurgencies as "Islamic" they would provoke a confrontation against the whole Muslim communities.

This was only partially correct. It was correct in the sense that if the governments address the insurgencies as Islamic, they would face the whole Muslim communities. But it was also incorrect in the sense that Muslims and Islam are never monolithic or unitary entities. Although founded upon common basic principles, in fact there are many schools and sects in Islam, caused by differences in interpretation of the teaching of the religion. Some people emphasize certain aspects, others emphasize other factors. Consequently, there are always pluralities among Muslim communities. The armed struggle waged by insurgent groups does not necessarily represent the intention of the whole Muslim communities—although these groups would say so. There were many—or using common-sense there would be the majority—Muslims

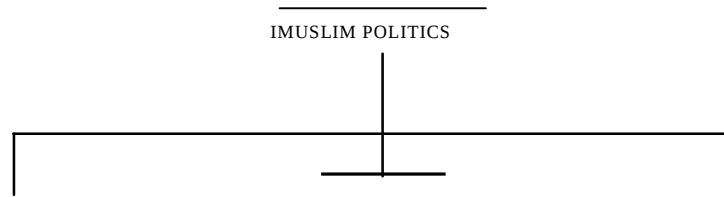
who did not agree with a violent way to solve the problem. Furthermore, theoretically, the relations between religion and social dynamics are always twofold: on the one hand, religious doctrine might be *prescriptive*, in the sense that it dictates what the believers could or could not and should or should not do; on the other hand religious doctrine might also be *legitimative*, that is, it is used by the believers to legitimize what they have done (Fermata, 2006).

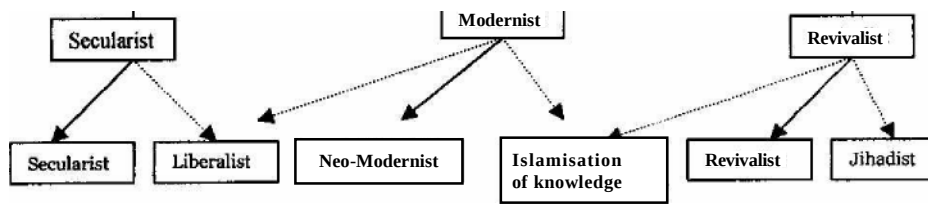
As long as the insurgencies are concerned, the most possible case was that Islamic doctrines were utilized by the insurgence groups to legitimize their causes. It does not mean, however, that this was illegitimate or unjustified acts. This is a very normal, hence legitimate, way of being religious: to legitimize what people are doing with their moral and spiritual values. Yet it does tell us that the religious interpretations of the insurgent groups—to solve the communal or religious problem through armed resistance—does not necessarily represent, or are shared by, the whole Muslim community. What the Southeast Asian government can do is to identify the main characteristic of the religious interpretations of insurgent groups—which are likely *jihadist* or violent in character. The next step is to find out another interpretation which is more dialogical among the community. Finally, they may promote this moderate group as the representative of Muslim communities to negotiate Muslim demands and interests.

It may be sound complicated to differentiate between moderate and radical groups among Muslim communities, but for students of Islamic studies there are some formulas to simplify the complexities and to enable to recognize the characteristics of Muslim organizations and movements from their labels and jargons, to make it as easy as for students of political party studies to identify parties' orientations and programs from their ideological labels using rights and left diagram.

Basically, the whole complex of modern Muslim politics were and are products of encounters between Islamic traditions and western civilizations and powers, therefore the complexities in Muslim political strands could be simplified by classifying them according to their relative positions and attitudes toward western world. Initially, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were three main schools: Firstly, *Secularists* who adopted wholeheartedly almost all western ideas and perceived Islam merely as ruins of outmoded past; secondly, *Modernists* who were receptive to some western inspirations—economy, educations, sciences and technologies etc.—but still committed to Islamic values and tried to formulate a synthesis out of

them; and thirdly, *Revivalists* who saw the West as enemy and threat to Muslim and Islam, and they tried to revived—and sometimes reinvented—Islamic traditions to fights against the West. In the second part of loth century these mainstreams evolved into newer versions and also created new hybrid strands as the results of interactions and combinations.





### **Conclusion: Addressing Muslim Insurgencies**

Insurgencies among Muslims in Southeast Asia are similar with, yet also different from, armed insurgencies in general. Similarly, these revolts were caused by accumulative resentments towards governments policies with regard to their ethnic or communal groups. Because these discriminative policies influence almost every single aspect of the people's communal life, they could only be understood and explained in rather abstract and general terms, usually using cultural and/or religious languages. It means that the problems were not just about interests, but also pertained with the groups' identities. When the conflicts started to involve intangible issues, such as values and identities, they became intractable conflicts. At this point, beyond the complexities of the protracted conflicts, the governments need to pay serious attention to the initial cause of the conflicts, namely the discriminative policies. The government should improve the disadvantaged conditions of the Muslim communities as the starting point to solve the conflicts.

Muslim insurgencies, however, also have specific character which derived from the special features of the religion of Islam. In this respect, Islam provided three simultaneous facilities for the insurgents.

It serves as religious-political ideology by which they legitimize their movements; it also provides an effective language for mass-mobilization by identifying the conflicts not as political or economic but religious struggles or *jihad*; and lastly Islam has enabled the insurgents to internationalize their cases, to get political, moral and material supports from international Muslim communities and organizations. For this point, the Southeast Asian Government should identify the violent religious interpretations of the insurgence groups, find more moderate and non-violent interpretations among Muslim communities, and promote these moderate groups as the representative of Muslim communities. (Note: this is, of course, not as simple as it seems to be. Sometimes, Muslim people are facing a complicated choice, between radical but clean groups and moderate but corrupt one—as happened in Palestine).

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