

Abstract

Conflict in Southern Thailand: The 2004 Upsurge

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The ethnic conflict between the Malay-Muslim communities and the Thai state is a long one. The seeds of the conflict were sown when the Thai king took over the Malay-Muslim kingdom of Pattani in the late 18th century. Matters were made worse when the Anglo-Thai treaties of 1904 and 1909 recognized the Thai authority over the Pattani region. Notwithstanding the primacy of this particular grievance, it was the conduct and mannerisms of the Thai-Buddhist state under different historical periods that exacerbated the conflict. As long as the Thai state did not overtly or blatantly intrude into the social and cultural affairs of Malay-Muslims, conflicts were kept at a low level. However this changed, when the Thai state took measures to integrate the Malay-Muslim communities within the mainstream without paying attention to their specific social, political and cultural needs. Malay-Muslim radical movements were active between 1940 and until the end of 1980s, things were relatively quiet in the 1990s but political violence rose to prominence from 2001 and onwards.

While the Thai state's removal of the Malay-Muslim Pattani kingdom provides the nourishment and imagination for the conflict, it is not a sufficient condition. To understand the contemporary nature of the conflict, there is necessity to understand the economic, social, cultural and political marginalization of the Malay-Muslim communities in the three provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani and how successive Thai governments with the exception of one or two sought to integrate them within the mainstream without being sensitive to their own concerns. Secularization and modernization of the Thai society discriminated and marginalized the Malay-Muslim communities to the extent that they began to look outside for alternatives. Arabization of Muslim politics, the strong Muslim resistance to western imposed political, social and economic order in the Middle-East and the teaching of those who returned to teach in the pondoks imbibed a strong ethnic and religious consciousness among the Malay-Muslim communities. Furthermore, the strong support of Thaksin to United States against war against terror and the sending of troops to Iran is a sad reminder to the communities that Thailand is totally insensitive to the needs of Muslims in Thailand.