

# **CHAPTER III**

## **CHARACTERISING REPORTAGE ON INSURGENCY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter will attempt to characterize the three select newspapers' response to the insurgency in Southern Thailand on the basis of the following criteria:

- The prominence/location of the articles
- The representation of violence in select articles with reference to the particular subjects of religion, politics and human rights
- The role of Prime Minister Thaksin and his government in handling the Thai insurgency

The violence in Southern Thailand erupted in January 2004. Brutal incidents have left over 800 people dead and many others hurt. Eventually, the central government of Thailand declared martial law and sent over 3,000 military troops to the south. Bangkok has adopted measures to put this policy into effect in order to deal with the crisis. The Emergency Decree was approved by the Government on July 15, 2005. On July 19, the Prime Minister (Thaksin) declared a state of emergency in three southern provinces of Thailand.

#### **3.1 Prominence**

The question for this thesis is to analyze the articles in three specific papers and the ways in which they characterize this insurgency. An important process in comparing newspaper articles is to look at their prominence or where the articles were located. Prominence was operationalized in terms of story placement and length, stories on right-sided pages, stories closer to the front page and those accompanied by photographs. The

*Washington Post* ran eleven articles with no photographs attached to the stories, while the *International Herald Tribune* published twenty three stories with only five photographs in comparison with the *Asian Wall Street Journal* who published five photographs in fourteen stories. Many of the articles lacked photographs, and images of the conflict leaving the researcher no chance to visualize the conflict in real terms. The absence of photo-journalism within most of the articles left the researcher with feeling that the stories did not transform the events into human experiences that could be witnessed on the faces and expressions of people within the conflict.

Most of the articles were found in section A of the newspapers with only one article found in section B. Section A of the newspaper is the front of the paper that is visible on the front page, either by publishing the entire story on the front page or linking it to the rest of the story within the paper in other sections. Section B of the paper is stories not mentioned on the front of the paper, but stories that need to be found within the paper, only coming across them if skipping or reading through the entire newspaper. *The International Herald Tribune* placed twelve of its articles in the regional news in section B, while the majority of articles in the other two newspapers were found in the international news section usually placed on the front page of the paper. Placing the articles in regional section of the *The International Herald Tribune* paper leads the researcher to believe that readers of the newspapers viewed the conflict as a regional disturbance and not a concern for international implications. Often looking for the articles not found on the front page became a difficult task requiring the researcher to re-read newspapers for articles found in the middle of back of the newspaper.

### **3.2 Characterizing this insurgency**

This thesis is concerned with the way in which select American newspapers reported on events in Thailand, specifically the insurgency in southern Thailand. The methodology of this study was to take three major newspapers and select articles in the time period from January 2004 to July 2005. The first step was to read and then analyze

the various articles. Once this was accomplished, this researcher sought out various subjects in these specific newspapers. These subjects were religion, conflicts, politics, and human rights. These particular subjects were chosen to assist in providing a more detailed analysis on the characterization of this conflict. The choice of these particular subjects was also to research whether or not (specifically) the issues of religion and human rights entered into these characterizations.

### **3.3 Analysis : The role of religion**

An important aspect of looking at these newspapers was to determine if religion was presented as a problem in Thailand. Interestingly enough, over ninety percent (90%) of the articles mentioned either the Muslim or Buddhist religion. It is important to understand that Muslims and Buddhists lived side by side in Thailand for many years without any problems. Since the conflict many of them live in fear of each other. Therefore it is indeed valid to focus at least part of this study on the ways in which these newspapers integrated the subject of religion into their characterization of this conflict.

The news articles examined show a distinct predilection towards focusing on the religious aspects of the violence in the region. Thailand is a country whose main population is Buddhist, but that does not necessarily mean that the violence has been motivated by religious differences. From the tone and direct statements made by the majority of the articles in these three particular newspapers, there is no doubt that the insurgency is being blamed on 'Muslim terrorists' and 'Islamic extremists' along with the Thai government for heavy handling of the conflict. In addition to the issue of religion as a foundation for violence between these two groups is the fact that many in the Muslim community feel they are treated as 'second class citizens' by the Thai government. This, according to the many of the articles selected for this analysis, could be a motivating factor for the insurgency. The researcher found that the main argument being made by the Thai Muslim community is that the Thai government handling of the

situation is the cause for many of the incidents in the south along with official corruption and bad leadership.

According to journalist, Alan Sipress (*Washington Post*, Feb. 20), the history of relations between the two cultures (Muslim and Buddhist) has generally been positive. However, you can see his ideological bent right away:

The renewed campaign of violence by Islamic militants, and the Thai government's heavy-handed response, are destroying once-amicable relations between Muslims, who form the majority in southern Thailand, and the Buddhists who live in their midst. "There's a growing belief here that it's okay to kill a Buddhist. When I hear that, I become very scared," he said, speaking in a soft, anxious voice. "In the past, we lived together. What happened around here never affected our relations." But the latest campaign is fueled primarily by militant Muslims, casting the conflict in religious terms that ominously polarize the communities (*Washington Post*, Feb. 20)

Again, on October 31, Sipress (*Washington Post*) takes the stand that Muslim extremists are at the root of this problem:

Muslim insurgents pressed their campaign of shootings and machete attacks, primarily targeting police, teachers and Buddhist monks.

Sipress' style of reporting itself is a little fictionalized, if one looks closely at descriptions such as the following:

"They're scared to talk to us," said Bersa, 32, a frown settling on his full face, heavy eyebrows knitting. "The elders who have lived

here for almost 100 years say they've never seen anything like this before."

Does the reading public really need to be told that the speaker has a "full face" and "heavy eyebrows"? This kind of pseudo-realistic narrativization indicates that the facts themselves are being overlooked or deliberately disregarded in the attempt to provide 'realistic' details. This kind of reportage seems to be substituting empirical data and description for hard-hitting facts.

Similarly, Sipress seems to be representing the relationship between the Muslim minority and the rest of Thai society in terms of a deliberate dichotomy by making statements such as the following:

The renewed campaign of violence by Islamic militants, and the Thai government's heavy-handed response, are destroying once-amicable relations between Muslims, who form the majority in southern Thailand, and the Buddhists who live in their midst.

By identifying "Islamic militants" as the cause of the violence in the south, the journalist is presenting a premeditated thesis which creates probabilities out of known facts, and it is these probabilities that are being presented as hypotheses to the reading public, creating a system of unverifiable truth determined from verifiable facts—a truth which is impossible to separate from the actual facts once it has been presented to the public in the guise of journalistic narrative. It also points out the "renewed violence" is being perpetuated only by the Islamic militants and leaving the impression that the Thai authorities are dealing with the violence firmly but not renewing or encouraging the violence themselves.

Another instance of such narrativization in Sipress' article may be identified in the following passage:



Taveesak's unmistakably Chinese features make him hard to miss in the Muslim village. The villagers now greet him stiffly, if at all. As he passes, nearly the only sound is the cooing of songbirds in painted cages and his sandals crunching on gravel.

Taveesak's "unmistakably Chinese features" are highlighted, but no evidence is given to support the thesis that his looks set him apart. It is only in the journalist's narrative that the man's looks are made the possible source of his alienation from his community. It is also leaving a strong impression that the ethnic features of people are the determining factors in the attacks and that alienation, and not the religious practices of the individuals or the personal position that the member of society may hold in the community, plays no part in the targeted attacks. Leaving the researcher to believe that Sipress' is painting an ethnic conflict.

Journalist Michael Vatikiotis takes the same approach (Dec. 30, *Washington Post*). He calls for peaceful actions on the part of the Muslim community but does not say anything about the responsibility of governmental authority:

Those responsible for the violence on the Muslim side should call a halt to the wave of killings and bombings that has killed more than 580 people this year -- like the ambush that took the lives of three police officers on Songkhla Province on Monday, the day after the tragedy struck.

This passage, like the ones in Sipress' article, again builds up the polarization being created by the media in its setting up of the Thai Muslim community as being

directly responsible for the communal violence in the south. Why should a journalist use a phrase like “those responsible for the violence on the Muslim side”? If there is violence being perpetrated across two communities or between the Thai government and the Muslim community, isn't it viable to assess *both or all* in terms of the events that have ensued, rather than verbally place the blame on one of the parties involvement?

The article then moves on to platitudes that seemingly provide proof that it is making all the right assumptions:

When human tragedy on such a vast scale takes place, the world tends to pull together -- and so, it is to be hoped, will the divided communities of this region. This is not a time for countries to be hostage to feelings of national pride -- or for rebel movements to exploit the weakness of centralized authority. This is no excuse to play games of one upmanship in the region or harp on old national wounds. (*Washington Post*, Dec, 20)

While no reader can dispute the obvious truth of the necessity for communities to come together, especially during the aftermath of the Tsunami disaster, such an assertion also serves the purpose of automatically validating any earlier statements that may have been made by the writer. This kind of syllogism uses an obvious truth as an umbrella to usher in covert assumptions as well. By supporting the large truth that communities must come together to support each other after the natural disaster, the article is also allowing smaller hypotheses to make their way into its world-picture, legitimizing them by presenting them as mere details in the larger picture, whereas they are actually to be seen in terms of a different code of reality. The writer also brings in the argument that the Muslim discontent is based on pre-existing national pride or a will to bring about a sovereign nation state, without giving any evidence that this is a demand made by the

Islamic groups involved with the conflict. It would benefit the reader and the public to explain statements such as “old national wounds”, no mention is ever made in the story about the history of the conflict and the different causes of past conflicts between the Thai centralized government and the different political aspirations in the southern Thailand.

Philip Bowring’s article (Oct. 28, *International Herald Tribune*) takes a decidedly interesting tone. At first it appears as if he is going to take a more objective approach to this insurgency. He tries to connect it to Thaksin’s heavy-handed approach. However, he eventually falls back onto familiar territory and blames ‘Muslim fundamentalists’.

The West has enlisted Thailand in its war on terror, and Thaksin has been praised for his support, which has earned the offer of a free trade agreement with the United States. But his government’s actions in the south have been creating just the kind of discontent on which Muslim fundamentalism thrives, and resorting to strong-arm methods that engender terrorism and violent reaction.

Even the title of Bowring’s essay contains the phrase “Muslim discontent,” suggesting that only one community is unhappy with the situation, and that it somehow exists in isolation from the larger framework of Thai society as a whole. This deliberate marginalization of a community and its people can lead to misrepresentation of what is actually happening in the country, especially in the manner in which this information reaches the outside world through a channel of the media rather than through what are purportedly less objective mediums of information.



Whether or not this seemingly judgmental representation has any potential to actually change or influence opinions, it is the fact that it has the *potential* to do so that needs to be recognized. It is not within the purview of this study to make a qualitative or phenomenological analysis of the effect on the American public of reading such articles through such means as surveys or interviews, but it would be prudent to record here that the channels of information through which information is processed and distributed to the American public may not be entirely objective. The danger in presenting that only the Muslims suffer in the south is to ignore that all people living in the south suffer under corruption and heavy-handed approaches to dealing with the conflict, such as innocent people being killed by responses by military force's and curfews imposed on the local communities in southern Thailand.

However, in another article, Bowring (April 29, *International Herald Tribune*) demonstrated that he was willing to offer a more complete analysis of this ongoing violence between the Muslims and Buddhists of Thailand.

But when the governments of the countries concerned lay the blame for homegrown terrorism at Al Qaeda's door, they are trying to excuse their own failures. Muslim violence in southern Thailand may well result from an increase in religious identity among Muslims that is linked to international events. But it also has to do with the arrogance of Bangkok administrators and the military, and the extrajudicial methods that have flourished under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawata.

Here, Bowring begins to take an even-handed approach and analyzes the insurgency in more complete and objective tones. He sets the tone early by stating very clearly that this insurgency is unlikely to have ties to Al Qaeda. In addition, he ties the violence on the Muslim side to difficulties that are clearly not of their own making. The

fact that the aforementioned journalists are American may or may not be at the root of the ways in which they characterize this insurgency. However, there is most definitely a strong thread in these articles that clearly blames Muslim or Islamic fundamentalism as the key problem. The question is, 'how much of this characterization has to do with world fear over events such as 9/11 or the recent bombings in London, England?' As Bowring suggests, it is likely that there are other reasons for the continued violence between these two communities, but he lacks in outlining the root cause of the situation.

The paper with the clearest bias towards characterizing the insurgency as the work of Islamic fundamentalists is the *Asian Wall Street Journal*.

The following four quotes in particular lead this researcher to believe that this particular journal is somewhat invested in characterizing the insurgency in particular tones:

Already this year, car bombings and remote-control explosions triggered by cellphones have dramatically escalated what began as a local rebellion against Bangkok's decades of neglect of Thailand's Muslim-dominated southern provinces. It is now an uprising with possible al Qaeda ties that is fast becoming Southeast Asia's most serious terrorist threat. (Sept 26, 2005)

Again and again, al Qaeda has been quick to move in and exploit local grievances to further its evil purposes. Now there are alarming signs that the same pattern may be starting to repeat itself in southern Thailand, *where a previously low-level insurgency is growing in intensity and taking on a more overtly Islamist character.* (Feb 24, 2005)

But even if the bombing wasn't al Qaeda's handiwork — as it probably wasn't — *it surely was a manifestation of the same global*

*disease: fundamentalist Islam using terror to force its mores on everyone else.* And al Qaeda can recognize an opportunity when it sees one. (March 31, 2004)

From Afghanistan to Indonesia, many a front in the war on terror began as a local conflict. Again and again, al Qaeda has been quick to move in and exploit local grievances to further its evil purposes. Now there are alarming signs that the same pattern may be starting to repeat itself in southern Thailand, where a previously low-level insurgency is growing in intensity and taking on a more overtly Islamist character. (Feb. 24, 2005)

Again the question arises as to *why* would this particular journal continually characterize this insurgency in blatant tones that indicate *a possible bias* towards blaming Muslim fundamentalism. One possible explanation for this is the fact that America wields a great deal of political power and clout in the world. It is possible that a trend is developing both in international politics that is now being reflected in international journalism. That trend is to blame Islamic fundamentalists (whether they are involved or not) in any 'terrorist like' activity that involves people of Muslim background.

This could be a reasonable assumption given the following quote from the same paper:

Yesterday's carnage in Thailand, where coordinated attacks by Muslim extremists left 112 people dead, raises the question of whether the Southeast Asian country has now become the latest theater of the global war on terror. The most likely answer is yes, even if both Bangkok and Washington have until recently rejected this interpretation. (April 29, 2004)

It is difficult to pinpoint why the media *Asian Wall Street Journal* seems to be affected by the need to assign blame for the violent events taking place in the south. Granted that it is the task of the media as guardian of public knowledge to present the reading public with informed and intelligent responses to global events, the ties between “Islamic fundamentalism” in Thailand and the communal violence that resulted in the 9/11 attacks are perhaps too strong and too obvious to disregard.

Thanks to the new language of communal sectarianism created by the media, the words “extremist” and “fundamentalist” are now almost inevitably linked with the word “Muslim.” The word “Islamic” has come to become synonymous with terrorist activities. The linguistic dimension in the creation of social reality has been almost completely usurped by the media, which uses selective recording to instil certain words into the global vocabulary, until these words and phrases have become so ingrained into a society’s construction of global reality that it seems passe to even wonder where the new language is coming from. The usage of fundamentalist also leave the impression that this is a religious war against Bangkok, and that those involved in the attacks in southern Thailand are justifying the attacks on the frouds of Islamic teaching in the Koran. This would imply that certain elements in the Muslim community are participating in a Jihad or a religious quest to create a fundamentalist society which has never been proven in any of the reportage or claims made by the insurgent groups.

Phrases such as “the war on terror” remind one of the Reagan administration’s use of the cult of Star Wars to promote its nuclear program during the Cold War. When a catchy phrase is embedded almost subliminally deep within the public’s psyche, the origins of the prejudice that create such a vocabulary are lost, and invariably forgotten. When this vocabulary is, in turn, used as currency to trade in international relations and to carry out political transactions, one cannot help but reflect on the notion that when the deal is being contracted with dirty money, no possible good can result from it.

### 3.4 The role of prime minister thaksin – political analysis

Another clear message in these articles is blaming the poor judgment and improper handling of this situation by Prime Minister Thaksin. These articles take a distinctly ‘human rights approach’ and often characterize the insurgency as brutal and violent because of Thaksin’s inability to deal with it properly. He is a common target in these articles and is often described in terms of ‘exacerbating’ rather than alleviating the situation.

Irrespective of the fact that Thaksin reversed his early decision not to assist in the war on terrorism, these articles clearly take him to task for his failure to deal with this insurgency in appropriate ways. This focus gives these articles a decidedly political interpretation. However, it is difficult not to offer political motives as a partial explanation for the violence. Thaksin is the political leader of Thailand. His actions are therefore political in nature. Whether he deals with the insurgency effectively or not will also be interpreted by other countries who will comment accordingly. The ways in which various countries interpret his actions and the comments they make are very much part of the political construction of this insurgency. According to journalist, Glen Kessler (*Washington Post*, Dec. 25):

Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said in a statement that Thaksin's comment on Suu Kyi was "both reckless and dangerous, and calls into question his democratic credentials...

But, the official said, the bottom line is that Thailand has supported the invasion of Iraq, including providing troops for humanitarian tasks, and has been helpful in the war on terrorism.

Kessler’s comments lead this researcher to believe that the ‘bottom line’ for the U.S. is that even though Thailand (and Thaksin in particular) may have committed human rights abuses or not deal properly with this insurgency, all is forgiven for the fact of



helping with the 'war on terrorism'. This journalist gives a strong political interpretation to these events by hinting that the US forgives human rights issues because of the help with the war on terrorism. The U.S. government may also shy away from taking a hard line in infractions with human rights within the war on terrorism, especially not wanting to draw attention to its own failures in protecting human rights for example holding hundreds of suspected terrorists indefinitely without charging them or right to counsel at Guantanamo, Cuba.

A December 1 Editorial (*Washington Post*) also blames Thaksin for dealing with this issue poorly. However, there is no statement or indication that he is being rebuked by the U.S. for his behavior in these matters.

The story behind the deaths is disturbing, too. Thailand for decades has been one of the stronger democracies in the region, but its current strongman prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, is leading the nation backward. He has strong-armed the media, intimidated opponents and sanctioned massive extrajudicial killings of supposed drug dealers. Now he is inflaming Muslim separatism in southern Thailand with brutal repression.

An interesting aspect of this quote is the phrase 'Muslim separatism'. It would have been valuable, perhaps even more insightful, had this journalist explored the matter of why these separatists feel so strongly that they must resort to violent acts in order to call attention to their cause, providing evidence that this is a Muslim separatist movement.

Journalist, Alan Sipress (December 1, *Washington Post*) reports on international concern over Thaksin's behavior:

The violence has stoked the anger of people in three southern Muslim provinces who have long complained of harsh tactics and discrimination by the ... Thaksin has been criticized by local organizations and human rights groups for heavy-handed actions in his response to violence in the Muslim portion of this predominantly Buddhist country.

These are interesting comments by Sipress and represent a slightly more objective article on his part than those previously quoted in this thesis. He, at least, gives mention (albeit brief) of the concern by the Muslim community that they long been discriminated against. However, Sipress seems unwilling to go the distance here and provide his readers with a more detailed and insightful analysis. As a reader, I must ask why this journalist recognizes the complaint by the Muslim community but does not elucidate on this issue. This would have been the perfect moment for him to provide a more in-depth analysis of the situation. Although his article is sharply critical of Thakin, the outstanding question is why he did not analyze what may be at the heart of this insurgency, the feeling by the Muslim community that they are discriminated against and cannot seem to gain the equality they desire. Sipress also had an opportunity to explore whether or not this concern by the Muslim community is in fact valid or not. Thus, as a reader, I am left wondering why he chose not to analyze this key issues and the root causes.

In another article, also by Sipress (in cooperation with Special correspondent Somporn Panyastianpong), he again provides small insights into the problem but does not seem to want to go further (October 28, *Washington Post*):

Thaksin has been accused repeatedly of using excessive force in dealing with unrest in the south. About 4 percent of Thailand's 65 million people are Muslim. They have complained about chronic poverty and discrimination in the predominantly Buddhist country.

The same question arises regarding this article. Given the previous articles by Sipress, this researcher wonders if this journalist seeks to offer an explanation which would satisfy the ways in which the U.S. *would like* to characterize this insurgency. It is no secret that President George W. Bush has stated numerous times; 'you're either with us, or you're against us'. For an American journalist to consider offering a positive picture of Thailand's Muslim community and actually seek to find the *root causes* of this insurgency might actually go against the ways in which American political powers view the international Muslim community. This would also be the perfect time to explore how Thai Buddhist have suffered under the same circumstances to bring the public into possible discourse for the true nature of the conflict and yield some possible solutions for the conflict. As a reader I am also left with the feeling that only the Muslim suffer in the south and that Thai Buddhist are either immune to the problems or don't face the same kind of social economic struggles. It is interesting to note that none of the articles elicit personal statements from Thai Buddhist about how they view the management of the southern regions in Thailand.

On May 27, 2005, journalist, Philip Bowring published a significant piece in the *International Herald Tribune*. In his article, he clearly tries to distinguish fact from fiction with regard to the insurgency:

Tragic events in three southern provinces over the past three years must be seen not as connected to the Sept. 11 attacks or to Osama

bin Laden or even to Jamaah Islamiyah, supposedly Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian arm. This upsurge, the ICG emphatically says, stems from the lethal combination of the past 103 years of history and the policies that the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra followed in the south after it came to power in Bangkok in 2001. Indeed, it is scathing of Thai attempts to blame the troubles on foreigners, and while there were links to Muslim radicals elsewhere, these have not played any role in the violence.

Here Bowring is clear that there is no connection to the events of 9/11 or Al Qaeda. He clearly tries to emphasize that the insurgency is very much a political event and not an attempt by Islamic fundamentalists devoted to terrorism. His emphasis on the events of the past as leading to this event is clearly important.

In the same paper, journalist, Nick Cumming-Bruce also tries to connect the events of the insurgency to a broader political problem:

Thaksin's tactics have helped to draw international attention to the conflict. After the deaths at Tak Bai, Thaksin outraged Muslims across the region by saying that the authorities had done nothing wrong and that the protesters had died because they had been weakened by fasting ...a senior Southeast Asian official [who] spoke on the condition of anonymity. 'He does not fill us with great confidence. I'm not sure he [Thaksin] understands the complexity of the problem.'

This analysis appears to also place tremendous responsibility on Thaksin's government for ignoring the true problem – the long years of discrimination and then using the situation to blame international terrorism.

In many ways, these articles also characterize Thailand as a country clearly trying to be a democratic country. While the problem is being reported on, the questions for this thesis is how do these articles characterize the insurgency. Clearly, the majority of them are trying to define or characterize this problem in terms of a religious problem – that is, an Islamic insurgency prompted by the same, or similar, fundamentalist network that was responsible for terrorist attacks in the Western world. In a limited way, that definition is true. However, it must be recognized that if the conflict was only a religious one, then the insurgents would only be targeting people who are Buddhists. The articles also leave out an important element to the crisis in the South and that is whether the mismanagement of southern region in Thailand has shared experiences between the Muslim and Buddhist communities. All of the articles are missing direct quotes and statements from the insurgent element, leaving the reader to form opinions made by Thai officials, allowing the government the opportunity to define the conflict as they perceive it, avoiding the root causes and true nature of why it is continuing.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The majority of articles were found in section A of the newspaper, giving the importance of the U.S. public interest in Muslim influenced terrorism. It is probably easy to try and characterize this as a religious-based insurgency and fall back on tired analyses that this is all about Islamic fundamentalism – once again they're trying to terrorize people, only this time in Thailand. However, as at least one journalist tried to point out (Philip Bowring), this insurgency is about much more than that. The Muslims in Thailand obviously feel strongly about a long history of discrimination in the country. They are frustrated with high levels of unemployment and systemic poverty. While violence is



hardly an effective answer, it may be that they feel they have to the point where there is no other reasonable solution for them. The analysis that is clearly missing here is how the Muslim community feels about this insurgency and why it's taking place, along with the views shared among Thai Buddhist in the ways in which the government is dealing with the conflict. While journalists are not required to propose solutions to public crises, there is a clear need for newspapers to investigate the roots of this insurgency and that is clearly missing, and to provide adequate and accurate representation of this difficult situation to international audiences. It may be that they will discover much more than they had originally intended. Instead, the majority of journalists (at least for these three newspapers) are using this insurgency to regurgitate the old line that people of Islamic background only want to terrorize others, or are fighting based on Islamic fundamentalist reasons.

However, many of the journalists have hit on a key point – that of the ineffective government of Prime Minister Thaksin. Another question arises out of this: why is he dealing with the Muslim insurgents in such a heavy-handed way rather than dealing with the root cause of the problem? One possible answer is that he has his own agenda and part of it is clearly the need and desire to appease the U.S. and appear as its ally, appease the majority of his constituents to remain in power. Thaksin has previously tried to balk against helping the U.S. but quickly changed his mind. He is striving hard to appear as the leader of a purely democratic country, a value which the U.S. will obviously appreciate.

Without a doubt, the insurgency is complicated. A long and difficult history has somehow propelled the Muslim community into violent action. There is a great need to understand this insurgency from more than one perspective – analyze its root causes and try to work towards a proactive, positive solution. While this remains a political concern that must eventually be worked out by governmental authorities, newspapers can ensure that they do not take any overt stances in this regard, but rather try and present the picture as objectively as possible to their audiences.