

**SOUTHERN THAILAND:
THE PROBLEM WITH PARAMILITARIES**

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SOUTHERN THAILAND: THE PROBLEM WITH PARAMILITARIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thailand's increasing reliance on paramilitary forces and civilian militias is hindering efforts to tackle the insurgency in its majority Muslim southern provinces. A bewildering array of paramilitary organisations works alongside and often in parallel to the regular military and police. There are advantages to using irregular forces. They are quicker and cheaper to train and deploy and tend to have more flexible command structures. Locally recruited volunteers have better local knowledge than troops brought in from outside. But they are also inadequately trained and equipped, confuse already difficult command and control arrangements and appear in some cases to make communal tensions worse. While paramilitaries are likely to continue to be deployed in the South, the government should move toward consolidating security arrangements and, in the longer term, concentrate on improving its regular security forces.

Paramilitary organisations and village militias have played significant roles in policing and counter-insurgency throughout Thai history, particularly against communist and separatist guerrillas during the 1970s and 1980s. Over the last decade, these forces have taken on new roles, from controlling refugee camps on the border with Myanmar/Burma to prosecuting the "war on drugs" in 2003. But the most significant expansion has been for the suppression of separatist violence in the South.

The army has tripled the strength of the paramilitary "ranger" force (*Thahan Phran*) in the South since violence surged in 2004, despite its well-deserved reputation for brutality and corruption. It has made some reforms, particularly in screening recruits, since the 1980s and on the whole is a more professional force than twenty years ago, but serious problems with discipline and human rights abuses remain.

The military's key rationale for recruiting new ranger units in the South was to create a local force familiar with the terrain, language and culture. In practice, however, no more than 30 per cent of new recruits are local Malay Muslims. The overwhelming majority of southern Muslims continue to fear and mistrust the rangers. Several suspected extrajudicial killings in 2007 have confirmed their suspicions and played into the hands of militant

propagandists. Insurgents are also believed to have carried out attacks dressed in ranger uniforms, in order to whip up anti-state sentiment.

The interior ministry has its own paramilitary force, the *Or Sor* (Volunteer Defence Corps). Known to be fiercely loyal to its ministry bosses, though less problematic than the rangers, it is widely viewed as the armed enforcer of the ministry's district officers.

The largest armed force in the South – after a massive expansion in 2004-2005 – is a civilian militia, the Village Defence Volunteers (*Chor Ror Bor*). Though senior government and military officials have questioned their effectiveness, the *Chor Ror Bor* still constitute the main form of security in most villages. Poorly trained, isolated and vulnerable, they are often unable to protect themselves and their weapons, let alone their communities. Militants have stolen the guns of hundreds since 2004. Some *Chor Ror Bor* have also turned their guns on fellow villagers when local security incidents have gone beyond control. Yet a plan was announced in July 2007 to recruit an additional 7,000 by the end of 2009.

Despite the evident problems with existing village militias, the Royal Aide-de-Camp department, under Queen Sirikit's direction, established a parallel volunteer scheme, the Village Protection Force (*Or Ror Bor*) in September 2004. Its volunteers receive ten- to fifteen-days military training, an improvement on the *Chor Ror Bor*'s three days, but hardly adequate for confrontations with well-armed and organised militants. Unlike the *Chor Ror Bor* militia, whose make-up broadly reflects the demographic balance of the region, the *Or Ror Bor* is almost exclusively Buddhist, often stationed in temple compounds and tasked with protecting Buddhist communities.

The Buddhist minority in the South feels increasingly threatened. Muslim militants have attempted to drive Buddhists from several areas. Officials, civilians and even monks have been targeted in gruesome killings apparently designed to provoke retaliation. Many Buddhists, frustrated with the government's failure to provide adequate protection, are taking matters into their own hands. Private militias are being established throughout the South, with varying degrees of official sanction and support.

The proliferation of poorly trained, loosely supervised militias in a volatile conflict in which civilians are the main victims confuses command and control arrangements, weakens accountability and heightens the risk of wider communal violence. However, the inability of the regular army to cope with the security threat posed by the Muslim separatist militants suggests that Thailand will continue to use paramilitaries for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the government should:

- review the effectiveness of each paramilitary and militia force as the first step toward consolidating security arrangements;
- provide additional military and humanitarian law training and supervision to the *Thahan Phran* “rangers”, to improve discipline and curb abuses;
- work to phase out, disarm and disband the various village militias, whose impact on security is negligible;
- tighten controls on guns and gun licenses;
- prevent the operation of private sectarian militias, whose emergence is an extremely worrying trend, and bring their sponsors within the government and security forces into line; and
- shift emphasis over time and concentrate on improving the professionalism and strength of its regular military and police rather than arming untrained and jumpy civilians.

Jakarta/Brussels, 23 October 2007

SOUTHERN THAILAND: THE PROBLEM WITH PARAMILITARIES

I. INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Thailand's southern provinces is as far from resolution as ever. Since violence surged in January 2004, over 2,600 people have been killed, the vast majority civilians. Significant swathes of territory are in effect controlled by separatist militants, who have persuaded or terrorised entire villages to cooperate. The post-coup government's policy, despite initial encouraging signals, has turned out to pay little more than lip service to reconciliation.¹ It made nearly no progress on addressing grievances in areas such as identity politics, justice for past abuses and education reform. Meaningful dialogue with insurgent groups remains a distant prospect.

Conversely many Buddhists feel the government's stance toward the insurgents is too soft. Communal tensions are rising, and there is a growing exodus of Buddhists from the South in response to ethnic cleansing by militants in some areas. Feeling aggrieved and abandoned by the government, groups of Buddhist civilians have formed self-defence militias, in many cases with the support of elements within the security forces.

The Bangkok elite remains engrossed with national politics – elections are due on 23 December 2007. The government is in caretaker mode, with little interest in pursuing political strategies to address the conflict in the South.

The region remains under martial law, while the government has struggled to formulate an appropriate security response to the violence. Sweep operations since late June 2007 have interrupted insurgents' communications and reduced their ability to conduct major coordinated attacks. But whether this is sustainable, and whether the alienation of Muslim youths caused by mass, arbitrary arrests ends up outweighing the gains, remains to be seen.

¹ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°129, *Southern Thailand: The Impact of the Coup*, 15 March 2007. For further background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°105, *Thailand's Emergency Decree: No Solution*, 18 November 2005; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°98, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, 18 May 2005.

One policy that has been consistently counter-productive is the government's reliance on poorly trained, ill-disciplined paramilitary forces and civilian militias. Paramilitaries have a long, though undistinguished, history in Thailand, including in the South. Since 2004 their strength has been increased massively. There is a confusing multiplicity of groups – the paramilitary rangers, an interior ministry force known as the Volunteer Defence Corps (*Or Sor*), several loosely supervised village volunteer forces and an unknown number of smaller sectarian militias. Added to the regular army and police and the border patrol police, this makes for a complex security scene.²

This report describes and analyses this landscape, focusing in particular on the two largest and most significant armed groups: the rangers and the *Chor Ror Bor* militia. The focus on irregular armed groups should not be interpreted as implying that there are no problems with the regular army and police; on the contrary, these have been analysed in previous Crisis Group reports. This report does not discuss the Border Patrol Police, since unlike the rangers, there has been no significant increase in their deployment in the South since 2004, and they are largely confined to specific duties within 25km of the border.

² There is no universally accepted distinction between "militias" and "paramilitaries". Writers use the terms in different ways, and there are striking inconsistencies of usage from country to country. The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations (London, 1998) defines militia as "locally raised, part-time forces used to supplement or to replace the regular army in an emergency situation" but does not define paramilitary. In general, however, militia is most commonly used of groups which are civilian and locally organised, while paramilitary is used of security groups which look like an army. In line with this approach, this report uses "paramilitary" to describe the ranger force (*Thahan Phran*) and the interior ministry's *Or Sor* force, but uses "militia" for civilian volunteer forces such as *Chor Ror Bor* and *Or Ror Bor/Or Ror Mor*.

II. PARAMILITARISM IN THAILAND

Thailand has used paramilitaries and militias for tasks ranging from territorial defence to internal security and nation and state building since the sixteenth century. Modern volunteer corps began with the Wild Tiger Corps in 1911 under King Rama VI, a graduate of Britain's Royal Military College at Sandhurst. It was primarily a vehicle for fostering nationalism but was also used to protect the king, assist the police, provide reserves for the military and carry out humanitarian work.³

The corps had two divisions; the one in the capital and a territorial division commanded by Interior Minister Prince Damrong, with an officer corps of carefully selected, loyal aristocrats. Wild Tiger forces from Nakhon Si Thammarat were used to help police suppress a Muslim rebellion in the South in 1923. However, the corps was widely seen as King Rama's personal project. Resented by the regular military, it disappeared soon after his death in 1925.

A variety of new paramilitary organisations emerged after the 1932 coup d'état that ended absolute monarchy. A Village Defence Corps was established in 1937, which turned into the Volunteer Defence Corps (*Or Sor*) in 1954. A variety of nationalist militias sprung up during the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), providing intelligence to district- and provincial-level interior ministry officials.

The most resilient irregular forces, however, were established with backing from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the 1950s and 1960s, including the Border Patrol Police, the Volunteer Defence Corps (*Or Sor*) and the Village Security Teams (the precursor to today's Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteers (*Chor Ror Bor*)). A counter-insurgency office in the U.S. embassy helped develop and expand these forces.

The growth of paramilitary forces at a time when the regular army and police were competing for power and resources caused additional friction. The Border Patrol Police and *Or Sor* were twice almost dismantled in the mid-1950s but on each occasion the U.S. saved them.⁴ Washington's funding ended in 1971.

The paramilitary forces were raised to strengthen internal security and help counter communist threats in neighbouring

countries.⁵ They came to the fore in the struggles against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) from the mid-1960s until the mid-1980s and against Muslim separatist insurgents in the southern provinces. They also played a significant role in managing the flows of tens of thousands of refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Burma during the late 1970s and 1980s.

General Saiyud Kerdphol, director of the Army Operations Centre, brought together all military, police and paramilitary organisations involved in counter-insurgency under a new Communist Suppression Operations Command in 1965 (renamed the Internal Security Operations Command, ISOC, in 1974). Rather than consolidate the forces and improve cooperation among existing agencies, however, ISOC oversaw a proliferation of new paramilitary organisations. A 1974 ISOC publication noted that since 1950 the government had established twelve security projects and at least twenty different paramilitary forces but that many had had very little impact, largely due to the lack of coordination among competing government agencies.⁶

As well as providing security in outlying regions, Thailand's paramilitary forces and village militias were designed as a link between the central government and the people. Many were involved in development projects and other programs to win the support of poor rural villagers deemed susceptible to communist indoctrination. They often failed to do so, however, since the "state development projects had little to do with people's real needs and were imposed upon local people", and they tended to discriminate against suspected CPT sympathisers.⁷ Villagers also resented the intelligence gathering function of the militias.⁸ Seen by insurgents as soft targets and an easy source of weapons, the village security forces suffered heavy losses.

Another problem was rivalry between the police and the interior ministry over control of the paramilitary forces. The military had always been suspicious of the irregulars, feeling that they encroached on its interests and heightened the risk of weapons and supplies falling into insurgents' hands.

³ Desmond Ball and David Scott Mathieson, *Militia Redux: Or Sor and the Revival of Paramilitarism in Thailand*, Studies in Contemporary Thailand no. 17, (Bangkok, 2007), pp. 4-5.

⁴ Daniel Finemann, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 245-247, cited in *ibid*, p. 30.

⁵ The clandestine deployment of Thai paramilitary forces in neighbouring countries was an explicit goal of the CIA, described in a 1953 policy document, Ball and Mathieson, *Militia Redux*, op. cit., p. 26.

⁶ General Saiyud Kerdphol, *The Struggle for Thailand: Counter-insurgency 1965-1985* (Bangkok, 1986), cited in *ibid*, p. 35.

⁷ Shane P. Tarr, "The Nature of Military Intervention in the Countryside of Surat Thani, Southern Thailand", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, no. 3: July-September 1991, pp. 37-38.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 40-42.

The army itself, however, has traditionally been reluctant to engage directly in counter-insurgency. “[Military] leaders saw their principal personal and institutional objectives in terms of Bangkok power politics rather than village or border operations”.⁹ It led operations against the CPT from 1967 until 1971 but when its favoured methods of large-scale sweeps and indiscriminate bombardment proved counter-productive, it handed over many functions to the Border Patrol Police and stepped up establishment of its own paramilitaries. By the mid-1970s, it was training village volunteers (*Thai Ban Asa*) in parts of the north east and the People’s Resistance against Communism force in the South. In 1978 it established the paramilitary rangers discussed below.

Paramilitary organisations declined throughout the 1980s and 1990s as the threat from communist and separatist insurgents receded. The strength of the *Or Sor* was almost halved, and many village militias were disbanded. The rangers were radically reorganised in 2000, brought under closer control by the regular army and reduced in size. Since 2001, however, rather than continue to modernise and consolidate its armed forces by dismantling the remaining paramilitaries and village militias, Thailand has revived them. The *Or Sor* and *Chor Ror Bor* have ballooned, as their roles in border security, counter-narcotics and suppression of violence in the South have grown. Since 2002, and particularly in 2006-2007, the rangers have been resurrected to tackle the revived separatist violence in the South.

Crisis Group has extensively analysed the experience with paramilitaries and militias in a number of countries and has found that their use often creates more problems than it solves. They tend to have worse records than professional troops on human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings, and they often stoke communal tensions at the village level. They have led in some cases to parallel security structures beyond state control, and in post-conflict situations they have severely complicated refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) returns and transitional justice processes.¹⁰

⁹ Thomas Lobe and David Morell, “Thailand’s Border Patrol Police: Paramilitary Political Power”, in Louis A. Zercher and Gwyn Harries-Jenkins (eds.), *Supplementary Military Forces: Reserves, Militias, Auxiliaries*, Sage Research Progress Series on War, Revolution and Peacekeeping, Sage (London, 1978), cited in Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰ See, for example, Crisis Group reporting on problems with militias in Afghanistan and Colombia: Asia Briefing N°35, *Afghanistan: Getting Disarmament Back on Track*, 23 February 2005; Asia Report N°65, *Disarmament and Reintegration in Afghanistan*, 30 September 2003; Latin America Report N°8, *Demobilising the Paramilitaries in Colombia: An Achievable Goal?*, 5 August 2004; and Latin America Report N°5, *Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries*, 16 September

The record of militias in Indonesia’s Lombok and Bali islands highlights the danger of these groups becoming armed enforcers for political parties, their involvement in extortion and human rights abuses and their potential to undermine national police reform objectives.¹¹

A village militia program launched in November 2003 to help fight Nepal’s Maoist insurgency was officially abandoned six months later, having done little to improve security, while often endangering participating villages.¹² The main reasons the program was ended, however, were fear militia members’ guns would end up in the hands of Maoists and opposition from the regular military. There are concerns that some village militias were never properly disarmed and may have subsequently used the government-provided weapons in communal violence.¹³

There are numerous examples in Indonesia (Aceh), as well as in East Timor, Guatemala, Kashmir, Peru and Turkey, of militia groups’ involvement in serious human rights abuses, such as extrajudicial executions, abductions, and torture.¹⁴ In Colombia, Peru and Guatemala, governments have found it difficult to dismantle militias; groups have moved outside state control, asserting control over whole communities and in some cases establishing their own judicial and executive structures.¹⁵ Militia and paramilitary

2003. Militias and paramilitaries in those countries have been more a product of security vacuums than creations of the state security forces but have produced similar problems.

¹¹ Crisis Group Asia Report N°67, *The Perils of Private Security in Indonesia: Guards and Militias on Bali and Lombok*, 7 November 2003.

¹² In February 2004 one of the villages in which locals had been armed, Sudama, was attacked by Maoists insurgents, apparently targeted for its participation in the pilot militia program. See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°30, *Nepal: Dangerous Plans for Village Militias*, 17 February 2004.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, Kathmandu, 2004 and subsequent.

¹⁴ See “Indonesia: Continuing Human Rights Violations in Aceh”, Human Rights Watch, 19 June 1991; “Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor Leste”, available at: www.cavr-timorleste.org/cheгаReport.htm. “Turkey 2005 Progress Report”, European Commission, available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2005/package/sec_1426_final_progress_report_tr_en.pdf, notes that the almost 60,000 village guards still operating in south eastern Turkey pose a major obstacle to the return of IDPs, since they either destroyed entire villages or now occupy their properties. See also “‘Still critical’: Prospects in 2005 for Internally Displaced Kurds in Turkey”, Human Rights Watch, March 2005, at www.hrw.org/reports/2005/turkey0305/index.htm.

¹⁵ On Colombia, see Crisis Group Reports, *Negotiating with the Paramilitaries and Demobilising the Paramilitaries*, both op. cit. See for Peru, Julio Faundez, “Non-state justice systems in Latin America, Case Studies: Peru and Colombia”, University of Warwick, January 2003, available at www.cejamerica.org/doc/docu-mentos/faundez-non-state.pdf; and for Guatemala,

groups also have a record of exacerbating communal tensions; in Indian-controlled Kashmir, for example, local politicians have called for the “village defence committees” to be disbanded because they have created a “dangerous divide among various communities”.¹⁶

Many of the problems generated by reliance on irregular security forces are already evident in Thailand’s southern provinces, suggesting the country risks even more serious trouble, particularly sectarian violence, unless it rethinks the use of civilian defence volunteers. It has a long tradition of using paramilitaries and militias but the current conflict is more complex than that with either the communist or Muslim separatist guerrillas of the 1960s and 1970s. The violence has shifted from the jungle to villages and towns, and militants are harder to distinguish from civilians. Tackling this new security threat calls for a more sophisticated, professional response.

III. RANGERS

The Thai Army first established the *Thahan Phran* (literally hunter soldiers) paramilitary “ranger” force in 1978 to flush out communist guerrillas from mountainous border regions in the north east. By late 1981, rangers had replaced up to 80 per cent of regular army units in counter-insurgency operations on the Burmese, Cambodian and Malaysian borders.

Recruits, ideally young men from the areas of operation, were selected for “fighting ability, patriotism and knowledge of the local insurgents”.¹⁷ Many were enlisted from right-wing nationalist militias such as the Village Scouts.¹⁸ Others were convicts released on parole, local thugs and Pa-O, Karen, Shan, Lahu and Wa mercenaries from Burma.¹⁹ Some Malay separatist militants also defected to join ranger units in the southern provinces.

Since new recruits were given only 45-days basic military training, their fighting skills and discipline were often inadequate. Rangers quickly developed a reputation for abusive behaviour, particularly in the South.²⁰ One of the most notorious incidents took place in August 1981 in Nakhorn Si Thammarat, when twenty rangers fired on the funeral procession of a prominent murdered village leader, killing eleven people. The rangers claimed the civilians had been caught in crossfire as they pursued communist insurgents but the army later admitted they had targeted friends of the deceased in a family feud.²¹

In November 1987, rangers from the 43rd regiment shot dead four unarmed Muslims suspected of links to insurgents in Songkhla province, leading to the transfer of the regiment commander to an inactive post.²² Human rights violations, including rapes and extrajudicial killings, were widespread, though relatively few were reported or investigated.²³

Albane Prophette, Claudia Paz y Paz, José Garcia Novali and Nieves Gomez, “Violence in Guatemala after the armed conflict”, presented at the International Symposium co-organised by the Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, the International Peace Academy and the United Nations University, New York, June 2003, p. 10; and A. Bolivar, *Combating Terrorism: Strategies of 10 Countries* (Michigan, 2005).

¹⁶ “Mehbooba takes a shot at village defence panels”, *Hindustan Times*, 18 April 2007; see also “Citizens versus militants: a battle gone all wrong”, *Hindustan Times*, 4 July 2007; “A spectre haunting India”, *Economist*, 17 August 2006. See “Where the State Makes War on Its Own People”, People’s Union for Civil Liberties (2006), at www.pucl.org/Topics/Human-rights/2006/salwa_jud-um.pdf on the Indian government’s disastrous use of militias in Chhattisgarh to fight against Maoist Naxalite rebels.

¹⁷ Phan Suksan (pseudonym), “Thahan Phran: The Thai Army’s Combat and Development Force”, *Sena Son Thet* [Army Information], vol. 33, no. 10, July 1995, p. 12, cited in Desmond Ball, *The Boys in Black: Thahan Phran (Rangers), Thailand’s Paramilitary Border Guards*, (Bangkok, 2004), p. 9.

¹⁸ On the Village Scout movement, see Katherine A Bowie, *A Ritual of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand*, (New York, 1997).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948* (Boulder, 1994), p. 260.

²⁰ John McBeth, “Thailand: The Bulldozer Invasion”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 May 1981.

²¹ Ball, *The Boys in Black*, op. cit., p. 96.

²² “Ranger chief faces transfer”, *Bangkok Post*, 27 January 1988, cited in *ibid.*, p. 166.

²³ See also Tarr, “Nature of Military Intervention”, op. cit.

Ranger units in Phattalung and Surat Thani were disbanded in 1981 after systematic abuses of local villagers were revealed, but while the military periodically acknowledged poor discipline and brutality, promises to bring offenders to justice were not fulfilled. The army tended to emphasise the rangers' contribution to counter-insurgency and turn a blind eye to abusive behaviour.

Rangers did indeed play a significant role in defeating communist and separatist guerrillas but usually in joint task forces with regular soldiers and Border Patrol Police:

[Rangers] made no singular contribution, and none which exploited their supposed advantage of superior local knowledge and contacts. In fact, the rangers rarely achieved the close working relationships with local hill tribes and villagers that was the essence of their original rationale....They are feared, not respected, by most of the people they are supposed to protect.²⁴

Rangers committed their worst atrocities at the height of the counter-insurgency campaigns in the early- to mid-1980s. Over the subsequent two decades, the army has made some efforts to reform the organisation. Recruits are selected more carefully and screened for criminal records.²⁵ In 1987, the army adopted a policy of attempting to recruit reservists, who had already completed more rigorous training during their military service.²⁶ The military announced in 1995 that the training period for new recruits would be increased from 45 days to six months.²⁷ In practice, however, this does not appear to have been implemented.²⁸ The emphasis is on

military training, including drills, weapon-handling (M16 and HK assault rifles and M79 grenade launchers) and cordon-and-search operations. Rangers do receive some basic training on their role and responsibilities under national law but none in international humanitarian or human rights law.²⁹

As the threat from communist and separatist insurgents diminished, the rationale for maintaining the rangers weakened. In October 2000, General Surayud Chulanond (then commander-in-chief of the armed forces) instituted wide-ranging reform of the rangers as part of a broader military restructuring program. The rangers' national headquarters and training base in Pakthongchai district, Nakhon Ratchasima, was closed, and eight of their 21 regiments were disbanded. Army officers seconded to the rangers were transferred back to their original units, and the remaining rangers divided among the four national army regions. The mandatory retirement age was reduced from 60 to 45 and Major General Nikhom Yossunthorn, the last commander of the Paramilitary Division, announced that no new recruits would be taken.³⁰ All indications were that the force was being phased out but as violence escalated in the southern provinces, it was instead built up.

A. EXPANSION OF RANGERS IN THE SOUTH

When Prime Minister Thaksin restructured security arrangements in the South in May 2002, he withdrew the 41st and 43rd Ranger Regiments to the Malaysian border, removing them from any internal security role. This was in part a reaction to police complaints that members of the 43rd were behind the killings of eight police officers in March that year and suspicion that rangers from the 41st were involved in the raid on a weapons depot in Bang Lang National Park in Yala.³¹ However, the decision had more to do with a political dispute between Thaksin (and the police) and the military establishment than any operational consideration. When it became clear the southern violence was beyond the capacity of the police,

²⁴ Ball, *The Boys in Black*, op. cit., p. 180. One of the Rangers' most lauded successes was the capture of the *Kaho Ya* Communist Party of Thailand camp in early 1981 but it was Kuomintang forces fighting alongside the rangers who played the decisive role in that operation. Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, op. cit.; Ball, *The Boys in Black*, op. cit., pp. 179-180; Crisis Group interview, Anthony Davis, Jane's Information Group, Bangkok, July 2007; Crisis Group interview, John McBeth, former *Far Eastern Economic Review* correspondent, Jakarta, September 2007.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, military officers, Yala and Pattani, July and August 2007.

²⁶ Thailand's conscription system is a lottery. At eighteen every man receives a letter containing either a red or a black card. If red, he must complete military service at the age of 21. If by then he has or is completing a bachelor's degree, he need only serve six months. If he has completed senior high school he need serve only one year; if he has only a primary or junior high school education, he must serve two years. If the card is black, he is exempt. In practice, however, no one with a university degree ever completes military service. Middle class men invariably are able to evade conscription by either bribing officials or using connections to have their names removed from the lottery.

²⁷ Ball, *The Boys in Black*, op. cit., p. 183.

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, numerous military officers, rangers and provincial officials in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and

Songkhla, January-August 2007. Every interviewee told Crisis Group the training period for rangers currently deployed in the southern provinces is 45 days.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, ranger commander, Pattani, October 2007.

³⁰ “แม่ทัพภาค 2 แจง ไม่ปลดทหารพรานเปลี่ยนแค่ชื่อค่าย”, ไทยโพสต์, 29 กันยายน 2543 [“Second Region Commander not disbanding rangers, just renaming the camp”, *Thai Post*, 29 September 2000]; “Army's rangers to break camp for good”, *Bangkok Post*, 28 September 2000; “Rangers' retirement age slashed to 45: no more recruits for paramilitary force”, *Bangkok Post*, 2 October 2000.

³¹ “Violence in South – Police challenged to prove their claim”, *Bangkok Post*, 22 March 2002.

he declared martial law, in effect returning control to the Fourth Army.³²

The 41st and 43rd Ranger Regiments were redeployed to their regimental bases and a third regiment (the 45th) was moved from Surat Thani province in the upper South to Cho Airong district in Narathiwat. It did not take long for problems to emerge. In September 2004, five rangers from the 41st in Yala shot dead an unarmed law student, Imin Nuruladin Jehlae, whom they allegedly mistook for a militant.³³

The rangers' performance in one of their first major operations in the South – the notorious mishandling of the October 2004 Tak Bai protest – did nothing to dispel fears about their incompetence and brutality. The 45th Ranger Regiment was primarily responsible for arresting and transporting protestors from Tak Bai police station to Inkayuthborihan military base, though border patrol police and marines also played a role. Rather than identifying and arresting leaders, the rangers stripped and bound the hands of all male protestors. Then, with minimal supervision from commanding military officers, they loaded some 1,300 Muslim men and boys on to trucks, up to four layers deep, for a four- to five-hour journey. 78 died, mostly of asphyxiation, though allegations of extrajudicial executions also linger.³⁴ When the first death was discovered, the rangers took no measures to prevent further injuries.³⁵ An additional seven people had been shot dead at the site of the protest, apparently by regular soldiers.³⁶

A government-appointed, independent investigative committee criticised the use of “inexperienced paramilitary rangers and conscripts to disperse the protestors with live bullets [as] inappropriate and not in line with international standards”.³⁷ It also condemned the commanding officers for failing to provide adequate supervision over the transportation of the detainees. The Tak Bai tragedy and the government's subsequent failure to hold any officers responsible for the 85 deaths became a symbol of brutality and injustice and a powerful recruitment tool for insurgents. A leaflet circulating after the protest stated:

The killers...are two trucks full of rangers. They were so proud of their task of shooting innocent people. Where did the first military truck full of dead people go after the mob dispersal?³⁸

The disastrous mismanagement of the Tak Bai protest did not prompt any re-think about the use of paramilitary rangers in such an explosive environment, however. In a November 2005 strategy review, General Sonthi announced that five new companies of rangers would be recruited, trained and deployed in the South, bringing the total to more than 3,000 men.³⁹ In response to the planned recruitment, more militant leaflets appeared:

One other thing for Muslim brothers and sisters to be aware of...is that the Siamese kafir government has a dirty policy to get us Malay people to kill those of the same religion, nationality and race. They want to hire Malay Muslims to work as volunteers and rangers. Each village can send in two people. These people will become a shield for the kafir government and victims of the Patani Mujahidin warriors.⁴⁰

In August 2006, General Sonthi announced a plan to establish another 30 companies of rangers for the South.⁴¹ The newly recruited rangers make up two additional regiments: the 42nd, which covers the four conflict-affected districts in Songkhla, and the 44th, which plays a supporting role in Pattani and Narathiwat. The 41st, 43rd and 45th regiments totalled around 3,240 troops by 2006.⁴² In October 2007, two further regiments (the 46th and 47th) were deployed, bringing the total to approximately 7,560

³² See Crisis Group Report, *The Impact of the Coup*, op. cit., pp. 1-2; also Duncan McCargo, “Thaksin and the Resurgence of Violence in the Thai South”, in *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* (NUS Press, 2007).

³³ “Law Student Shooting: Court rejects suit against 5 rangers”, *The Nation*, 16 September 2004.

³⁴ Autopsies cited in the investigative report stated that fourteen deaths were caused by injuries from blunt objects. Families of some victims have alleged there were bullet wounds in the bodies of their relatives, suggesting they were shot dead rather than crushed in the trucks. Information made available to Crisis Group from independent researcher.

³⁵ รายงานของคณะกรรมการอิสระสอบข้อเท็จจริงกรณีผู้เสียชีวิตในเหตุการณ์อำเภอดงไผ่ จังหวัดนราธิวาส เมื่อวันที่ 25 ตุลาคม 2547 [Report of the fact-finding commission on the death of protestors during the Tak Bai incident in Narathiwat, 17 December 2004], p. 48; Thai Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigation, cited in “Death toll ‘could be far higher’”, *The Nation*, 30 October 2004. See also Crisis Group Report, *Insurgency, Not Jihad*, op. cit., pp. 27-31.

³⁶ Video footage of the incident on file with Crisis Group shows a soldier with his gun in a horizontal position, firing on the crowd. Two experts have argued after viewing footage that the shots came from a direction where soldiers, not rangers, were stationed. Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 249.

³⁷ รายงานของคณะกรรมการอิสระสอบข้อเท็จจริงกรณีผู้เสียชีวิตในเหตุการณ์อำเภอดงไผ่ จังหวัดนราธิวาส เมื่อวันที่ 25 ตุลาคม 2547 [Report of the fact-finding commission], op. cit., p. 45.

³⁸ Leaflet found in the South after Tak Bai tragedy.

³⁹ “Army to change its training procedures: Focus on ambush, urban combat tactics”, *Bangkok Post*, 6 November 2005.

⁴⁰ Malay language leaflet collected by local researcher, 2005.

⁴¹ “New ranger units for deep South”, Thai News Agency, 28 August 2006.

⁴² Between 2004 and 2006 regiments were increased from six to twelve companies, Crisis Group interview, Colonel Charin, Yala, October 2007.

troops.⁴³ The overall commander for these seven regiments, Colonel Wiwat Pratompak, is based at the southern civilian-police-military joint headquarters in Sirinthorn camp and answers to the Fourth Army Region commander, General Viroj Buancharoon.

The military sees five main advantages in using rangers rather than regular soldiers. First, rangers, if locally recruited, are thought to have a natural advantage in intelligence gathering through their language skills and social networks (very few regular soldiers are local or speak the Patani Malay dialect). In practice, however, only a small proportion of the newly recruited rangers are actually local Malay Muslims. Estimates from military sources ranged from 15 to 30 per cent. Most new rangers are southerners, but around 60 per cent are local, Thai-speaking Buddhists, and another 10 to 25 per cent are Muslims from Phattalung, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Chumporn provinces in the upper South who do not speak Malay.⁴⁴

Knowledge of the local mountainous terrain is very useful but the Malay Muslim rangers are not usually deployed in their home districts. In fact, one of the most dangerous times for local rangers is their monthly home leave.⁴⁵ At least four were killed by militants in their own villages while on leave between January and July 2007.⁴⁶

The second advantage is rangers' more flexible command structure. Each company of between 80 and 100 is fairly autonomous. The company commander, a captain seconded from the regular army, can make operational decisions. A company commander in Mai Kaen explained:

If I get a call from the local police asking for help to set up a road block, for example, if there were suspicious people milling about in the area, I can jump straight in the truck with my men and be there in five minutes. In the regular army you first need to secure permission from at least one level above and often end up missing the window.⁴⁷

⁴³ Each ranger company deployed in the field has 74 troopers, one lieutenant (the commanding officer), one captain, and fourteen non-commissioned officers (five sergeant majors 1st class and nine sergeants) from the regular army. At each regimental headquarters there are 48 officers (the commanding officer is a colonel), 36 women rangers and three women sergeants. Crisis Group interview, Colonel Pakorn Juntarachota, Pattani, October 2007.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Yala, Pattani, July and August 2007.

⁴⁵ Rangers work 22 days then have eight off per month.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Colonel Pakorn Juntarachota, who oversees eight of the new Ranger companies, Saiburi, Pattani, July 2007.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, ranger company commander, Pattani, July 2007.

In a case in Saiburi, a ranger unit heard gunfire from the direction of the local police post. Nine rangers rushed to the scene, where ten militants were attacking the police. They repelled the attack, shooting dead three gunmen.⁴⁸ This responsiveness is certainly an advantage of a decentralised command structure. The downside is weakened accountability.

The third benefit in using rangers is the cost. The pre-deployment training period is only 45 days. The monthly salary is 9,350 Baht (approximately \$300), higher than that of a conscript but significantly lower than that of a professional soldier.⁴⁹

The fourth perceived advantage is the rangers' reputation for fearlessness and getting the job done. Army recruiters seek out relatives of people killed by militants. "Lots of Muslims have been killed, and their sons are very angry", explained an officer. "They have a strong will to fight. They want to avenge the deaths of their fathers – they are very easy to recruit".⁵⁰ Regular troops in the South (of whom some 60 per cent are young conscripts) tend to stay on base or patrol in large groups in vehicles.⁵¹ Rangers, on the other hand, conduct regular foot patrols on small back roads.⁵² Daily duties are patrolling and manning checkpoints but they also periodically go into the jungle in units of twelve and set up camps for a few days at a time.⁵³ In a rare instance of an active rebel training camp being suppressed, Ranger Company 4506 stumbled upon one in an area in Narathiwat's Taway mountains accessible only by foot.⁵⁴

When a Border Patrol Police officer guarding a school was shot dead in June 2007 in Sri Sakhon, police, marines and even the men in his own unit were afraid

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, ranger commander, Saiburi, July 2007.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, rangers and army officer, Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla, July and August 2007.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Yala, January 2007.

⁵¹ โดย รุ่งรวี เฉลิมศรีภิญโญรัช, "การคัดเลือกและการปฏิบัติหน้าที่ของเจ้าหน้าที่ทหารตำรวจกับปัญหาการละเมิดสิทธิมนุษยชนในสามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้" [Rungrawee Chalerm Sriyoyrat, "Human Rights Violations in the Deep South: Security Officers and Recruitment Criteria"], paper presented at conference, "Southern Violence and the Thai State", Bangkok, 18-19 August 2006.

Officers interviewed by Crisis Group were unable to give an exact figure but all admitted "a majority" of troops deployed in the South were conscripts.

⁵² A company commander explained that, "rangers always patrol on foot. It's our way. But we also don't have any proper military vehicles like the army, so we don't really have a choice!" His 84-man company had only four motorcycles, a pickup truck and a minivan. Crisis Group interview, Narathiwat, July 2007.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview, company commander, July 2007.

⁵⁴ "Teens shot dead in Narathiwat ambush", *The Nation*, 4 March 2007.

to go into the separatist-controlled area during the day to collect his body, so the rangers were called. Eight rangers on four motorcycles retrieved the body within ten minutes.⁵⁵

Because they have a reputation for being more gung-ho, the rangers have been systematically deployed in the militant-dominated “red zones”. Putting troops with only 45-days training in the most dangerous areas has led some to conclude they are “being used as cheap cannon fodder”.⁵⁶

The fifth advantage is that rangers are expected to commit for long deployments. Annual rotations are a major problem for the regular army in the South. As soon as a unit has built local knowledge, contacts and perhaps some trust with villagers, it is replaced. This makes locals reluctant to share information. A villager in Panare asked, “what is the use of going out on a limb to build a relationship with these soldiers when they will be gone in a few months? Who will protect us then?”⁵⁷ Rangers are not rotated in the same way. They are only required to commit for one year at a time but are expected to stay in the region for at least three and are encouraged to serve until the retirement age of 45. Their pay increases with length of service.⁵⁸

In addition to these five comparative advantages the military claims, there is a sixth reason for the increasing reliance on rangers in the South: a shortage of professional soldiers there.⁵⁹ The Fourth Army Region is the smallest of the four regional commands and already has four battalions each from the first, second and third regions, plus three battalions of marines in the South.⁶⁰ More could be used but the government has been anxious to retain a strong military presence in Bangkok and opposition strongholds in the north and north east since the September 2006 coup.⁶¹

The major disadvantages of using rangers are their inexperience and poor discipline. Their training is insufficient to provide new recruits with the skills and discipline required to protect communities and tackle insurgents in “red zones”, and some receive even less

than the prescribed 45 days.⁶² All companies are commanded by professional soldiers, often assisted by two or three regular army non-commissioned officers, but this is inadequate for proper oversight. One company commander said he rarely took his monthly eight days leave, “because I know my men would not cope without me here”.⁶³

Many commanders admitted to discipline problems. An officer in charge of eight companies said he had to dismiss six rangers in six months, mostly due to drug problems.⁶⁴ Recruitment has been reformed, and convicted criminals are now screened out but deliberately recruiting relatives of conflict victims is potentially an even more risky practice.

The gross human rights violations committed by rangers in the 1980s left a legacy of hatred and fear among southerners. The expansion in 2005-2007 has been met with trepidation by most Muslim residents, and a series of violent incidents in the first few months of the new deployments confirmed many people’s fears. The head of a religious school in Yala said after the local ranger unit raided his school, “rangers cannot solve the problems here. They can only add to them”.⁶⁵ A villager in Saba Yoi, where communal tensions intensified in 2007, said, “I don’t know who is behind the violence here. All I know is that things are worse since the rangers came”.⁶⁶

Negative perceptions are also reinforced by militant propaganda. For example, a leaflet found in July 2007 claimed:

The Siamese kafirs are creating confusion in the four provinces. They have killed innocents, shot into teashops, into people’s houses, at people returning from prayers, into *ponohs* [Islamic boarding schools]...All these incidents have been carried out by government officials, especially *Thahan Phran*.⁶⁷

Two incidents discussed below demonstrate the problems caused by the rangers’ characteristic ill-discipline and how separatists can tap into a deep reserve of genuine fear and mistrust.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, company commander, Sri Sakhon, July 2007.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, independent analyst, September 2007.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, villager, Panare, Pattani, April 2006.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Colonel Pakorn Juntarachota, Pattani, July 2007.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, military officers, Yala, Pattani and Bangkok, January and July 2007.

⁶⁰ Because the southern region is long, narrow and flanked by the sea, the navy has a greater role than in other regions.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, Bangkok, July-October 2007.

⁶² Rangers interviewed by Crisis Group in Saba Yoi had received 30 days pre-deployment training. A trainer was stationed in their company to do additional on-the-job training. Crisis Group interviews, August 2007.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, company commander, Narathiwat, July 2007.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, Colonel Pakorn Juntarachota, Pattani, July 2007.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, *Baboh* Muhammad of Pondok Ta Seh, Yala, July 2007.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, villager in Kolomudo, Saba Yoi, Songkhla, August 2007.

⁶⁷ Leaflet collected by local researcher.

B. TA SEH SHOOTINGS AND ISLAMIC SCHOOL RAID

On 9 March 2007 at around 5:30pm, as Abukori Kasoh and Afandi Pohma slowed to pass through a checkpoint on the Yala-Mae Lan road, troops from Ranger Company 4202 fired into their pickup. Abukori, the fifteen-year-old passenger, was hit in the stomach and side. Afandi, the driver, was hit on the nose and left arm but continued to the Ta Seh Islamic School about 100 metres away, where he was to pick up his wife. Students immediately took them to Mae Lan hospital, in the pickup belonging to *Baboh* (school head) Muhammad. Abukori and Afandi were transferred to Yala Provincial Hospital that night, where Abukori died. Afandi was discharged the following day.⁶⁸

Approximately twenty minutes after the shooting, some twenty rangers from the same unit came to the school and demanded to see the two people from Afandi's car, which was parked at the front. *Baboh* Muhammad tried to explain that they were no longer there but the rangers, who he said appeared to be drunk, refused to believe him and began searching the school.⁶⁹ The doors to all the *pondok* (dormitory huts) were locked but the rangers shot them open. They forced all the male students (approximately 90) out of the mosque and *musholla* (prayer room) onto the sports field and made them strip to their underwear and lie face down on the ground. Some rangers guarded the students, while others continued to search the school, shooting randomly into buildings, including the mosque.⁷⁰

Baboh Muhammad called Yala Deputy Governor Grisada Boonrach, asking him to mediate. Grisada arrived just before seven pm with the district police commander, Colonel Phumphet Pipatpetphum, after the rangers had been at the school for approximately one hour. He asked them to stop shooting but they ignored him.

The school's female students had congregated in the upstairs rooms of *Baboh* Muhammad's house with his family on hearing the shooting at the checkpoint. Rangers entered the house but were blocked on the stairs by Muhammad's 21-year-old son, Sobri. The police commander ordered them down and by eight pm had

convinced the rangers to leave the school.⁷¹ *Baboh* Muhammad claimed the rangers stole 80,000 Baht (approximately \$2,550) in property from the dormitories, including cash, mobile phones and watches. Three days later, on 12 March, a regular army unit came to the school and presented 70,000 Baht compensation and an apology.⁷²

The rangers initially claimed Abukori and Afandi had shot first, and they responded in self-defence. They later said there was another passenger in the back of the car, who had fired at them.⁷³ Afandi denied these claims. An examination by Dr Pornthip Rojananasunan, director of the Central Forensic Science Institute, found no gunshot residue anywhere inside Afandi's car and that the only bullet holes were from the outside.⁷⁴ Rangers from Company 4202 later claimed Afandi had run the checkpoint, and his car was similar to one from which shots had been fired at their unit earlier in the day.⁷⁵

The National Legislative Assembly panel on the southern violence investigated in late March. Its report concluded that the rangers had fired on civilians unprovoked.⁷⁶ The company was moved to another area, and the individuals involved were transferred back to the Army's Fourth Region headquarters in Nakorn Si Thammarat.⁷⁷

The checkpoint shooting and the raid at Ta Seh School are exactly the sort of incidents that give the rangers their reputation for brutality and play into the hands of militant propagandists. Leaflets were found in the vicinity of the school within days describing the "rangers' evil operation to kill innocent people at Ta Seh".⁷⁸ Several students have

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, *Baboh* Muhammad, relative of Afandi and Abukori and head of the Pondok Ta Seh, Yala, July 2007.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ When Crisis Group visited the school in July 2007, there were still bullet holes in several buildings. See also อารีฟิน บินจิ, "4 ชม ระทึก ในปอเนาะตาเซะ อีกมุมมองความแตกต่าง ความแปลกแยกที่ยังคงอยู่", สำนักข่าวอิศรา 13 มีนาคม 2550 [Arifin Binji, "4 Hours in Pondok Tasae; a different perspective; discrimination still alive", Issara News Agency, 13 March 2007].

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, *Baboh* Muhammad and Yala Deputy Governor Grisada Boonrach, July 2007.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "ทหารพรานปะทะคนร้ายดักซมยิง," ไทยรัฐ 11 มีนาคม 2550 ["Roadside attack at Thahan Phran", Thai Rath, 11 March 2007]; "คำชี้แจงจากโฆษก พตท. ต่อเหตุการณ์ปะทะระหว่าง ทพ. และ ผู้ต้องสงสัยก่อความไม่สงบที่บ. ตาเซะ อ.เมือง จ.ยะลา" สำนักข่าวอิศรา 17 มีนาคม] 2550["Thahan Phran vs militants at Tasae village, Muang district, Yala: Press conference with Army Spokeman", Issara News Agency, 17 March 2007].

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Dr Pornthip Rojananasunan, acting director, justice ministry's Central Forensic Science Institute, Bangkok, August 2007.

⁷⁵ "สถานการณ์ชายแดนใต้-ไทยรัฐ 12 , มีนาคม] 2550 "Deep South Situation", Thai Rath, 12 March 2007].

⁷⁶ ข้อเท็จจริงกรณี เหตุการณ์การยิงที่บ้านตาเซะ และการบุกค้นปอเนาะ อิสลามศาสน์ ดารุสสลาม ["Facts on the incident at Ta Seh village and the raid of Islamsart Darusalam pondok", National Legislative Assembly, panel report].

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Grisada Boonrach, deputy Yala governor, July 2007.

⁷⁸ Leaflet collected by local researcher.

since been approached about joining the separatist movement.⁷⁹

C. THE KILLING OF YAKARIYA PA'OHMANI

At around five am on 27 June 2007, several pickup trucks full of rangers from the 41st Regiment came to arrest suspected militant Yakariya Pa'ohmani at his house in Bacho sub-district, Bannang Sata, Yala. The rangers told his wife they were taking him to Inkayuthborihan for questioning. The family was informed by the Bacho sub-district chief on 29 June that Yakariya had died, and his body could be collected from Yala Provincial Hospital.⁸⁰

The rangers actually took Yakariya to the 41st Regiment's base in Raman the morning of 27 June, rather than to Inkayuthborihan base in Pattani. On the night of 28 June, they transferred him to Raman police station to be charged. The rangers claim that their two-truck convoy was ambushed by four militants on two motorcycles. The tyres of one truck were punctured by spikes on the road. All jumped out of the back of the trucks, except Yakariya, who was handcuffed to his vehicle. The gunmen sprayed that truck with bullets, killing Yakariya, while the rangers escaped.⁸¹

It is entirely conceivable that militants would attack a ranger convoy on a dark road in Raman district. Scattering spikes to stop a vehicle before ambushing it is a classic tactic. Forensic investigations of the crime scene and (separately) the vehicle show that Yakariya and the cab were shot from a distance of less than five metres.⁸² Skid marks on the road were consistent with a vehicle slipping off course.⁸³ But why the rangers were transporting a suspect through a dangerous area at night has not been explained. It is also strange that not a single ranger was injured.

Fourth Army Region Commander General Viroj ordered an investigation but the results have not been made public. Yakariya's autopsy revealed severe blunt force injury to the chest, suggesting he had been kicked repeatedly or

jumped on prior to the shooting. It was not possible to determine whether the cause of death was the chest injuries or the shooting.⁸⁴ Locals are convinced the rangers staged the incident to cover up the torture, which they believe killed him.⁸⁵ There was a possible motive for the rangers to kill Yakariya. Less than a month before his arrest, eleven rangers from the same Bannang Sata company which arrested him were killed in an ambush by separatist insurgents.⁸⁶

Locals' suspicions were fuelled by militant propaganda. A leaflet produced by the "News Agency of the Fighters of Patani State", with a photograph of Yakariya's corpse, contested the official account:

The autopsy showed that the body had bruises from being punched or kicked and several wounds from being shot in the head and body. The conclusion is that this incident was created by the 41st Ranger Regiment from Wang Paya camp. This is one of many incidents in which officials abuse innocent Muslims, then fabricate stories in collaboration with the media.⁸⁷

Whether or not the convoy was ambushed, and regardless of whether the shooting or the beating was the cause of death, it is clear Yakariya was severely beaten while in the rangers' custody.

D. ALLEGED RAPE IN PATAE AND THE PATTANI PROTESTS

The alleged rape of a young Muslim woman and her murder, and that of three of her relatives in Patae, Yaha in May 2007 sparked a propaganda war between the government and separatist militants. Relatives and some local villagers alleged that rangers were behind the atrocities. The government insisted the rangers were innocent, and the woman had not been raped. Militant-

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, July 2007.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, Adilan Ali Ishak, lawyer for Yakariya's family, Yala, August 2007.

⁸¹ "ความหวาดระแวง-สงสัยที่ยังมีอยู่ทั่วพื้นที่หลังการเสียชีวิตอย่างมีเงื่อนงำของนายสาการียา ปะโอะมานิ," สำนักข่าวอิศรา 14 กันยายน 2550 "Distrusted and suspected after mysterious death of Pa-O-Mani", Issara News Agency, 14 September 2007]; Crisis Group interview, Adilan Ali Ishak, lawyer for Yakariya's family, Yala, August 2007.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, Adilan, Ali Ishak, lawyer for Yakariya's family, Yala, August 2007.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, Dr Pornthip Rojanasunan, forensic scientist, Bangkok, August 2007.

⁸⁴ There were large contusions on his chest but no fractures. His right lung was ruptured but not the left. The rupture could have been caused by either the chest injury or the bullet in his right side. If his body had been jumped on, a rupture of the heart would have been more likely but if the force was applied primarily to his right side, it is possible he could have died of the chest injuries. Ibid.

⁸⁵ "ความหวาดระแวง-สงสัยที่ยังมีอยู่ทั่วพื้นที่หลังการเสียชีวิตอย่างมีเงื่อนงำของนายสาการียา ปะโอะมานิ," สำนักข่าวอิศรา 14 กันยายน 2550 "Distrusted and suspected after mysterious death of Pa-O-Mani", Issara News Agency, 14 September 2007].

⁸⁶ Militants detonated a roadside bomb, overturning the local rangers' patrol vehicle, then executed those who were not killed by the blast. "18 People Killed In Two Deadly Incidents In Southern Thailand", *Bernama* [Malaysia], 1 June 2007.

⁸⁷ "Follow the News Closely", leaflet found in July 2007.

linked student groups held a large demonstration outside Pattani Central Mosque, blocking traffic for five days. The government eventually agreed to conduct an official enquiry but the committee it established fell apart within weeks.

1. The Patae case

At around ten pm on 22 May 2007, gunmen in green ranger uniforms shot dead four members of a Malay Muslim family in Salapae village, Patae sub-district.⁸⁸ According to Dah Jehloh, who survived, ten to fifteen rangers wearing scarves over their faces burst into the house and shot her father, Mauseng Jehloh, in the head, killing him instantly. Her sister, Nurhayadi Jehloh, was shot in the back. Dah's mother ran out of the house crying out for help and reached a nearby relative's house. Dah hid in a dark room. The gunmen ran to the house to which her mother had fled and shot dead her two cousins, Kuseng Tuankohseng, fourteen, and Tuwaeasuming Tuankohseng, eighteen, but her mother and aunt survived. Dah claims two rangers then came back to her house, and she heard Nurhayadi cry out. She said she knew her sister was being raped.⁸⁹

Dah told local journalists that rangers had come into the village a month earlier to gather information. She was convinced the gunmen who killed her relatives were rangers. They were dressed in the same uniforms as the men who had come the month before, she said, and rangers had caused trouble for many Muslim families in the past, so it must have been them.⁹⁰ Government officials insist Nuryahadi was not raped, and the gunmen who killed her and her relatives were local militants in ranger uniforms.

A month before the attacks in Salape village, a joint team of police, rangers and Border Patrol Police had conducted a large sweep in Patae. They sealed off the entire sub-

district and carried out house-to-house searches. The operation failed to net any insurgents but obtained intelligence from locals that the militants who had been based there had fled to neighbouring Kabang district. The team caught up with some of the militants there and engaged in a gunfight but did not manage to arrest them.

During the fifteen-day sweep, a Border Patrol Police unit based itself in Salapae village. Yaha District Officer Supnat Siruntawinati said there were only some seven families in Salapae, and the Jehloh family was not local. They were from Saiburi in Pattani, but worked as labourers in the rubber plantation and had temporary housing there. His suspicion is that militants killed members of the family to punish them for giving information to the authorities.

On the night of the shootings, the village imam informed the Yaha deputy district chief four people had been shot dead. He made no mention of rape. When the district chief offered to come with police to collect the bodies, the imam warned that the road was not safe and suggested they wait until morning.

On the morning of 23 May, the imam and deputy village head brought the four bodies to Yaha town where they were examined by a local doctor with witnesses from the police, the district office and the imam, in accordance with Thai law.⁹¹ Since neither the imam nor the deputy village head had mentioned an alleged rape, the doctor's post-mortem examination was conducted solely to determine the cause of death. In Nurhayadi's case, it was clear she had been shot (apparently from under the wooden house) in the left side of her lower abdomen and bled to death. There were no signs of struggle. The other members of the family had also been shot dead.⁹²

The same morning, the district officer went with a security team in a convoy of four pickup trucks to examine the scene. A bomb was remotely detonated under the fourth truck, carrying rangers, on the road into Patae. No one was killed but four rangers were injured. When a police team from Yaha went to Salapae village later that day, it was ambushed by militants.⁹³ Police killed a man in the subsequent shoot-out.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Rangers may wear either the traditional black ranger uniform or a green camouflage uniform introduced in the 1990s. There may be variation within the same company. The uniform also includes a distinctive neckerchief, whose colour varies from company to company.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Soraya Jamjuree, Friends of Victimized Families support group, who had interviewed Dah, Pattani, July 2007. Soraya also helped mediate between protestors and authorities at the June Pattani Mosque demonstrations at which Dah spoke. See also “เมื่อทหารพรานถูกกล่าวหาว่าข่มขืนสาวไทยมลายูที่บ้านมาฆาลาเป อ.ยะหา จ.ยะลา,” สำนักข่าวอิศรา 7 มิถุนายน 2550 [“Rangers accused of raping Thai-Malay woman in Salapae village, Yaha district, Yala”, Issara News Agency, 7 June 2007].

⁹⁰ “เมื่อทหารพรานถูกกล่าวหาว่าข่มขืนสาวไทยมลายูที่บ้านมาฆาลาเป อ.ยะหา จ.ยะลา,” สำนักข่าวอิศรา 7 มิถุนายน 2550 [“Rangers accused of raping Thai-Malay woman in Salapae village, Yaha district, Yala”, Issara News Agency, 7 June 2007].

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Supnat Siruntawinati, Yaha District Officer, Yaha, Yala, October 2007.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid; “Six die in southern violence”, *The Nation*, 24 May 2007.

⁹⁴ A witness who arrived minutes later observed that the alleged assailant shot by police was an elderly man, naked from the waist down, as if he had been wearing a sarong that had fallen off as he ran. Although militants on the hillside by the road were almost certainly responsible for the roadside bomb earlier in the day and the attack on the police, the man police shot may have been a villager caught in crossfire. Crisis Group interview, October 2007.

Military spokesman Acra Thiproj asked the doctor, Surat Praneenarat, to speak at a press conference about the alleged rape, but he refused, since that had not been the object of his examination.⁹⁵ Acra nonetheless announced on 3 June that the doctor had found no evidence of rape.⁹⁶

A ranger interviewed by Crisis Group said dismissively of the rape allegation, “everyone knows it was a lie. Some people alleged that two women were raped and four people were shot during that incident but it wouldn’t have been possible in the timeframe they suggested. And the woman wasn’t even good looking”.⁹⁷ The rape allegation became so controversial that the four murders seemed to be swept aside. The military announced that eyewitness Waseng Wari had told police the gunmen were local militants dressed to look like rangers.⁹⁸ Police added that militants had carried out a similar attack in Pattani’s Khok Po district in ranger uniforms.⁹⁹

On 29 May, around 100 women and children, including Nurhayadi’s mother, blocked the road in Patae to protest the alleged murders and rape by rangers. The protest, six days after the attack, was the first public accusation of rape, or of ranger involvement. Officials claim no Salapae villager, including Nurhayadi’s mother, had mentioned either until then. The protest lasted two days and closed seven schools in Patae and Baroh sub-districts. On the afternoon of 30 May, Deputy Yala Governor Grisada Boonrach convinced the women to disperse, promising that if they produced evidence of any ranger involvement in the attacks, the offenders would be removed from the area.¹⁰⁰

2. Pattani protests

On 31 May 2007, a group calling itself the Student Network for People’s Protection led a demonstration at Pattani Central Mosque to protest abuses by the security forces. They presented 21 cases of alleged human rights violations, topped by the rape of Nurhayadi. The attacks on the Ta Seh Islamic School in Yala, the Islahuddin Islamic School in Saba Yoi (discussed below) and the shooting of a female religious teacher in Sungai Padi, Narathiwat, were all

blamed on rangers. The students also raised the shooting of Muslim youths by the Buddhist *Chor Ror Bor* in Bang Lang (discussed below). Nurhayadi’s sister, Dah, gave her account of the attack and called for withdrawal of rangers from the South.¹⁰¹

Estimates of the size of the protest range from 1,000 to 10,000. Imam Yakob of Pattani Central Mosque gave a figure, based on a comparison with the number of people who normally attend Friday prayers in the same space, of 4,000 for the height of the protest.¹⁰² The demonstrators appeared to be very well organised, with drinking water, rice and tinned fish for several days.¹⁰³ The students arranged for dozens of pickup trucks to provide transport from districts up to three hours away.¹⁰⁴ According to the imam, the majority of protesters were not from Pattani, but from conflict areas in Yala and Narathiwat.¹⁰⁵

The leaders of the Student Network were all members of PNYS (Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, Songkhla), an association of southern Malay Muslim students at Ramkhamheng University in Bangkok, which the government believes is linked to the armed separatist movement.¹⁰⁶ The students claimed they organised the protest as part of a series of activities, including community meetings and humanitarian work, and never expected so many participants.¹⁰⁷

Though the PNYS students denied links with separatists, the protest bore all the hallmarks of insurgent-organised actions. Protestors covered their faces, blocked the road and refused to speak to reporters. It seems unlikely a relatively small, Bangkok-based student group could mobilise 4,000 protestors without assistance. The crowd appeared to be highly disciplined and to follow instructions given by the students.¹⁰⁸ The protests appeared to some

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Soraya Jamjuree, Friends of Victimized Families support group, Pattani, July 2007; and Supnat Siruntawinati, Yaha district chief, Yala, October 2007.

⁹⁶ “Slain woman not raped, hospital says; 20 young footballers hurt by bomb blast”, *Bangkok Post*, 4 June 2007.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, ranger, July 2007.

⁹⁸ “มือเบรียกร้องความยุติธรรม-มคชน 1 มิถุนายน 2550 [“Mob demands justice”, *Matichon*, 1 June 2007].

⁹⁹ “เมื่อทหารพรานถูกกล่าวหาว่าข่มขืนสาวไทยมลายูที่บ้านบะชาลาแปอ อ.ยะหา จ.ยะลา”, “สำนักข่าวอิศรา”, 7 มิถุนายน 2550 [“Rangers accused of raping Thai-Malay woman in Salapae village, Yaha district, Yala”, *Issara News Agency*, 7 June 2007].

¹⁰⁰ “มือเบรียกร้องความยุติธรรม-มคชน 1 มิถุนายน 2550 [“Mob demands justice”, *Matichon*, 1 June 2007].

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, Soraya Jamjuree, Ni Amran Sulaiman and Imam Yakob of Pattani Central Mosque, July 2007. All were present at the protests.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Imam Yakob, Pattani Central Mosque, July 2007.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, Soraya Jamjuree, Friends of Victimized Families support group, Pattani, July 2007. Soraya was a mediator at the protest.

¹⁰⁴ “สถานการณ์ภาคใต้-ไทย”, โพสต์, 6 มิถุนายน 2550 [“The situation in the deep south”, *Thai Post*, 6 June 2007].

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, military officers, January and July 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Soraya Jamjuree, (protest mediator), Pattani, July 2007; “Voices from leader of the “Pattani mosque siege””, *Prachatai*, 5 June 2007.

¹⁰⁸ The PNYS students laid out seven rules, including to follow the leaders’ instructions at all times and not to leave the protest area without permission. They had guards around the perimeter of the crowd to enforce these rules. The same crowd-control measures were used at the Tak Bai demonstration in October

observers an attempt to provoke a crackdown by the security forces, another Tak Bai. But the military was acutely aware of this risk and went out of its way to stick to peaceful methods.¹⁰⁹

Relatively few students from Pattani's Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) took part but the PNYS organisers used the name of its student union without permission. They are also alleged to have threatened PSU student leaders who were reluctant to participate. Some students on the PSU campus linked to the radical PNYS students in Bangkok flaunt their links with the insurgents and use them to intimidate other students and faculty members. Campus politics became so heated after the protest that the leader of the student union, a Muslim but not a local Malay, resigned.¹¹⁰

The symbolism of the demonstration was powerful. For many observers, it recalled a similar protest organised by the Pattani United Liberation Organisation in November 1975, after marines killed five Muslim youths in Bacho, Narathiwat. That protest, in which religious symbols were shrewdly manipulated, continued for 40 days, including *Eid ul Adha*, the second most important holiday on the Muslim calendar. The 1975 protest delivered a significant propaganda victory to the militants and is thought to have led to the emergence of several new armed groups.¹¹¹

The May-June 2007 Pattani protest lasted only five days but paralysed traffic and trade in the town and caused the army to cut mobile phone signals for four days. Like the 1975 protest, it tapped into local anger over heavy-handed security policies and government failure to investigate or punish abuses. It also raised the profile of accusations against the security forces, particularly the rangers, which had been confined to smaller, rural protests, teashop rumours and leaflets.¹¹²

On the fifth day of the demonstration, the government called in prominent Muslim civil society leaders to mediate between the students and the military. The students presented a list of demands, which included the withdrawal of rangers from the South, the lifting of martial law, the emergency decree and the curfews in Yala's Yaha and Bannang Sata districts and fast, thorough and transparent

investigations of the 21 cases of alleged abuse. The compromise was that an independent committee would be established to investigate the cases.

The students and the military agreed on a list of committee members, including representatives from local non-governmental organisations, religious leaders and police and military officers. The committee was established in late June but held only one meeting in July before fizzling out. Since it had no budget, the Bangkok members had to fund their own travel and expenses.¹¹³ Two members resigned at what has been the only meeting.¹¹⁴

In the absence of a conclusive investigation, most local Muslims will continue to believe rangers were responsible for the Patae, Ta Seh, Kuan Ran and Sungai Padi cases. Ranger involvement in the Ta Seh case is clear but questions remain about the others. The rape and killings in Patae may have been carried out by militants in ranger uniforms. The attack on Ponoh Kuan Ran, discussed below, may have been committed by a Buddhist vigilante militia, perhaps with some ranger involvement. The killing of the religious teacher in Sungai Padi, according to a witness Crisis Group interviewed, was committed by police.¹¹⁵ Rangers remain the number one propaganda target of the separatist militants, however, whose claims are given weight by real cases of abuse and by the government's failure to investigate allegations properly.

2004. Additionally, the PNYS students ordered protestors not to use violence, even if attacked by the soldiers.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, military officer, July 2007.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, July 2007.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group Report, *Insurgency, Not Jihad*, op. cit., p. 9.

¹¹² Yaha District Officer, Supnat Siruntawinati, a Buddhist from Pattani, said of the May-June protests, "they were designed as a replica of the 1975 protests. The difference is that in 1975 the accusations were true. If rangers had really committed those crimes, I would join the protest myself, as I did in 1975, but it's simply not true". Crisis Group interview, October 2007.

¹¹³ Responsibility for funding was bounced between the Fourth Army command and the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre. In the end neither provided support. Crisis Group interview, committee member, July 2007.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, committee members Soraya Jamjuree, Ni Amran Sulaiman, July, August, October 2007.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, villager from Ai Batu village, Sungai Padi, Narathiwat, conducted in Pattani, July 2007.

IV. THE VOLUNTEER DEFENCE CORPS

The Volunteer Defence Corps (*Kong Asa Raksa Dindaen*), commonly known simply as the “Volunteers” (*Or Sor*), is the country’s largest paramilitary organisation. It was established in 1954 under the interior ministry, with encouragement and covert financial assistance from the CIA.¹¹⁶ It was founded and led by some of the most corrupt politicians in Thailand’s history, who pursued criminal activities through networks of provincial governors and district officers as well as *Or Sor*.

Some *Or Sor* members, particularly in more remote districts, have also become involved in independent criminal activities, but “whatever their personal propensities for corruption and criminality, they are the obedient servants and armed enforcers of their superior officials”.¹¹⁷ They have been implicated in human rights abuses and extrajudicial executions, including during Prime Minister Thaksin’s 2003 “war on drugs”. But security experts Desmond Ball and David Scott Mathieson argue that *Or Sor* are “much less involved in criminally-motivated killings than the police or the *Thahan Phran* and much less involved in human rights abuses than police or army units”.¹¹⁸ They are generally regarded as the most professional of the paramilitary organisations.¹¹⁹

Like the rangers, *Or Sor* troops receive approximately 45 days of basic military training. Their monthly salary is between 4,500 and 7,000 Baht (\$145-\$255), depending on length of service. They work a seven days on, seven days off schedule. *Or Sor* carry out many of the same functions as rangers but are not expected to perform a combat role. They are closer to security guards than soldiers. There is a national administrative office in Pachuap Khiri Khan but each district-level unit is commanded by the civilian district officer (*Nai Amphoe*), representing the interior ministry, with an army lieutenant colonel as deputy.

The *Or Sor* help protect interior ministry officials and infrastructure in the southern provinces. Their strength in the region tripled between 2002 and 2004, as the violence intensified. In October 2007 there were 2,187 in the southern conflict area, 600 having been newly deployed that month.¹²⁰

Compared with other paramilitaries in the South, the *Or Sor* have a relatively good record. The force has not been implicated in major scandals, though it played a secondary role in the early stages of the Krue Se and Tak Bai massacres in 2004, perhaps the two most notorious incidents in the South’s recent history. But neither have *Or Sor* been very effective at maintaining security. After one *Or Sor* guarding a house-building project in Kapho was killed in a January 2007 militant attack, his three colleagues ran rather than protect the village headman or the project they were guarding. The militants made off with their M16 assault rifles and set fire to their truck.¹²¹

The *Or Sor* are known for extreme loyalty to their interior ministry bosses. The case discussed below examines the possibility that *Or Sor* members in Mai Kaen, Pattani, carried out killings on behalf of the local district officer.

On 14 June 2007, an elected sub-district representative and three sub-district officials in Mai Kaen, believed by their superiors and local police to be active in the separatist movement, were ambushed on their way home from an official banquet in Pattani town. Three were shot dead and one was wounded.¹²² Local villagers and even some security officers suspect the *Or Sor*, acting on behalf of the district officer, was behind the incident.

One of the murdered men, Waesama-ae Basor, the elected chief of Don Sai sub-district administrative organisation, had been arrested in January 2006 on suspicion of providing military training for separatist militants. Detainees in Saiburi district had implicated him under interrogation; when his house was raided, police found unlicensed guns. He was released on bail in November 2006.¹²³ Eleven other suspects arrested in the same operation went to see Pattani Governor Panu upon release. After Waesama-ae failed to join the meeting, his relationship with the governor soured.¹²⁴

A month after Waesama-ae’s release, a road sign in his sub-district was damaged, probably by local militants. The district officer, Chayaphat Raksayos, blamed Waesama-ae, suggesting he gave the local separatist youth movement a free rein. Neither Waesama-ae nor the other three victims had good relations with the district officer, who was described by a Pattani resident as “a dynamic and ambitious

¹¹⁶ Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., pp. 279-280.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 290.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 321.

¹¹⁹ Bertil Lintner, “Arm Thy Neighbour”, *Asia Times Online*, 10 May 2007.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Yala Deputy Governor Grisada Boonrach, Yala, 20 July 2007.

¹²¹ Crisis Group Report, *Impact of the Coup*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹²² Waesama-ae Basor, chief of Don Sai sub-district council, Suemae Todeng, Don Sai sub-district chief, and Hama Sarae, Sai Thong sub-district chief, were all shot dead. Maeree Suding, sub-district chief of Taloh Sai Thong, was injured. “Seven soldiers killed in insurgent ambush”, *Bangkok Post*, 16 June 2007.

¹²³ Waesama-ae spent a month in detention at Yala police college, two months in Pattani provincial police station and six months in a Songkhla prison. Crisis Group interview, Waesama-ae relative, Mai Kaen, Pattani, August 2007.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

young man, eager to impress his superiors and known to be close to the governor, but seen by many locals as arrogant".¹²⁵ On the afternoon of 14 June, he personally phoned each of the sub-district leaders to invite them to the banquet, on the way back from which their car was ambushed.¹²⁶

Crisis Group was not able to interview Maeree Suding, the sub-district chief of Talok Kraithong who survived the attack, but relatives of the victims and other Mai Kaen locals were convinced *Or Sor* personnel were behind the attack.¹²⁷ A military officer deployed in the area admitted that, "it was definitely our [the government] side. It wasn't my men but may have been the police or *Or Sor*".¹²⁸

Local militants promoted the idea that the *Or Sor* or someone working for the district officer was to blame. On 18 June, four days after the attack, there was a night of chaos in Mai Kaen. Government primary schools in Don Sai and Talok Kraithong were burned, and militants killed a soldier and shot into the local ranger base. Leaflets appeared all over the area blaming the district officer and the governor for the three men's deaths. Graffiti on the bridge on the main road proclaimed: "Governor Panu is the boss who ordered the killings". "We will avenge the killings" was spray-painted on the road.¹²⁹

The following morning, District Officer Chayaphat, accompanied by an *Or Sor* and Lieutenant Colonel Surasak Phosutha from the Internal Security Operations Command, went to investigate the incidents. On their way to the Don Sai school a roadside bomb was remotely detonated under their pickup truck, killing all three.¹³⁰ Local police conducted routine investigations but no suspects have been identified.¹³¹

There is no hard evidence implicating the *Or Sor* in the attack on the sub-district officials but strong suspicions, fuelled by separatist propaganda, reinforce locals' fear and suspicion of the paramilitary force.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, August 2007.

¹²⁶ The relatives of the dead were under the impression that the four who were attacked had been singled out for invitation to the function, fuelling their suspicion of an official murder conspiracy. In fact all four sub-district chiefs and all four sub-district administrative organisation chiefs were invited and attended the function but only the car in which four were riding was attacked. Crisis Group interviews, Mae Kaen sub-district chief; relatives of murdered officials.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Mai Kaen, Pattani, July and August 2007.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Pattani, July 2007.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, military officer, Pattani; Mai Kaen residents, July and August 2007; see also "Four Including DO Die in Pattani Violence", *Bernama* [Malaysia], 19 June 2007.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, military officer, Pattani, July 2007.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interviews, Mai Kaen ranger commander; families of sub-district officials, local residents, July and August 2007.

V. VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT AND SELF DEFENCE VOLUNTEERS

The interior ministry established the national Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteer (*Chor Ror Bor*) program in 1985. It was seen as the successor to the Village Security Teams set up in the late 1960s to defend villagers against communist insurgents and prevent them from providing supplies. The contribution of those teams to counter-insurgency was negligible, and the volunteers were a lucrative source of weapons for the guerrillas, particularly in the South.¹³²

Chor Ror Bor are employed by the ministry's Department of Provincial Administration but the army's Internal Security Operations Command is nominally responsible for operational control.¹³³ In practice, there is little oversight of any kind. Volunteers are recruited to work in their own villages, providing security for the headman and other village and sub-district leaders, teachers, state schools and government infrastructure.

Each 30-member village unit has fifteen guns and a monthly budget of 20,000 Baht (\$640) from the interior ministry. In theory, each member works approximately ten twelve-hour shifts per month, so there are always five men on guard, often at a checkpoint or outside the local school or village head's house but sometimes just hanging around the village teashop.¹³⁴ In practice, shifts are left largely to the discretion of the village chief and are often much shorter than twelve hours.

Members are given three days (and five bullets) for military training in gun handling, patrolling and defensive tactics, by either the army, the rangers or the *Or Sor*. They are armed with five-round, pump-action shotguns but are not properly trained in maintaining them. A volunteer in Bannang Sata district complained that "the guns they give us jam easily and cannot hit targets more than about 50 metres away. The other side has much better weapons. We're at a disadvantage".¹³⁵

The main advantage of the *Chor Ror Bor* other than the low cost is that they are locals. They generally have a good knowledge of local militant networks but they are also extremely vulnerable. Many choose not to share

¹³² George K Tanham, *Trial in Thailand* (New York, 1974), cited in Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 330.

¹³³ Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 63.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, *Chor Ror Bor*, villages throughout Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, 2005-2007.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interview, *Chor Ror Bor*, Bannang Sata, Yala, July 2007.

their intelligence with the authorities, fearing this would endanger themselves and their families.¹³⁶

The other advantage of *Chor Ror Bor* is that they provide around-the-clock security. “There are 24 hours in a day. The soldiers are only there for three or four of those hours. We need a full-time security presence in the villages”, a provincial official explained.¹³⁷ The problem is that *Chor Ror Bor* are not very effective at providing security. Many only sign up under pressure from local officials, and some simply stop manning their checkpoints if they decide it has become too dangerous.

In a Yala village where insurgents are quite active, the *Chor Ror Bor* team initially manned the two checkpoints in mixed Buddhist-Muslim groups. After a few months, though, the Buddhist volunteers were afraid to work the checkpoint in the Muslim part of the village, so an all-Muslim *Chor Ror Bor* team guarded it, leaving the Buddhist volunteers to man the checkpoint in their end of the village. After the Muslim checkpoint was attacked, however, no *Chor Ror Bor* dared stay there, so it now sits empty.¹³⁸

Muslim *Chor Ror Bor* often find themselves in a particularly difficult position, regarded as *munafik* (traitors) by separatist militants, and hence targets, yet often also regarded with suspicion by the government they are serving. Poorly trained, isolated and vulnerable, they often fail to protect themselves and their weapons, let alone their communities.¹³⁹ Yet, as the violence has surged, the *Chor Ror Bor* program has been expanded massively in the South. 24,300 volunteers were recruited between 2002 and 2004, and in 2005 it was further bolstered to provide each of the 1,580 villages in the South with 30 volunteers (a total of 47,400). On 28 July 2007, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre announced another expansion: the recruitment of an additional 7,000 volunteers by the end of 2009.¹⁴⁰

The program has also been reinforced in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Tak in the north west, where it has played a growing role in tackling narcotics trafficking

and managing the spillover of armed groups from Burma. Many *Chor Ror Bor* units, particularly in Mae Sot and Phop Pra districts, have become notorious for human rights violations against Burmese refugees.¹⁴¹

The *Chor Ror Bor* in the South are known not so much for brutality as for ineptitude, but there have been cases of volunteers turning their guns on fellow villagers when local disputes get out of hand. This is particularly problematic when it intersects with communal tensions, as was the case in Kern Bang Lang sub-district, discussed below.

A. WEAPONS THEFTS

Hundreds of weapons have been stolen from *Chor Ror Bor* since the violence re-emerged in 2001. As well as frequent individual thefts, there have been waves of apparently coordinated robberies, suggesting militants view village defence volunteers as an easy target and lucrative source of weapons.

Between 3 and 7 June 2003, seven shotguns and an M16 assault rifle were stolen in raids on *Chor Ror Bor* and *Or Sor* guard posts and private houses in Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala.¹⁴² These robberies prompted then Interior Minister Wan Muhammad Noor Matha to recall weapons from *Chor Ror Bor* across the three provinces. “If the volunteers were allowed to keep the guns, it would be like inviting terrorists to come and take them away”, he said.¹⁴³ His instruction was widely ignored, however. Although some guns were recalled and stored in district offices and police stations, most were redistributed when the program resumed in February 2004, reportedly in an attempt to gain the cooperation of Muslim leaders.¹⁴⁴

A case of alleged theft of *Chor Ror Bor* weapons provided the pretext for the 25 October 2004 demonstration at Tak Bai police station. Six Muslim defence volunteers from Khok Kuwai village in Tak Bai reported their weapons stolen. The local police accused them of selling or handing their guns to militants voluntarily, and charged them with false filing, criminal association and embezzlement.¹⁴⁵ A

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Pattani, January 2007.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, provincial official, Yala, July 2007.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interview, *Chor Ror Bor*, a Yala village, July 2007.

¹³⁹ A program to retrain *Chor Ror Bor* was launched in January 2007. Each unit is supposed to receive an additional five to ten days training from the military. Crisis Group interviews, *Chor Ror Bor* and military officer, Yala, July 2007.

¹⁴⁰ 2,400 *Chor Ror Bor* are to be appointed as additional assistant headmen (each village already has two) in 600 villages in 2007. Another 3,600 will be recruited in 900 villages in 2008 and the remainder in 2009. “Southern security to get injection of 7,000 men”, *Bangkok Post*, 29 July 2007. These new *Chor Ror Bor* are in addition to the 30 volunteers already stationed in each village.

¹⁴¹ Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁴² “สถานการณ์ภาคใต้” [ไทยรัฐ 9 มิถุนายน] 2546 “The situation in the deep South”, *Thai Rath*, 9 June 2003]; “Gangs steal more weapons in South”, *The Nation*, 7 June 2003; “Probe into Southern unrest turns inwards”, *The Nation*, 9 June 2003, cited in Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., pp. 225-226.

¹⁴³ “Probe into Southern unrest turns inwards”, *The Nation*, 9 June 2003.

¹⁴⁴ “Volunteer Defence Corps: Heroes, Civilian Warriors”, *Daily News*, 9 February 2004, cited in Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 235.

¹⁴⁵ See Crisis Group Report, *Insurgency, Not Jihad*, op. cit., p. 27. On the same night the *Chor Ror Bor*'s weapons were stolen in

Chor Ror Bor from Khok Kuwai village, who was cleared of charges but ordered to pay for the stolen gun, said:

It's ironic that they trained us for only three days, allowed us to fire the gun just five times during the training and then expected us to provide security to the people in the village. I could not even protect myself with the gun, let alone the village.¹⁴⁶

Almost exactly a year later, on 26 October 2005, armed militants stole more than 90 guns from defence volunteers in a single night of raids across four provinces. Two days later, Prime Minister Thaksin accused *Chor Ror Bor* of collaborating with insurgents: "many volunteers even cooperated with militants by allowing them to take their guns without a fight". Defence Minister Thammarak Isarangura complained that "the army has warned the interior ministry several times...not [to] arm villagers without sufficient training; otherwise their weapons could be a threat to themselves".¹⁴⁷

B. KERN BANG LANG SHOOTINGS

Another major problem with relying on *Chor Ror Bor* is the danger volunteers will turn their weapons on unarmed villagers if local incidents get out of hand. This risk is particularly acute in areas with a history of communal tensions. The shootings in Kern Bang Lang sub-district in Bannang Sata, Yala, are a case in point. The area is heavily infiltrated with Muslim militants and until December 2006 had virtually no state security presence. The local *Chor Ror Bor* are often too afraid to man their checkpoints.¹⁴⁸

The minority Buddhist population had been intimidated and threatened, and by the middle of 2006, Buddhist residents were being systematically targeted in shooting and arson attacks.¹⁴⁹ The entire Buddhist populations of several villages fled the area, some seeking shelter in a temple in Yala town in November 2006. In December, a few dozen of the displaced Buddhists decided to return to

Tak Bai, a *Chor Ror Bor* in Rangae, Narathiwat, also had his gun stolen, and a group of around twenty well-armed militants in Pattani Kapho district attempted to raid the weapons store at the district office. They failed to break the lock but killed an *Or Sor* paramilitary trooper, injured two others and stole the guns of all three. "สถานการณ์ภาคใต้" มติชน, 14 ตุลาคม 2547 ["The situation in the deep South", Maticchon, 14 October 2004]; "ทหารหัว 14 ผู้ต้องสงสัยเกินสอง", ไทยรัฐ, 14 ตุลาคม 2547 ["Police interrogate 14 suspects", *Thai Rath*, 14 October 2004].

¹⁴⁶ "Defence volunteer rues being armed", *The Nation*, 31 October 2005, cited in Ball and Mathieson, op. cit., p. 250.

¹⁴⁷ "Armed volunteers 'aid' militants: PM", *The Nation*, 28 October 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, *Chor Ror Bor*, Bang Lang, Yala, July 2007.

¹⁴⁹ See Crisis Group Report, *The Impact of the Coup*, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

their villages, and around 40 trained as *Chor Ror Bor* with the Army Special Warfare unit deployed to protect them.¹⁵⁰

On 9 April 2007 a small group of the returnee, Buddhist *Chor Ror Bor* was manning a checkpoint in Pak Dee village, as a convoy was travelling from Bade Kapa village to the Padang Kapul Mosque for the funeral of a local Muslim official killed that morning. Some young men in the funeral procession, apparently convinced that this official, Kern Bang Lang sub-district administrative organisation chief Beuraheng Puna, had been killed by security forces, confronted the Buddhist *Chor Ror Bor*. According to nearby Border Patrol Police, some jumped down from their pickup truck, threw sticks and stones at the volunteers and tore the Thai flag at the security post.¹⁵¹

At around five pm, as the crowd returned from the funeral, the young men again confronted the *Chor Ror Bor* at the checkpoint. This time the volunteers responded with gunfire. Three young men were killed on the spot, and a twelve-year-old boy died from wounds a few hours later in hospital. Six were injured.¹⁵² An army spokesman claimed a shot was fired into the air as the funeral procession approached the checkpoint, causing the *Chor Ror Bor* to panic.¹⁵³ Border Patrol Police stationed on the hill 100m behind the checkpoint admit they fired warning shots but claim this was a response to hearing gunshots.¹⁵⁴ The *Chor Ror Bor* claimed that people in the funeral procession fired first, and they shot back in self-defence.¹⁵⁵ One of the six injured, however, insisted that no one from the funeral procession shot at the defence volunteers, pointing out that none of them was injured.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Buddhist residents of three villages, Bang Lang, Yala, January and July 2007; military officer, Yala, July 2007.

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Border Patrol Police officer, Pak Dee village, Yala, July 2007. Crisis Group was not able to interview the *Chor Ror Bor* at Pak Dee village. The Border Patrol Police officer interviewed was not an eyewitness but arrived on the scene within minutes and interviewed the *Chor Ror Bor* at length.

¹⁵² "เหตุคนร้ายยิงถล่มรถกระบะชาวบ้านตาย 4 ที่บ้านนังสตากลานเป็นผี-มือ ชรบ.โน พท .อ้างป้องกันตัวเอง," สำนักข่าวอิศรา 10 เมษายน 2550 ["4 deaths in pickup truck shooting at Bannang Sata, *Chor Ror Bor* claimed self-defence", Issara News Agency, 10 April 2007]. "7 killed in Yala, school bus shot up", *The Nation*, 10 April 2007. See also "Thai Army Admits Government-backed Militia Shot Dead Four Muslim Youths", Associated Press, 10 April 2007.

¹⁵³ "Army: Defence Volunteers not to Blame for Muslim deaths", *The Nation*, 11 April 2007.

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Border Patrol Police captain Somrat Arnworn, Yala, July 2007.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Information made available to Crisis Group by local human rights investigator who interviewed eyewitness Abdul Halim in April 2007. He has since fled the area.

The exact sequence at the checkpoint remains murky but it is clear the *Chor Ror Bor* were ill-equipped to manage the situation, and the result was four civilian deaths. A senior military officer lamented, “if soldiers or police had been manning that checkpoint they would have been able to handle the situation but the local *Chor Ror Bor* were not trained and not impartial”.¹⁵⁷ Arming civilians is never the most effective way to provide village security. Giving militias three days of military training does not equip them to manage tense confrontations in conflict areas. Arming a minority ethnic group in an area prone to communal violence was a recipe for disaster.

VI. VILLAGE AND TOWN PROTECTION VOLUNTEERS

In September 2004, Queen Sirikit founded the Village Protection Volunteer (*Or Ror Bor*) project while spending two months at the Taksin Ratchanives palace in Narathiwat. Deputy Royal Aide-de-Camp General Napol Boonthap conducted a two-week training course for the first 1,000 recruits in Narathiwat that month. The interior ministry gave the volunteers rifles and shotguns, which were to be kept by their village headmen.¹⁵⁸ There are now over 10,000 *Or Ror Bor* and *Or Ror Mor* (Town Protection Volunteers), in the South, mostly in Narathiwat.¹⁵⁹

The creation of this militia responded to a demand, particularly from Buddhist villagers, for additional security but it has led to the same basic problems as all militia forces. The ten to fifteen days of military training provided is clearly inadequate.¹⁶⁰ The program duplicates functions carried out by the police, army and various interior ministry defence volunteer programs and further confuses an already bewildering chain of command and control.

Three assistants to General Napol from the Royal Aide-de-Camp department are stationed in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala.¹⁶¹ That department, which specialises in ceremonial and close protection work, comes under the jurisdiction of the defence ministry but is outside the normal command structure of the Fourth Army. This parallel structure has caused frustration among the regional task forces in the South, particularly for the marines, the lead agency for Task Force III in Narathiwat, where the *Or Ror Bor* program is particularly strong.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ “Queen’s Visit; Buddhists, Muslims asked to unite”, Bangkok Post, 14 September 2004; “สถานการณ์ภาคใต้”, มติชน, 30 กันยายน 2547 [“The situation in the deep South”, Matichon, 30 September 2004].

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, sources close to the Aide-de-Camp department.

¹⁶⁰ One *Or Ror Bor* unit interviewed by Crisis Group in Panare district of Pattani in April 2006 had only received five days training. As noted, since January 2007 there has been a program to train *Chor Ror Bor* for an additional five to ten days, to bring them up to the level of *Or Ror Bor*, but it does not appear to have had much impact. Crisis Group interviews, military officers, Yala, July 2007.

¹⁶¹ In Yala, Colonel Mani oversees *Or Ror Bor* and *Or Ror Mor* units. In Pattani it is Colonel Wiwat and in Narathiwat, Colonel Bor. Crisis Group interview, Fourth Army officer, Yala, October 2007.

¹⁶² Crisis Group interviews. The conflict area (Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala provinces plus four districts of Songkhla) is divided into five areas, in which security is managed by five task forces. Task Force III in Narathiwat province is led by marines.

¹⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, military officer, Yala, July 2007.

Although the queen originally envisaged a mixed Buddhist-Muslim force, in practice it is almost exclusively Buddhist.¹⁶³ *Or Ror Bor* units are often based in temple compounds or explicitly mandated to protect Buddhist minorities. This tends to make surrounding Muslim communities uncomfortable and fuels conspiracy theories about Buddhist vigilante gangs.¹⁶⁴

General Napol's team has also provided military training to informal Buddhist militias.¹⁶⁵ He explained in a special lecture to alumni of schools under royal patronage that the queen was deeply concerned about the safety of civilians in the South. "I don't care what anyone says", he quoted her as telling him. "We must help the people [in the South] to survive. If they need to be trained, train them. If they need weapons, give them weapons".¹⁶⁶

VII. INFORMAL BUDDHIST MILITIAS

The Buddhist minority in the South feels under siege. Buddhists have been systematically targeted in several areas, and thousands have fled to other parts of the country.¹⁶⁷ Buddhist government officials, ordinary civilians, even monks, have been targeted by insurgents. Though Buddhists are only 20 per cent of the population in the three provinces, they account for almost half the casualties of the conflict since 2004.¹⁶⁸ Many Buddhist communities feel the government is not doing enough to protect them, and some have taken matters into their own hands, at times assisted by individual police officers and military personnel.

Groups of Buddhists throughout the South are training and arming themselves for an anticipated communal conflict. "They're killing us and destroying our businesses", a Narathiwat militia member said. "We need to defend ourselves, so we went and got guns".¹⁶⁹ Video CDs showing gruesome attacks on Buddhist civilians and monks circulate widely among these groups, often overlaid with fiery rhetoric about the need to protect Buddhist communities. "The government doesn't protect us", this militia member complained. "We had hoped that after the coup the government would use force to enforce the law but they do nothing".¹⁷⁰

This was echoed by a militia member in Saba Yoi, who complained that "the government is not using its power to deal with the problem. Sometimes they know that certain people around here were behind certain incidents but they do nothing about it".¹⁷¹

In late 2005, a small group of police in Yala, led by Colonel Phitak Iadkaew, established a clandestine civilian militia, *Ruam Thai* (Thais United). Phitak described the group as a citizens volunteer corps, to help locals feel more secure and to "bring people together in their identification as Thais". He claimed it was open to Muslims but few were interested. By late July 2007, he and his police colleagues had recruited

¹⁶³ Ibid; โดย รุ่งรวี เฉลิมศรีภิญโญรัช, "การคัดเลือกและการปฏิบัติหน้าที่ของเจ้า-หน้าที่ทหารตำรวจ กับปัญหาการละเมิดสิทธิมนุษยชนในสามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้" [Rungrawee Chalerm Sripiyarat, "Human Rights Violations in the Deep South: Security Officers and Recruitment Criteria"], Paper presented at conference, "Southern Violence and the Thai State", Bangkok, 18-19 August 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Crisis Group interviews in Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani, January-October 2007.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist militia member, Narathiwat, August 2007.

¹⁶⁶ สถานการณ์ภาคใต้-ไทย โพสต์ 18 มีนาคม 2550 ["The situation in the deep south", *Matichon*, 18 March 2007].

¹⁶⁷ The government has no records of the number of Buddhists fleeing the South but estimates range from 35,000 to over 100,000.

¹⁶⁸ Dr Srisompob Jitpiromsri from Prince of Songkhla University in Pattani compiled statistics showing that between January 2004 and June 2007, 1,101 Buddhists died as a result of the conflict and 1,281 Muslims (as well as 111 victims whose religion was unknown).

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist militia member, Narathiwat, July 2007.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist militia member, Saba Yoi, July 2007.

and trained more than 6,000 members, of whom they estimate 200 are Muslim.¹⁷²

Phitak, chief of investigations for the Yala provincial police and a former Border Patrol Police officer who worked his way up the ranks over 36 years, has spent much of his career in the South. He was based for ten years in Betong in southern Yala and subsequently in Bannang Sata, Yala, where he set up self-defence militias to enable local people, “to assist police in maintaining security”.¹⁷³ He designed a two-day training course for *Ruam Thai* recruits, focusing on raising awareness of security risks, but also providing basic military training for self-defence. The sessions are held in a private house rented for the purpose. *Ruam Thai* members are responsible for providing their own weapons. Phitak says he has no government budget but some team leaders have been able to get support from sub-district councils to buy weapons. The government has also established cheap loan schemes for teachers, police and other civil servants to buy guns for self-defence.

Ruam Thai members are organised into 23 local groups at the village and sub-district level, mostly in Yala, but also southern Pattani, western Songkhla and some parts of Narathiwat.¹⁷⁴ Phitak claims hundreds approach him every month to join, so he conducts training sessions for new members most weekends.¹⁷⁵

Despite Phitak’s insistence *Ruam Thai* was established purely for self-defence, there have been allegations of members carrying out vigilante-style attacks against Muslims.¹⁷⁶ When these came to light in June 2007, southern region police commissioner Lieutenant General Jettanakorn Napeetapateral ordered Phitak transferred out of the area. The Yala provincial police commander told Crisis Group, “even if *Ruam Thai* was intended as a self-defence group, there is no way of controlling what its members do back in their districts”.¹⁷⁷ After hundreds of Buddhist

residents of Yala town blocked a downtown road in protest, however, Jettanakorn withdrew the transfer order.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, police Colonel Phitak, Yala, 23 July 2007.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ There are active *Ruam Thai* groups in Bannang Sata, Than To, Yaha, Betong, Muang Yala, Saiburi, Khok Po, Thepa and Saba Yoi districts among others. Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ *Ruam Thai* members are suspected in at least four cases: the separate attacks on a mosque and a teahouse in Yaha on 14 March 2007 in which two people were killed and 21 injured; the 17 March attack on Pondok Bamrungsart in Pien sub-district of Saba Yoi, Songkhla, in which two students were killed and eight injured; and the 31 May shootings in Kolomudo village in which five Muslim youths were killed and two injured. Crisis Group interviews, police and human rights investigators, Yala and Songkhla, July and August 2007.

¹⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, police Major General Paitoon Chuchaiya, Yala, 26 July 2007.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid; “สถานการณ์ภาคใต้-ไทย”, โพสต์, 1 กรกฎาคม 2550 [“The situation in the deep South”, *Thai Post*, 1 July 2007].

VIII. MILITIAS AND COMMUNAL TENSIONS IN SABA YOI

Many of the problems associated with paramilitary and militia groups are illustrated by a cycle of sectarian violence in March-May 2007 in Saba Yoi district, Songkhla province. It was sparked by a massacre of Buddhist civilians by separatist militants in a neighbouring district, an attack apparently designed to incite sectarian conflict. Subsequent attacks on Muslim civilians may have been carried out by Buddhist vigilante groups, though local Muslims, influenced by militant propaganda, blamed the rangers.¹⁷⁹

The case illustrates several patterns: Buddhist communities feel victimised and insecure, leading many to establish self-defence militias. Indications some of these groups may have carried out vigilante attacks lead in turn to creation of Muslim self-defence groups. Attacks on Muslim civilians are also invariably followed by militant-organised protests blaming security forces, especially rangers. Until police successfully investigate and prosecute perpetrators of sectarian violence, including cases involving security forces and state-linked militias, mutual suspicions and resentment will only harden, increasing the risk of communal violence.

A. SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN YAHA

On the morning of 14 March 2007, three days before violence broke out in Saba Yoi, a commuter van carrying Buddhist civilians was ambushed in neighbouring Yaha district. The attackers, apparently separatist militants, scattered nails and blocked the road with a tree trunk, then fired on the bus as its driver tried to turn back. After the bus swerved off the road, ten gunmen ran to it, shouting “kill them all” and executed eight passengers, including two teenaged girls, shooting them in the head at point blank range. The ninth passenger survived, seriously injured. Only the bus driver was spared, after his mumbled prayers revealed him to be a Muslim.¹⁸⁰ This unprecedented

¹⁷⁹ Saba Yoi is one of several areas where a pattern of tit-for-tat Buddhist-Muslim violence has raised suspicions about the possible involvement of sectarian vigilante groups. Others include Bannang Sata, Yaha and Muang districts, all in Yala Province.

¹⁸⁰ “Eight massacred in van ambush”, *Bangkok Post*, 15 March 2007; “อมนุษย์จ๋อยิงหัวผู้โดยสารรถตู้ 8 คน”, *ไทยโพสต์*, 16 มีนาคม 2550 [“Inhumane gunmen shot dead 8 commuters”, *Thai Post*, 16 March 2007]; “คนขับรถเผยคนร้าย 10 คนดักสังหาร”, *มติชน*, 16 มีนาคม 2550 [Van driver tells of deadly minutes, 10 gunmen killed passengers”, *Matichon*, 16 March 2007]. An alternative theory is that the massacre was committed or ordered by

massacre of Buddhist civilians sparked outrage far beyond Yala, with protests in at least six cities outside the South. The local consequences were explosive.

That evening two attacks in Yaha district arbitrarily targeted Muslim civilians, apparently to avenge the Buddhist deaths. In Patae sub-district at around 8:30, two men on a motorcycle threw an M-26 grenade at a group outside Al-mubarooh Mosque, injuring eleven. In Katong sub-district an hour later, unidentified gunmen in a black pickup truck fired on a Muslim teashop in Padaeru village, killing one man and injuring ten.¹⁸¹ Suspicion immediately centred on *Ruam Thai* but investigations were inconclusive.¹⁸²

On the morning of 15 March, some 50 Muslim women and children blocked the road in Patae claiming state security forces were behind the attack at Al-mubarooh Mosque. Local police were able to disperse the crowd peacefully.¹⁸³

B. BUDDHIST SELF-DEFENCE GROUP ESTABLISHED

Buddhist residents of Saba Yoi district have been targeted by Muslim militants since mid-2005.¹⁸⁴ “Buddhists here live under constant threat of attack”, a local told Crisis Group.¹⁸⁵ Communal relations have frayed badly; there is

disgruntled police in some kind of factional feud, Crisis Group interviews, Bangkok, July 2007.

¹⁸¹ “ปะระเบิดใสมัสยิด และ ร้านน้ำชา”, *ไทยรัฐ*, 16 มีนาคม 2550 [“Mosque and teashop attacked”, *Thai Rath*, 16 March 2007]; “ปะระเบิดร้านน้ำชา”, *ไทยโพสต์*, 17 มีนาคม 2550 [“Teashop Bombed”, *Thai Post*, 17 March 2007].

¹⁸² Crisis Group interview, Yala Provincial Police Commander Major General Paitoon Chuchaiya, Yala, July 2007.

¹⁸³ “มือปราบทั่วเจ้าหน้าที”, *ไทยโพสต์*, 17 มีนาคม 2550 [“Mob protests against security officers”, *Thai Post*, 17 March 2007].

¹⁸⁴ Attacks on civilians in the district include a bomb at the market in May 2005, the shootings of a highway office employee in June 2005, a rubber tapper on his plantation in January 2006, and a teacher in February 2006 and the killing of another rubber tapper in March 2006. Two more rubber tappers were shot dead, and a teashop bombed killed three in October 2006. A rubber merchant was shot dead in November 2006. Three rubber tappers were shot dead as they drove to their plantation in January 2007. “Six homemade bombs explode, two people shot”, *Bangkok Post*, 13 May 2005; “Deep South: Teachers homes shot up”, *The Nation*, 28 June 2005; “Prem to play more active role in South”, *Bangkok Post*, 13 January 2006; “33 more schools shut in Songkhla”, *The Nation*, 8 February 2006; “Violence continues in Songkhla and Narathiwat”, *The Nation*, 21 March 2006; “Rubber tapper and son latest fatalities”, *The Nation*, 8 October 8 2006; “Friend of a former MP gunned down in South”, *Bangkok Post*, 11 November 2006; and “3 Buddhists killed, one injured by Islamic insurgents in Songkhla”, *The Nation*, 29 January 2007.

¹⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, militia leader, Saba Yoi, August 2007.

little contact now between the communities, and there are fears that Buddhist groups are stepping in where they feel the government has failed them.

In March 2007, a former *Chor Ror Bor* in Saba Yoi town decided to establish a Buddhist self-defence group. He and some twenty other local Buddhists purchased pistols and two-way radios, having easily obtained gun licenses from the district office. The local *Chor Ror Bor* provided some basic military training on the sports ground of the primary school.¹⁸⁶ Militia members interviewed by Crisis Group insist their network was established strictly for self-defence, and no member was involved in any recent violence. They added, however, that they are ready to defend local Buddhists who are attacked.¹⁸⁷ Although this Saba Yoi group is not part of the *Ruam Thai* network, some members have attended *Ruam Thai* training sessions.¹⁸⁸ A local member also claimed that “the rangers support us”.¹⁸⁹

C. THE ATTACK ON ISLAHUDDIN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

The violence in Saba Yoi appears to be part of the same wave of sectarian violence sparked by the minivan massacre in neighbouring Yaha. On the night of the Yaha attacks, unidentified gunmen roamed around the Muslim village of Kuan Ran (Bukit Toreng) firing at random. No one was injured but several houses were damaged.¹⁹⁰ Three days later, on 17 March, gunmen burst into the grounds of the Islahuddin Islamic Boarding School in Saba Yoi’s Pien sub-district just before ten pm.¹⁹¹ They threw grenades into at least one bamboo and corrugated iron hut and sprayed bullets at three others with shotguns and M16 assault rifles.¹⁹² *Baboh* Haji Abdullah Chelah heard the shooting and a student’s cry and rushed out to investigate.

Four dormitory huts had been hit by bullets, killing a twelve- and a fourteen-year-old student and wounding another eight boys.¹⁹³ A seventeen-year-old student later

died in hospital. It was dark when the attack took place, so the students were not able to see the gunmen but one claimed to hear an attacker say (in Thai) of a boy they had killed, “oh, this one’s still very young”.¹⁹⁴

The *baboh* did not report the attack to the local authorities, with whom he has a difficult relationship. His school is the only one in the district that has consistently refused to adopt the secular national curriculum and offers only a traditional religious education. Security forces in the area, including rangers, have regularly accused him of harbouring militants. The school was raided in 2006 but no arrests were made.¹⁹⁵ Police in neighbouring Yaha have a warrant out for the arrest of one of the injured students in connection with stealing *Chor Ror Bor* weapons in mid-2007 and suspect he is linked to local militant leader Padoh Klongkud.¹⁹⁶

1. Protests blaming rangers

Within a few hours of the shootings, a group of mostly women from the surrounding community had set up a picket outside the school. They accused the local ranger unit, whose base had been attacked by militants less than 24 hours earlier, of carrying out the attacks. They denied police investigators access, arguing that they might tamper with evidence or try to shut down the school.

The protestors, who were initially mainly from Jiwan, about 5km away, but also included locals, had swelled to 200 by morning and to more than 500 later in the day.¹⁹⁷ The later arrivals were almost all from outside Songkhla, according to Saba Yoi police.¹⁹⁸ The protest bore all the hallmarks of a militant-organised action: spikes scattered on the road, access blocked with felled trees and oil drums and a demand motorists wind down their windows and identify themselves so the picketers could control entry. Leaflets blaming the rangers appeared around the district.¹⁹⁹

¹⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, militia leader, Saba Yoi, August 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, members, Saba Yoi self-defence group, July 2007.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, militia leader, Saba Yoi, August 2007.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, militia member, Saba Yoi, August 2007.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, two Kuan Ran residents, July 2007.

¹⁹¹ The school is also known in Thai as *Islam Bamrungart Witthaya* and *Ponoh Kuan Ran*.

¹⁹² Crisis Group interview, *Baboh* Abdullah, and examination of the bullet holes in the *ponohs*, Pien, Songkhla, July 2007; Crisis Group interview, Dr Pornthip Rojanasunan, forensic scientist who examined the school, Bangkok, August 2007.

¹⁹³ Rohya Pasoh, twelve, and Kariya Sulong, fourteen, were

killed in the attack. Abdullahtorlae Salae, sixteen, Dolloh Maboh, seventeen, Rohsali Ma-ae, fourteen, Kampee Awae, thirteen, Mamunro Ola, seventeen, Rohmae Yeedareng, seventeen, Sukri Mudoh, fifteen, and Zulkifle Sama-ae, seventeen, were injured. บั้มปอเนาะ ตาย 2 เจ็บ 8, ไทยรัฐ, 20 มีนาคม 2550 [Ponoh Bombed, 2 dead, 8 injured”, Thai Rath, 20 March 2007].

¹⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, *Baboh* Abdullah and another teacher at the school, July 2007.

¹⁹⁵ “Thailand enlists women to battle insurgency”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 April 2007.

¹⁹⁶ บั้มปอเนาะ ตาย 2 เจ็บ 8, ไทยรัฐ, 20 มีนาคม 2550 [Ponoh Bombed, 2 dead, 8 injured”, Thai Rath, 20 March 2007].

¹⁹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, *Baboh* Abdullah and Saba Yoi rangers, July and August 2007.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Saba Yoi police chief, August 2007.

¹⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, *Baboh* Abdullah and Saba Yoi police, op. cit.

The *baboh* claims that none of the protestors consulted him about demonstrating in front of the school. He assumes locals heard the shooting and rallied a crowd. Local police believe he actively collaborated and that militants hid in the school before joining the demonstration.²⁰⁰ Some demonstrators said they had come to protect him and the families of the dead students but the *baboh* said he felt uncomfortable with the protest, which he knew would raise the suspicions of the authorities.²⁰¹

Songkhla Governor Sonthi Techanant, Provincial Islamic Council Chairman Akis Pitakkumpol and senior regional police attempted to negotiate with the crowd but protestors refused to disperse. Soldiers fired warning shots but they stood firm. The only official they would allow into the school compound was the prominent forensic scientist Dr Pornthip Rojanasunan. On 20 March, she arrived at the school, examined the shot-up huts and persuaded the women to go home. She was not able to conduct a proper investigation since the bodies had already been buried and the bullet casings collected. She was able, however, to put to rest a theory advanced by the military and some local Buddhists that the students had been making a bomb that went off prematurely, accounting for the bullet and shrapnel holes in the huts.²⁰² According to Dr Pornthip, there was no evidence of explosive residue, only shells from shotguns and M16 rifles and grenades.²⁰³

Police were finally able to enter the school a month after the attack but could not reach firm conclusions about responsibility. Justice ministry ballistics experts checked the guns of all local police, Border Patrol Police and rangers against the bullet casings collected at the school but found no matches. This does not exclude the possibility of participation by security forces using non-official-issue weapons. The police's working theory is that there is a group bent on stirring up communal tensions. "It is not the militants, nor the authorities, but a third force", a local police official told Crisis Group.²⁰⁴

A prominent Bangkok-based human rights investigator received a phone call from a distraught young Buddhist man in Saba Yoi, confessing to involvement in the attack, claiming he came under pressure from peers and was too

afraid to go to police.²⁰⁵ A Buddhist Songkhla politician told Crisis Group, however, that a ranger had confessed to involvement.²⁰⁶ Leaflets found in the area claimed the attack was staged by militants from Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the main separatist group active in the South, and blamed on the rangers to generate anti-state sentiment.²⁰⁷ This theory was also propounded by some local authorities. But many of those same officials argued that the school was a centre of insurgent activity, which would make it a strange target for a BRN attack.

2. Buddhist counter-protest

On 26 March 2007, in reaction to the Muslim protestors' demand that rangers and Border Patrol Police be withdrawn from the district, Buddhists in Saba Yoi demonstrated to demand they stay, additional security forces be deployed, and arms given to Buddhist residents so they could protect themselves. 2,000 people, several of whom were armed, rallied outside Saba Yoi town hall for four hours until authorities promised to consider their demands.²⁰⁸ Although a significant minority of the rangers in Saba Yoi district are Muslims (albeit mostly non-Malay speakers from the upper South), they are regarded by both communities as a force to protect the Buddhists.

D. BOMB AT THE BUDDHIST MARKET

At approximately four pm on 28 May 2007, the Buddhist section of the market in Saba Yoi town was bombed, presumably by separatist militants. A device in the basket of a motorcycle parked at the Buddhist section of the market was detonated remotely by mobile phone – standard BRN tactics. Four people were killed, including girls aged two and eight; 26 were injured.²⁰⁹

Police investigations revealed the motorcycle was registered in Pattani but no suspects have been identified.²¹⁰ Later that evening, some 30 Muslim youths reportedly rode around Kuan Ran village in Pien sub-district (the location of the

²⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Saba Yoi police chief, August 2007.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, *Baboh* Abdullah, Saba Yoi, July 2007.

²⁰² "มือบสกัดเจ้าหน้าที่ตรวจสอบที่เกิดเหตุ", มติชน, 20 มีนาคม 2550 ["Mob blocked officers from investigating crime scene", *Matichon*, 20 March 2007].

²⁰³ Crisis Group interview, Dr Pornthip Rojanasunan, Bangkok, August 2007. Fourteen petrol cans were also found behind the school, possibly prepared to burn the fourteen huts, but, like the bullet casings, students and staff at the school had left fingerprints all over them when they collected the evidence for her, so a forensic investigation was not possible.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, Saba Yoi police chief, August 2007.

²⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, July 2007.

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, July 2007.

²⁰⁷ บั้มปอเนาะ ตาย 2 เจ็บ 8, ไทยรัฐ, 20 มีนาคม 2550 [Pondok Bombed, 2 dead, 8 injured", Thai Rath, 20 March 2007].

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, Buddhist residents of Saba Yoi town, July 2007; "Buddhists protest for troops", *The Nation*, 27 March 2007.

²⁰⁹ Napaswan Chombodin, two, and Amornthip Dangsrithie, eight, died at the scene. Crisis Group interview, Saba Yoi police chief, August 2007; and "Four killed, 26 injured by bomb in Songkhla", *The Nation*, 29 May 2007.

²¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Saba Yoi police chief, August 2007; "บั้มสะบ้าย้อยตาย 4 เจ็บเพียบ", มติชน, 30 พฤษภาคม 2550 ["Saba Yoi Bomb: 4 died, many injured", *Matichon*, 30 May 2007].

Islahuddin school), shouting and shooting in the air to celebrate the bombing. Ten houses were damaged.²¹¹

The previous night, seven home-made bombs had been planted at various locations in Hat Yai town, Songkhla, killing one person and injuring twelve. Teenagers from Saba Yoi, who had reportedly been involved in Hat Yai bombings in 2005, are the prime suspects.²¹² Whether the Saba Yoi market bombers were separatist militants from Pattani or Saba Yoi and whether they had any connection to the Islahuddin School remain to be seen but the attack played straight into the cycle of violence and retribution in the area.

E. SHOOTINGS OUTSIDE KOLOMUDO MOSQUE

On 31 May 2007 at around 8:50pm, just three days after the market bombing, gunmen in black t-shirts riding in two pickup trucks opened fire on young men sitting opposite Kolomudo Mosque in Saba Yoi's Chanae sub-district after evening prayers. Five were killed and two injured.²¹³ The trucks, which came from the direction of Kabang district, would have had to pass a Border Patrol Police checkpoint about a kilometre from the shooting, on the way into and out of the village. Those manning the checkpoint would have seen armed men coming into the area and heard the gunfire but they did not stop them.

Locals cannot understand why the Border Patrol Police failed to apprehend the killers. Some suspect they were complicit in the attack.²¹⁴ The guns used in the attack were M16s and AK-47s. Authorities again checked the weapons of all the local security forces and found no match, though in this case it was the police themselves who did the checking rather than an independent agency, somewhat undermining the investigation's credibility. Most locals believe the state was behind the shootings. Local police again hinted at Buddhist militia responsibility. And again investigations went nearly nowhere.

Kolomudo villagers (all Muslim) concluded that, regardless of who was behind the violence, the state was not able to protect them. Joining a *Chor Ror Bor* scheme was not considered an option; that kind of association with the state became too dangerous after separatist militants moved into the area in late 2004. Village leaders, therefore, decided to institute their own security system. The headmen brought together around 70 young men in the village and organised them into shifts to guard all six entrances. They cut the long grass and any trees that obscured their view and man the checkpoints every night from seven until dawn prayers, refusing entry to all outsiders, including officials. They initially told Crisis Group they operate unarmed but when pressed admitted that anyone with a gun brings it along.²¹⁵

All said they fear the security forces more than anything else. A woman explained, "I don't know who is behind these attacks. All I know is that the situation is worse since the rangers came".²¹⁶

None of the violent attacks in Saba Yoi between March and May 2007 have been resolved but most locals have suspicions about who is behind each of them. Opinions tend to divide along communal lines, with Buddhists suspecting Muslim militants and Muslims suspecting either state security forces or Buddhist militias. Groups in both communities have set up ethnically-based militias, some of the Buddhist groups with government sanction and support. The deployment of paramilitary rangers in the area also appears to have deepened the rift between Buddhists and Muslims in the district.

Perceptions are as powerful as facts in a propaganda war. The government's best weapon is transparent investigations. Prosecuting rangers and other security force members in cases where abuses have occurred would help undermine militant claims that the state must be responsible for every unsolved case. A thorough examination of the role played by private militias, including those with links to the state, and ending government programs to arm civilians would also help curb the cycle of violence.

²¹¹ "สมช ยันไม่มีไม่เกี่ยวปมการเมือง", มติชน, 31 พฤษภาคม 2550 ["National security council dismissed political motivation", Matichon 31 May 2007].

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ The five shot dead were identified as Abdulla Masasa, 29, Masuhaidi Magaji, 23, Daduenan Laemansen, 24, Adul Tayae, seventeen, and Annuwa Kadae, eighteen. Karim Mao-a and Maruding Mapi, both sixteen, were injured. Crisis Group interview, imam of Kolomudo Mosque, July 2007; "คนร้ายใช้อาวุธสงครามยิงใส่มีสติดคอลอมุดอ ต.จะแหน สะบ้าย้อย ชาวบ้านตายแล้ว 7", สำนักข่าวอิศรา, 1 มิถุนายน 2550 ["Gunmen open fired at Kolomudo Mosque, Chanae sub-district, Saba Yoi, 7 dead", Issara News Agency, 1 June 2007].

²¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Kolomudo villagers, July and August 2007.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, villager, Kolomudo, August 2007.

IX. CONCLUSION

On balance, Thailand's various village militia and paramilitary organisations hinder more than they help address the violence in its southern provinces. Each offers some advantages but none performs a role that could not in the longer term be carried out as well or better by either a more professional police force or military. One of the main comparative advantages cited by the government is local knowledge and networks. However, they have not contributed significantly to intelligence collection, which remains a critical weakness in the government's counter-insurgency strategy.

The *Or Sor* have the best record among the irregular forces and tend to be perceived by many villagers as genuinely local and less abusive than either the military (including rangers) or the police. But they continue to be deeply involved in local corruption and money politics, and the danger they could be used by local politicians and officials as armed enforcers – in politics, business or security management – suggests that in the long term the government should consider abolishing the force. Until police are less corrupt and abusive and better able to enforce the law without help from volunteer forces, however, the *Or Sor* may still play a useful role.

The combat skills of individual rangers may be comparable to those of the regular armed forces, given the high proportion of conscripts deployed in the South. But their poor discipline is a major problem, one that is exacerbated by loose supervision. The rangers' past and more recent abuses against civilians have provided significant grist for the militants' propaganda mill. The 2007 deployments appear to be creating at least as many problems as they solve.

However, the rangers are playing something closer to a genuine counter-insurgency role than the regular military and may prove to make a useful contribution in this respect. The government should, however, consider giving them additional training in military skills and humanitarian law and closer supervision by the regular army, perhaps under Special Forces units.

The contribution of the various village militias to security is negligible. They routinely fail to defend the schools, government offices and civilians with whose protection they are entrusted and have allowed hundreds of weapons to fall into the hands of separatist insurgents. Government programs to arm tens of thousands of civilians and its relaxation of controls on small arms more generally have facilitated the creation of sectarian militias, heightening the risk of wider communal conflict. Unsupervised armed groups such as *Ruam Thai* should be disarmed and

disbanded, and controls on guns and gun licenses should be tightened.

There is no doubt that relying on paramilitary forces and civilian militias is cheaper than deploying professional soldiers but it is a poor substitute. It has become clear as the conflict has worsened that the approximately 22,000 regular soldiers and 10,000 police in the region are not coping with the security threat. The separatist insurgents operate with virtual impunity in many districts and have killed hundreds of civilians as well as members of the security forces. The only security policy to have had an impact on the militants' capacity to plan and carry out major attacks has been the sweep operation launched in late June 2007. It has bought the army some time but the long-term impact of mass, arbitrary arrests is likely to be alienation of hundreds of young Malay Muslim men. Meanwhile, assassinations continue on a daily basis.

National political considerations appear to be behind the military's reluctance to deploy additional troops to the South from Bangkok, the north and north east. However, this calculation overlooks the increasingly serious security threat posed by the conflict, which requires a serious response from professional security forces.

Thailand's next democratically elected government will have enormous tasks ahead of it: healing national political divisions, reviewing the new constitution and taking forward a series of reform initiatives, including a wide-ranging program to reform the national police. Tackling the separatist insurgency in the South must also be an urgent priority. Ultimately a lasting solution can only be reached through political dialogue but there is also a clear need to improve the security response.

The inability of the police and regular military to cope with the mounting insurgency in the South suggests that the government will continue to use paramilitaries for the foreseeable future. It cannot be expected to abandon their use immediately but it needs to begin a managed process of moving toward more professional and accountable security arrangements. Resources currently devoted to building up the poorly trained, ill-disciplined and largely unaccountable paramilitary and militia forces would be better spent rationalising and consolidating them and professionalising and strengthening the regular armed forces and police.

Jakarta/Brussels, 23 October 2007

APPENDIX A

MAP OF THAILAND



APPENDIX B

MAP OF THAILAND'S SOUTHERN PROVINCES



APPENDIX C

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Stanley Fischer
Malcolm Fraser
Bronislaw Geremek
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Max Jakobson
Todung Mulya Lubis
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Barbara McDougall
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Surin Pitsuwan
Cyril Ramaphosa
George Robertson
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Volker Ruehe
Mohamed Sahnoun
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Ed van Thijn
Shirley Williams
Grigory Yavlinski
Uta Zapf