

CHAPTER V

DIAGNOSIS OF ROOT CAUSES FROM AN EXAMINATION OF “THE NATION”’S CONTENTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is critical to our understanding of the conflict. It examines what and how “The Nation” has gone beyond convenient “normal” journalism of just reporting on events to constructive reporting on the basis for the violence. This divergence towards the objects, the logic for the violent conflict is the distinguishing hallmark of “peace” journalism compared to “violence” journalism, “sports” journalism, “victim” journalism.

5.2 The Perpetrators

The individual militant has taken on the ‘faceless’ and ‘nameless’ anonymity of members of a Communist cell; or al-Qaeda cell or a surfer in cyberspace of modernity. In the words of Turkle (1995), they seemed to enjoy the anonymity and hence security of the cyberspace to put on new identities and peel off old ones. They surface only when they kill. Yet, no face can be placed on them.

In the light of this, the general characteristics of these militants are the only leads we have to-date of them. The collective identity (in a cultural sense rather than an individual sense) of the perpetrators holds the key to understanding the perpetrators of violence.

Based on the keywords of “militants, insurgents, operatives, separatists, community, enemy”, my analysis, as outlined in Appendix II; showed that “The Nation” has determined certain characteristics of the perpetrators and they are :-

- (a) Malays (denoting a strong ethnicity cause);
- (b) Muslims (denoting a strong religious cause);
- (c) found in close-knit rural communities of the South (denoting that they have very different worldviews of urban communities)
- (d) many youngsters;
- (e) armed and trained in ‘drive-by shootings’; bombs triggered by cell-phones; ‘face-to-face’ combat in slitting throats and lately beheadings;
- (f) operate in small cells (adopts a “faceless” and “nameless” modus operandi)
- (g) some religious teachers (“ustads”) amongst them.
- (h) opposed to the state.

Theories abound, however, if foreigners are directly involved in the fighting – whether as instructors in training camps or are “embedded” in the groups or provide financial or spiritual support. Apart from reporting official releases that foreign participation is involved, “The Nation” has not made an assertion (in the form of an opinion; editorial or analysis in its reports) that there is direct foreign participation on the ground.

In my view, “The Nation”’s findings of the collective identity of the perpetrators, of being Malay Muslims, young, and found in close-knit communities, provide the strong basis to further my research that the conflict is primarily an ethnic-religious one. The ethnic and religious grievances of the primary “violence actors” and their communities deserve great research scrutiny. Besides the collective identity of being Malay and Muslim, “The Nation” also directed attention to the Islamic concept of “ummah” and “martyrdom”.

5.3 The Supporters or Sympathizers

“The Nation” had reported that the Government blamed poor intelligence for its inability to ferret the leaders and militants. Their Majesties have goaded military and police leaders to co-operate more closely in their operations in the South, insinuating that weak co-operation between the para-military had led to intelligence failure. It has also been reported that the secretive and mysterious operations of “cell-like” perpetrators have made arrests and identification of perpetrators difficult.

My analysis of the newspaper reporting showed that all of the above parties have missed one fundamental point. As early as November 2004, “The Nation” opined that virtually the entire Muslim communities in the 3 southern provinces are arrayed against the state apparatus. This could be one of the reasons that the militants are ‘faceless’ and ‘nameless’. Being ‘arrayed’ against the state could mean one of several things : -

- (a) that the communities were voluntarily and actively supporting the militants (the Associated Press of 4 July 2005 quoted , an ex-military commander of the South, Gen Kitti Rattanachaya, as having said “The separatist movement has complete control over the people. Only the land belongs to us, but the people belong to the movement, 100 percent”.);
- (b) the communities could be terrorized by both the militants and the state’s security apparatus into silence; frozen in a ‘limbo’ state;
- (c) the communities are caught between the ‘deep blue sea’ and the ‘devil’, neither supporting the militants nor enthusiastic about the state. They are surely not assisting the authorities

Besides the local Malay-Muslim communities, “The Nation” has also identified the global Muslim community as sympathizers thereby enlarging the scope of mediation and conflict resolution. The global Muslim community could possibly indirectly participate in the conflict by lending both financial and spiritual support. Hence, localized issues have ballooned into a global cause. The Government, for obvious political reasons, has rejected recognition of the internationalized nature of the conflict.

To lend support to its assertion that international sentiments are also at play in the conflict, “The Nation” published several reports by regional media such as the Star of Malaysia, The Jakarta Post of Indonesia and the Western news wire such as AP and AFP. These finding will be discussed in later sections of this submission.

5.4 Root causes : An Overview Covering Local Grievances and Globalization of Islamic Extremism

The violence in Southern Thailand is not a sudden bolt out of the blue. The separatist movement has been waxing and waning from the early days when Siam exercised suzerainty over the 3 provinces from the 18th century. What distinguishes this “escalation” of violence are 4 major features :-

- (a) the sheer viciousness of the violence – the “drive-by” shootings; the slitting of throats; the beheadings;
- (b) the price paid by civilians from teachers, monks, railway workers; bystanders; simple petty businessmen;
- (c) the technological sophistication of the bombings carried out at the Hatyai airport, Carrefour supermarket, restaurants and petrol kiosk; and
- (d) the sphere or theatre of operations now extend everywhere – supermarket, restaurants, hotels, police stations, temples, rubber plantations etc.

“The Nation”, in its 21 December 2004 edition, reported that the great bulk of violence in the South over the past decade has taken place since PM Thaksin assumed power in 2000. This was based on research made by Srisompop Jitpiromsri, Deputy Dean of Prince of Songkla University’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Science. He wrote that what caused a major impact to security in the deep south was the dissolution in 2001 of the Southern Border Province Administrative Centre and the Joint Civilian, Police and Military Force 43. This event, in my analysis is not a root cause but an enabler of the violence.

An exercise on theme identification, a fundamental task in qualitative research, has helped me to create some abstract constructs that will get us to the root causes of the conflict.

Based on the data-reduction techniques of Keywords and Key-words-in context (KWIC), gleaned from a literature review, I have established some key constructs or themes, summarized as follows :-

Keyword (the KWIC are given in various appendices to this submission)	Themes	Nature of the themes
Oppression, oppressive	Oppression	Local grievances
Justice, injustice, fair, unfair, lawful, unlawful	Injustice	Local grievances
State Officials, governance, security agencies, military, police abuse, government policy	State Policy on military, police & governance	Local grievances
Neglect, alienate, decency, lack of understanding	Cultural Alienation or exclusion	Local grievances
Thai-ness, Thai identity, Thai nationalism, Thai race, non-Thai, un-Thai	Cultural Alienation or exclusion	Local grievances
History, historical past	Historical Anger	Local grievances
Economy, economics, underdevelopment, money, work	Economic Underdevelopment	Local grievances
Religious extremism, radicalism, distortion of religion, spirituality, foreign and international terrorist	Globalized Islamic Consciousness	Global issue

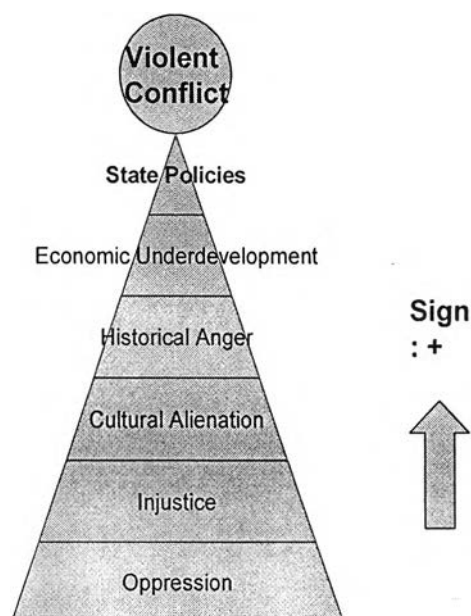
The relationship of these themes to the “violent conflict” are analyzed in 2 dimensions, namely :-

- (a) **sign** – sign is related to whether this theme has a positive or negative co-relationship with the violent conflict. A “positive” sign implies that the theme contributes or adds on to the violent conflict.

A “positive” relationship, however, generates negative feelings or negative results.

- (b) **intensity** – strength as a measure of the relationship is useful for identification of root causes as not all relationships are of equal strength. The strength of the relationship can be (i) implied; (ii) stated explicitly; or (iii) emphasized. A judgmental decision is made based on a thorough reading of the linguistics used in the newspaper reports.

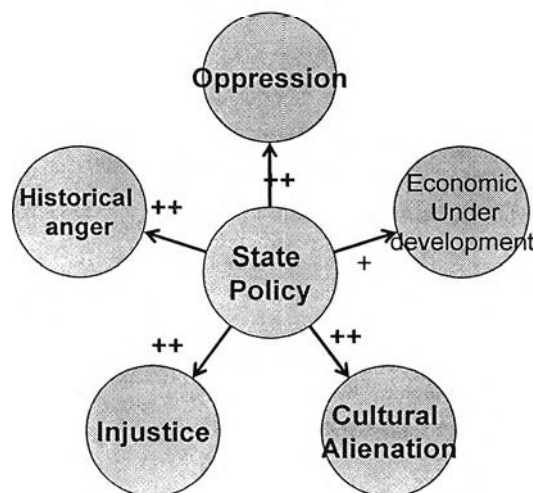
The following diagram illustrates this direction:-



The relationships between or amongst the themes are analyzed as to whether the linguistics point to a “definitive” or/and “logical” relationship. The relationship between, say “state policy” and “oppression” will be “definitive” based

on direction. This means that the first theme has some sort of “prior” (“prius” in Latin) relationship to the second theme. For example “State Policy” leads to “Oppression” or “State Policy” comes before “Oppression”. Next the relationship is “logical” based on 3 criteria :- (i) The nature of the report (an editorial or opinion piece will carry more weight than just a daily regular report) (ii) The background of the narrator (such as a privy councilor, academic specialist in peace studies, ex-military general) (iii) Contextualized research conducted by academicians.

The following diagram outlines the framework for analysis of relationships between/among themes :-



(Note : a double ++ sign indicates a greater strength than a single + sign. A double or single + was allotted after the research analysis has been completed.)

Broadly, the theme analysis has identified two major clusters of root causes comprising local and international elements:-

- (i) unresolved local grievances due to :
 - (a) state oppression;
 - (b) injustice;
 - (c) cultural alienation;
 - (d) state policies on governance;
 - (e) historical anger over Patani's annexation; and
 - (f) economic under-development
- (ii) globalization of radicalized Islam.

The next 2 chapters, chapters 6 and 7, will delve on detailed findings on (i) and (ii) from an examination of "The Nation"'s contents.