

Institution: University of Leeds
Unit of Assessment: UoA 21 Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Case Study 3: Shaping policy approaches to Thailand's southern violence as a <i>political conflict</i>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research by Duncan McCargo at the University of Leeds has changed the way in which domestic and international policymakers, NGOs, the media and the Thai public have understood and engaged with the ongoing insurgency in southern Thailand. Since 2008, this award-winning, ESRC-funded work has played a key part in building consensus around the need for a political solution such as autonomy or decentralisation in the region. The research has supported peace initiatives, changed the implementation of security policy, and provided a road map for international donors seeking to help end the conflict.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The core research was conducted by McCargo (Professor of Southeast Asian Politics, University of Leeds, 1993–present) between 2002 and 2009. It was initially based on a DFID/British Council Higher Education Link with Prince of Songkla University (PSU) Pattani (2002–6), which involved McCargo as Link Co-ordinator working with a group of Leeds and Thai colleagues. McCargo conducted one year's fieldwork in Pattani, a major town in the far south of Thailand, between 2005 and 2006, conducting 270 formal interviews and numerous informal observations of political leaders, security personnel, activists, religious leaders, and other members of the local community.</p> <p>McCargo's was the first study of the conflict based on extensive original fieldwork and contradicted previous scholarship that characterised the ongoing insurgency in Thailand's southern border provinces – which has claimed over 5,500 lives since 2004 – as driven by Al-Qaeda-linked Islamists and fuelled by crime and socio-economic grievances [1]. The research set out to interrogate these arguments. Published outputs challenged and contradicted both the centrality of 'Islamist' underpinnings and socio-economic factors, arguing instead that the insurgency had political roots [2] in the incomplete incorporation of the Patani region into the Thai state. It demonstrated that, while the Thai state's earlier attempts to manage the conflict had enjoyed initial successes, the policy had gradually unravelled [3]. The divide-and-rule tactics of Bangkok progressively weakened political and civil society in the region.</p> <p>The research interpreted the conflict as a crisis of legitimacy for the Thai state, reflecting the declining authority of Thailand's ageing king and national-level political tensions following the election of Thaksin Shinawatra to the premiership in 2001 [2]. The conflict has exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions through the rise of Buddhist chauvinism and a parallel backlash from elements of the Muslim community [3].</p> <p>The research demonstrated that the legitimacy deficit was compounded by inept and sometimes abusive actions by the Thai security forces, especially during the Krue Ze and Tak Bai incidents in 2004. Heavy-handed blunders by the military created propaganda victories that helped a resurgent militant movement to thrive [2]. The nature of the militant movement – a loose network based on small village-level cells – proved extremely difficult for the Thai military, trained in conventional warfare, to counter effectively. Militants themselves were mainly young men aged 18-25, motivated by a strong belief that Malay Muslims had been exploited and abused by the Thai state and its local allies and agents over a long period.</p> <p>Based on this analysis of the conflict as a political problem, a range of potential political solutions were proposed by the author. These included alternative forms of autonomy, decentralisation and regionalisation [4]. Administrative reforms such as the possible creation of a special ministry for the</p>

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South were investigated [5].

Findings have been conveyed in briefings to key beneficiaries on three continents, including the FCO (December 2008, July 2010, July 2011), Cabinet Office (May 2011), UK (June 2011) and US (November 2010) Ambassadors to Thailand, State Department (March 2008, November 2010, May 2013), UN (March and December 2009, May 2010, April 2011, October 2012, December 2012), Thai Senate President (January 2009), EU officials (June 2011), Norwegian Foreign Ministry (November 2011) and Japanese parliamentarians (October 2012).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of five references)

1. Jitpiromsri, S and D. **McCargo** (2010), 'The Southern Thai conflict six years on: insurgency, not just crime', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 156–83. Widely-cited regional journal.
2. **McCargo**, D. (2008), *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*, Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, (Southeast Asian edition by NUS Press, Singapore, 2009; Thai translation, Bangkok: Kobfai 2013). Leading publisher. Won world's top book prize in Asian Studies (2009 Bernard Schwartz Prize, Asia Society of New York, \$20,000)
3. **McCargo**, D (2012), *Mapping National Anxieties: Thailand's Southern Conflict*, 213pp, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. Book based on articles from leading journals.
4. **McCargo**, D (2010), 'Autonomy for Southern Thailand: thinking the unthinkable?' *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 261–281. Leading journal of Asian politics and international relations.
5. Jitpiromsri, S and D. **McCargo** (2008), 'A ministry for the South? New governance proposals for Thailand's troubled region', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 30, 3, pp. 403–28. Widely-cited regional journal.

Grants

DFID/British Council UK Higher Education Link between Leeds and Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani, 2002-06, supporting academic staff exchange and research collaboration, c. £40,000. Provided for groundwork for ESRC award.

Economic and Social Research Council, 'Interpreting political violence in the Thai South', RES-000-22-1344, £46,035, 2005-09, Rated 'Outstanding' by all four assessors. Directly funded core research for all five publications above.

Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency, 'Judicialization and insecurity in Southern Thailand', 22 March to 21 April 2010, highly competitive fellowship won by only a handful of UK scholars annually. Spin-off funding from ESRC award.

ASEASUK/British Academy Research Committee on South East Asian Studies, 'The politics of justice in Thailand's southern borderland', £3000, 2009 to 2012. Spin-off funding from ESRC award, supported work on publication 3 above.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research has shaped policy debate and outcomes relating to the Southern Thai conflict from 2008 to the present.

- i) Policy-makers

Since the publication of key research in 2008, previously 'unthinkable' ideas of autonomy for Thailand's southern border provinces have become increasingly mainstreamed. McCargo's 2009 and 2012 testimonies to Thai parliamentary sub-committees on the Southern conflict played an

important role. As former Army Commander-in-Chief (2005-07) who led the military coup of 2006, and became Deputy Prime Minister in 2007, writes:

“I have instructed the secretary of my sub-committee to summarise Professor McCargo’s analysis for the main Armed Forces Committee, and plan to have them submitted for wider consideration by the Parliament and indeed by the Prime Minister... McCargo’s research has provided important insights into the southern conflict which are being taken on board at the highest levels of the Royal Thai Government.” [A]

McCargo’s main local collaborator, PSU’s Dr Srisompob Jitpiromsri, leads Thailand-based advocacy initiatives, building upon their joint research to develop alternative governance models for the region. Since February 2013, Dr Jitpiromsri has served as a Thai government negotiator, talking regularly to the insurgents in a Malaysian-government-brokered dialogue process seeking a political settlement.

The Asia Director of the International Crisis Group – the NGO which has produced the most influential policy reports on the Southern violence – writes:

‘With the recent start of the Malaysian-brokered talks between Thai authorities and insurgents, we are now seeing become public and official government policy the kind of understanding of the conflict and for a peace process that Professor McCargo has long argued for. It is not coincidental that his long-time collaborator Dr. Srisompob Jitpiromsri is one of the nine-member Thai negotiating team for the talks. Dr. Srisompob and Professor McCargo have co-authored at least two articles... on the conflict and share almost identical views on it. Both scholars are have been the forefront of the intellectual advocacy urging the Thai government to set aside its security approach and find a political solution to this enduring and deadly conflict...’ [B].

The research has also been used by a range of state actors including the Royal Thai Police, whose national chief writes: ‘I have asked Professor McCargo to serve as an informal advisor to the Royal Thai Police with respect to our handling of issues in the deep South’ [C]. Similarly, the UN Chief in Thailand, writes: ‘McCargo’s research has fed into our understanding of the Southern Thai conflict and the way in which we have framed our responses and policies accordingly... his conclusions have helped us in shaping our collaborations with the Royal Thai Government’ [D].

ii) NGOs

The research has also inspired further policy-based work on the South, including initiatives to support local journalists and civil society groups by Japan’s influential Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF), which has used McCargo’s research as a ‘handbook’ for determining its interpretation of the conflict and moves to develop political solutions [E]. The Foundation Director writes, ‘It is no exaggeration to say that SPF’s various projects in the Deep South region have been guided by Professor McCargo’s work in many respects’[H]. The Foundation’s application of the research to support projects such as journalism training illustrates the reach of impact well beyond Thailand itself.

iii) Framing the public debate

Coverage of the research has helped formulate an emerging international consensus that the conflict in southern Thailand is a political problem, for which autonomy or some comparable decentralisation of power is the obvious solution. An ESRC evaluation report concluded that the research had “been carried directly to the heart of the global community studying, working on and fighting insurgencies.” [F]. The research has also served to discredit alternative arguments that the conflict arises primarily from local mafia feuds, the drug trade and smuggling. This has increased pressure on the Thai authorities to modify policies in the south and engage with peace dialogues and other initiatives. Media coverage of research-based arguments—including an op-ed in the

Guardian Weekly and a Thai Public Broadcasting Service TV interview—has boosted their impact.

The high profile and international reach of the research has made its interpretations more difficult to sideline and has helped open up greater debate within Thailand. According to a second ESRC evaluation: 'The researcher has also had an impact on public discussion of the violence in Thai South in the international media, which in turn has an influence on policy-making [G].'

6. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Corroboration letter dated 21 December 2012 from a parliamentarian, former Army Commander and ex-Deputy Prime Minister, concerning the influence of the research on government thinking about political solutions for the South.
- B. Corroboration letter dated 25 September 2013 from Asia Program Director of the International Crisis Group, on how the research has fed into policy shifts in relation to dialogue concerning political solutions.
- C. Corroboration letter dated 26 November 2012 from Royal Thai Police Chief on how the research has helped shape security policy in the south.
- D. Corroboration letter dated 27 November 2012 from UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand, on how the research has fed into policy shifts in relation to developing political solutions.
- E. Corroboration letter dated 29 November 2012 from Executive Director, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo, on how the research has shaped their policy agenda and funding priorities for the southern Thai conflict.
- F. 'ESRC Rapporteur Evaluation Report B, RES-000-22-1344, Interpreting political violence in the Thai South, Professor D J McCargo, A, Evaluation Grade: Outstanding, Swindon: 27 November 2009 (from non-academic assessor).
- G. 'ESRC Rapporteur Evaluation Report A, RES-000-22-1344, Interpreting political violence in the Thai South, Professor D J McCargo, A, Evaluation Grade: Outstanding, Swindon: 27 November 2009 (anonymous peer assessor).
- H. 'ESRC Rapporteur Evaluation Report C, RES-000-22-1344, Interpreting political violence in the Thai South, Professor D J McCargo, A, Evaluation Grade: Outstanding, Swindon: 27 November 2009 (anonymous peer assessor).