

Is the Islamic State a “Geopolitical Tool”? US Looks to Southeast Asia to Unleash Its ISIS-Daesh Hordes

By [Tony Cartalucci](#)

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Western think tanks have been increasingly busy cultivating a narrative to explain the sudden and spreading presence of militants linked or fighting under the banner of the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” (ISIS) across Southeast Asia.

This narrative – these think tanks would have audiences believe – entails militants fleeing Syria and Iraq, and entrenching themselves amid supposedly sectarian conflicts in Southeast Asia. The think tanks conveniently never mention how tens of thousands of militants are funding the logistical feat required to move them to Southeast Asia or sustain their militant operations in the region once they arrive.

Among these think tanks is the so-called International Crisis Group (ICG). In its report, [“Jihadism in southern Thailand – A phantom menace,”](#) it claims:

The decline of the Islamic State (ISIS) and the advent of ISIS-linked violence in South East Asia evince the possibility of a new era of transnational jihadist terrorism in the region.

Recurring, albeit unsubstantiated, reports about ISIS activity in Thailand have prompted questions about the vulnerability of the country’s Muslim-majority deep south and, in particular, its longstanding Malay-Muslim insurgency to jihadist influence.

While ICG claims that “to date” there is no evidence that ISIS has made inroads in southern Thailand, it warns:

But the conflict and a series of ISIS scares in Thailand are fanning fears of a new terrorist threat. Such fears are not irrational, though they are largely misplaced and should not obscure the calamity of the insurgency and the need to end it.

Direct talks between insurgent leaders and the government are a priority; a decentralised political system could help address the principal grievances in the south while preserving the unitary Thai state.

In essence, ICG is warning of a crisis it itself admits is unlikely, then recommends that Bangkok pursue a course of action it already is taking – talking with militant leaders in its southern most provinces.

The lengthy ICG report – in reality – is just one of many reoccurring and premeditated

attempts to place the notion of ISIS militancy taking root in Thailand into the realm of possibility. Just as the US and its allies have used ISIS as a geopolitical tool elsewhere in the world, and more recently, in Southeast Asia itself – particularly in the Philippines – a longstanding US goal in Thailand is to find and exploit sociopolitical and sectarian fault lines across which to divide, destroy, and control the Thai state.

B. THE OPPOSITION FORCES WILL TRY TO USE THE IRAQI TERRITORY AS A SAFE HAVEN FOR ITS FORCES TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SYMPATHY OF THE IRAQI BORDER POPULATION, MEANWHILE TRYING TO RECRUIT FIGHTERS AND TRAIN THEM ON THE IRAQI SIDE, IN ADDITION TO HARBORING REFUGEES (SYRIA).

C. IF THE SITUATION UNRAVELS THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A DECLARED OR UNDECLARED **SALAFIST PRINCIPALITY** IN EASTERN SYRIA (HASAKA AND DER ZOR), AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THE SUPPORTING POWERS TO THE OPPOSITION WANT, IN ORDER TO ISOLATE THE SYRIAN REGIME, WHICH IS CONSIDERED THE STRATEGIC DEPTH OF THE SHIA EXPANSION (IRAQ AND IRAN).

B. THE SALAFIST, THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, AND AQI ARE THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE INSURGENCY IN SYRIA.

C. THE WEST, GULF COUNTRIES, AND TURKEY SUPPORT THE OPPOSITION; WHILE RUSSIA, CHINA, AND IRAN SUPPORT THE REGIME.

(b)(1) Sec. 1.4 (c); (b)(1) Sec. 1.4 (d)

It was in a 2012 leaded memo drafted by the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) that admitted the US and its allies sought the creation of what it called at the time a “Salafist” (Islamic) “principality” (State), specifically in eastern Syria where eventually ISIS would base itself before joint Russian-Iranian-Syrian operations uprooted and expelled them.

The [2012 report \(.pdf\)](#) states specifically (emphasis added):

If the situation unravels there is the possibility **of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime**, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran).

Thus, if ISIS is a geopolitical tool first designed and deployed by the US and its allies to subvert, isolate, and overthrow the government of Syria, it follows that ISIS’ expansion [into other regions of the world US foreign policy is facing increasingly insurmountable challenges](#) is also very much planned and fueled by US policymakers and the special interests that sponsor them.

Who is the ICG and Why are They Promoting ISIS Fear?

ICG is a corporate-funded and directed policy think tank and network that creates and leverages conflicts under the guise of “preventing” them.

It claims [on its website](#) that:

Crisis Group aspires to be the preeminent organisation providing independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage deadly conflict. We combine expert field research, analysis and engagement with policymakers across the world in order to effect change in the crisis situations on which we work. We endeavour to talk to all sides and in doing so to build on our role as a trusted source of field-centred information, fresh perspectives and advice for conflict parties and external actors.

Yet a look at its sponsors and membership reveals a Westerners-only club of corporate-financier special interests, lobbying groups, lawyers, and politicians linked directly to the US State Department, the UK Foreign Office, or governments beholden to either or both.

These sponsors include oil giants Chevron, Eni, Noble Energy, Shell, Statoil, and British Petroleum (BP). It also includes financiers such as HSBC Holdings, MetLife, and RBC Capital Markets.

There is also the matter of law firms and lobbyists which fund and are directly involved in ICG's agenda including Sherman & Sterling, White & Chase, APCO Worldwide, and Edelman.

APCO Worldwide is notorious for fabricating news articles to manipulate inner corporate governance, while Edelman is notorious specifically regarding Thailand [for providing lobbying services \(PDF\)](#) to ousted dictator Thaksin Shinawatra, removed from power in 2006 via a military coup ICG itself vehemently opposed, condemned, and to this day protests.

Edelman's lobbying for Thaksin Shinawatra was headed by Kenneth Adelman, [who joined Edelman as a senior adviser](#) in 2001. Not only is Edelman a corporate sponsor of ICG, but Kenneth Adelman himself is listed in the appendixes of ICG's Thailand report as a senior ICG adviser. Adelman also chairs the US State Department's National Endowment for Democracy (NED) subsidiary, Freedom House – another front alongside Washington and London-based lobbyists [that have pressured Thailand](#) since the ousting of Shinawatra in 2006.

Listed along with Adelman is George Soros who sits on ICG's board of trustees. Soros' Open Society Foundation is listed by ICG as one of its sponsors.

Soros and his Open Society Foundation's involvement is essential to note. Virtually all of Thailand's "opposition" groups – from supposed student and academic fronts to media platforms and activists – are funded by both NED and George Soros' Open Society Foundation. These include Prachatai, Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), Thai Netizens, the New Democracy Movement (NDM), Human Rights Watch Thailand, Amnesty International Thailand, iLaw, the Isaan Record, and many more.

The concerted efforts by ICG, its corporate sponsors through lobbying, and among its memberships various other associations like Freedom House and Open Society to attack and undermine Thailand in favor of the West's proxy of choice – Thaksin Shinawatra and the large and growing opposition front the West is building inside Thailand – already raises suspicions about ICG's motivation in publishing its most recent report regarding ISIS in Thailand.

Observing Western efforts against Thailand's Southeast Asian neighbors, particularly Myanmar and the Philippines, raises suspicions even further.

The United States has expertly cultivated a deadly sectarian divide in Myanmar – turning

nationalist extremists against the nation's Rohingya minority and using the resulting violence to undermine the nation's military while propelling Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) into power. The violence also compromises constructive economic and diplomatic ties between Myanmar and China.



In the Philippines, ISIS-linked militants [managed to seize an entire city](#) in the nation's southern region. The money, weapons, and militants required for this feat clearly required state sponsorship. Just as in Syria, ISIS in the Philippines is linked to Saudi Arabia which serves as an intermediary for US money, weapons, supplies, and directives.

The conflicts in both Myanmar and the Philippines has given the US the initiative in serving as "mediator" in Myanmar, and providing "military assistance" in the Philippines. Both moves serve to give Washington a tighter grip over both nations at a time when the whole of Southeast Asia moves further out from under the shadow of US hegemony and into a more constructive and mutually beneficial embrace with Beijing.

Thailand - because of its large economy, population, and geostrategic location at the center of continental Southeast Asia - would serve US interests well in reasserting hegemony over Asia Pacific and creating a untied front against Beijing. However, Thailand - because of its independent institutions, particularly its military and monarchy - enjoys a level of unity its neighbors do not.

Under Thaksin Shinawatra, the US sought to exploit sociopolitical and class fault lines. As this fails, it appears the US is trying to use the very same networks of "reds" to stoke the same sort of nationalist fervor that has consumed neighboring Myanmar. "Reds," referring to Shinawatra's ultra-violent United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) street front, have already begun shifting activity toward temples to cultivate a previously nonexistent Buddhist-Muslim divide.

Soros-funded fronts like Prachatai posing as "rights advocates" [have decried swift and decisive moves by the Thai military](#) to detain and defrock "monks" attempting to promote sectarian violence.

To bookend US efforts to engineer a sectarian divide in Thailand, it appears that organizations like ICG are creating a narrative to explain soon-to-be ISIS activity in Thailand. The abhorrent nature of ISIS operations will play well into the anti-Islam propaganda

promoted by US-backed networks in Thailand's northeast. Somewhere in the middle – US policymakers hope – a self-sustaining “clash of civilizations” can be sparked, and consume Thailand's historically impressive national unity.

Once divided, Thailand will be more easily coerced toward US objectives in Thailand and across the wider region.

What Thailand Should Really Do

The militancy in southern Thailand is contained. The Thai government must continue existing efforts to bring socioeconomic progress to the region to drain the swamps of poverty and perceived injustice that drives recruitment into militant organizations. But beyond that, Bangkok must identify and deal with the logistical nature of the conflict, particularly those involved in arming, training, and funding the militancy.

To preemptively stop efforts by the US to expand the conflict, the government would benefit from Singapore-style hate speech legislation which makes attempts by groups to promote sectarian violence impossible without receiving immediate and severe jail sentences.

Simultaneously, efforts to further promote interfaith understanding, mutual respect, and activism would enhance Thailand's already renowned values of tolerance and diversity. Many Thais are already aware of the constructive role members of [the Thai Muslim community](#) have played in Thailand's history. There is already positive cross-cultural exchanges that happen accidentally everyday in Thailand's markets and among its many street vendors. Highlighting and enhancing this will help further inoculate the public from attempts to divide and destroy the nation along sectarian lines.

Also, the government must expose and hinder efforts by US NED and Open Society-funded fronts. Citing the US' own precedent in forcing Russia's RT to register as “foreign agents,” the Thai government could legislate mandatory disclosures in all social media profiles and at the beginning and end of every publication in print or online – including social media posts – by fronts like Prachatai indicating who funds them and why.

Finally, understanding that ISIS' source of strength came from networks propped up by the US and its allies means that fighting an ISIS militancy in Thailand begins with understanding that the US Embassy represents the very source of the militancy's strength. Rather than fostering a direct confrontation with the United States, alternative Thai media could link ISIS activity directly and repeatedly with the US embassy – ensuring any terrorist act is immediately linked to suspicion of the US Embassy.

The more covert US-sponsored terrorism that unfolds, the more US credibility in Thailand and in the region will suffer.

Finally, when seeking allies in a true “War on Terror,” Bangkok should cultivate ties with nations that are truly waging war on terror. This includes China, Russia, and Iran.

When the US begins losing and being excluded permanently everywhere it brings its “War on Terror,” policymakers in Washington will either be held accountable and the tactic abandoned, or the US itself will find itself as isolated and irrelevant as it has tried to make nations like Syria and Iraq upon which it first unleashed its ISIS menace.

Tony Cartalucci is a Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the

online magazine [“New Eastern Outlook”](#) where this article was originally published.

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