

## **CHAPTER IV**

# **EXAMINATION OF “THE NATION”’S PEACE JOURNALISTIC STYLE AND METHODOLOGY FOR ITS CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, “The Nation”’s description of the sufferings is analyzed as to whether it over-played the gory details of the killings and so inflame passions. Its process of reporting on the conflict will also be matched against the established methodology of peace journalism of opening space to more parties to participate in the peace process, being pro-solution and exercising care in its linguistics so as to avoid violence-oriented or victory-oriented reporting.

### **4.2 The Nation’s Description of the “Patients”’ Suffering and Battle against Violence**

Like health journalism, peace journalism documents the sufferings and pain that violence has wrought on the landscape of Southern Thailand, both in terms of its economic, social, security situation as well as people-to-people relationships. The Nation has focused less on the gory details of the violence per se and more on the impact of violence on its ‘soft’ targets, the people; and the institutions that support the socio-economic fabric of the South.

The ‘patients’ of the conflict include :-

Victims	Institutions/Business Premises
1 By-standers, unarmed protestors at Tak Bai	1 Police station 2 Schools
2 Rubber tappers and gold-scrap traders	3 Banks 4 Hotels
3 Construction workers and rail workers	5 Airport 6 Supermarkets
4 Monks	7 Restaurants
5 Students	8 Religious Places of Worship
6 Teachers	9 Rail lines and passenger trains
7 Village Chiefs	
8 Judge	
9 Deputy governor	
10 Worshippers	
11 Para-military	

“The Nation” interviewed widows, children of victims (on both sides of the divide, Muslims and Buddhists), businessmen, para-military and reported both their physical, economic and psychological sufferings and pain.

Although the pain and deaths were reported, the newspaper did not sensationalize ‘death’ by printing gory pictures of the maimed and dead. The emphasis was a pro-solution approach in its reporting style, starting with the point that the Thai Government alone cannot solve the conflict. It sought out other “actors” who can contribute to conflict resolution.

#### 4.3 No Monopoly on Conflict Resolution

In the immediate days following the Tak Bai incident of 25 October 2004, “The Nation” gave extensive coverage of the Tak Bai incident, reporting events as they occurred. However, in its first editorial (28 October 2004) since the incident, “The Nation” called on Thai society at large to shake off its apathy toward violence in

the south. It wondered aloud if Thailand has lost its conscience and noble attributes of compassion, respect for the sanctity of life and tolerance. In an opinion column titled “Time to get active about promoting peace”, it exhorted all Thais, parts of civil society to become more pro-active and pro-peace and not sit back and let the government decided upon things. In another editorial dated 1 November 2004, it issued the warning “...that public efforts to reach out to the South are the result of the growing public sentiment that the government alone cannot bring lasting stability and peace”.

Henceforth, “The Nation” adopted a journalistic slanted towards promoting peace and conflict resolution. Its position was clear – that the Thai Government has no monopoly on the solution. Because of this, “The Nation” introduced a whole gamut of “players” and “roadmaps to peace” into the peace-making effort. My research of the two-months reporting showed that the English daily reported and favored knowledge, understanding and dialogue instead of inciting violence.

Conflict resolution, in “The Nation”’s view, involves the participation of all members of Thai society. It did not centralize the ‘issue’ as a violent confrontation between dual parties. The English daily sought ways to defuse the violent conflict and not heighten tensions as a “tug-of-war” between “them and us”(as evidenced by its quoting Privy Councillor, General Surayud on 2 November 2004 – “If we regard them as opponents, it’s over”). An antithesis approach always results in a direct confrontation whereas a ‘roundtable’ approach is more amenable to peace.

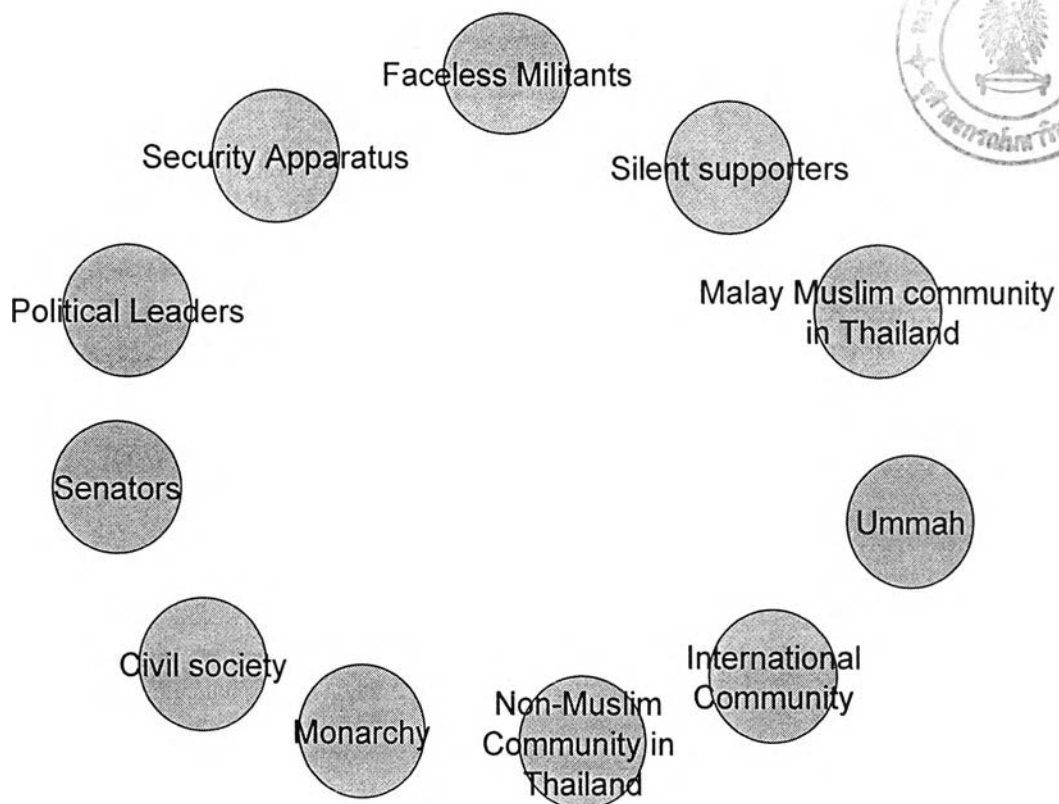
Secondly, the English daily also reported on the possibility of many roadmaps to peace. Peace proposals by several “players”, in-house journalists and editor, and even foreign correspondents were reported. It went on to comment that many of these proposals remained untried by the government, which was too focused on relying on force to solve the insurgency.

Thirdly, “The Nation” reported on ways on how the Thai state and the majority Buddhists can accommodate the minority Muslims’ legitimate rights in a free and democratic society.

#### **4.4 Roundtable Approach – Many “Actors” and “Roadmaps”**

“The Nation”’s pro-peace stance was to report the participants as a virtual ‘roundtable’ of ‘actors’, whom jointly and collectively can resolve the conflict. It takes an inclusive rather than exclusive (only the Government) stance. It helps to disaggregate the conflict hereby opening up the potential for solutions that are not establishment-driven. The actors were not only the militants and members of the Thai political establishment including its para-military but a gamut of characters and these include :-

## A roundtable of ‘actors’



These ‘characters’ tapped upon by “The Nation” include the following :-

Roundtable of “actors”	Name	Office
<b>Academia</b>	Chaiwat Satha-Anand	Political Scientist and Peace scholar, Thammasat University
	Somsak Jaemtheerasakul	History professor, Thammasat University
	Parinya Theewanaruemitkul	Law lecturer, Thammasat University
	Surichai Wun-gaew	Sociologist, Chulalongkorn University
	Thirayuth Boonmi	Sociologist/Anthropologist, Thammasat University
	Kasian Tejapira	Political Scientist, Thammasat University
	Niran Pantharakit	Professor, Mahidol University
		144 lecturers from 18 universities released an open letter
<b>Statesmen</b>	Anand Panyarachun	Former Prime Minister

		Monarchy
<b>Islamic Leaders in Thailand</b>		The Office of the Chularatchamontri, Thailand's Islamic spiritual leader
	Paisarn Promyong	Deputy Secretary-General, National Islamic Committee
	Vinai Sama-oon	Vice-Chairman, National Islamic Committee
	Nimu Makajae	Deputy Chairman, Yala Islamic Committee
	Abdulrahamn Abdulsamat	Chairman, Islamic Council of Narathiwat
	Niran Pantharakit	Director, Sheikul Islam Office
<b>Senators</b>	Kaewsan Atibhodhi	Senator from Bangkok
	Sompong Srakavi	Senator from Songkla
	Sophon Suphaphong	Senator from Bangkok
	Niran Pitakwatchara	Senator from Ubonratchatane
<b>Ex-military/police commanders</b>	Gen Surayud Chulanont	Ex-Supreme Commander of Thai Armed Forces & Privy Councillor
	Gen Kitti Ratanachaya	Ex-Southern Region Army Commander
<b>Civil Society</b>		People's Commission on Violence in Tak Bai and Southern Thailand
		People's Monitoring Committee on the Violence of the Tak Bai Case
<b>Buddhists</b>	Phra Sripariyatmoli	Vice-Rector of Foreign Affairs, Maha Chulalongkorn Buddhist University
<b>Opposition Parties</b>	Surin Pitsuwan	Democrat Party
<b>Foreign Correspondents</b>		The Star (Malaysia), Republika, Jakarta Post, Kompas (Indonesia); AFP (France)

At the virtual roundtable, these “actors” have different views of the conflict and hence different roadmaps for peace. Their contributions will be analyzed in detail in later sections of this thesis.

#### 4.5 Publication of Foreign Contributions that Aid Understanding of Issue

“The Nation” has re-printed a series of articles from foreign media that would aid understanding and conflict resolution. These foreign media include the AFP, the Indonesian and Malaysian Dailies such as the Jakarta Post, Republika, Kompas, the Star and these are summarized in Appendix I.

These foreign contributions have identified the root causes as desire for respect and fair representation by the minority Muslims, discrimination suffered, official neglect, high-handed bullying by corrupt officials. They extol people’s participation in conflict resolution and changes in education policies to promote pluralism in society.

By a large measure, these foreign contributions reinforce “The Nation”’s diagnosis of the violent conflict and appeared to have been selected for this sharing of its idea of peace through non-violent means.

#### 4.6 Promotion of Peace Initiatives

“The Nation” gave significant coverage and emphasis on peace initiatives such as :-

Date of report	Initiatives
1 Nov 2004	Friday night candle-lit gatherings, peace mission being put together by a group of non-governmental organizations, Thais who are living overseas can participate by sending in e-mails in support of the various peace missions and by reaching out through internet chat rooms.

4 Nov 2004	Political activists yesterday formed the People's Commission on Violence in Tak Bai and Southern Thailand as a counter to the government-appointed team in charge of investigating the tragedy. The Commission will be led by Surichai Wankaew, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University.
8 Nov 2004	A group of 144 lecturers from 18 universities yesterday released an open letter to PM Thaksin, calling for his apology for the deaths of at least 78 detained demonstrators at Tak Bai.
14 Nov 2004	20 Thai academics will today meet PM Thaksin to call on the government to stop using force in the strife-torn deep South and instead rely on political dialogue and local participation to restore peace.
14 Nov 2004	Meanwhile Thammasat University's Lecturers' Council yesterday asked the university's rector to plan a course that would teach university students across the country to help curb violence.
16 Nov 2004	The government will establish a national reconciliation committee.
17 Nov 2004	Former PM Anand Panyarachun and ex-Army Chief Surayud Chulanont voiced strong opposition to the government's use of force leading to the Tak Bai bloodbath, and called for a concerted national effort to restore peace in the troubled deep South. They were speaking at a press conference ahead of the second round of "Bridges : Dialogues Towards a Culture of Peace"
17 Nov 2004	The Nation will post a full programme of events continuing until the end of April, with speakers such as former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali. Readers can also access the programme by logging onto <a href="http://www.peace-foundation.net">www.peace-foundation.net</a> .
18 Nov 2004	"If military and police officers managed to handle the situation properly, people would live in peace and happiness," His Majesty told an audience of 78 military and police officers who he promoted to the rank of general.
21 Nov 2004	Royal call for peace echoed by Muslims.
22 Nov 2004	Village Scouts Meeting and held rally for peace
2 Dec 2004	The Office of the Chularatchamontri, Thailand's Islamic spiritual leader, will next week distribute a religious white paper to rebut propaganda aimed at inciting secession in the three southernmost provinces.
6 Dec 2004	King : task of restoring peace shared by everyone



“The Nation” would pick up and profile peace initiatives from various sources – civil society, grassroots organizations, Malay community- particularly when they are “contrarians” to the government’s position. This is in line with its view that the government has no monopoly to solve the conflict.

#### 4.7 Linguistic Care in Peace Journalism

A textual analysis of “The Nation” revealed that the newspaper has exercised considerable care in its linguistics and avoided the use of emotive, inflammatory, “demonizing” adjectives and nouns and instead tried to be precise and factual in their descriptions. For instance, a comparison of some examples with the “Bangkok Post” will illustrate that “The Nation” style is more pro-peace than pro-violence reporting:-

1	<p>“The Nation” generally identifies the perpetrators as “insurgents”, “militants”, “assailants” or simply “gunmen”. Occasionally, it uses the term “Muslim insurgents”.</p> <p>The “Bangkok Post” names the perpetrators as “separatist militants”, “separatist insurgents”, separatist gangs”, “Muslim insurgents, “Muslim militants” and “Islamic militants”.</p> <p>The Thai Government’s official position is that these perpetrators are “separatists”.</p> <p>Observation : Although both newspapers have avoided labels like “terrorists”, “extremists” or “fanatics”, “The Nation” has avoided religious insensitivities by not using the adjectives “Islamic” or “Muslim” to describe the assailants. Moreover, “The Nation” also avoids using the noun “separatists” as the agenda of the mysterious assailants is uncertain.</p>
2a	<p>During the “bird-dropping” peace initiative of the Thaksin administration in November 2004, “The Nation” demonstrated its support for the peace initiative by using nouns like “origami birds”, “peace birds” or “paper birds”.</p> <p>On the other hand, the “Bangkok Post” labeled the birds variously as “paper cranes”, “paper crows” before settling on the word “paper birds”.</p> <p>Observation : This comparison shows that the “Bangkok Post” is more hesitant and less enthusiastic than “The Nation” about this peace initiative.</p>
2b	<p>There was fear that some of the “origami birds” might contain offensive messages. “The Nation” was cautious in its reporting (6 December 2004) :</p>

	<p>“Some messages scribbled on some of these birds might also include abusive words that could be offensive to the hearts and the souls of Muslims”. However, it did not report on the offensive messages. Instead, it paraphrased the words of a Muslim community leader that even if Bht500 banknotes were used to fold 100m birds, it would not stop the suffering of the severely oppressed.</p> <p>On the contrary, the “Bangkok Post” was rather inflammatory : “Birds are a hit with children. Some Malay villagers belittle the release of paper cranes. Local residents found messages such as ‘Bandits are fire and Thais are friends’, ‘I want to kill bandits’ and ‘All bandits must die’”.</p> <p>Observation : “The Nation”’s report is more illuminating about the root cause of the violence.</p>
3	<p>“The Nation” tries to open up space for more parties to contribute to the peace process rather than directing it to either the Government or the Malay Muslim community. For instance, it would be more “inviting” and solution-oriented in its headlines : “Conflict resolution : Respected figures urged to help cause”, “Heal the people’s hearts”, “Many roadmaps, no clear path to peace”.</p> <p>The “Bangkok Post” seems to see “the other”, “them” clearly as the Muslims : “PM urges Muslims to say what Govt must do to restore peace”, “Muslims not mollified on Tak Bai”.</p> <p>Observation : The “Bangkok Post” is more pro-establishment and had on several occasions reported the Prime Minister’s assertion that he would not allow Thailand to be parceled off and not yield an inch of Thailand. “The Nation” has avoided such victory-oriented reporting.</p>

In addition, “The Nation” has also avoided violence-oriented linguistics like “massacre”; “bloodbath” or “genocide”. In fact, it is truth-oriented when it wrote headlines like “Tak Bai is a crime”; “Money won’t end unrest : critics”; “Knowing and yet not knowing the South”.

#### **4.8 Prognosis - Duty to Forewarn**

Like a good medical doctor, “The Nation” has a duty to forewarn society about where the confrontation is going and about new potential threats to peace. It is really up to the security agencies to evaluate the probability that these threats would materialize and to balance these threats against possible damage to the country’s tourist and international reputation.

Some 6 months before the Hatyai airport and Carrefour bombings in March 2005, “The Nation” has in several articles forewarned that these perpetrators might strike outside its usual sphere of operation in the 3 southern provinces. These warning (included in my research samples) were :-

<b>Date &amp; Title of Article</b>	<b>Message</b>
29 Oct 2004 “Tak Bai Aftermath : Fears violence could spread beyond South	The Government must take urgent steps to restore citizens’ and investors’ confidence.
29 Oct 2004 “Getting a grip on the terror threat”	Get ready, anti-terrorist forces, emergency services. Tighten security at bus terminals, airports, railway stations and public buildings.

“The Nation”’s unfavorable prognosis of the conflict was spot-on when the violence turned deadlier after the Tak Bai incident with throat slittings and beheadings and incidents occurred outside of the 3 provinces. In the same editorial, “The Nation” warned of a long battle against the Islamic militancy, a very strong signal that the conflict is going along spiritual lines.

#### **4.9 Diagnosis and Therapy**

In accordance with Galtung’s methodology on peace journalism, a peace journalist would try to pursue and report knowledge for “diagnosis” reasons so that root causes are identified. He should seek the “perpetrators”; “sympathizers”; reveal their suffering, discontent, grievances and then report on what remedies or could be done to alleviate the suffering. As identification or root causes is a critical step in the peace process, the next chapter is devoted to “diagnosis”.