

From Winning Hearts and Minds to Whacking Them in Outhouses: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Policy across East and South Asia

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Andrea M. Lopez
Susquehanna University
Department of Political Science
Selinsgrove, PA 17870
USA
lopez@susqu.edu

Steven F. Jackson¹
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Department of Political Science
Indiana, PA 15705
USA
sjackson@iup.edu

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Introduction

While the war in Syria and attacks by ISIL supporters in Europe and the US capture western headlines, insurgencies and terrorist attacks continue across Asia and the Pacific. How countries have confronted current and recent militant groups has varied from the relatively population-centric approach by the Philippines government against Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to the scorched-earth approach by other countries. While the strategies adopted have an effect on governments' ability to defeat rebels and terrorists, the choices made by countries in dealing with domestic threats also have wider implications to peace and stability in the region. Myanmar' targeting of rebels has raised tensions with China, most notably when Chinese civilians were bombed. How Thailand deals with Malay-Muslim separatists affects its relations with its southern neighbor. To discuss the effects of such policy on regional stability, this paper provides a brief survey of recent counterinsurgency and counterterrorism practices in East and Southeast Asia. It places these policies along a spectrum from approaches focused on building legitimacy to efforts focused on military defeat of rebel groups and examines links between such policies and relations with neighbors. The survey is not comprehensive but focuses on some of the primary examples of counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism policy types.

The risk of regional instability from civil wars and insurgencies², particularly those denoted by ethnicity, has long been recognized (See, for example, Deutsch 1964). In examples

² In its counterinsurgency manual, the US military defines insurgency as “an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government...while increasing insurgent control” (US Department of the Army 2006, 1-2). This is the definition being used in this paper. While we

of diffusion, refugee flows and armed insurgents seeking safe haven can destabilize neighboring states. The appearance of political success by groups in one country can encourage groups elsewhere. Ongoing conflicts can also encourage escalation, military intervention by neighbors for a variety of reasons, including the protection of co-ethnics or to achieve the irredentist goal of reunification. Ethnic conflicts in particular, with their easy appeal to emotion, provide the possibility for diversionary wars. Lastly, internal conflicts also provide the opportunity to prey upon a seemingly weakened neighbor (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 25-31; Saideman and Jenne 2009, 260-273).

Countries are likely to respond to events in their neighbors. When a country cracks down on rebel groups, the approach taken (and its degree of success) may create a number of effects likely to lead to reactions from other states. In part, those effects may present the aforementioned risk of diffusion, where unintended consequences of the conflict can engulf a neighbor. Policies that result in refugee flows into a neighbor are likely to be met with opposition. In other cases, the strategy undertaken by the war-torn country can heighten demands to protect co-ethnics and raise the risk of intervention on their behalf. Human rights violations may galvanize domestic opposition, notably in democracies.

This paper provides an overview of ongoing insurgencies in South and East Asia and discusses ways in which they have and, based on theory and other examples in the region, may affect regional stability. In the next section, we will provide a brief overview of differing counterinsurgency approaches. We will then give a survey of current counterinsurgencies from Asia, briefly categorizing how countries engage in opposing domestic rebel movements. Following that, we will discuss ways in which those practices—and other aspects of the

recognize they have different meanings, for purposes of ease, terms like guerrilla, insurgent, and rebel are used interchangeably.

insurgencies have affected the foreign relations and regional stability of Asia. Lastly, we will discuss how the rise of Islamist groups linked to al Qaeda and ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), may affect relations among the countries of the region.

The Options: Counterinsurgency Strategies

States can respond in several ways to violence from rebel groups. While they can simply accede to demands for autonomy, independence, control of the government, or significant reforms, they can give concessions, they can also engage, at the simplest level, in one of three ways of countering the insurgency: population-centric, draining-the-sea, and counter-terrorism.

Population-centric, sometimes referred to as winning hearts and minds (WHAM), and draining-the-sea approaches are both premised on the idea that insurgents must be separated from one of their key sources of support: the population. It is the population that (primarily) provides the rebels with recruits, with material support, and with intelligence. Cut off the insurgents from their support, and the guerrillas are “like the fish out of its native element”; without the water in which they swim, the fish will die (Mao 1961, 93). Where the approaches differ is the question of *how* to accomplish this separation. Advocates of population-centric approaches argue that the best way to achieve this separation is to focus primarily on the political aspects of the war. Provision of good governance, services, and jobs to the population are essential aspects to winning a counterinsurgency; these will result in a government that is seen as legitimate, as one that the population *chooses* to follow. The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual (FM 3-24) states that legitimacy yields a government that “is inherently stable” (1-115). Similarly, the British Army Field Manual *Countering Insurgency*, released in October 2009, notes that “Counterinsurgency is warfare; it is distinctly political, not primarily military” (British Army 1-1).

This does not suggest, however, that military factors are unimportant. Both the US and UK doctrines emphasize the fact that this is warfare and that force is necessary. Indeed, the first role of a government is providing security to its population. Without security, the people cannot trust that the government will protect them from revenge-seeking rebels. Without security, there is no opportunity for economic or political development. Military force, however, must be minimized and selective, recognizing that too much force risks “jeopardising public tolerance of its effects” (British Army 3-28). The use of indiscriminate violence or collective punishment can alienate the very public the government is hoping to win over. Seeing themselves become targets of the government, the people may turn to the insurgents for protection. Deaths of friends and family and destruction of property can lead people to actively support the guerrillas to get revenge (Lynn 2005; Thompson 1969, 41). Violence, therefore, while it is necessary, is best applied carefully, discriminating between insurgent and noncombatant citizen in order to clear and hold a territory.

In order to best apply that violence, though, intelligence is essential. Knowing where and against whom to target strikes relies heavily on information drawn from the populace. In the short term, an understanding of local culture, of language, and practice is essential to securing that intelligence, according to population-centric advocates. In the longer-term, understanding the local environment is needed to create development and aid programs and governance structures that are appropriate to the people of the area and will therefore enhance the government’s legitimacy (Cline 2015, 152; Ucko 2013).

Practitioners of the draining-the-sea (DtS) approach agree with the WHAM advocates that the population is central to quelling a rebellion. Draining-the-sea approaches instead treat the population not as a group to be won over but one to be cowed or simply removed from the

area. Whereas WHAM enthusiasts often argue the majority of the population has flexible loyalties, those engaged in DtS see loyalties as more fixed: ethnicity, religion, and family, among other factors, mean people will not simply shift their support from insurgent to government and back. Instead, the best way to compel possible supporters of rebels is through fear. Mass deportations, restrictions of movement of entire populations, collective punishment, and intentional killings of civilians are hallmarks of such strategies (Downes 2007; Paul, et al. 2016, 1023; Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay 2004).

Like the draining-the-sea approach, the “whack-a-mole” approach is enemy-centric, focusing on the insurgents and arguing that military force takes precedence over governance and economic development. Unlike either the draining-the-sea or the population-centric approach, it is seen as a strategy requiring relatively limited manpower and resources. Largely ignoring the population, the approach focuses purely on the insurgents, seeking to engage in targeted military strikes against rebel forces including decapitation strikes and efforts to cut off sources of finance and weapons. The approach is akin to a classical counterterrorism approach, in which the aim is to capture or kill the terrorists and dismantle their networks (Kilcullen 2009, xv) It is both a tool of the weak (Cline 2015, 155), but also one useful when there is perceived to be little support for the rebels among the population; there is no need to build legitimacy if the government is already seen as the preferred option and widespread repression is likely to empower, not weaken the rebels.

These three options—population-centric, draining-the-sea, and counterterrorism—are oversimplifications (see, for example, Paul, et al. 2016). Within each model, there is a great variation in how states may approach the insurgency. They are not exclusive categories,³ but are

³ This is perhaps best exemplified by Vladimir Putin’s 1999 statement, “We will pursue the terrorists everywhere, if we catch them in the toilet, we’ll whack them in the outhouse”, suggesting both the targeted hunt for terrorists, but

instead best considered along a series of spectra. Nor do countries adopt a single dominant model and pursue it throughout a conflict. As governments change, as the situation on the ground changes, and as military and civilian governmental organizations learn what does and does not work, approaches change. Moreover, these three categories ignore the many other options that states have, including decisions to develop local militias, to offer amnesty to rebels, and to pursue negotiations with them.

Choices Made: State Approaches to Countering Insurgencies

Nonetheless, the simplistic approach is useful in categorizing how, broadly writ, a state approaches an insurgency. How states approach their opponents is likely to have broader effects. DtS approaches are likely to create large(r) refugee flows and claims of human rights violations.

There are a number of insurgencies ongoing in South and East Asia currently. Excluding Afghanistan,⁴ there are at least six countries facing a variety of insurgencies. Others are facing lower-level terrorism threats. In this section, we will give a brief overview of each of the ongoing situations in the six states, focusing our attention on how the state is countering the insurgency.

Thailand

Thailand, a country that is overwhelmingly Buddhist in its religion and Thai in its ethnicity, has long had a problem along its southern border with peninsular Malaysia. In December 2001, a Malay-Muslim separatist insurgency in southern Thailand that had largely

also the collective punishment approach that was used in the second Chechen war. The full quote (as reported by BBC (2011); other versions vary slightly), "Мы будем преследовать террористов везде: в аэропорту - в аэропорту, значит, вы уж меня извините, в туалете поймаем - мы и в сортире их замочим, в конце концов. Все, вопрос закрыт окончательно". For an interesting discussion on the meanings and derivation of в сортире их замочим ("whack them in the outhouse"), see Camus (2006).

⁴ Afghanistan is excluded here as much of its counterinsurgency has been directed and conducted by the United States and allied forces. While it is acknowledged that the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police have taken the lead in recent years, we chose not to focus on such an internationalized conflict which has been well-covered by other analysts.

died out in the 1980s, again emerged. In the three southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani, violence peaked in mid-2007, but the government in Bangkok responded, sending more than 60,000 security forces into the region. Violence then declined in 2008, stabilized until 2014, and declined further in 2014, after the military coup in Bangkok. However, by 2015, levels of violence increased (Abuza 2015, 8). By September 2016, more than 6,670 people had died in the conflict (ICG “Southern Thailand” 2016; 3, 8). Unlike in earlier years, there does not appear to be a defined set of rebel groups; instead, an “amalgam of militants drawn from the decimated ranks” of several earlier groups (Chalk 2008, 10) Figure 1 shows a map of southern Thailand:

Fig. 1 — Map of Southern Thailand



By en:User:Adam Carr - Own work, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1440056>

Since the late 1990s, Thai security forces have not pursued a population-centric approach to counterinsurgency. During that decade, the Thai government pledged to improve funding for

occupational training for local Malays; it also worked through the Southern Borders Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), to educate bureaucrats and security officials in cultural awareness and the local language. The body, originally created in 1981, was also used to formulate policies for lessening the conflict. However, while violence decreased in the 1990s, the government failed to improve the economic situation in the south or to increase Malay-Muslim participation in either government or business and in 2001, Prime Minister Thaksin dismantled the SBPAC and transferred security responsibilities to the police who were considered more heavy-handed than the Thai army (Chalk 2008, 9).

As of 2004, the Thai government treated the uprising as an insurgency, deploying 24,000 personnel to the south. The military approach built fear and resentment among the population, after storming a revered Islamic religious site, the Krue Se mosque in April 2004, and firing upon protestors later that year; 78 of the 1300 demonstrators who were subsequently rounded up died of asphyxiation during transportation to a detention camp. This was not accompanied by efforts to address the political, social, and economic causes of the conflict; the government paid “scant attention to educational, cultural, and economic initiatives that could build community trust.” (Chalk 2008, 17-19; see also Kurlantzick 2016, 4).

Under Yingluck Shinawatra (Prime Minister 2011-2014, sister of Thaksin, who had been ousted in a September 2006 coup d'état), there were hints of change; she relaunched the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center, appointed a new body to coordinate ministries' activities in the three southern provinces, and agreed to talks with the insurgents. “For the first time, a Thai government admitted that the conflict in the south had political and cultural roots, that it was not simply a battle against bandits or militants with no real grievances” (Kurlantzick 2016, 7).

After the May 2014 coup, the armed forces cracked down on political dissent across the country, leading to little room for southern insurgent groups to pursue nonviolent paths to achieve their goals (Kurlantzick 2016, 1; ICG “Southern Thailand” 2016, 16). Rebel groups, in turn, increased attacks. The main rebel group, the BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani) moreover, has boycotted the talks and the government itself seems uninterested in achieving peace through negotiations (ICG “Southern Thailand” 2016, 1-2).

Philippines

As with several of the states in Asia, the Philippines have and are facing a variety of insurgencies. The Philippines are facing a continued communist insurgency through the Communist People’s Party-the New People’s Army (NPA); the ethno-separatist movements on Mindanao island represented by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); and Islamist movements, including the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and, most recently, the Maute group, which is loyal to ISIS. Figure 2 shows a map of the Philippines and the southern island of Mindanao.

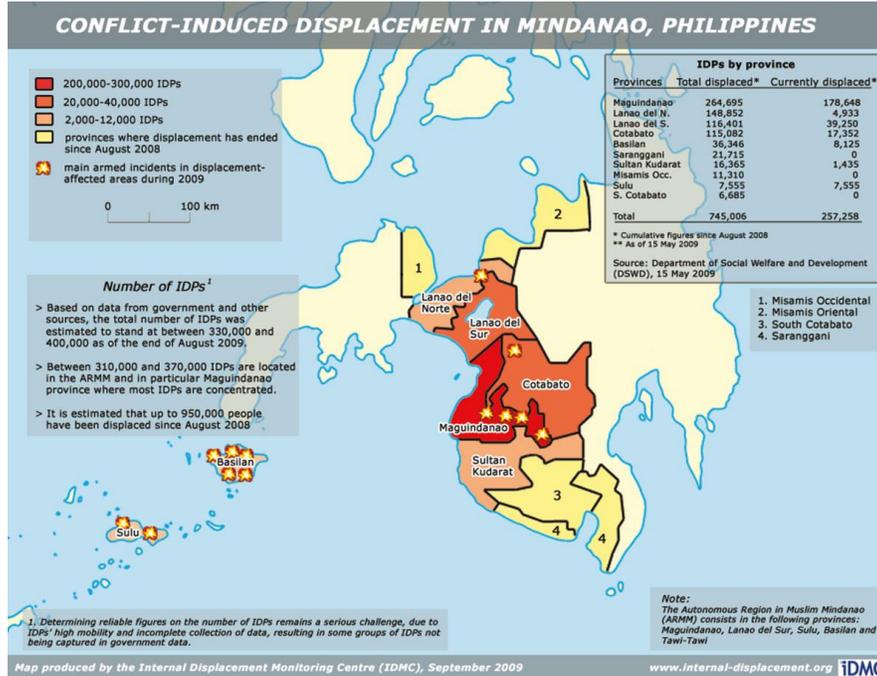
Fig. 2 — Map of the Philippines



Source: University of Hawai'i.

A closer view of the situation on Mindanao can be seen in Figure 3:

Fig. 3 — Map of Conflict Displacement in Mindanao



Counterinsurgency in the Philippines shifted from a clearly enemy-centric approach during the Marcos regime to one increasingly focused on the population. After he was deposed in February 1986 “People Power Revolution,” there was an increased focus on negotiations with rebel groups by the new Corazon Aquino administration; there was also an increasing focus on civilian protection and promises of land reform from the government (Fowler 2011, 9-10). This combination of approaches succeeded; in 1996, the government in Manila signed a truce with MNLF in exchange for Moro autonomy.

Until the end of 2010, however, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) emphasized conventional operations and had been widely accused of widespread human rights violations and a failure to discern between armed insurgents and others (Conde 2009). In late 2010, however, the government of Benigno Aquino (Corazon’s son) announced a shift from the previous “Oplan Bantay Laya” to the new plan, “Bayanihan”. Whereas the previous plan had emphasized military operations, particularly against communist insurgents, and had been associated with a

wave of extra-judicial killings, the new plan instead emphasized economic development and a “people-centered” approach. (Rulz 2010; see also Michaels 2011, Zenn 2010). The new plan was explicitly anchored in the “People-Centered Security/Human Security Approach” and argued that the “primary objective of AFP internal security operations shall be *Winning the Peace* rather than simply defeating the enemy” (Armed Forces of the Philippines 2010; vi, 24 italics in original).

Such a practice had been followed in the government’s fight against Abu Sayyaf since the early 2000s; the armed forces employed a combination of offensive strikes, successfully killing several leaders, and “security at the village level”, working with US advisors and civil-affairs teams to provide services and build infrastructure, including roads. The legitimacy this helped establish further enhanced the armed forces’ ability to identify and target Abu Sayyaf forces (Fowler 2011, 10).

The Maute group, like most of the others discussed, is active on Mindanao, was formed in 2012, but was not widely known until attacks in Marawi and Davao in 2016. In 2015, it pledged allegiance to ISIS and has linkages to Abu Sayyaf, MILF, and JI (Head 2017). In May 2017, the government launched a strike to capture Isnilon Hapilon, a commander of the faction of Abu Sayyaf that had declared allegiance to ISIS, and he called on the Maute groups to assist him, and the Maute have since engaged the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Marawi, a city of 200,000 in northern Mindanao. The government has declared martial law in Mindanao and engaged in air strikes to try to clear the city, in what has become an enemy-centric, conventional conflict against a foe engaged in trying to hold fixed positions.

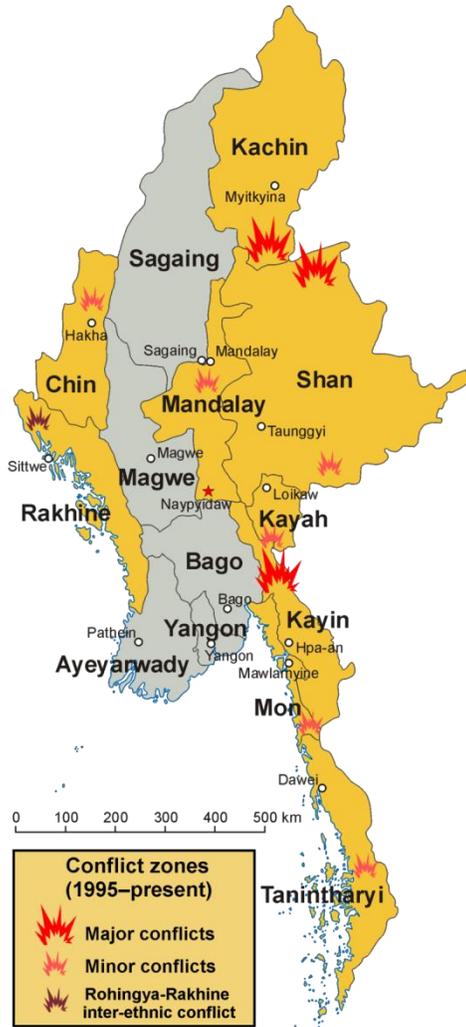
*Myanmar*⁵

Myanmar faces insurgencies from twenty different ethnic rebel groups, including the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in Kokang, all in Shan State. The newest insurgency, arising among the group of Muslims in Rakhine State known as the Rohingya, is fronted by a group referring to itself as Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY or the Faith Movement).

Figure 4 shows the locations of the different conflicts.

⁵ Myanmar was known internationally as Burma prior to 1989. The US and many other western governments have continued to use the term “Burma” in official statements because of the authoritarian nature of the government there after 1989, but the distinction is not as clear-cut in Burmese/Myanmarese, where the two terms are actually closely related linguistically and historically both have been used. See Owen 2005, xx-xxi.

Fig. 4 — Myanmar Conflicts



Source: By CentreLeftRight, Aoetearoa - The information displayed is courtesy of documentation by the Free Burma Rangers., CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=48610530>

Against the HaY,

“The military has indicated it is conducting ‘area clearance operations’ across a section of northern Maungdaw township, which it has sealed off. On the basis of reports from the authorities and non-government sources, it appears to be using something akin to its standard counter-insurgency “four cuts” strategy developed in the 1960s to cut off rebel forces from their four main support sources (food, funds, intelligence, recruits) and largely unchanged since. It involves cordoning

off territory for concentrated operations, a “calculated policy of terror” to force populations to move, destruction of villages in sensitive areas and confiscation or destruction of food stocks that could support insurgents” (ICG “Myanmar...” 2016, 7).

Four months after the military operation began in October 2016, the Myanmar government announced it had ended. In that time, more than 1,000 Rohingya Muslims had been killed, another 70,000 fled to Bangladesh, and 20,000 were internally displaced, according to UN estimates (“Myanmar Military...” 2017). A February 2017 UN report, based on interviews of Rohingya who had fled to Bangladesh, noted that the attacks against the population “seems to have been widespread as well as systematic”; satellite imagery, coupled with the testimonials “indicate clearly that the security forces have deliberately targeted the entire Rohingya population in the area, instead of investigating those who may have been linked to the 9 October attacks” (UN 2017, 41-2).

As suggested by the quote above, the enemy-centric, draining-the-sea approach by the Burmese army is not new; nor is it utilized only against the Rohingya. In August 2016, the government launched a major conventional offensive against the KIA which had resumed attacks in 2011, after a seventeen-year cease fire collapsed. The operation, intended to take the mountain Gidon from Kachin control, included mortar and artillery fire, and attacks by fighter jets and helicopter gunships (Vrieze 2016, Vrieze and Yang 2016).

In November, three other armies, including the Ta’ang and Kotang, mentioned above, joined with the KIA to attack army and police stations in Shan state near the border with China (Vrieze and Yang 2016). More than 3,000 fled to China as an outcome of the fighting between the government and rebels in Shan. Shells fell in Wanding, an important border crossing, lightly damaging on Chinese government building and injuring one Chinese resident (Blanchard 2016).

Needless to say, the Chinese government was not happy about this, but it continues to be the government's primary weapons supplier. From 2004 to 2015 it transferred no less than \$1.478 billion to the military authorities in Yangon, with Russia coming in second with \$1.22 billion. Interestingly, and not at all noted in the international press, the Chinese supplies to the government expanded greatly after democratic elections there in 2012 (SIPRI ATD Tables 2017).

China

China's only significant insurgency is in Xinjiang. The security of the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang (新疆维吾尔自治区, the official name of the province-level political unit) is core to China's relations with its Central Asian neighbors, Russia, and much of China's foreign relations in general. As its name implies, Xinjiang is traditionally populated by Uighurs, a Sunni Muslim Turkic-speaking people. It has been defined as a "Core national interest" by China.

Fig. 5 — Map of Xinjiang



Source: Microsoft

The war in Afghanistan has attracted a number of ethnic Uighurs to the fighting, and a number were captured in the fighting there in 2001-2006 (Wayne 2009, 250). The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM, the acronym used internationally for the organization), an off-shoot of al Qaeda, has taken responsibility for many of the attacks in China, cooperates closely with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Fortunately for China, the Central Asian republics all openly oppose this and other movements described as “the three evils: terrorism, separatism and religious extremism,” and compared to the Afghan and Pakistani governments, see the threat of Islamist terrorist organizations as a serious common threat.

The Chinese approach to the problem of Xinjiang is multi-faceted. The Chinese government takes great pains to discuss the improvements in the standard of living in Xinjiang, reduction of unemployment, increase in disposable per-capita income, educational improvements including bilingual education, public health provisions, social security, poverty alleviation and all of the other areas normally associated with “population-centric” approaches to insurgency and terrorism (State Council 2015). There is no doubt that the Chinese Communist Party and government consider these to be major improvements. Whether local Uighurs appreciate them is another question, and much more difficult to answer, given media restrictions in Xinjiang. Those reports coming out of Xinjiang paint a less harmonious picture, in which Han Chinese receive preference in employment, and Uighurs are excluded from security positions, cannot obtain passports, cannot grow beards, wear veils, attend mosques as minors, experience cuts in Internet access and cellphone service, curfews, and the trivialization of Uighur history (Jacobs 2013a, Jacobs 2013b, Jacobs 2014). The Chinese Communist Party in May 2014 reaffirmed its policies in Xinjiang and has called for continued Han Chinese migration to Xinjiang, and for Uighurs to be settled in other parts of China, learn Mandarin Chinese and integrate into the broader (Han) Chinese society (Wong 2014).

The other side of the Chinese approach to the Xinjiang problem has been a vigorous use of military, then paramilitary and police forces in the “Strike Hard” campaign that began in 1996. Although there had been incidents that might have been described as Uighurs resistance as early as the April 1990 uprising in Baren, near Kashgar, they had not been reported in the Chinese media. That changed in 1996 when the government in Beijing acknowledged what was happening, and posed it as part of a larger international problem (Gill and Murphy 2005: 24). After riots in Yining (Gulja) in 1997, the government in Beijing applied more force. China has

used overwhelming numbers of paramilitary People’s Armed Police (PAP, 中国人民武装警察部队 *Zhongguo renmin wuzhuang jingdui*) to monitor potential trouble spots, and an impressive array of technological tools to monitor the situation in Xinjiang.

The Chinese approach is summarized as, “heavy-handed enemy-centric operations are being combined with society-centric methods such as large-scale Han Chinese immigration and economic development to suppress Uighur secessionists fighting for an East Turkestan state. The blend of military, political, and economic methods is redolent of a classical COIN approach” (Evans 2014, 254).

India

India has long faced multiple insurgencies and continues to do so today. The Naxalites, a Maoist insurgency, continues to pose a threat to multiple states within the country. In Assam, in the northeast part of the country, there are multiple groups seeking a number of goals, including independence for the whole region (the United Liberation Front of Assam or ULFA) and independence for sub-regional areas, including Bodoland (the National Democratic Front of Bodoland or DNFB) and the Karbis (the Karbi People’s Liberation Tigers, KPLT, among others). In Kashmir, separatist groups, long supported by Pakistan, have again emerged.

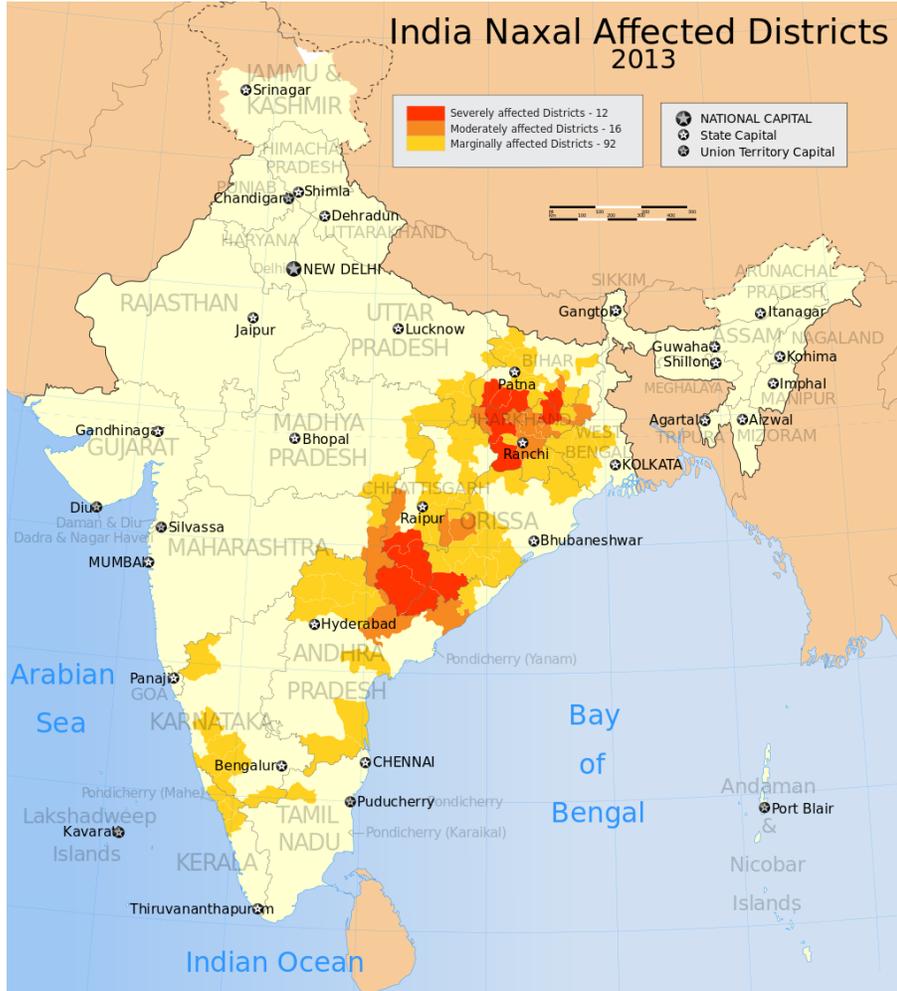
India’s counterinsurgency doctrine has long emphasized the need to address grievances of local populations. Military force is typically supplemented by economic development and political reconciliation efforts (Ray 2016b; 18, 43). However, in practice, Indian counterinsurgency has been more enemy-centric, with attrition-based efforts to demonstrate that “fighting the government is a ‘no win’ situation” (Integrated Headquarters 2006, 21; Athele 2012, 170; Lalwani 2011, 5). To do so, “planners depend on gargantuan concentrations of forces, coupled with denial of access to population centres, to dominate the physical terrain” (Swami

2017). The internal nature of all of its counterinsurgencies (excepting the operation originally planned as peacekeeping in Sri Lanka) has shaped its views (Ray 2016b, 42), but in a way that inherently delegitimizes many of the demands of the rebels. In its introduction, the 2006 Indian *Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations* states that “The modus operandi of weaker side is generally characterized by irrationality, indiscrimination, unpredictability and ruthlessly destructive behaviour” (Integrated Headquarters 2006, 1; see also Fidler 2009, 214). As the government has seen itself as legitimate (Athele 2012, 4-5), it has been unwilling (or unable) to undertake significant political reforms, especially at the local level (Lalwani 2011, 9).

Reflecting this more enemy-centric approach was “Operation Green Hunt”, launched in 2009 against the Naxalites. While leftist Naxalites had risen against the government since the 1960s, the movement became a larger threat in 2004 as the People’s War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre joined to form the CPI-Maoist party.⁶ Highly centralized and with significant support from the local society in east-central India, the CPI-Maoist party was, in 2013, called by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the country’s greatest internal threat (Evans 2014, 245). In 2009, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) began a large-scale operation against the Naxalites. By 2012, approximately 100,000 paramilitary personnel had been deployed, along with 84,000 CRPF personnel, and 200,000 members of the State Armed Police Forces (Prasanna 2016, 519-520). Whereas violence did drop, it has since risen; 2016 was the bloodiest year since 2011 and the CPI-Maoist party continues to be active in at least five states (Routray 2017). Figure 6 shows the “Red Corridor” of India where Naxalites have been active circa 2013:

⁶ Not to be confused with the CPI(M), the Communist Party of India-Marxist, which is an elected party in several Indian state legislatures.

Fig. 6 — Map of India’s “Red Corridor”



By M Tracy Hunter - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33684794>

Kashmir, a state bordering Pakistan and India’s only Muslim-majority state, has long been the scene of an insurgency against India. Figure 7 shows the divisions of the area.

Fig. 7 — Map of Kashmir



Source: By CIA http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/kashmir_region_2004.jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=618641>.

On 8 July 2016, Indian security forces in Kashmir killed Burhan Wani, a commander of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, a Pakistani terrorist group. Rapidly, protests against the Indian forces were organized and violent confrontations between Indian security forces and protestors resulted in

sixty-eight deaths and more than two thousand injured. The Indian government imposed a strict curfew during Eid celebrations, an unprecedented step that resulted in more violent protests (Ray 2016a). The uprising surprised many in India who did not expect the large-scale indigenous appeal to what had been assumed to be external extremism. It had generally been viewed that violence in Kashmir “has a limited indigenous component and is largely fuelled (sic) by Pakistan” (Chadha 2016, 14; see also Evans 2014, 245). In the earlier iteration of insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, much attention was given to shutting down the border to prevent infiltration from Pakistan. While improvements to previous practice were made (Ray 2016a), Indian counterinsurgency continued to be alienating to local Kashmiris. This is a continuing problem because India’s approach is also affected by its federalist structure in which individual states bear much of the burden of counterinsurgency (Lalwani 2011, 7). While the concept of federalism is integral to the legitimacy of the Indian state given its diversity, it also means that self-interested state leaders make the counter-insurgency situations worse while trying to make their own political fortunes better (Ganguly 2015, 148-149).

Pakistan

Pakistan too is facing continued threats from internal groups. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and ISIS both show increasing threats to the state, striking Lahore and Sindh, among other places. In Balochistan, a low-level separatist insurgency renewed in 2004. Figure 8 shows the states of Pakistan:

Fig. 8 — Provinces of Pakistan



Source: University of Central Arkansas.

In early 2002, Pakistani forces were deployed to the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). They largely played whack-a-mole, engaging in tactical strikes against terrorist groups, including al Qaeda forces (Haider 2014, 69-70; Jones and Fair 2010, 17). The foreign forces increasingly linked up with domestic groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e Jhangvi, and Harakut-ul-Jihad-al-Islami. Playing off anger at American forces' presence in Afghanistan and the increasing perception that the Pakistan government anti-Islam and pro-American, terrorist forces were able to win over a number of local tribes and an active insurgency began (Haider 2014, 70) By 2004, some eighty thousand regular army troops had been deployed to the areas in and around Waziristan.

In 2008 and 2009, the Pakistan armed forces launched a series of operations in Waziristan and Swat Valley. As before, much of the approach was enemy-centric and heavily based on collective punishment. Villages were frequently destroyed and, in 2009, the Pakistan Army established ‘shoot-on-sight’ curfews in cities throughout Swat (Jones and Fair 2010, 62-73; Evans 2014, 248). The government was able to take territory and, indeed, often faced little opposition, suggesting that the TTP forces simply withdrew and relocated, so they could fight another day (Jones and Fair 2010, 73).

On 15 June 2014, Pakistan launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb (Sharp Strike) against Islamist insurgents in North Waziristan. Two years on, it arguably had some successes: save a few scattered pockets, no area of Pakistan was under militant occupation (Basit 2016). Pakistan claimed that 3500 terrorists had been killed and 992 hideouts destroyed. The region also dropped noticeably in terms of violence (SATP 2017). However, relatively little redevelopment had occurred. Furthermore Pakistan failed to close the border and, so while the TTP in Pakistan was weakened, many of its members fled to Afghanistan. “Pakistan’s strategy in the war of ideas, the basis for countering an ideological threat, appears to be missing” (Basit 2016).

Pakistan counterinsurgency, whether against the TTP or against Baloch insurgents is enemy-centric and overly militarized (Kupecz 2012, 104-5). In Balochistan, it is less about open military operations and more based upon targeted killings, disappearances, and extrajudicial killings (Grare 2013, 14). Nonetheless, as in the FATA, “the rights and needs of Balochistan’s people remain unaddressed. Citizens continue to live with a sense of heightened insecurity, rattled by persistent violence. Comparative levels of social and economic development remain abysmally low, and the perception of deprivation, exploitation, and political alienation remains

alarming high” (Hasan 2016, 5), suggesting that there has been little successful effort to focus on the population.

The Internal Becomes External: Counterinsurgency and Regional Destabilization

The counterinsurgency approaches here range from the relatively population-centric approach of the Philippine government against Abu Sayyaf to the scorched-earth policies of Myanmar and Pakistan. Recent practices by both Philippines and India, while far from perfect, have been influenced by Western counterinsurgency methods that “honor liberal democratic values” (Evans 2014, 246). However, even those values have limited effect on the conduct of domestic counterinsurgency. Most of the states, including the two noted, for a variety of reasons, have leaned toward enemy-centric approaches, both counterterrorism and collective punishment. To some extent, this is reflective of the militaries’ broader strategic ends. In both India and Pakistan, for example, the primary emphasis has been on conventional war with the other (Evans 2014, 248; Jones and Fair 2010, 37; Ray 2016a; see also Ray 2016b, 23). In other cases, the approach is (somewhat) shaped by the government. Liberalizing efforts in the Philippines and in Thailand were marked by more population-centric approaches.

To what extent does *how* the counterinsurgency is fought affect regional stability? Ostensibly, the approaches chosen are likely to affect it through two means: spillover, including through the large-scale movement of refugees, and other states’ reactions to human rights violations and the treatment of co-ethnics. This brief survey of internal conflicts in Asia suggests little direct linkage. There appears limited likelihood that *how* a country engages in counterinsurgency will affect its relations with its neighbors.

Spillover is a possibility; there is some concern, for example, that a conflict in Balochistan could spread to Iran which also has a population of Baloch; in 2005 (Kupez 2012, 105-6). Refugee flows can worsen destabilization through a variety of means. Tamil refugees, for example, were involved in the assassination of India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Saleghan and Gleditsch 2006, 343). As they don't seek to protect the population, but may instead target them, enemy-centric approaches are logically more likely to result in additional refugees. Following the outbreak of violence in October 2016, more than 90,000 Rohingya Muslims fled Myanmar to Bangladesh (Husein and Khan 2017). In China, more than 20,000 refugees had fled from the northern Shan State by March 2017 (Pomfret 2017).⁷

Spillover can also when rebels from one country flee into another; those rebel groups can turn on their host governments. By 2009, the Taliban in Pakistan were explicitly seeking to overthrow the Pakistani government and were seeking to govern areas of the Swat Valley. In a March 2009 ceasefire, the Pakistani Taliban successfully negotiated the release of twelve Taliban militants and implementation of Sharia law in the region. While the ceasefire did not hold for long, it demonstrated government weakness (Singh 2009, 32). In 2014, the TTP claimed responsibility on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, killing more than 140 people, most of whom were children (Paul and Nelson 2016, 172).

Poor treatment of civilians and can also strain relations between countries, particularly if co-ethnics are involved. Indian Tamils have long pushed the Indian government to pressure Sri Lanka to improve treatment of the Tamils, even blocking training of Sri Lankan military personnel in Tamil Nadu (Aliff 2015, 324). Seven years after the Sri Lankan conflict against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (2016,

⁷ The island status of Philippines makes it more difficult and less likely that those fleeing violence will become refugees as opposed to internally displaced persons. Nearly all the 200,000 people of Marawi, the city under attack by the Maute group in 2017, are believed to have fled their homes (Allard 2017).

1) still chose to comment that “During the course of the conflict, India supported the right of the Government of Sri Lanka to act against terrorist forces. At the same time, it conveyed its deep concern at the plight of the mostly Tamil civilian population, emphasizing that their rights and welfare should not get enmeshed in hostilities against the LTTE” and to express hope for a political settlement of the problem.

The External Becomes Internal: Push-back and Other Factors Leading to Destabilization

Instead of the strategy adopted by the facing the insurgency, two other factors related to the conflicts appear to be more important in terms of affecting regional stability: neighbors’ support for rebel groups and the war-torn country’s response, most notably to sanctuaries.

Support for Others’ Rebels

Pakistan stands out as the poster-child for supporting rebels in other states. Shortly after independence, Pakistan began supporting rebel groups in Kashmir; in 1965, it dispatched 30,000 infiltrators into the Indian-administered territory to ignite a rebellion.⁸ In Afghanistan, aid to the *mujahedeen* began at least five years before the Soviet invasion as Pakistan sought to shape its neighbor into one governed by Sunni Islamist or Pashtun forces. In the 1980s, Pakistan assisted Sikh forces in Punjab, India. By 2006, there was increasing support for the Taliban and other Afghan insurgent groups, reflecting Pakistani concerns that Tajiks and Uzbeks were filling too many governing positions and that India may gain further influence (Jones and Fair 2010, 5-18). Pakistan, in turn believes that India has provided training for Baloch rebels (Kupez 2012, 106).

South Asia is, in this way, distinct from East Asia today. While in the past, support for rebels in others’ territories was common (consider the support for the Khmer Rouge and other groups fighting the Vietnam-supported government of Cambodia in the 1980s), it has become far

⁸ While the infiltrators failed to ignite a rebellion, it did lead to war with India.

less so. States support rebel groups when they have ideological, religious, or ethnic ties to them, such support is primarily a reflection of the *a priori* relationship between the countries. States overwhelmingly assist rebels in their rivals' territory (Salehyan, Gelditsch, and Cunningham 2011, 730; see also Byman et al. 2001, 20-41). Rebel groups become a weapon against the rival state.⁹ As relations have improved, and as the ideological conflict between communists and non-communists and among different communists has largely dissipated, large-scale support for rebel groups has also diminished.

It has not necessarily gone away, though. Low-level support, in particular, continues. China has been accused of turning a blind eye to supporters of Chinese rebels in Myanmar. While it has not necessarily directly supported forces, it appears to have not cracked down on groups gathering funds and supplies for Kokang rebels (Li 2016; Zhou 2016). The deniability inherently present in such actions enables the donor state to apply pressure to the other, increasing its costs and improving the chances that the state will have to concede to the donor country's interests (Bapat 2011, 2; Byman et al. 2001, 23-33).

The provision of sanctuary is a particular form of support. Access to foreign territory provides a *moderately* safe location for rebel groups to rest, to train, and to prepare attacks. Rebel groups with such havens need little more than access to their target state in order to continue to undermine state security and, with it, legitimacy and stability (Staniland 2005-6, 22).¹⁰ Sometimes such sanctuary is given readily by states. Pakistan, for example, has long

⁹ Such provision of aid can significantly increase the likelihood of victory for rebel groups. A 2010 Rand study found that insurgents won more than half of the wars in which they received support from states; those rebel groups who received no support, however, were able to win in only three of eighteen conflicts (Connable and Libicki 2010, 62).

¹⁰ Salehyan (2007, 240) found that safe havens in other countries had a positive, substantially large, and statistically significant effect on the length of wars. In another study, of 22 cases in which insurgencies had no sanctuary, only three ended with a victory for the rebels; where they had a sanctuary, rebels won nearly half (23) of the 52 conflicts that had been clearly decided. It mattered, however, whether that sanctuary was voluntarily provided. If the host

housed and supported groups targeting its main rival, India, including Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, and Harakat ul-Mujahadeen. Though it never legalized the group as a registered organization, “Malaysia found GAM useful as a bargaining chip with Indonesia” who was facing the separatist Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement) (Hastings 2010, 126).

Other times, rebels take advantage of weak neighboring states who cannot or choose not to expel them. Two insurgent groups, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), both fighting against India in its northeast region, had long established training camps in Bhutan, a country with limited capacity to oppose the development. In 2015, the government of Myanmar refused to target a rebel base run by Naga and Manipuri rebels, noting it was busy fighting its own domestic threats (BBC 2015).

Providing sanctuary is a *moderately* secure means of doing that as states can disavow the existence of such groups, making it more difficult for the war-torn state to respond. Bangladesh, for example, denied Indian assertions that it had housed groups including NDFB and ULFA for more than ten years, even after India presented a list of 155 camps operated by insurgents (Nath and Nath 2004, 641).

For rebels, though, there is risk. Even in cases where the state was unable or unwilling to crack down, that situation can change.¹¹ In 2003, Bhutan, having raised an army explicitly for the task, attacked the camps run by the ULFA, NDFB, and a third rebel force, the KLO (Kamatapur Liberation Organization), destroying the rebel camps and capturing many of the top and middle leaders of the groups (Nath and Nath 2004, 641). While Thailand had officially been

state did not care to house the rebels but lacked the means to expel them, the insurgents had little more than an average likelihood of success (Connable and Libicki 2010, 35-36).

¹¹ For this reason, in his examination of terrorist groups, David B. Carter (2012, 146-7) found that those groups who received state-sponsored safe havens (as opposed to sanctuaries available because states were too weak to defend the territory) were actually 267% more likely to fail than if they never received sponsorship. These groups, he argues, are far more vulnerable to their host states turning on them and providing information to the state targeted by the rebels.

neutral in the war, GAM operated there in its war against Indonesia; however, Thaksin Shinawatra, upon becoming Prime Minister in 2001, began to pressure the group and, in 2003, it was forced out of its haven (Hastings 2010, 126).

State Response to Sanctuaries Elsewhere

However, providing sanctuaries is not without cost. There is some moderate protection through the ability of states to deny knowledge or existence of safe havens. Furthermore, given international norms opposing military strikes on others' territory, states "cannot easily exercise force outside of their national boundaries" (Salehyan 2007, 221). Nonetheless, the states at war have powerful incentives to pressure—and perhaps attack—those housing their insurgents. Salehyan (2008) finds that rebel sanctuaries do increase the likelihood of an international conflict. Often this is justified under the legal doctrine of "hot pursuit" across a border, or justified by the inactivity of the host state.

However, states' responses seem, like their support for rebel groups in opposing states, directly linked to their preexisting relations with the other actors. While Bangladesh simply refuted the charges of housing rebels, India's own ability to respond was limited by its larger concerns. "An anti-India Bangladesh is the worst fear for the Indian strategists for the survival of the NE India" (Nath and Nath 2004, 641-2).

In 2015, India launched attacks into Myanmar, pursuing the Naga and Manipuri rebels that had killed at least twenty Indian troops in Manipur. Myanmar made no apparent reaction; it too had occasionally chased its own Chin and Arakanese rebels into Indian territory. It was noted that the two countries "have good military-to-military co-operation...[and] "understand each other's compulsions" (BBC 2015).

Possibilities for Greater Stability or Long-Term Destabilization: States Helping States?

That states have been involved to assist one another in counterinsurgencies is neither new nor surprising. Just as strategic goals lead states to support rebels, they lead states to support likeminded governments in opposing rebels. China's arms sales to Myanmar certainly is part of its effort to maintain the government there against multiple rebellions, and support for domestic security in Pakistan is critical for China's growing economic footprint in that country.

Furthermore, the opportunity to mediate peace provides benefits to other states. Especially when the war is on their doorstep, assisting in the furtherance of peace yields greater stability, reducing the risk of spillover and secondary effects. Additionally, it can enhance a state's international prestige. Malaysia helped mediate the Bangsamoro peace agreement in Philippines. While the government of Rodrigo Duterte still has to draft a law and it must be approved by congress, on 27 March 2014, the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro was signed between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and members of the Moro National Liberation Front, ostensibly ending the conflict.¹² In Thailand, the Malaysian government helped to create the MARA Patani (Majlis Syura Patani or Patani Consultative Council), the umbrella group of insurgents that has participated in talks with the government (Abuza 2015, 10).¹³ China has made efforts at mediation in both Afghanistan and Myanmar, though in both cases clearly backs the established government.

The post-9/11 period poses particular opportunities and risks for cooperation among states in Asia. The threat of al Qaeda and ISIS, and groups linked to them, is one shared by many of the countries in the region. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which originated in Indonesia in the 1950s, sought to create broader Islamic governance in Southeast Asia after it achieved the

¹² Though there are critiques from the MNLF that the agreement undermines the autonomy it was given in 1996.

¹³ However, according to Abuza (2015, 10) the government itself seems unwilling to negotiate with Thailand.

Islamization of Indonesia (Chalk, et al. 2009, 90). Though it became an al Qaeda affiliate and was happy to receive funds and expertise, it maintained its own independence and particular goals (Chalk et al. 2009, 92). In October 2002, JI targeted a nightclub district in Bali popular with Westerners, killing approximately 200 and injuring more than 300 (Paul and Nelson 2016, 177). It subsequently attacked targets in Jakarta, but, in 2009 moved away from striking foreign tourists to targeting the Indonesian police (Liow 2016, 6). It maintains its links to al Qaeda, but has a variety of political and ideological differences with ISIS. Nonetheless, Indonesia was “the victim of the first ISIS-inspired attack in Southeast Asia” on January 14, 2016 when “self-proclaimed followers of ISIS set of bombs at a Starbucks outside the Sarinah mall and at a nearby police outpost, and gunfire broke out on the streets at Jalan Tamrin in the heart of Jakarta” (Liow 2016, 4-5).

The recent conflict in the Philippines, in the city of Marawi, is between the Maute group, which as noted above has sworn allegiance to ISIS, and the government. It was allegedly called in when the military targeted Isnilon Hapilon, the leader of a faction of Abu Sayyaf who had declared allegiance to ISIS in 2014, leading to a split within the ASG. Historically, in the Philippines, while before 9/11, MILF had links to JI, but after the US-led global war on terrorism began, it insistently distanced itself from the group, though accusations that it was linked remain (Rabasa 2007, 115-116; Evans 2014, 250).

These cases, and of course, Pakistan, provide credible evidence of the internationalization of some of the terrorist and insurgent threats in Asia. Such provides an opportunity for states, all of whom (excepting perhaps parts of the Pakistani government, armed forces, and intelligence service) share a concern over an Islamist threat. This opens the door for cooperation among even states with historically problematic relations. In Southeast Asia, there have been collaborative

efforts by Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia to counter JI, engaging in joint surveillance and intelligence sharing while also seeking to counter terrorist ideology among the Muslim communities of their countries (Paul and Nelson 2016, 177).

However, while countering transnational terrorist organizations provide a fruitful basis on which states can cooperate, the danger is that states will exaggerate the threat and/or use it to acquire weaponry, maintain martial law or other repressive policies that also keep the current government in power. “For the most part, the presence of ISIS in Southeast Asia is expressed in the form of radical groups and individuals who have taken oaths of allegiance to ISIS. In other words, the ISIS phenomenon is imbricated with indigenous jihadi agendas and movements” (Liow 2016, 3).

Thailand is a case in point. In Thailand, there has been limited evidence of international linkages, including those with JI, al Qaeda, or ISIS. “Indeed, there appears to have been a deliberate strategic decision on the part of militants to explicitly *not* tie the Malay cause to wider Islamic anti-Western/secular designs for fear that this will undermine the perceived credibility of their local commitment (and thereby threaten popular support)” as well as invite an international crackdown on the movement (Chalk et al. 2009, 29). In August 2015, however, terrorists killed twenty people and injured 125 more in the heart of a business and tourism district in Bangkok, Thailand. The Thai authorities suggested the ringleaders were linked to a Uighur militant group (Kurlantzick 2016, 5). Uighurs have also been found in a training camp in Indonesia of a pro-ISIS group, the *Mujahidin Indonesia Timur* (Liow 2016, 6).

Conclusion

The obvious answer for minimizing the regional risks of domestic insurgencies is to defeat them. Civil conflicts pose an inherent threat to neighboring states. Refugees, whether

caused by guerrilla threats, by state scorched-earth policies, or by state incompetence, pose challenges for states who are fragile. The inability to control territories results in opportunities for transnational criminal organizations to thrive and for terrorists to hide. In Thailand, for example, continued insurgency in the south has resulted in a boon to human trafficking, gun running, and drug trafficking (Kurlantzick 2016, 9).

The challenge, of course, is how to select the best approach to defeating insurgents and terrorists. There is no single answer. Enemy-centric, draining-the-sea approaches have worked in some cases, including against the LTTE in Sri Lanka in 2009, but failed in Nepal against Maoist rebels in a war that ended in 2006. More population-centric approaches have been successful in the Philippines against the Moro National Liberation Front (Paul and Nelson 174-175) as well as against MILF and, while there is no peace, has significantly contributed to the weakening of Abu Sayyaf.

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