

Building High-Trust Cultures for Peace in the South of Thailand

Warayuth Sriwarakuel

Abstract

Lack of trust is one of the most fundamental problems in the three provinces in the South of Thailand. There is no trust among civilian people, insurgents, news reporters and government officials. If we do not trust people, we will never be able to cooperate with them and empower them.

Yet all actual entities are subject to change. In this sense, we cannot trust any person or any actual thing at all. We cannot trust even our own hearts. Today we may fall in love with one person, but tomorrow we may experience a change of heart and fall in love with another.

If every (actual) thing is impermanent, then should we live our lives without trust? Should we live our lives in despair? No, not at all. In fact, in our daily lives, we use trust in response to impermanence and change. If we do not trust a bridge, how can we use it to cross over? If we do not trust food and beverages, how can we eat and drink them? If we do not trust friends, colleagues and people around us, how can we live with them peacefully?

How do we trust that tomorrow the sun will rise in the east? The answer is obvious: because we trust the laws of nature. Natural law is

believed to be permanent and never subject to change. Why do we trust people around us? The answer is also obvious. Because we have faith that those people possess certain principles and values like *love, justice, integrity, respect, and equality*, which provide stability in the face of change. Trust inspires participation and empowerment, and participation and empowerment lead to peace. Therefore, to build a culture of peace requires the creation of trust, through the cultivation of stable principles and values.

I. What are the Problem and Its Causes?

We are currently witnessing continual violence in the three provinces in the South of Thailand. This is a very deep problem. What are its causes? The answers are various, and depend on who is asked.¹ For those who see the problem within a short-term context, they will see short-term causes for the violence. For example: the Thai government's participation in the invasion of Iraq, and the arrest of Hambali, the operational leader of *Jemaah Islamiyah*. However, for those who see the problem within a long-term context, they will see different causes. These can be divided into two main groups according to their different ideologies: the security-oriented and the independence-oriented groups. The Thai government and the Thai people in general belong to the first group whereas many (if not all) of the Malay Muslims who hold Thai nationality, in the three provinces belong to the second one. It is a fact that these ethnically Malay people prefer to be called "Malay Muslims" to "Thai Muslims". When people hold different ideologies,

¹ The same event can mean different things to different people. For example, the September 11 event may be considered as an effect for some people whereas it may be thought as a cause for others. And when people see things differently, they will act and react differently.

they see and react to the problem of violence differently. While the government sees violence as the cause of insecurity, the insurgents see it as the effect of dissatisfaction. Why are the insurgents and their supporters dissatisfied with the Thai government?

The problem in the South of Thailand is not a new one. It has been happening for hundreds of years. At times the violence has been severe and frequent. At times it has been minor and rare. There are three main assumptions why the insurgents and their supporters are dissatisfied. They are: underdevelopment, injustice and identity. Some people believe that the root cause of the problem is underdevelopment, some believe that it is injustice, and others believe that it is identity which is the root cause.

Thailand is a developing country. What often characterizes developing countries is a huge gap between developed and underdeveloped areas. Thailand is no exception. In the past four decades the Thai government had problems with the Communist guerrillas. One main reason the Communist Party of Thailand used as a condition in their campaigns is underdevelopment. Cities were seen as exploiters of rural villages. In other words, "the haves-nots" in rural areas were believed to be exploited and oppressed by the "the haves" in the towns and cities. Therefore, quite a few students in that period left their universities and joined the Communist insurgents in the forests in the rural areas. Later, when these people dropped their weapons and became "developers of Thailand," their villages, both in the "pink" and "red" areas, have been developed and supplied with new roads, piped water and electricity. In the case of the three provinces in the South, although some villages in the three provinces may be considered underdeveloped in terms of market economy, this is probably not

the major cause of the problem of violence in the South. Economic problems, sooner or later, can be solved by His Majesty King Bhumibol's *New Theory* and the theory of self-sufficient economy if people apply them in their lives.

It is often believed that injustice is one of the major causes of violence in the world. When people are conscious that they have been unjustly treated, they will feel very unhappy at the beginning. Then their unhappiness will be followed by fear, hatred, and anger. When people get angry, they usually choose fight rather than flight. That is the reason why the problem of injustice often ends in violence. Unfortunately, when seeking justice through violence, they create more injustice. We see this in the Old Testament description of justice as "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth."² It is in fact a warning that you should be careful that when seeking justice, you create another injustice.³ Many people are convinced that in the case of the three provinces in the South of Thailand, injustice and seeking justice are the major causes of violence. Even though it is possible that there are some civil servants, merchants and organized crime organizations who have committed injustices against the local people, this is still, I believe, not the major cause of the problem of violence in the South. The problem of injustice in the society can be eventually solved by the reformation of educational and juridical systems even though it may take a long time.

² In the New Testament we can find another fundamental sense of the concept of justice, namely, we need to render to God what we owe to Him, and to others what we owe to them, as Jesus Christ taught.

³ For example, after a man had been hit and had become blind, he then killed the man who had hit him. This is not just because taking someone's life is more than making someone blind.

The third assumption of the cause of violence in the South is based upon historical, ethnic and religious identity. This, I believe, is the major cause of violence in the South of Thailand. The insurgents and their supporters have longed for freedom and independence. This is a fact that no one can deny. They have appealed to their history, ethnicity and religion as the three main factors in their campaigns and struggles. Historically speaking, Pattani was once a free and independent state. The local people in the three provinces never have forgotten this history, and this memory has been transferred from generation to generation. We can assume that their heroes will not be the same as traditional Thai heroes such as King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, King Naresuan the Great, and King Taksin the Great. History, therefore, for those people is not considered as a lesson of continuity to guide present life but as something to be reconstructed. This is one of the big problems of the peoples in Southeast Asia. We often learn our history in such a way that it promotes patriotism and nationalism. This usually leads us to hatred and anger. History and nationalism make us consider our neighbors as foes not as friends.

Ethnicity is used as the second factor. Thailand, like other countries in the region, has many minorities. Among minorities, the largest group is the Malay in the three provinces in the South. The insurgents and their supporters use ethnicity in their campaigns. People in the three provinces speak Malay, and they want Malay to be an official language as in Malaysia.

The third factor concerning identity used by the insurgents in their campaigns, is Islam. Those people have tried to interpret Islamic doctrines and used their interpretations to train young people to fight for the liberation of Pattani. In summary, the insurgents and their

supporters have tried to exploit three factors, historical, ethnic and religious identities in their campaigns. And these hold an enormous sway over the mind of the youth.

II. What are the Solutions?

The solutions depend upon how people see the causes of the problem. We may classify the three solutions corresponding to the three main causes: underdevelopment, injustice and identity. If underdevelopment is the major cause, then development is needed. The Thai government believes that underdevelopment is one of the main causes. Thus the Thai government has initiated many projects in rural development within the three provinces in the South. Education and public hygiene have been improved. Water, electricity, roads, dams, and telecommunications are provided. Moreover, the Thai government also believes that injustice is the other main cause. Therefore they have tried to improve legal and juridical systems.

We hereby may combine underdevelopment and injustice as the one major cause of violence in the South of Thailand. So far the Thai government has assumed that the major causes of the problem in the South of Thailand have been both underdevelopment and injustice, and that the insurgents and their supporters have tried to use the factors of identity (language, ethnicity and religion) as the conditions of their campaigns and fights. However, Mark Tamthai,⁴ one of the

⁴ He presented his talk on “การแก้ไขปัญหาคาคใต้ ความเป็นไปได้ของสันตินิยม” (The Solution of the Problem of the South: The Possibility of Non-Violence) at the mid-year academic training of the Philosophy and Religion Society of Thailand on “Rawls, Kuhn, Feenberg: Justice, Knowledge and Technology” at Rayong Beach Condotel, Rayong on May 14-16, 2006.

members of the National Reconciliation Commission, sees things in another way. He argues that the major cause of the problem in the South of Thailand is identity, and that the insurgents and their supporters have merely used underdevelopment and injustice as justifications to fight for their self-determination. Mark Tamthai further argues that if his assumption is correct, then the only solution with non-violence is self-government in the form of Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Therefore there are two main assumptions about the root cause of the problem in the South of Thailand: (1) underdevelopment and in justice, or (2) identity. If (1) is correct, then socio-economic development and educational and juridical reformation are needed. If (2) is correct, then self-government is needed. Surprisingly, the Thai government always thinks that (1) is true and always rejects (2). It seems to me that the Thai government cannot deny the fact that there has been a group of people who would like to liberate the three provinces and establish the State of Pattani. The government needs to accept the fact that the case of the three provinces is different from other regions, those of Lan Na and Lan Chang. In Thai history, after Lan Na (Chiangmai) was defeated, it was incorporated into one part of the Kingdom of Thailand. It was the same with Lan Chang in the Northeastern part of Thailand. The Thai government deceives itself into thinking that the situation in the South is the same.⁵

⁵ I am from the Northeastern part of Thailand, and I can say that, from the bottom of our hearts, we, Isaan people, never feel that we are not Thais even though we speak our own dialects and some people may call us Laotians. We have always been proud of our great heroes like King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, King Naresuan the Great, King Taksin the Great, and others. Nobody ever feels, thinks and teaches that we have to liberate the North and the Northeast. This is very different from the case of the three provinces in the South.

III. Is a Non-Violent Solution Possible?

The answer to this question is surely affirmative. A non-violent solution is possible both in principle and in practice. But how? Again, this depends upon how people see the problem. If the major cause of the problem in the South of Thailand is thought of as underdevelopment and injustice, then the center of the solution is at the government itself. But if the major cause of the problem is conceived as identity, then the momentum is with the Muslim people in the three provinces themselves. It may be asked which answer is correct. According to the Aristotelian Law of the Excluded Middle, only one answer can be correct. However, we do not need to follow Aristotle here. Since both assumptions may be correct together, then the solutions from both sides, namely, from the government and from the local people, are both needed. On the one hand, the government needs to effectively deal with all the conditions of underdevelopment and injustice through sustainable development and serious reformation. On the other hand, the local people need some certain kind of "space" to express their freedom and political participation.

From history it may be summarized that the most fundamental problem in the South of Thailand is the lack of trust. The government does not trust the local people, and the local people do not trust the government. If trust happens, then a non-violent solution is surely possible and practical. To solve the problem of violence in the South, both sides need to adjust themselves and sacrifice something.

First of all, everybody must keep in mind that nobody can violate the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997. Section 1 says, "Thailand is one and indivisible Kingdom." Section 2 says, "Thailand

adopts a democratic regime of government with the King as Head of the State.” Section 5 says, “The Thai people, irrespective of their origins, sexes or religions, shall enjoy equal protection under this Constitution.”⁶ Therefore, the way the insurgents and their supporters have tried to liberate Pattani to become an absolutely independent state is unacceptable. The Thai government will surely shut the door in their face. And the Thai people in general, who are usually very tolerant, will not allow this to happen.

However, as mentioned above, the government has to accept the fact that the problem of violence in the South is based on the problem of identity. To solve the problem of identity is apparently different from solving the problem of interests conflict. Therefore, the Thai government needs to have a “Paradigm Shift” in their thinking. In other words, the government needs to rethink the situation from the point of view of the insurgents, not from its own view, in order to truly understand why the insurgents and their supporters *want* to liberate Pattani. The government needs to change its attitude and treat the insurgents and their supporters not as “the terrorists” but as the fellow friends who “have walked on the wrong way.” Still, the government should, unlike the United States and its allies, be open for talks with all those who are considered as “separatists and terrorists,” but those who have committed crimes should have been brought to justice. Thailand should be the country of true multiculturalism whose people have authentic toleration, otherwise those people may feel the same way as Tariq Modood who says,

⁶ See Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997, translated by the Office of the Council of State, published in the Government Gazette, Vol. 114, Part 55a, dated October 11, 1997, p. 3.

While I too strongly feel that multiculturalism means something more than negative tolerance or 'benign neglect', a cultural laissez-faire, it seems certain that while we all have to learn to live with groups of people and their norms that we may in various way disapprove of, many people will not want to affirm or celebrate or publicly fund other people's religions or their hedonism...⁷

Thus, to solve the problem of identity requires an approach which is different from solving the conflict of interests. While it is good that the government has tried its best to develop the economy, reform education, law and jurisprudence for the sake of the happiness of the local people, this is not sufficient to solve the problem of identity. A minority has the right to self-determination in the same way as an individual has the right to autonomy as Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz put it, "The right to self-determination derives from the value of membership in encompassing groups. It is a group right, deriving from the value of a collective good, and as such opposed in spirit to contractarian-individualistic approaches to politics or to individual well-being. It rests on an appreciation of the great importance that membership in and identification with encompassing groups has in the life of individuals, and the importance of the prosperity and self-respect of such groups to the well-being of their members."⁸

⁷ See Tariq Modood, " 'Race' in Britain and the Politics of Difference" in *Philosophy and Pluralism*, ed. by David Archard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 189.

⁸ Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination" in *Political Thought*, ed. by Michael Rosen & Jonathan Wolff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 288.

Therefore, I agree with Mark Tamthai's proposal of self-government with the condition that the Thai language must be an official language of the Special Administrative Region (SAR). Why does the SAR need to have the Thai language as official? Because the SAR still belongs to the Kingdom of Thailand. Language can unify people of different origins and backgrounds to become one state or nation. In every part of Thailand, all people are free to respect any religious tradition and to speak any dialect, but all people need to learn and understand Thai. The SAR is no exception because Thai language helps us find out and share "unity in diversity." The same language can help us transcend all the differences.

IV. How to Build High-Trust Cultures for Peace

All nations need high-trust cultures, otherwise they will not survive. We have learned about this fact from history of the world. Many empires collapsed because their people, especially their authorities, did not trust one another. Ancient Carthage, ancient Macedonia, and ancient Rome are remarkable examples. Lack of trust leads to disharmony. Disharmony leads to hatred. Hatred leads to anger. Anger leads to violence and war. Actually, trust is the most basic value because it is the most important for the smallest units of society, namely, the family. If members of the family distrust one another, then they will become disharmonious. And they will be plagued with disharmony and violence.

If peace is what we would like have, then we must have a "Paradigm Shift" first. We have to change fundamentally the way we think about people. We have to believe that people are the most important factors, and that they are capable of peace-making. Then we have to help

them believe and adopt these facts. In other words, we have to see the oak tree in the acorn, and we have to understand the process of helping that acorn become a giant oak tree.

In the case of the three provinces in the South, it is not sufficient merely to treat people well as we did in the past with the Communist Party of Thailand. We have to help local people find meaning and fulfillment in the *process* of peace-making. They certainly do not want to be treated and used by the government like victims or unimportant persons. They want to be proud and have stewardship over their own land and resources. They want to feel that they are making their personal contribution to something meaningful to their lives. Peace in the South is possible if and only if the local people have real motivation and real fulfillment. That is when they truly release the human potential and all that tremendous energy and creative power that is hidden inside them. Goethe says, "Treat a man as he is, and he will remain as he is; treat a man as he can and should be, and he will become as he can and should be." Without the participation and the contribution from the local people, there is no other way to solve the problem in the South with non-violence. Hence the Thai government needs to treat and motivate the local people as partners who share the same common good.

The Thai government underestimates the local people's potential to create a peaceful solution. The government needs to change its attitude towards people, both the local people and the insurgents. Then they need to have faith that the solution lies less in their own heads, than in the hands of the local people. In other words, what has to change first is the government mindset, the old paradigm that most agencies are locked into. While government agencies appropriate new

technologies and new techniques to solve problems, the old authoritarian paradigm remains. Distrust breeds distrust.

In order to reach the solution with non-violence in the South, the government, therefore, needs to change its attitudes and mindsets first, and then it has to act as a government with principles and virtues, or with good governance. If so, the local people will trust it, and they will be ready to cooperate. Since the root cause of the problems in the three provinces is identity, the government should trust that those people can become mature and be capable of ruling themselves in the form of SAR. This may make the insurgents and their supporters feel satisfied and stop fighting because their need for recognition is beginning to be met. The world in the global age makes us care for the importance of recognition as Taylor says,

The importance of recognition is now universally acknowledged in one form or another; on an intimate plane, we are all aware how identity can be formed or malformed in our contact with significant others. On the social plane, we have a continuing politics of equal recognition. Both have been shaped by the growing ideal of authenticity, and recognition plays an essential role in the culture that has arisen around it.⁹

However, bringing about this new and different way of thinking is a process that takes a great deal of patience because we have to work at it from the inside out. Every person in the region must change inside

⁹ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) p.49.

their hearts and minds, so that they themselves become principle-centered. To attain peace in the South, we have to get right down to the local people, starting with the people at the top, namely the government authorities. It is very difficult to go through such a fundamental paradigm shift, especially on the middle and the bottom levels, but it is possible. And it is the only way to achieve the solution with non-violence.

To be successful, we need more than lip service which deals only with words and ideas. We need to put these ideas into practice. If the government is really pursuing principle-centered leadership, they need to build these principles into all structures and systems of the society. Every part is accountable to those principles. And nobody is exempt. Those people who cannot adapt their styles, their structures and systems according to these principles cannot be successful. Thus they need to adjust themselves until they succeed. Then they will become happy because happiness is found only in success as Dewey puts it, "Happiness is found only in success; but success means succeeding, getting forward, moving in advance. It is an active process, not a passive outcome."¹⁰ So, little by little, the principle-centered leadership will purify the culture. Only when we apply the principles consistently, they will become behavioral habits, and this will enable the fundamental transformation of individuals, of families and of the society at large. What to keep in mind is that we cannot get principle-centered leadership without principle-centered leaders. This whole thing has to come from inside a people. It has to come out of their hearts and spirits.

¹⁰ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) p. 179-80.

To build high-trust cultures for peace in the South, the Thai government, first of all, should be humble. They should be humble in the sense that they understand that they do not rule the country, but principles do. Ultimately, principles will effectively govern the state. The next virtue for the government after humbleness is courage. The government should be brave enough to embrace those principles, despite the sway of very powerful social forces, of old paradigms, as well as of its own old habits.

We may divide these principles into three main kinds: eternal, natural and artificial laws.¹¹ First, eternal laws are religious and moral standards. These laws are discovered by the enlightened prophets. They are both eternal and supernatural. Thus they are not subject to change and beyond sense experience. Second, natural laws are scientific laws. These laws are discovered by the scientists. Like eternal laws, scientific laws, for example the Law of Gravity and the Law of Photosynthesis, are not subject to change. Third, artificial laws are laws that are made by people. Civil and common laws are made by men; therefore, they are considered artificial and subject to change. What all the rulers have to bear in mind is that eternal and natural laws must not be neglected and ignored, and that all civil and common laws must be made to correspond to natural and eternal laws, otherwise they will become unjust and lead the state to great suffering and damage. Martin Luther King says,

¹¹ As for mathematical laws, there are different opinions about them. For example, Plato considers mathematical laws as eternal, Kant considers them as natural (a priori synthetic judgments) while Bergson considers them as artificial.

A just law is man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.¹²

The government should govern with just laws and be a source of stability, or as Confucius puts it, “He who rules the people, depending upon the moral sentiment, is like the polestar, which keeps its place while all the stars turn towards it.”¹³

V. Conclusion

A non-violent solution in the South is both logically and factually possible if and only if we care for a politics of recognition. As Habermas says, “Multicultural societies require a ‘politics of recognition’ because the identity of each individual citizen is woven together with collective identities, and must be stabilized in a network of mutual recognition. The individual’s existential dependence on intersubjectively shared traditions and identity-forming communities explains why the integrity of the legal person cannot be secured without equal cultural rights in culturally differentiated societies.”¹⁴

¹² Martin Luther King, “An Unjust Law is No Law” in *Political Thought*, ed. by Michael Rosen & Jonathan Wolff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 83.

¹³ See *Confucian Analects*, Book II, chapter 1.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001) p. 74.

In the region where there exist low-trust cultures, principle-centered leadership is needed. Only when this kind of leadership is put into practice, high-trust cultures will be built. Civil and common laws, even though they are made, may be transcended if and only if for the sake of moral laws. Insofar as we have not reached enlightenment yet, we need to observe all rules and regulations. In other words, we can and will transcend all the conventional principles if and only if we are enlightened. If we are enlightened, we can say like Jesus, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” because all our actions will be no more based on selfish inclinations and sins. If we try to violate or transcend all the principles in spite of our disqualifications, we will be crooked and tricky like Srithanonchai. And nobody can ever trust people of this kind.