

## Thailand's Security Sector "Deform" and "Reform"

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## Thailand's Security Sector "Deform" and "Reform"

Paul Chambers and Napisa Waitookiat

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# Thailand's Security Sector "Deform" and "Reform"

**Paul Chambers and Napisa Waitoolkiat**

## ABSTRACT

Despite a 2019 election, Thailand remains dominated by the military and monarchy. The state implemented security sector reforms at the national level and the Deep South regional level, before and after a 2014 military coup, which overthrew the country's frail democracy. Thailand offers an impressive example of pitfalls and contradictory practices in security sector reform (SSR) because the country's military junta supported globally transferred notions of SSR but applied them distinctively at different regional levels. Nationally, the military utilized universalist SSR notions to rationalize its prolongation and even expansion of autocracy. But regarding the Deep South insurgency, the junta applied a more progressive version of SSR, continuing negotiations with insurgents while reducing military abuses in the Deep South region. This study analyzes Thailand's simultaneous "deform and reform" dynamics in the field of security sector governance. The authors examine why national SSR has been such a deform of more sincere SSR efforts in Thailand's South.

## INTRODUCTION

2021 finds Thailand in a crisis of intensifying political pandemonium. But in a country which has experienced different levels of political turmoil over the last decade, it has not been uncommon. What is new this year is the almost daily demonstrations by large numbers of youth-led protestors who are boldly calling for military and monarchical reform, as well as their demand that the current Prime Minister resigns. The demonstrations are unprecedented and are happening throughout the country. A military coup, meant to repress the demonstrations, could be on the horizon.

With the protests and possible coup in mind, this paper examines the implementation of security policies in Thailand at both the national (center) level and more specifically at the Deep South regional (periphery) level before and after the 2014 military coup, which overthrew the country's democracy. Following that putsch, the armed forces directly administered the country through authoritarian rule. In 2018 Thailand represented the only case worldwide where a formal military regime wielded power. On March 24, 2019, the junta oversaw a general election monitored by junta-appointed election commissioners, enforced by soldiers, and in which a proxy military political party (Palang Pracharat) competed. Amidst allegations of electoral wrongdoing, Palang Pracharat was victorious at the polls, it formed a ruling coalition and the coalition chose 2014–2019 junta leader General Prayuth Chan-ocha to lead the country as Prime Minister (Sawasdee 2019). Since 2019, the government has remained dominated by the military.

Thailand offers a particularly astonishing example of security sector reform (SSR). This is because the Thai junta and successor government have looked favorably upon globally transferred notions of SSR, but have applied the concepts distinctively at different regional levels. The military has utilized universalist notions of SSR to rationalize the prolongation and even expansion of autocracy across the country. The deformed translation of these normative concepts is thus ironically practical for Thai authoritarians, who are opposed to the original concepts (and goals) of SSR but still want to pay lip service to them. Nevertheless, with regard to a long-simmering Malay-Muslim insurgency in Thailand's Deep South, the putsch appears to have transitioned the military toward spearheading moves in favor of negotiations with insurgents while reducing military abuses in the Deep South. Much of what goes on in that part of Thailand actually achieves the ends of SSR

in the way the concept has been defined by the United Nations, the OECD and other global norm agents in that field (United Nations 2012: 3; OECD 2007: 22). We analyse the striking simultaneous “deform and reform” dynamics in the field of security sector governance in Thailand, and the extent to which they are influenced by external players.

In this paper, we argue that since the 2014 coup, Thailand, despite the apparent resumption of electoral democracy in 2019, has represented a case of near-total military victory over elected civilians in the tug-of-war between the two over control of decision-making policy power. Moreover, almost all international SSR efforts have been turned on their head across the country. Thai political progress at the national level has been “deformed” by the post-2014 persistence of the military’s political domination as well as the large number of military coups and juntas throughout Thai history and support for military rule from the monarchy, which have impeded attempts to achieve lasting and decisive SSR. Meanwhile, at the level of the Deep South, the views of powerful actors such as the late Privy Council Chair Prem Tinsulanonda, an attempt to borrow from other counterinsurgency successes, and a desire to boost their public relations image have convinced military leaders to negotiate, construct an appearance of being peace-makers, and engage in other SSR (though without civilian control). In this way they have at least partially adopted and practiced concepts of SSR in the Deep South that are globally promoted by reform programs in favor of good security governance. However, such adaptations have occurred only because of military (and monarchical) preferences, not because of civilian pressure, given that Thailand is in 2021 a charade democracy dominated by monarchy and military—which itself might be characterized as a “monarchized military” (Chambers/Waitookiat 2016). The Thai case is thus a peculiar one in terms of studying the processes of SSR translation practices and outcomes. It also represents an odd example of local ownership conditions. Nevertheless, precisely these peculiar aspects make a closer look significant: Strikingly, even the current quasi-authoritarian regime pays tribute to the globally circulating normative discourse on contemporary standards in security governance. On the one hand, the junta’s purposeful reference to and practical deformation of SSR raises questions about how meaningful the reform concept is in substance. On the other hand, the reformed security governance practices in the Deep South allow us to identify driving motives for such a security policy, even under authoritarian conditions. Ultimately, different applications of SSR can be observed based upon center versus periphery, with the distinctive forms of implementation based on different rationales.

The paper is divided in two sections, looking briefly at the national and then specifically at the Deep South levels of analysis. At the national level, it addresses the following questions: First, prior to the 2014 military coup, what was the character of the country’s SSR endeavors, how effective were these, and what was the role of foreign actors in pushing for SSR? Secondly, since the 2014 coup, to what extent did the 2014–2019 junta and 2019–present military-dominated government achieve the goal of implementing its own translation of SSR in order to bring “order” to Thailand? At the Deep South level, it asks the following questions. First, what was the evolution of military security policy in the Deep South prior to 2014? Secondly, what has the policy of the ruling National Council for Peace and Order military junta toward the Deep South been since the coup of 2014? Thirdly, what are the non-state SSR actors involved in the Deep South and how has the military cooperated with them in Deep South policy? Fourthly, given the advent of dialogue, how exactly do state security agencies in the Deep South translate the global norms of the established SSR concept and apply these to the Deep South situation, and with what effects?

## 1 THE CONCEPT OF “TRANSLATION” APPLIED TO THE THAI SECURITY ARENA

SSR can be seen – as we suggest in this research – as a “traveling model” of norms, practices, or concepts which are communicated and “translated” across different social, cultural arenas where they are then reconceptualized and locally adapted to a particular country (Merry 2006: 38). Domestic actors contest with donors and/or among themselves about how SSR is to be understood and/or implemented.

The principal goal of the majority of donors (or Western external actors) is to offer security assistance in support of their perception of SSR to local actors, mostly in line with the codified OECD catalogue (OECD 2007: 20–21). Nevertheless, “there is an emerging consensus that some degree of local ownership is a necessary if not sufficient condition for successful SSR” (Donais 2009: 124). Meanwhile the primary objective of local actors has been to obtain donor funding for security resources. Such a trade-off has often risked the possibility that the latter would only seek to pay lip service to the objectives of the external actors. However, in practice, the result is a type of transformative bargain in which external and local actors – using official language in support of SSR along the lines of presumably universalist values – carry out negotiations on the provision of security assistance and SSR which is to be transferred to the local actor. Some local actors accept SSR in the form donors intended; other local recipients accept only parts of it; and still others reject it completely. The process prods local actors to enact at least parts of the SSR agenda. In the end, SSR is either adopted as initially planned, partially adopted, re-interpreted or simply rejected – in other words: transformed (Mannitz 2014: 269–285).

The notion of translation underlines the significance of agency and a non-linear infusion of values in terms of what factors determine why different people appropriate values in different ways. According to Bruno Latour, when “localizing the global,” the translation of ideas always involves some level of “deformation” (Latour 2005: 173). This is because actor-network mediations are ensconced in a multiplicity of translations. The “deformation” alluded to by Latour can produce accidental or intentional re-interpretations of the original concept. Such reproductions are susceptible to translations across different levels of analysis. At a national level there may be one particular translation, while at a certain regional level there can be a different form of translation altogether (Latour 2005: 173). Moreover, Latour’s notion of “deformation” might be more salient at one level than another. SSR is a prime example of such a global narrative which has been communicated and translated into extremely diverse local settings. Sometimes SSR translates one way at a national level but in a different form at a regional level. Thailand is a case in point.

Thailand represents one case of a country into which SSR has been translated. Years before the 2014 coup, SSR concepts were being introduced in the country’s fledgling democracy. However, since the putsch the junta has continued to claim adherence to SSR notions. The Thai military has engaged in “Latourian deformation,” directly ruling through force while selectively communicating and translating the global norm discourse of SSR into local settings. The junta has given the notion of SSR new meanings, thus offering conceptual legitimacy to the perpetuation of direct military control. Yet at a regional level, in the Deep South, the military appears to be practicing what it preaches – adhering to more genuine security governance reforms which have replaced some of the previous iron-fisted policy there. Thailand is thus a fascinating case of deliberate deformative translation, first, because a military-dominated regime appears to feel that it must mask its activities behind SSR, which indicates the high impact in Thailand of this global norm, and secondly, because at distinct levels of analysis, the military seems to be implementing different levels of SSR translation.

With regard to methodology, this paper utilized elite interviews, participant observation, official documents and secondary literature (Thai and English). These are listed in the bibliography. The dearth of interviews results from a problem of feasibility: security considerations. First, the Thai junta has not been amenable to researchers conducting interviews about security policy in

Thailand. Secondly, insurgents themselves have not made it safe for more interviews to take place. Nevertheless, the authors travelled to Thailand's Deep South several times, conducting interviews, collecting information and sitting in meetings designed to build peace among Muslim and Buddhist participants.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 MILITARY POLICY AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM AT THAILAND'S NATIONAL LEVEL

The security sector has played a foundational and dominant role in the expansion, development and consolidation of the kingdom of Thailand. Core security actors are spearheaded by the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTArF). These include the RTArF staff itself, which acts as a formal, though ornamental, umbrella above the Royal Thai Army, the Royal Thai Navy, and the Royal Thai Air Force. The Royal Thai Army receives by far the highest proportion of the defense budget. With over 190,000 personnel, the army is the strongest part of the security sector, and the army commander has been the most powerful core security actor (Waitoolkiat/Chambers 2013: 19–23). The Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) is the smallest service in terms of manpower. The Royal Thai Navy is also much smaller than the army and has at times been at odds with the army. Outside the RTArF, the Royal Thai Police competes in size with the army (it has 230,000 personnel (Thai PBS World 2019)), but has a smaller budget and also has less security hardware such as weapons, vehicles and computers. Apart from these formal force structures, paramilitaries (rangers, border patrol police, volunteers, marine corps, etc.) stand as a more informal forward guard for the Thai state. Ultimately, Thailand boasts 335,425 active-duty military personnel and 292,000 reserve personnel, adding up to a total of 627,425 military personnel (Globalfirepower.com 2018). Varying degrees of human rights abuses, lack of transparency and accountability, corruption, insulation from elected civilian control, and inefficiency have bedeviled each of the security services (Transparency International 2015).

A second part of the security sector involves executive management actors. This area includes the Prime Minister's Office, which heads up the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), the National Security Council, the Defense Ministry, the Interior Ministry, the Justice Ministry, and the National Intelligence Agency. Since 1998, and more strongly since 2004, the Prime Minister has stood directly above the Royal Thai Police (Ratanapinsiri 2013: 510, 512). Finally, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), established in 1981, has coordinated the army, police and ministries in Thailand's Deep South.

A third part of Thailand's SSR has been legislative actors. These are the upper and lower house parliamentary committees which, under Thailand's democratic regimes, have sought to monitor the military and police, and security policy. Nevertheless, such supervision has tended to be deficient because the elected civilians involved generally lack military expertise. In addition, where committee chairs or their members are ex-security officials, they may still be biased in favor of military interests (Waitoolkiat/Chambers 2013: 68–69).

A fourth part of SSR in Thailand has involved financial actors. These include the Finance Ministry, the Bureau of the Budget, the National Economic and Social Development Board, and the State Audit Commission. Nevertheless, the armed forces possess separate funding sources (e.g. slush funds, military enterprises) which cannot be directly controlled by financial actors (Transparency International 2015).

A fifth dimension of SSR in Thailand has involved judicial and supervisory actors. Upwards of 12 such institutions are legally responsible for ruling upon cases in the area of Thailand's security sector and security forces. Nevertheless, no prosecutions by these bodies have ever led to

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<sup>1</sup> The authors are indebted to the organizations Deep South Watch and Berghof Foundation and wish to express their thanks for these institutions' assistance.

punishments for soldiers and the latest cases ended when the putsch occurred (Transparency International 2015).

A final set of actors has been civil society organizations. These include political parties such as the Democrats, NGOs such as the Lawyers Council of Thailand, the Thai Journalists Association, and research think tanks such as the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI).

## 2.1. *Before the 2014 Military Coup d'État*

### 2.1.1. *Military Policy*

Thirty-five coups and coup attempts from 1911 until 2016 and 53 years of military-dominant regimes from 1932 until 2016 bear witness to the reality that Thailand suffers from a legacy of strong military influence, while attempts by civilians to challenge such control have been only recent and rarely successful (Chambers 2013: 583–587). The years 1992 to 2001 saw the Thai military take a backseat to elected civilian rule. Nevertheless, during this period, retired General Prem Tinsulanonda, who had risen to become the head of the King's Privy Council, dominated (with the King) Thai politics (Samudavanija 1997: 56). Prem's influence in politics was arguably a continuation of military sway over Thailand, albeit an indirect variant.

In 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra was elected Prime Minister. He succeeded in partially wresting control over Thailand's security forces from Prem, establishing a faction of supporters within the military and police (McCargo/Pathmanand 2005: 134–135). He was thus able to establish elected civilian control over Thailand's security forces, although it was personalized control rather than institutionalized supremacy. In 2006, Thaksin was ousted in a military coup partly directed by Prem (Pathmanand 2008: 129). Though Thaksin remained in self-imposed exile, a pro-Thaksin political party won the December 2007 election. But in late 2008, the Constitutional Court dissolved the ruling party, paving the way for a new coalition to come together as a new government without an election. This coalition, headed by Democrat Abhisit Vechachiwa, was cobbled together through the intercession of the Privy Council and arch-Royalist military officers (Rojanaphruk 2008). In the 2011 general election, Thaksin's sister Yingluck was elected Prime Minister.

At the beginning of May 2014, Yingluck was forced from office by Thailand's Constitutional Court and her deputy Niwatthamrong Bunsongphaisan officially replaced her. But on May 20, with large-scale protests having persisted for over six months and multiple deaths and injuries, Army Commander Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha declared martial law under the authority of the 1914 Martial Law Act (Phoonphongphiphat 2014). Two days later he seized power outright.

### 2.1.2. *Security Sector Reforms Efforts*

SSR has only been implemented in a lackadaisical way in Thailand. Since 1952 there have been US-funded military/police reforms which embody two dimensions. The first is the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. A principal aim of IMET has been to educate foreign militaries "to install and maintain democratic values and protect internationally recognized human rights in their own government and military" (United States 2013). However, IMET has been hindered by insufficient US budgetary finance as well as a general, negative reception given the program by the Thai armed forces (Taw 1994: 53). In the meantime, a second US program which works with Thai security forces, Foreign Military Financing (FMF), has been introduced. FMF provides grants for the acquisition of US defense technology, hardware, and services. But obtaining such financing necessitates that Thailand's security forces "maintain support for democratically elected governments that share values similar to the United States for democracy, human rights, and regional stability" (United States 2009). Nevertheless, the United States has been reluctant to require Thai soldiers to take related classes for fear that this could "create bad" blood between the Thai military and Washington (Taw 1994: 31).



In 1999, Army Commander Gen. Surayud Chulanond, responding to international pressures, commenced military-sponsored SSR. The goal was to build smaller, credible, professional, more efficient, more capable, and more transparent armed forces over the following 10 years (Bangkok Post 1999). There was also to be a “reallocation of military spending from personnel to procurement and training” (Hänggi 2009: 11). Yet Surayud’s SSR plan faded away following the 2001 election of Thaksin Shinawatra as Prime Minister (Kocak/Kode 2014: 92).

The September 19, 2006 military coup halted all efforts at Thai SSR. Meanwhile the civilian governments ruling between 2008 and 2014 could do very little in terms of SSR (Chambers 2013: 351–352). Yingluck’s 2011–2014 government tried to distance itself from Army Commander Prayuth, relying instead on police to manage security. It also unsuccessfully attempted to appoint senior military officials based upon loyalty to Yingluck (The Nation 2011). But the May 22, 2014 putsch once again ended Thailand’s short-lived democracy.

## 2.2. *Military Rule: 2014–2019*

### 2.2.1. *Military Policy*

Army Commander General Prayuth Chan-ocha seized power on May 22, 2014. Following the putsch, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) junta attempted to establish military, economic, and political control over Thailand. Proclaiming these strategies to be necessary to bring order and efficiency back to the country (when instead they facilitated military domination), these tactics provide concrete examples of deformation. First, a Peace Maintaining Force was established to arrest and detain potential enemies of the regime. By 2015, this force had placed over 751 Thais under arbitrary arrest (Human Rights Watch 2016). By 2016, this number had grown. Secondly, military courts now became the most powerful judiciary in Thailand. Such courts involve long pre-charge and pre-trial detentions, prohibit appeals, can produce harsh sentences, and are closed to public observation. The junta also increased the number of prosecutions of persons accused of insulting the monarchy (ILAW 2015). Thirdly, the military took control over all state enterprises and boosted the number of board memberships offered to senior military brass. The regime moreover initiated weekly Friday night television addresses to the nation by Prayuth. Furthermore, the junta sponsored nationalistic programs and educational reforms (Thongnoi, July 20, 2014).

In July, the NCPO enacted a temporary constitution, Thailand’s 19<sup>th</sup>. It gave amnesty to the coup-makers (Article 48) and granted complete legal power to the junta leader (Article 44). On March 31, 2015, Article 44 was substituted for the Martial Law Act of 1914 that had been used since the coup to “legally” give the NCPO arbitrary powers over the country. Military officials were given power over all other bureaucrats, including police.

The NCPO voided democratic rights while limiting civil liberties. First, Thais have no right to elections at the national or local level. Secondly, there have been severe restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association. While political parties were not dissolved, they were forbidden to carry out any activities. Political demonstrations of five or more people were banned. The NCPO placed extensive restrictions on the media, closing press outlets that criticized its actions, blocking many internet websites, and detaining members of the media. Military personnel cancelled or monitored academic lectures, and threatened participants with detention. Each detention could last (without charge or trial) a maximum of seven days, although detentions could be repeated *ad nauseam*. During detention, soldiers sometimes (allegedly) used torture against detainees (US Department of State 2016). The junta placed Thais living abroad deemed to be critical of the regime on a list, and threatened family members in Thailand (Asia Sentinel 2016).

In April 2017, the regime published a junta-approved draft constitution. It called for a non-elected Senate, with members directly or indirectly appointed by the junta. This Senate (along with the elected Lower House of Representatives) had to approve candidates to be Prime Minister. If any amendments were to be made to this constitution, it required the assent of at least 1/3 of the junta-



appointed Senators. Post-junta governments would have to adhere to a junta-imposed Twenty Year National Strategy: veering away from the ambiguous strategy objectives could lead to the judicial dissolution of sitting governments. The draft included the possibility of an unelected Prime Minister, which could open the door to future military premiers (ICG, August 4, 2020).

By 2019 the military monopoly over Thailand (under the monarchy) was continuing and the country was preparing for elections to be held on March 24 of that year. In the run-up to the election, there were allegations of junta gerrymandering (The Nation, November 22, 2018). At the same time, commissioners overseeing monitoring agencies such as the Election Commission as well as judges on courts such as the Constitutional Court had all been appointed by the junta (Kriak-sorn, February 18, 2019). There was no surprise when proxy party Palang Pracharat won the election. Since 2019 it has led a ruling coalition with former junta leader General Prayuth Chan-ocha as Prime Minister.

### 2.2.2. *Security Sector Deformation*

So-called “SSR efforts” after the coup consist of a litany of deformations which have ideologically entrenched military control over Thailand. These deformations have proceeded precisely because the ideology of apparent SSR has been used as a rhetorical tactic by the junta to build popular acquiescence to military rule. When talking about Thai security sector “reform,” military officials endorse it in order to help Thai security forces “gain more acceptance, domestically and globally.” Interestingly, this language seems to imply that SSR, as a translatable norm across the globe, must be undertaken by Thailand to appease the “developed countries,” instead of to benefit the Thai people. The insinuation is also made that SSR values “must comply” with Thailand’s “context,” thus rationalizing any recontextualization of it by Thai security managers (Ministry of Defense 2013).

In its preferred deformative translation of SSR to Thailand’s local setting, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) military regime (and the Prayuth-led successor electoral authoritarian regime) has placed emphasis on producing stronger and more efficient security forces. The recontextualized meaning of SSR for the Thai junta is to create a powerful military which can stimulate an “awe factor” in potential enemies, both domestic and foreign (Areerat 2015). The NCPO has supported OECD-proposed SSR objectives such as enhancing effective governance in the security system, improving delivery of security and justice services, and sustaining justice and security service delivery (OECD 2007: 21). Where the regime has parted ways with this definition has been in promoting its “vernacularization”<sup>2</sup> of Thailand’s security sector reforms.

Meanwhile, Thai security force educational institutions, while seeking to promote SSR among soldiers, have only concentrated on those SSR efforts which improve military capabilities. Consequently, military education represents another type of deform. For example, in September 2014 a Thai army general from the Strategic Studies Center of the country’s armed forces gave a speech at an academic conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand entitled “Rethinking Security Sector Reform and Governance in Thailand”. He extolled the junta’s achievements in building greater capacity and efficiency as a fighting force and combating non-traditional threats such as natural disasters deriving from climate change. But when the general was questioned about when the NCPO would return power to elected civilians, he departed from the event.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, possibly as a punishment (and in another example of deformation), the junta refused to allow the sponsoring College of Law to hold another event it had planned days later.

2 Levitt and Merry define “vernacularization” as “the process of appropriation and local adoption of globally generated ideas and strategies” (Levitt/Merry 2009: 441).

3 Representative. Strategic Studies Center/Royal Thai Armed Forces, “Re-thinking the Security Sector Reform and Governance in Thailand (a paper presented at the 8th Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA) Congress),” Chiang Mai, Thailand, September 19–20, 2014.

### 3. MILITARY SECURITY POLICY IN THAILAND'S DEEP SOUTH

#### 3.1. *Until 2014*

The provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala, as well as four districts of the neighboring Songkhla province make up what is collectively referred to as Thailand's "Deep South". The region is involved in a long-running Malay-Muslim insurgency against Thai rule. Seventy-seven percent of the Deep South population is Muslim, while the remainder is Buddhist (Funston 2008: 7). Thai security forces are deeply involved in this region.

Insecurity in this region dates back to 1786, when Siam forcibly subjugated the sultanate of Patani, then quelled numerous later insurrections, and divided Patani into seven provinces, ultimately incorporating the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat into Siam in 1902, while ceding the four others to Britain in 1904 and 1909 (ICG 2005: 2). The monarchy gave the Siamese army direct control over the region in a bid to create order through force.

From 1902 until 1944, military policy involved using draconian laws and assimilation policies against the southern Malay-Muslim community. The Malay language was banned in public offices, Malay state employees were required to assume Thai names, Muslim-Malay attire was forbidden in public, and Islamic law was no longer allowed to be practiced. At the same time, statues of Buddha were placed in schools, and children were forced to bow before them (ICG 2005: 3).

But state repression simply fuelled continuing resistance in the Deep South. Thus, between 1946 and 2014, Thailand's military involved themselves in six principal reform efforts in the Deep South region. These occurred in 1946, 1980–85, 2001–04, 2009–11, 2006–07 and 2011–14, respectively. The fact that so many changes in security policy occurred illustrates its lack of sustainability over time.

In 1980–1985, Prime Minister Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda (1980) issued Order 66/2523 which – following US counterinsurgency doctrine – established that political methods would henceforth take precedence over repression when combating insurgency (carried out in the Deep South as the *Thai Romyen* policy) (Kraisoraphong 2013: 5–6), sought to improve security institutions by making them more efficient, focused on building trust with moderate Malay-Muslim leaders ("Wadah" faction), merged the objectives of Deep South state agencies, gave amnesty to former insurgents who were willing to live under Thai law, and worked more closely with Malaysia to secure the Thai-Malay border. To improve the efficiency of security forces and merge agencies working with local Deep South leaders, Prem in 1981 established Task Force CPM 43 (which coordinated security operations among civilians, police, and the military) and created the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) (ICG 2005: 11–12).

The third security reform (2001–2004), carried out by elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, saw Thailand dismantle CPM 43 and SBPAC (which Thaksin viewed as giving their loyalty to his opponent, ex-Premier and now Privy Council chairperson Prem (McCargo 2007: 39) in 2002, and place control over southern security matters in the hands of police commanders, exacerbating tensions between the army and police, while police were accused of increased human rights abuses in the south. However, the 2004 upsurge in insurgency forced Thaksin to return to relying principally on the military, issue (in March 2004) Order 68/2547 (followed by Order 260/2547 and 200/2548) to establish the Southern Border Provinces Peacebuilding Command (SBBPC) (similar to the previous SBPAC but directly controlled by the Prime Minister rather than the army) (Funston 2008: 25; Waitoolkiat/Chambers 2013: 35–39), and attempt diplomacy with representatives of five Muslim insurgent groups, as mediated by Malaysia, although the talks were unsuccessful (Bhukari 2006).

The 2006 coup-appointed regime of Gen. Surayud Chulanond implemented Thailand's fourth security reform in the Deep South, which included reestablishment of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Committee and Civil-Military-Police Task Force to coordinate security and political policies on the ground in the south, both of which were again placed under the army-

controlled ISOC, which meant that army commanders would again be in command in the Deep South. Surayud discarded Thaksin's negotiations with Deep South insurgents, partly because of the earlier peace plan's promise to establish an independent tribunal to try security officials for alleged human rights violations and at first commenced his own half-hearted peace talks (dubbed the "Geneva Process"), but when these negotiations proved futile (Bhukari 2006) the state returned to a more repressive policy in the Deep South (Jitpiromsri/McCargo 2010: 159–160).

The fifth security reform, that of civilian Prime Minister Abhisit Vechachiwa (2008–2011), included the proclamation of a new paradigm called "Politics Leading the Military", which would henceforth place elected civilians ahead of the military in terms of formulating policies to resolve the crisis in the Deep South. This policy shift led Abhisit to try to take the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) out of the control of the military, instead making it directly answerable to the Prime Minister, ostensibly to produce unified delivery of policing (although the military still managed to maintain control over Deep South policy, albeit informally) (Askew 2010: 248–249).

The last pre-2014 security reform regarding the Deep South occurred in 2011 following the election of Yingluck Shinawatra. Yingluck benefited from the proposal of her predecessor Abhisit to transfer the SBPAC from under the control of the army (ISOC Region 4 Forward Command which reported to the Army Chief) and place it under the Prime Minister. This reform – implemented in 2011 – meant that ISOC would no longer control the SBPAC's budget. However, the revamped SBPAC continued to hold less power than ISOC, given that ISOC (and the army) remained insulated from civilian control, were informally in charge of Deep South policy, and possessed a larger budget than the SBPAC.

Reviving her brother Thaksin's policy preferences, Yingluck gave the Royal Thai Police a leading role in the Deep South, through a new police-led Southern Border Provinces Problem Solving and Development Centre (SBPSPDC), designed to implement policies to quell the violence. Army Chief Prayuth was appointed deputy chairperson. Given that the police were directly under the supervision of the Office of Prime Minister (while the military was more insulated from executive control), this move could be interpreted as a security sector reform, since it increased civilian control over security forces in the Deep South (The Nation 2011).

Finally, in 2013 Yingluck's government – with reluctant support from the military – agreed to a direct dialogue with a segment of the Malay-Muslim insurgents. This agreement, facilitated by Malaysia, led to three talks, although they were eventually discontinued as the Thai government became distracted by massive opposition political demonstrations in Bangkok. The talks were also hampered by the fact that Yingluck received little cooperation in support of the negotiations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Thai Army (ISOC) or the National Intelligence Agency. Moreover, given that Yingluck's government only negotiated with one insurgent group, there was little to stop continuing attacks by other insurgent organizations (Boonpunch 2015: 121).

### 3.2. *Since 2014*

Thailand's May 22, 2014 military coup, establishment of martial law and the implementation of deformative tactics to embed long-term military influence all suggested that the 2014–2019 junta and post-2019 electoral authoritarian regime would cut short any moves toward finding peace in the Deep South, including the continuation of negotiations. The new NCPO appeared suspicious of peace talks in the region. NCPO leader Prayuth and other army officials had earlier shown little enthusiasm for the 2013 negotiations (ICG 2015: 13). Thus, the chances that the NCPO would push forward with negotiations seemed doubtful.

Yet despite the 2014 coup, the junta implemented non-deformative SSR for the Deep South involving institutional and resource changes, elite-level dialogue, support for peace initiatives at the level of civil society (including those sponsored by the Berghof Foundation), as well as

alterations in troop levels and budgeting. The changed policy seemed to be guided by a bottoms-up approach which created the impression that the NCPO had learned from the military's previous errors in focusing on repression in the region.

By mid-2015 new negotiations had begun. Indeed the military appeared to be pursuing a two-pronged policy of repressive (deformative) counterinsurgency measures amid SSR-based support for new peace talks. The junta organized 206 civil society "peace forums," which included participants "who hold different views from the state" (Benjakat 2016). However, there was an increase in army arrests and targeted raids on villages or venues deemed to be hotbeds of sympathy for the rebellion. Prayuth even ambitiously promised to end the far-south conflict by the end of 2015 (Phuket News 2014).

### 3.2.1. *Institutional and Resource Modifications*

Immediately following the 2014 coup, the new junta began implementing SSR-based alterations to state policy towards the Deep South which involved changes in institutions as well as resources (e.g. troops and budget). On May 30, 2014 the junta initiated drastic changes in Thailand's Deep South policy. First, it issued Announcement 34/2557. The decree declared that the SBPAC would be placed directly under the jurisdiction of the junta leader, voiding the 2010 law that had made the SBPAC into an independent agency. In other words, the SBPAC was placed back under the control of ISOC, as managed by the Fourth Army Command (NCPO 34/2557; INSa 2014). Then, on July 21, the NCPO enacted Announcements 96/2557 and 96/2557.

The decrees enshrined a three-level organization for dealing with the southern crisis. At the top tier of this structure was the level of policy formulation spearheaded by junta leader/Prime Minister Prayuth assisted by the National Security Council Secretary General as secretary. The second level was the tier which coordinated government strategies towards the Deep South. Such co-ordination was managed by a Steering Committee to Resolve the Protracted Southern Unrest Problem, as managed by Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan. Finally, the third level was the policy implementation tier, and it was overseen by the Fourth Army regional commander (directly in charge of the Deep South) (ICG 2015: 14; NCPO 96/2014; NCPO 98/2014). Thus, following the 2014 coup, Deep South policy was completely transferred from control by civilian administrators to military bureaucrats.

In addition to this structure, following the coup, in late July 2014 under Decree 96/2557 a new Ad Hoc Committee Structure for Extinguishing the Crisis in the Deep South (CSDS) was established. This structure, under the direct control of the Royal Thai Army Commander, was presided over by a committee and managed by a secretariat. Under the Secretariat, three organs of state coordinated different areas, working with the local civilian population. The first, ISOC, was directly responsible for coordinating the Safety in Life and Welfare Promotion Group – in other words military security. The second, the SBPAC, was tasked with overseeing four groups: justice, facilitation of understanding, education, and development/commerce in the Deep South. The third, the National Security Council, was charged with overseeing the Policy Efficiency Group and the "Searching for Exits from Divisions" Group (INSb, August 4, 2014). Through these groups, the CSDS sought to promote discussions in general; discussions about laws, discussions about politics, and discussions about reducing violence. CSDS structure was divided into three hierarchical parts. On paper, ISOC, the SBPAC and the NSC looked balanced in their CSDS authority. However, ISOC, with its control over military security in the Deep South and post-coup domination of the SBPAC and NSC, became the effective veto holder in the CSDS, enshrining military supremacy over civilian decision making in Deep South policy.

Although the Martial Law Act was lifted across the country on April 1, 2015, it was replaced with Section 44 of the 2014 interim constitution. This section grants the NCPO chief overwhelming power over Thailand. The Executive Decree for Public Administration in Emergency Situations

2005 remains in force in all districts of the three conflict-ridden provinces except for one in Pattani and four in Songkla, where the Internal Security Act 2008 is in force.

Meanwhile, the junta increased the number of combat personnel and the amount of funding for counterinsurgency in the region. Indeed, in 2015 and 2016 it increased the 60,000 troops deployed in the region to over 70,000 security forces. These included approximately 32,500 soldiers, including numerous Taharn Phran Rangers under army command as well as a small number of navy and Marine Corps officials. Included in the total were roughly 18,600 Royal Thai Police, although this number included the Border Patrol Police under Royal Thai Police control. Finally, there were exactly 9,680 *Or Sor* Volunteers, under the Ministry of the Interior (Source: ISOC 2015; 2016).

Apart from the troops just mentioned, there are two types of state militia in the Deep South. The first are the nearly 25,000 *Or Ror Bor* Village Protection Volunteers (Jitpiromsri 2013: 562–563), although exact figures remain unclear, since there is no up-to-date official state source for verifying these speculations. The other militia in the Deep South is the *Chor Ror Bor* Self-Defense Volunteers. Ultimately, each of Thailand's 2,050 villages is supposed to have 30 *Chor Ror Bor* Volunteers. While in theory this number could thus exceed 60,000 persons, in 2008 only 1,218 villages had such volunteers. Since then, no official state figures have been made available for the number of volunteer forces. As a result, we can only estimate that approximately 60,000 *Chor Ror Bor* could exist in Thailand's Deep South in 2015. Beyond these two militias there are other, smaller state militia groups, including the "Iron Lady Unit," initiated by the Queen in October 2005. This all-female militia was tasked to "train women in Pattani province in self-protection and use of firearms" (Sarosi/Sombutpoonsiri 2009: 14–15).

Despite the Thai junta's investment in additional soldiers, October 2016 saw it move to begin outsourcing principal security tasks to the local paramilitary volunteers – the *Or Sor*, *Or Ror Bor* and *Chor Ror Bor* – working alongside army officials and rangers. Twelve ranger regiments would remain in the region as would as many as 18 army battalions. However, four military battalions would be withdrawn. The rationale for this SSR – dubbed the Tung Yang Daeng model – was to increasingly localize the counterinsurgency. In the past, rebels have demonstrated a preference for attacking non-local state security officials rather than local ones (Pathan 2016; Senwong 2016). Volunteers are familiar with local terrain and are better accepted by local Malay-Muslim people than soldiers from outside the Deep South. However, rangers (and to some extent volunteers), with less training than regular soldiers, have generally committed more human rights violations than regular military officials (ICG 2007: 8, 14; Pathan 2016).

With regard to financing counterinsurgency (under the country's 2015–2021 National Security Policy), in 2016, Thailand's budget across all ministries "to douse the southern fire," which includes enhanced security infrastructure, was estimated to be 30.51 billion baht (US\$865,323,400). This marked an increase of US\$115.3 million from 2015, when the figure was estimated to be 25.68 billion baht (US\$750 million), which itself had represented an increase of approximately US\$44 million from 2014, when it was 24.15 billion baht (US\$685 million) (ICG 2015: 15, footnote 85; Bureau 2014; Bureau 2015). In fact, this figure has grown each year since the Deep South insurgency escalated in 2004. The growth of this budget coincides with a vast increase in defense spending for 2016, a major objective of which is counterinsurgency in the Deep South. Indeed, in 2016, for the first time, the Thai army and police each had an annual budget of more than 100 billion baht. For police services, the budget was 106,900,000,000 baht (see Bureau of the Budget, 2016: 205–209, 299). Within the Office of the Prime Minister, there was an increase in spending for ISOC and its related programs, most of which were also part of the counterinsurgency campaign. In 2015, the overall ISOC budget had been 8,906,478,600 Thai baht (US\$252.7 million), but in 2016 this amount grew to 10,200,971,600 Thai baht (US\$291,285,888) (Bureau 2016: 205–209, 299).

In all, from 2004 until 2016, the amount of money spent by the state to rectify the Deep South emergency totalled around 264,953,000,000 baht (US\$7,517,789,670) (INS 2016). The Deep South



insurgency during this period represented a veritable gold mine for Thai security forces in terms of increased budgetary allocations.

Aside from the budget, the Deep South counterinsurgency has also facilitated informal financial gains for military officials. These allegedly include oil smuggling, drug smuggling, human trafficking and corruption. Regarding oil smuggling, Malaysian racketeers have reportedly shipped illegal oil supplies across the Thai-Malaysian border to sell at cheaper prices in Thailand. Many Thai security officials have allegedly accepted bribes as part of the business, estimated to be worth between 50–100 billion baht annually. Some of the oil racketeers are also allegedly involved in narcotics smuggling. Oil smuggling may also have been used to fund Deep South insurgent groups (INSc, August 14, 2014). Human trafficking is another lucrative racket from which Thai security officials stationed in the Deep South have reportedly profited. According to one source, “Yala is reputed to be the heartland of human trafficking in Thailand” (Sidasathian/Morison 2015). Finally, corruption in the Thai military in the Deep South has persisted (e.g. the proliferation of “ghost soldiers” (non-existent soldiers, with salaries going to commanders)) (Transparency International 2015).

Ultimately, though military and police officials have enjoyed formal (budgetary) and informal (illicit) financial gains as a result of the unrest, at the same time most senior-level officers realize that the costs of counter insurgency are depleting the economy, and many thus want a rapid end to the insurrection.

### 3.2.2. *Military Support for Elite-Level Dialogue*

In the course of these administrative, organizational and budgetary changes, the NCPO slowly agreed to participate in a dialogue with insurgents. Only in December 2014, under prodding from the international community, did Prayuth (who sought global acceptance of the NCPO) formally agree with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak to three principles that would restart negotiations: a period of no violence before talks could commence, inclusion of all insurgent groups, and unity in rebel demands. The regime had earlier, on November 26, 2014, decreed Prime Ministerial Order 230/2557, which mandated the creation of a junta mechanism for peace dialogue.

This structure possessed three levels. At the top was a steering committee for the peace dialogue, chaired by junta leader/Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha. Under this was a peace dialogue panel, which represented the actual representatives who were to participate in talks with the insurgents. Its chair and chief negotiator was Gen. Aksara Kerdpol. Finally, at the bottom was the area-based inter-agency coordination working group, which was chaired by the Royal Thai Army Fourth Region Commander (Al-Hakim 2015a).

Then, on May 13, 2015, it was reported that six Malay-Muslim resistance groups in southern Thailand, with the assistance of Malaysia, had formed an umbrella organization called the Majilis Syura Patani (Patani Consultative Council or MARA Patani). The grouping included three PULO factions, the Barisan Islam Perberbasan Patani (BIPP), Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate (BRN) and the Gerakan Mujahideen Islami Patani (GMIP) (BenarNews, May 13, 2015). MARA Patani’s avowed purpose is to participate in peace talks with Thailand, “gain recognition and international support for the Right to Self-determination for the people of Patani,” and to maintain what all participating insurgent groups ascribed to the claim for independence (Al-Hakim 2015b). The establishment of MARA also appeared to match one requirement of the December 2014 Prayuth-Razak communiqué. MARA Patani’s expressed goal is independence for the Deep South three-province region. However, it is likely that the group would accept a form of regional autonomy from Thailand. Three months later, in early June 2015, the first in a new series of negotiations between Thailand and the insurgents MARA Patani quietly commenced in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The new round was reportedly started and backed by Prayuth himself (Kummetha, June 18, 2015).

By February 2016, it was reported that 80 to 90 percent of the Terms of References (TOR) – agreements which must precede the formal peace negotiations – had been completed (Prachatai, February 1, 2016). The junta for its part now appeared to be demonstrating that it was serious about pushing for pragmatic conciliation as part of the military's SSR in the Deep South. Then in April, Thai junta leader Prayuth transferred Gen. Nakrob Bunbuathong from his position as deputy director of ISOC Unit 5, removing him from the Thai negotiation team. Other team members were also replaced. Nakrob was the most experienced member of the Thai team, spoke the local Malay-Muslim dialect, and had been the member most deeply immersed in technical parts of the talks (Rakkanam/Yusof 2016). His transfer allegedly resulted from his tendency to appear overly moderate in meetings with MARA Patani (Bangkok Post, April 24, 2016).

Following Nakrob's ouster, the Thai junta announced that it needed to review the TOR to ensure that the negotiations complied with international law before it would allow the meetings of the Joint Working Group-Peace Dialogue Process (JWG-PDP) to continue. The regime was annoyed by MARA Patani's insistence that a ceasefire must come before any confidence-boosting measures (Prachatai, May 9, 2016).

With the dialogue temporarily suspended, violence between the state and insurgent groups intensified. In the first 10 days of August alone, insurgents engaged in 50 bomb attacks in the Deep South. Although the violence was related to the breakdown of negotiations, it was also related to the impending August 7 referendum on a new military-backed constitution. Rebels scribbled anti-constitution graffiti at locations throughout the region (Engvall 2016). The result of the referendum, though on a national level a victory at the polls for the military regime, represented an overwhelming "No" among voters in the Deep South. The rationale was probably two-fold. First, the proposed Article 67 appeared to show that the state would henceforth give priority to supporting Buddhism (The Nation 2016). Secondly, the result possibly showed that most Deep South voters did not favor a draft constitution which would establish military power until possibly 2023 – destroying the chances for people in the region to work out a negotiated settlement with a democratically elected government.

Then, only four days after the referendum, coordinated arson and bombing attacks in seven southern Thai provinces killed four people and injured 35 more. The attacks were seen by most experts to be the work of Deep South insurgents (Wheeler 2016). If so, they marked a dangerous turn toward insurgents perpetrating attacks not only in the Deep South but all across Thailand. In the post-bombings environment, Thailand's junta hardened its position, with Prayuth now demanding that insurgents first cease all violence and merge into one group before any negotiations could resume. He also said that the state would move toward imposing Thai language education in all schools in the Deep South (Prachatai, August 29, 2016). Despite this tough talk, the two sides held another round of informal talks on September 2, and came away with an agreement on a new version of the TOR. The agreement included plans to discuss regional safety zones and the unofficial continuation of the peace dialogue (Bangkok Post, September 3, 2016). The continuing negotiations show that the military is either truly interested in using dialogue to settle the Deep South crisis or it has drawn upon notions of SSR to build up a favorable domestic and international public image while simultaneously engaging in the forceful prosecution of insurrection.

In 2017, violence between insurgents and security forces continued unabated. Since 2004, the conflict has witnessed 6,400 killings and 11,500 injuries (Deep South Watch 2017). Statistics for 2014 showed that of 6,097 deaths, most were among the Muslim population. As for injuries, there were 10,908, suffered mostly by Buddhists (Jitpiromsri 2014). In late 2016, the figures for killed and wounded grew to almost 7,000 and at least 12,000, respectively (CCSCD 2016). Regarding people displaced by the Deep South conflict, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates an approximate number of 35,000 as of April 2015, although that number could be three times higher.



IDMC also estimated a 20 to 50 percent reduction in the Buddhist population and a 10 percent drop in the Malay-Muslim population from the Deep South (IDMC 2015).

Amid increased numbers of dead, wounded, and displaced persons, allegations of torture by the military have skyrocketed. In February 2016, two reports, one issued by the Muslim Attorney Center Foundation and another by the Cross Cultural Foundation, Network of Human Rights Organizations and Duay Jai Group, similarly listed a litany of army torture techniques. According to the latter report, torture has been “done systematically [...] it is destroying confidence in the structure of the state [contributing to more Malay-Muslims] joining the violent struggle” (Rojanaphruk 2016). However, instead of launching an investigation into the accusations in order to improve security force performance, Thailand’s military charged three of the authors with criminal defamation (Bangkok Post, July 26, 2016). Such an attitude suggests that the armed forces are as yet unwilling to give consideration to and respect human rights in their treatment of prisoners.

### 3.2.3. *Military Support for Internationally Backed, Non-Elite-Level Reconciliation*

Meanwhile, since the growth in state repression in the Deep South in 2004, international players such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United States, the European Union, Japan, Malaysia, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have continuously urged Thailand to reform military policy and respect the human rights of Malay-Muslims in the region (see, for example, Tansubhapol 2012). For the most part, the Thai state has forbidden international organizations from becoming involved in reducing tensions in the Deep South periphery owing to fears that the insurgency might gain more legitimacy among the international community. However, in 2013, the Yingluck government did agree to allow the low-profile Berghof Foundation to initiate a program of promoting accommodation between Muslims and Buddhists at the Deep South’s non-elite level. These efforts would permit deliberations that do not take place on a national level. Following the 2014 coup, the NCPO allowed Berghof’s program to continue. Berghof itself is an independent, internationally operating (established in Germany), non-governmental organization which “supports efforts to prevent political and social violence, and to achieve sustainable peace through conflict transformation” (Berghof 2017a).

In an interview, the Deep South representative of Berghof stated the following:

The military junta must be congratulated for committing itself to a peace dialogue with MARA Patani. Nevertheless, the junta’s policy of combining peace efforts with more military counterinsurgency is not good for building trust and confidence. But in the end how can any Deep South peace talks be successful without the participation of the military given that it has so much authority in the region? To achieve peace, Thailand’s junta (and succeeding regimes) will have to follow a multi-track policy: support from the military, Thaksin Shinawatra; support from southern NGOs, peace negotiations, and moves by politicians in parliament to realistically look for peace in the far southern region. On that last point, I want to add that talks on secession need to be decriminalized. Thai party politics should allow for the creation of political parties within southern Thailand or an election system which can boost the voice of voters in Thailand’s Deep South (Berghof representative interview, 2015; anonymized).

One strategy which Berghof has supported is *the Peace Education for Conflict Management by Local Communities in Southern Thailand*. This “Peace College” is designed to raise general awareness among local pro-peace activists about global peace initiatives.

A second strategy backed by Berghof is the *Platform of Insider Peacebuilders* (IPP). The purpose of IPP is to assemble Thai-Buddhists, Thai-Chinese, Malay-Muslims and people with different political views who are all interested in achieving peace in Thailand’s Deep South (Berghof 2017b). We attended and participated in two of the IPP sessions in which there were 38 participants and 44

participants, respectively.<sup>4</sup> We noticed that a local Thai army colonel was in attendance as a participant representing the Thai state in seeking to build bridges toward peace. He told us that either he or other army officers always attended and participated in the IPP sessions (RTA colonel interview, 2016). Despite deformative tendencies of the junta at Thailand's center, the NCPO's support for and even participation in Berghof's peace initiatives illustrates a break with past military refusal to seek Buddhist-Muslim understanding at the Deep South's non-elite level. Berghof's initiatives are thus indirectly becoming important parts of the junta's SSR strategy in the Deep South periphery.

### 3.2.4. *Analyzing Post-2014 SSR in the Deep South*

Ultimately, since the 2014 military coup, the 2014–2019 junta and its 2019-present electoral authoritarian successor seem to have followed a policy of officially functioning as a more conciliatory actor through the use of Western-originated SSR notions (except for civilian control of the military) to unobtrusively deliver security to the Deep South while unofficially continuing a repressive military strategy in the region. Through the use of more efficient institutions in the Deep South, elite-level and non-elite-level peace talks, as well as military tactics, the junta is borrowing from other models of state negotiations with ethnic armies such as the Philippine experience in Mindanao, the Indonesian experience in Aceh, and the Myanmar model of negotiations with ethnic armies – all of which used military force and negotiations accompanied by limited concessions. Such models have been praised by international SSR donors since they at least offer the chance of peaceful conflict resolution. The military even contends that it has sought to reduce its own abuses in the Deep South (e.g., corruption, human rights violations) that have inflamed local grievances, especially the grievances of the majority Malay-Muslims. The mechanisms used include military courts, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) and the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC), all of which can punish security officials found guilty of illegal mistreatment of civilians. Although the military's apparent conciliation and restraint in the Deep South could be merely a public relations ploy, it is still showing itself to be quite interested in continuing the talks as well as expanding the role of civil society in the region.

There were several likely motives behind the junta's strategy. These include, first, the influence of Prem Tinsulanonda and the monarch for an expedited Deep South solution. Second, the junta may believe that it can successfully borrow from the experiences of other militaries that have also long been engaged in counterinsurgency (e.g., Aceh, Indonesia; southern Philippines; Karen State, Myanmar). Third, the Thai junta may regard a public appearance of conciliation and its embrace of modest reforms over past repression (which to some extent reflects Western conceptions of SSR) as good public relations, both domestically and in the international community.

### 3.3. *Viewpoints of Security Officials toward Security Policy in the Deep South*

Alongside Thailand's security policy in the Deep South are the viewpoints of security actors themselves. These are significant given that it is these officials who interpret and implement state policy on the ground in the troubled region. To understand these perspectives, we interviewed representatives of the army, police and paramilitaries – the security services at the forefront of the counterinsurgency.

We first talked to senior army officials. The two are part of the senior group of military officials who oversee all armed forces operations in the Deep South and they themselves have served in the region for several years. With Gen. Poolswat nodding his head in agreement, Gen. Suwannathat told us the following:

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4 Authors attended two sessions of the Insider Peacebuilders' Platform (IPP), Berghof Foundation, held at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani, Thailand, March 26–27, 2016.

17 ministries and 65 departments are involved in resolving the counterinsurgency. The state is allocating two trillion baht to pacifying the conflict. The 2014 coup represented a change for the better in Thai Deep South policy. The coup united the Thai state with regard to Deep South policy. With the military ruling Thailand, the security sector has become more efficient in the Deep South and SSR have been rapidly implemented there. Thailand under democracy could never achieve successful results in the Deep South (Suwannathat and Poolsawad 2016).

These two generals appeared to be trying to produce a positive assessment of Thai military policy in the Deep South. They also tried to contend that the 2014 coup which ended Thai democracy was something which was quite beneficial to SSR in the region.

Secondly, we interviewed two intermediate-level army officers who wanted to stay anonymous. The two officers have worked as part of Thai military operations in the Deep South for over 10 years. The first told us the following:

Since the 2014 coup, the new Ad Hoc Committee Structure for Extinguishing the Crisis in the Deep South, CSDS, has been very helpful to peace in the region because it has been very inclusive, bringing together different functional sectors, including the grassroots, NGOs, and military. But we [Thai security forces] still suffer from obstacles that prevent us from achieving quick success in counterinsurgency. First, Thailand's tragic Red-Yellow conflict has gotten in the way of Deep South resolution. Secondly, there has been inconsistency in policy in the Deep South owing to the overrotation of 4th Region commanders. Thirdly, there is the secretive nature of the insurgents and their use of guerilla warfare makes it difficult to quickly defeat them. Fourthly, the Thai military is misapplying counterinsurgency strategy, using decades-old anti-communist counterinsurgency tactics to combat the Malay-Muslim secessionist insurgents. But in fact, the Deep South insurgents are very different than were the Thai communists. Fifthly, Thai policy-makers in the Deep South have been notoriously inept. Those army officials with any real knowledge have little voice over policy. Sixthly, there has been a lack of collaboration among state security agencies. Seventh, police stick too much to the law. That could create a problem because the law simply cannot solve the problems of the Deep South (RTA Interview 2015).

Upon the first officer's mention of the police, the second energetically jumped into the conversation to add:

Actually, there is no collaboration between the military and police. The military knows what tactics to use to pacify the insurgency but the military does not know the law. The police, on the other hand, know the law but nothing else and the two institutions can thus never successfully collaborate. The two do not talk enough so it is difficult to work together to resolve the problems of the Deep South (RTA interview 2015).

These interview partners, while presenting a positive picture of army counterinsurgency efforts in the Deep South, seemed to be very frank, critical of what they perceived as security deficiencies (especially among the police), and willing to talk at length about them. In this respect, they differed from the senior army officers whom we also interviewed. They also seemed to blame police for deficiencies but demonstrated that there are disparate voices within the security forces regarding policy in the region.

Thirdly, we interviewed two members of the Royal Thai Police, who also provided information on the condition of anonymity. One of the two has worked in the Deep South for several years; the other has only worked in the Deep South for one year. They presented a different perspective from the military interviewees. The first one spoke as follows:

[T]he duties of the police regarding security policy in the Deep South are to protect lives, welfare and property of the people in the troubled region. Moreover, police must collect evidence and prove it in investigations. The rest of the job amounts to being a facilitator in the area of justice. The annual budget for Deep South police operations in 2015 is 1,878,821,700 baht (SBPPOC 2016). The NCPO has offered more financial support than did the Yingluck government. Nevertheless, when compared to other security agencies, the budget provided for the police is proportionally smaller than that given to the military and

the Interior Ministry's Volunteers paramilitary. As for drawbacks of police budgeting, the police have few personnel actually involved in budgeting. Most police are expected to do field work, not desk work in policy and planning. So they are not trained enough to make and sustain a budget. Finally, though both the police and army suffer from corruption and lack of transparency, the fact that the Defense Ministry need not abide by the strict budgetary rules helps the military get around legal obstacles that police cannot avoid.

The second police interviewee added the following information:

Another weakness of police in the Deep South is that there has tended to be no policy consistency for police. Though the crisis suddenly grew in 2004, police have tended to adopt policies based upon short-term experiences in the Deep South rather than using any entrenched policy paradigm. Actually, army officials try to dominate Deep South policy, do not put enough effort into cooperating with police, tend to use violent repression before considering moderate state responses, and, because of this, are the second most detested security agency, after the Rangers, by most Malay-Muslims of the Deep South (RTP interview, 2015).

These two police officers were perhaps the most cynical of the security officials we interviewed, blaming the army for being too heavy-handed in the Deep South and preventing police from fulfilling their responsibility to maintain law and order. In fact, as with the intermediate-level army officers we interviewed, they offered critical assessments that the senior military officials to whom we talked did not reveal.

Finally, we turned to the perspective of paramilitary *Or Sor* (volunteers). This interviewee is a Buddhist who has served as a security official in the Deep South for several years. He was previously a paramilitary Ranger but became an *Or Sor*. The interviewee stated the following:

[T]he policy of the NCPO is much better than that of Yingluck because hers was too vague. Prayuth's policy also has more stability. Moreover, Prayuth has closely followed up the facts on the ground. Regarding policy weaknesses, the state over the years has been unable to maintain policy stability and unity. Policy stability depends mostly upon the Prime Minister but also the 4th Army Commander. There has also been a rift among state agencies, including the SBPAC, ISOC, National Security Council, the 4th Army Region headquarters and the Royal Thai Police. Regarding the paramilitary rangers, they are deficient in counter-intelligence, tend to excessively corner the enemy and are not well-liked by local Malay-Muslims. In the past, the state recruited rangers from the local population since local people know the local situation. However, now the state increasingly recruits rangers from outside the Deep South. These "non-local rangers" do not know the local situation as well as locally-recruited rangers. A major problem in the rangers has been corruption whereby local commanders sometimes create "ghost soldiers," filling out their roster of troops with more soldiers than really exist and then personally collecting excess salaries and benefits. The Black Uniformed Gentleman *Supap-burut Chut Dam* Rangers policy started in 2009. Rangers would not be so abusive or intimidating. In other words, rangers must "be gentlemen." But this change makes rangers more vulnerable to danger, creates more danger for rangers. Regarding volunteers, though they work with the military, police and rangers in the Deep South, their responsibilities are unclear. Volunteer salaries are too meager. We receive about 4,000 baht per month, forcing us to locate additional careers to supplement our salary (*Or Sor* interview 2015).

This informant appeared to be generally supportive of the state's efforts at counterinsurgency in the Deep South. His criticisms were more specific such as in terms of bureaucratic politics, malfeasance, and the need to respect human rights. The fact that his salary is so low (requiring the need for an extra job) is interesting: financial needs have compelled some paramilitary officials to perform work in private security or even in informal – sometimes illegal – labor (e.g., human trafficking).

Based upon the interviews in this study, officials from the army, police and paramilitaries, and volunteers all seem united in expressing the need to quell Thailand's Deep South insurrection as quickly as possible. However, they all admitted to continuing security sector problems in the region. At the same time, all generally expressed at least superficial support for dialogue with

insurgents. Such a mindset illustrates that, although they have enjoyed receiving funding for counterinsurgency operations, Thai security forces may have come to the realization that brute force alone is not a viable policy in the Deep South.

#### 4. MILITARY COOPERATION EFFORTS WITH DOMESTIC NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE DEEP SOUTH

Since the upsurge in violence in 2004, Thailand's military has actively promoted working with local (domestic) non-state stakeholders who are amenable to achieving a peace in the Deep South that recognizes continued sovereignty over the region by the Thai state. Such collaboration efforts intensified during the formal negotiations held by the Yingluck government in 2013, persisted after the 2014 coup and have continued under the 2019-present Prayuth Chan-ocha electoral authoritarian regime. Nevertheless, friction has sometimes occurred between the military and Deep South civil society. Actors willingly or reluctantly cooperating with the Thai government include local Muslim groups, Buddhist organizations, NGOs, journalists, academics, and politicians. Representatives from each of these stakeholders necessarily have specific perceptions of Thai security policy in the Deep South. Such standpoints were ascertained through interviews.

First, assessing local Malay-Muslims, the majority have been distrustful of security officials. The Muslim Attorney Center (MAC) in Pattani works to represent the rights of Deep South Malay-Muslims. In an interview, its leader declared the following:

Thai Malay-Muslims in the Deep South have traditionally been the victims of human rights violations by Thai state policies and the soldiers that implement them. It is the purpose of MAC to render legal assistance to Muslims detained by state authorities. Though MAC cooperates with Thai security officials, the Thai junta needs to implement SSR policies that prove to local Malay-Muslims that they can trust the military to be sincere, non-prejudicial, committed to justice and less repressive (Kohar interview, March 24, 2016).

A second group, Deep South Buddhists, has been divided with regard to how to react to the insurgency. Some, mostly older-generation locals have supported a hardline state response while other, mostly younger-generation Buddhists have advocated a more moderate policy. According to Deep South Watch, moderates are gaining influence among Buddhists in the region (Deep South Watch 2015; Jitpiromsri interview 2015).

Buddhist hardliners were disappointed at the Thai military's move toward moderation in the Deep South. These individuals stated that

Muslims always take; they never give; they are greedy; and the days of the dictatorship of Sarit Thanarat from 1958 to 1963 were good for Pattani province because the military used force to keep control [...] Since Muslims can rarely be trusted, there should be more military supervision of Muslim teachers in the Deep South (Buddhist hardliners interview, October 9, 2015).

The more moderate Deep South Buddhists seek a voice within the regional peace process. One of their representatives is Rukchart Suwan, leader of the Network of Buddhists for Peace (NBP) from Yala province. Rukchart declared in an interview that

Deep South Buddhists do not like it that the state only makes discussions with Muslims. The NBP thus seeks to give moderate Buddhists in the region a voice, informing them of their rights and the peace process. At the same time hard-line Buddhists as well as some security officials are only making it more difficult to achieve peace in the Deep South by acting with prejudice against Muslims and referring to them as bandits (Kummetha 2016; Suwan interview, March 26, 2016).

A third Deep South group, NGOs, have similarly been divided about their perceptions of security policy in the region. NGOs critical of security forces have recently accused the military of discrimination and profiling in the May 2015 implementation of a policy requiring southern Malay-Muslims to provide DNA samples via cotton swabs, fingerprints and other evidence. At a



military-NGO meeting regarding the policy, the Thai commander of the region promised that “our officials are trying to adhere to human rights principles, as well as religious guidelines, when they search for targets” (Nasueroh 2015).

This study interviewed leaders of three NGOs. The first two (interviewed together) voiced critical standpoints regarding military policy. As stated by their representatives, “the mistake of the military is that the problem in the Deep South is not a security problem. Rather, it is a problem of injustice in using natural resources, preventing participation in politics by locals, as well as censorship of identity” (Wetland Research Project interview 2013; Southern Islamic Culture Foundation interview 2013). The third NGO, “One Voice” Women’s Group, founded in 2015, is a merger of different Muslim women’s groups working to strengthen the role of women in building peace in the Deep South. The “One Voice” representative we interviewed responded as follows:

Since the 2014 coup, the military has really tried to understand the Deep South problem. The regional commander even invited us to talk with him so that he could understand our problems. The military helps people because it enforces security in the Deep South. It is very good that the military has explicitly stated that ‘women will bring peace to the Deep South.’ The military pays much more attention to “One Voice” activities than ever before (“One Voice” 2015).

A fourth group interviewed was a group of four local journalists. One of them told us the following (while the other three nodded in approval):

The traditional mentality of the Thai security state in the Deep South was to implement repression. But now, with insurgency continuing and even becoming more violent, the post-2014 coup military is coming to realize that it must move from a military strategy to a political strategy of granting real autonomy (Journalists interview 2015).

These journalists thus reflect a viewpoint that compromise is necessary to resolve the crisis in the Deep South, a view that they say the military has also come to adopt.

The fifth group interviewed was local academics. Some members of this group have been more supportive of Thai military policy than others. One such academic stated the following: “Yes, the army is sincere about negotiations – they are not just a public relations ploy.” A second academic (sitting next to the first interviewee at the time) added that, “As a result, most people are beginning to feel more secure. Generally, security sector reforms – especially the junta’s commitment to negotiations – have been positive for the Deep South (Chomaitong/Laipaporn interview 2016).

Other academics have been more critical. One such academic told us that “the crisis in the Deep South derives mainly from continuing Thai military repression of Malay-Muslim people in the region. While negotiations are useful, they must be incremental and involve input by local people. Ultimately, the state needs to create an autonomous zone for the Deep South” (Tamthai interview 2013). Another academic declared that “the state should make efforts to promote greater peace education for locals in the Deep South to create ‘peace constituencies’ and it should also create a special cabinet ministry responsible for the Deep South” (Utarasint interview 2013).

The sixth group interviewed consisted of two locally elected Muslim politicians in the Deep South at the level of subdistrict administrative organization. The first interviewee (interviewed before the 2014 coup) stated that “Thai military policy has always unfairly targeted and discriminated against Malay-Muslims in the Deep South. Moreover, the Thai state does not trust Malay-Muslims.” When asked if any Thai government had ever won over any confidence from Malay-Muslims in Thailand’s Deep South, the second interviewee, responded by saying:

Unlike the repressive military, the elected government of Yingluck Shinawatra was more compromising, she sincerely sought to connect with Thai Malay-Muslims, and also tried to give them a greater voice in Deep South affairs (politicians [anonymous] interview 2013).

In sum, domestic non-state actors in the Deep South have held alternative viewpoints on Thai security policy in the region. These standpoints can be broken down into more supportive groups

urging a few security reforms versus far more critical groups looking for reforms that are much more substantial. Most of these domestic actors (e.g., NGOs, academics, Buddhists) are themselves divided in terms of their views on military policy in the Deep South. One particularly interesting trend is the growing number of moderates among Buddhists in the Deep South who favor a peaceful solution. Except for hard-line Buddhists and Muslims, virtually all Deep South actors support the on-going negotiations between the Thai state and MARA Patani. The most prominent critics of SSR in the Deep South have urged even greater security sector reforms such as the military's adoption of more just and less repressive (deformative) policies toward Deep South Malay-Muslims, as well as greater prioritization of a negotiated settlement.

## 5 CONCLUSION: IN NEED OF REAL REFORM

Since 2014 in Thailand, a military junta and subsequent military-dominated electoral authoritarian regime have taken control of local ownership over SSR concepts and practices originated by Western democratization efforts about what is “good” security governance. Yet the junta has translated these ideas into policies primarily designed to bolster its prospects of staying in power for a long time.

Thailand today is a country in which security policy is distinguished by level of analysis: national center and Deep South regional (periphery) level. At the center, Thailand's military junta took control of Western-originated SSR notions to rationalize its seizure and perpetuation of power as well as the enlargement of its military capabilities to serve its own corporate interests and those of Thai aristocrats supporting the junta. Under the guise of SSR objectives, the “real” interests of the military are to consolidate political power, maintain legitimacy by demonstrating their guardian role of the king and Thai people, and ensure itself generous funding.

In 2021 Thailand, in the aftermath of post-2014-2019 coup policies, this kind of security sector “deform” has reversed the country's previous SSR attempts, given that the military has entrenched itself across the country. Because of the junta's tinkering with the 2017 constitution, Prayuth's government could last until 2023 or beyond. When the armed forces eventually allow a return to truly elected civilian rule, democracy will be weak and allow for a military with an enhanced deformation of enshrined powers.

Meanwhile, at the periphery level of the Deep South (where the Malay-Muslim insurgency continues), Thailand's arch-royalist military-dominated state actually applied Western-derived SSR notions to deliver security in the region less obtrusively and become a more conciliatory regional actor. This was motivated by an institutional interest in ending the region's Malay-Muslim insurgency, pressures from powerful international and domestic actors to lower tensions in the region, and a belief that it could borrow from the successful counterinsurgency experiences of other countries. Senior security officials want to end the conflict in order to enhance security and establish opportunities for development in the Deep South, put an end to the heavy investment in regional counterinsurgency which has depleted the Thai economy and comply with the King's desire to quickly end the crisis. These interests pressure the junta to move toward SSR, firstly, because the junta recognizes that the past use of repression alone has been counterproductive, and secondly, because the King can influence military policy.

In 2021, negotiations between the Thai army and representatives of insurgent groups (begun in 2015) arbitrated by Malaysia entered their seventh year. Though insurgent attacks followed by state repression have continued, the peace talks could represent an unexpected diminishing of hostilities between the two sides. Meanwhile, there have been more meetings taking place between Buddhist civil society groups and Malay-Muslim civil society groups, which have been backed by the junta. External actors such as Malaysia, the OIC and Berghof Foundation have been supportive of these efforts. The junta policy in the Deep South appears to be one which, drawing from the SSR concept (except for civilian control), formally supports negotiations with insurgents, societal reconciliation



between Malay-Muslims and Thai Buddhists, as well as more moderation. At the same time, alongside these negotiations, the Thai state is using SSR as a legitimation to call for more budget, soldiers and weapons in its informal prosecution of a repressive counterinsurgency campaign. The state's Deep South policy is rather hypocritical. Normatively shaped by professed adherence to globalized values, in practice it also continues to apply force indiscriminately as a policy instrument.

There are numerous obstacles to the Thai state's SSR efforts. First, insurgent attacks and military raids have persisted. Secondly, not all rebel groups have joined MARA, with some radicals refusing to be a part of any negotiations. Thirdly, some elements in the military do not support SSR to end the conflict (preferring repressive deformation) because the conflict has guaranteed them a steady source of financial support, such as higher military salary and illicit profits (e.g., oil smuggling). Some senior officers have shown themselves to be opposed to moderation in the Deep South. For example, junta leader Prayuth has in the past poured cold water over proposals for autonomy. Indeed, in 2011, responding to proposals for granting limited autonomy there, he declared: "Any action that may serve to undermine our strength or weaken state authority should be of concern [...]. What is important is that Thais are Thais" (Szep 2011). Such comments have given rise to fears among Malay-Muslims in the Deep South that military talk of dialogue is simply not serious. Fourthly, the instability of Thai politics over the last decade could easily deter progress in negotiations.

Meanwhile, other security sector problems are in need of reform. First, security officials are often insufficiently trained to deal with Deep South counterinsurgency issues. The result has been a knee-jerk preference for using repression rather than moderation. A second problem has been the misbehavior toward the local Malay-Muslim population by some security officials in the Deep South. Allegations of human rights violations, intimidation, discrimination and corruption have long tainted Thai bureaucrats. A third problem is that rotations of senior state officials in charge of the Deep South tend to happen so regularly that there appears to be a lack of policy durability. From 2014 until 2021, Thailand has had six army commanders and seven 4<sup>th</sup> Army commanders (and their teams), a trend in constant rotations which has hampered policy consistency. A fourth problem is the persistent clash between the army and police with regard to Deep South policy. The United States Embassy in Bangkok has referred to this rivalry as "institutionalized" (United States 2006). The army has traditionally been dominant over the region while the police exercised enormous clout there from 2001 to 2006. Fifthly, elected civilian control needs to return to Deep South policy so that it becomes accountable.

Ultimately, at the level of the Deep South, if Thai security forces sincerely seek reconciliation and peace, they need to take stock of the problems which this study has highlighted in terms of reforming the Thai security sector to better ensure the safety of the people. To achieve substantial change, reforms should be implemented based upon a genuine willingness to compromise rather than merely using masked deformation dialogue as a public relations ploy in combination with repression.

Despite the attempts by Thai authoritarian actors to control the country at the national level and dominate the Deep South, such efforts have met resistance from the very parliament which the junta allowed to be elected in 2019. The Future Forward Party (*Pak Anakot Mai*), the second largest opposition party, was adamant about diminishing the size of the defense budget and passing other military reforms. But in February 2020, the junta-appointed Constitutional Court dissolved Future Forward, leaving only its smaller successor Move Forward Party (*Pak Kao Klai*) to try to push forward its goals. Interestingly, during that same month of February, a berserk soldier went on a shooting spree, killing dozens of civilians before he himself was shot (Bangkok Post, February 9, 2020). The tragedy resulted in promises by the military to finally implement tangible SSR. Despite promises, few, if any reforms have occurred (Khaosod, October 1, 2020). Regarding the Deep South, the 2019 election saw another small party send representatives to the Lower House. The party, People's Nation (*Prachachart*), was part of the parliamentary opposition and brought up demands for reform of Thai Deep South policy during parliamentary sessions.

July–August, 2020 saw the beginning student-led demonstrations – occurring on a regular basis in urban areas. These have suddenly placed Thailand’s military and authoritarian electoral regime on the defensive. Among their demands, the protestors have called for Prime Minister Prayuth Cha-ocha’s resignation, amendments to the 2017 constitution and monarchical reforms (Nikkei, October 15, 2020). Though it remains to be seen how and to what extent such protests will compel moves toward any SSR, it must be remembered that in Thailand’s history, all actual moves toward such reform only occurred following 1946, 1973 and 1992, years in which the military had become weak as a result of gaining a tainted and tarnished image (e.g., negatively seen by the public as bloody agents of dictatorship) and was thus faced with enormous opposition from society. It is thus likely that any real SSR in Thailand at the national level and Deep South will only occur when the military feels forced to engage in reform – following extensive pressure from demonstrators. For that to happen now would represent a breakthrough in Thai SSR efforts. But in 2021, with arch-royalist elites and their armed forces agents still quite powerful, the chances that these conservative groups will resist such change through the use of force is dangerously high.

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