‘STAY WHERE YOU ARE UNTIL OUR BACKS ARE TURNED’
IMAGINING THE BORDER FROM KUALA LUMPUR AND BANGKOK

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

GEOGRAPHY

MAY 2015

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Abstract

This thesis examines the security situation along the border between Thailand and Malaysia by conducting a discursive analysis of the security concerns of government officials on both sides of the border. The border between is the site of considerable contradiction. At once, dividing two ethnically and linguistically disparate states with different conceptions of security, the border also serves as the site for a number of cooperation efforts, including joint military patrols along the border, a cooperative mineral extraction regime encompassing a disputed territorial claim in the Gulf of Thailand, and one of the only border walls in the world that has been constructed jointly by the states on either side. In this thesis, I explore the concept of security and the imagined geography of the border from the perspective of both states, drawing extensively on two sources: personal interviews with mid-level government and military officials on both sides as well as local news media reports about border security issues over the last 15 years. In approaching the study of the border region in this way, I challenge the argument that borders are best studied at the local level. Instead, this paper seeks to return agency to state actors who ultimately wield the economic and military might to define borders performatively, and are in any case, the referent objects of local resistance movements.

Keywords: Thailand; Malaysia; borders; security; cooperation; imaginative geography; performativity
Introduction

"I think a long-term solution to the problem is to build a wall and declare the border as a security area. I realize the livelihoods of people living along the border will be affected by the proposed plan, but we have to stop the smuggling of firearms and drugs and prevent criminals escaping across the border. We cannot take into account only the economic factors involved, as the country's security must be a priority."

– Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs, 13 September 2013

The epigraph above from the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs could be quoted from nearly any politician or pundit anywhere on the globe. Borders are the defining characteristic of the modern state and quite often the decision-makers and the general public view the construction of security barriers along international boundaries as the most logical and practical solution to national security problems. Minister Zahid’s statement about the country’s border with Thailand uncovers some of the complexity of borders. He makes it clear that the illegal activity along his country’s border with Thailand presents a threat to the security of the state, but also reveals that the border serves another important role for the people living nearby. Indeed, the border between Thailand and Malaysia both unites and divides the community it bisects; it is a powerful economic, social and cultural force in people’s lives at the local level, yet several hundred kilometers, and in some ways, a world away in Kuala Lumpur, the erection of a security fence along the border between Thailand and Malaysia is seen as a rational policy response meant to address the persistent threats to national security in the border area. In fact, an expansion of the current security measures is simply the continuation of a long-standing bilateral security regime at the border that for over a hundred years has sought to peaceably regulate

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migration flows between Thailand and Malaysia while also imprinting each state’s sovereignty over their internationally recognized territory.

Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the number of international border walls has more than tripled to greater than 36 today (Vallet, 2014: 2). In justifying their renewed interest in border security through “hardening,” advocates of this approach have tended to view closed borders as the norm and modern open borders as aberrations to an historical bordering paradigm that was dominated by fixed and closed borders. However, as Rosière and Jones (2012) argue, the “…opposite is more accurate. In previous eras it was never necessary to have a completely closed border” (222). In the modern era, governments have come to view borders through the lens of security, and discourses surrounding border walls have largely emphasized the threat posed by the passage of dangerous persons, goods and ideas from one (typically poorer) country to another (usually richer) country through unsecured or insufficiently guarded borders. The construction of walls along the boundary between Thailand and Malaysia has not fully adhered to this paradigm, for it has largely been the product of a history of bilateral cooperation between linguistically, culturally and religiously distinct states with disparate goals in their bordering processes. Moreover, at least since 1998 onward, both sides have found cause to work even closer together despite their own internal political struggles (Chalk, 2008). This study will explore this seemingly anomalous case by parsing through the discursive structures that serve to unite Thailand and Malaysia in their pursuit to create a border between them that is permeable only by means authorized by the two governments.

Border Studies
The trends leading to the erection of security walls along the Thailand-Malaysia border are not unique (e.g. Sparke, 2006; Nevins, 2010; Jones, 2009). The construction of such devices is often viewed as the logical solution to solving border crises in which borders are presented as the weak link within integrated systems of national defense. Governments around the world seek to show how leaky borders serve as conduits for a variety of threats to the very existence of the state (e.g. Bush, 2002). But walls and fences are not the only tools employed by the state in order to concretize boundaries. States are concomitantly militarizing borders through the deployment of army, police, paramilitary troops and border agents, as well as technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles, “smart” fences and sensors, CCTVs, and other methods (Coleman, 2005; Johnson, et al., 2011; Jones, 2012). While these efforts by states to reify their international boundaries and assert sovereignty over their peripheries have achieved a modicum of success in reducing the movement of undocumented persons across borders, there is an increasing awareness that these efforts are successful principally in diverting workers and economic migrants instead of terrorists and criminals, and they are also responsible for causing more migrant deaths (Cornelius, 2001; Nevins, 2010). Moreover, there is growing concern that such measures are stoking an arms race with organized criminals, terrorists and gangs who are forced to match the firepower wielded by state border agents (Van Schendel, 2005; Andreas and Price, 2001; Salter, 2004).

Though borders are certainly being fortified at an astonishing rate, military conflict resulting from border disputes is far rarer than it once was. Zacher (2001) terms this phenomenon the “territorial integrity norm” in which state actors in the international arena are largely respectful of the borders of their neighbors. Of course this norm is not all-encompassing, and
military incursions across border do still occur (e.g. Iraq’s 1991 invasion of Kuwait and Russia’s more recent incursions into Crimea, etc.) However, engaging in this type of behavior is often costly for the belligerent (Salehyan, 2007). As a result, the traditional role of borders as defenses against incursion by another state has been largely supplanted by their law enforcement function, as non-state actors have conspicuously chosen the opposite path by violating the territorial integrity norm (Andrijasevic, 2003: 256; Brown, 2010). In fact, even before the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, non-state actors have increasingly been seen as the primary security concern in border regions (United States Department of Defense, 2013: 5). This phenomenon is not limited to the United States. Brown (2010: 21) proposes that the marked increase in the construction of barriers and exclusion zones in border regions around the world is specifically targeted towards transnational security threats including terrorists, traffickers and others non-state actors. This development has been a driver in the merger between internal and external security threats and has served as the basis for increasing border controls and policing (Andreas, 2003). Though many observers acknowledge this dramatic rethinking of security, states continue to do much of the heavy lifting in forming border regimes and remain the primary referent of most border studies (Hassner, 2002).

Owing to the salience of borders and their centrality in conceptions of the state, there is an increasing interdisciplinary interest in the study of borders and their physical manifestation as walls and fences. Wilson and Donnan explain that “[b]order studies have become significant themselves because scholars and policy-makers alike have recognized that most things that are important to the changing conditions of national and international political economy take place in borderlands…” and that “…some of these things, for instance those related to migration,
commerce, smuggling and security, may be found in borderlands in sharper relief” (2012: 1). Some of the more visible phenomena of borders, such as the construction of border walls and fences are more commonly found outside of the Western context, yet the vast majority of this scholarship continues to focus on sites in Europe and North America. Studying the Thailand-Malaysia border, then affords us the opportunity to gather unique insights that will contribute meaningfully to the literature on borders and border studies.

**Research Approach and Questions:**

This thesis presents a case study of the boundary between Thailand and Malaysia. My research aims to determine what makes this border unique by identifying the mechanisms that have led to the unprecedented international cooperation between the two states in managing their common border while giving particular attention to the securitization of the border and level of cooperation between the two states in the maintenance of their boundary regime. Furthermore, I demonstrate that while a physical wall exists and is meant to separate Thailand from Malaysia and Malaysia from Thailand, the boundary remains dynamic in its *performance* by the governments of the two states. I do this by answering the following sets of interrelated questions:

- *How do the governments of Malaysia and Thailand articulate their respective border security concerns? How do these articulated concerns translate to national policy and joint cooperation endeavors? How have these narratives evolved over time and what events or series of events have played the most important roles in shaping the official government border narratives?*

- *What is the current nature of security cooperation along the Thailand/Malaysia border? How do the primary theoretical perspectives on security cooperation (i.e., liberalism,*
realism, and constructivism) explain the level of cooperation? Which theory(ies) best explain(s) the nature of security cooperation along the border?

• What are the theoretical and practical obstacles to deeper cooperation in border security? Can these obstacles be overcome? How can the border security cooperation paradigm employed by Thailand and Malaysia be employed elsewhere?

Many authors have written about this particular border area from the local level, so in asking the questions above, I have concentrated principally on the imagined geography of the border as conveyed through national-level journalism and government and military officials in the capital of each country. Within the discourse on border security there is a single dominant narrative that views the shared border as a cooperative endeavor meant to support mutually-held interests, Westphalian notions of space and ASEAN principles of brotherhood. Security, defined broadly to encompass non-traditional domains such the economy, transnational crime and illicit migration underpins this narrative of the border and the relationship between the governments. Indeed, it serves as the ideational foundation for a number of institutional frameworks and agreements that have been brokered at the strategic levels of government, which help to turn geographical imaginations into reality. However, this narrative is tempered by inputs from local media and government and military officials who serve largely at the operational level and translate policy and ideas into action.

The contributions from these actors mutually support one another and add two crucial considerations to the border security discourse. In the first place, both the media and the government apparatchik narratives make a clear representation of the border as the site of threat and danger. This is unsurprising, for as Soguk (1999) argues, the practice of statecraft is most often associated with agents who view borders in a particular way that largely differs from the
cooperative paradigm outlined by the most senior government officials. In order for the performances of these actors to be successful, they “must incite popular and institutional discourses of problems and dangers; statize them, that is, inscribe them as problems and dangers…, and regiment them in terms that privilege a statist imagination of the world” (Soguk, 1999: 40). Indeed, the US-led Global War on Terror and the increase in violence in the Thai Deep South in the early 2000s have served as key events that have contributed to the emphasis on the threat narrative on both sides of the border.

Certainly most government officials that I interviewed in Thailand and Malaysia see security in the region as a realistic and attainable goal. And every government official with whom I spoke made it clear that the governments of the two states often attempt to cooperate on a wide variety of matters. However, neither realism nor liberalism is satisfying in their explanations for the level and success of security cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia because they both lack an emphasis on culture. Instead, insights from constructivism are helpful in that this approach assumes that processes matter more than structures. Thus, my second finding is that despite the pervasive narrative of threat on both sides of the border, a coherent ideational imperative, and a certain degree of cooperation between them, there is a palpable mistrust within the strategic communities of Thailand and Malaysia about the other side’s earnestness in fulfilling its obligations to ensure border security. The result is that many fissures between the two sides exist, and the vision of cooperative border management remains unrealized.

Without ignoring the structural elements of cooperation, this study emphasizes the use of language to convey meaning about the border and its security. I observe that despite the robust
institutional and ideational cooperation frameworks, tactical-level bilateral security cooperation is inhibited by the divergence of threat perception between the two states, as well as their mistrust of one another. Furthermore, I find that the discursive organization of the border centers on notions of power, stability and goodness, which stand in opposition to impotence, disorder and evil. In this, the narratives of the media and the apparatchik are mutually supportive, for the former construct a framing mechanism through which the latter articulates policy and then acts. Thus, while the media frame the debates on security, the government or military official is the operative element that can be mobilized to either enhance or weaken the bilateral relationship between the two states, and should be seen as a crucial actor in performing the border in the first place. The government official, then, is the most appropriate actor in any project meant to strengthen the levels of cooperation, or conversely, to limit the effects of central government’s statist designs on the borderland.

After outlining the obstacles to further cooperation between the governments in performing border security, I conclude this thesis by offering two diverging visions for the future of security cooperation in the Thailand-Malaysia border region. First, I propose a course of action that I believe would allow both states to maintain their current posture toward the national security threats that they articulate, but harmonize their approaches. An introduction of fully-embedded exchange personnel at all relevant agencies charged with implementation of border security would serve to promote the spirit of cooperation and understanding that is so lacking in both countries. Presently, there are Thai and Malaysian liaison officers at a number of agencies who are not necessarily reciprocated, and continue to report to their national chain of command without fulfilling specific duties for their hosts. There is precedent elsewhere for deeper
cooperation, thus if the two governments embedded exchange personnel in leadership and managerial positions within host agencies, I contend that much of the mistrust would soon disappear.

The second proposal is broader in scope, and would require a dramatic re-thinking of the purpose of border security itself. Admittedly, the chances of success in this approach are slimmer, but its impacts would be far greater. Though she refers specifically to Malaysia, Nah’s argument that the status quo on security is the product of a “distinct view of the world in which each and every individual possesses a place where he/she belongs” is equally valid in Thailand (2007: 37). Under this paradigm, the most important role of borders is their ability to secure the state from the existential threat of an other. But, the instrument is crude, simplistically categorizing people based on what amounts to an arbitrary line. I argue that the state must be replaced as referent of security, and that the threat be more accurately articulated. The border between Thailand and Malaysia is the ideal site for redefining border security in this way because there is an existing level of ideational goodwill and concordance of interests between the two sides. Although they cannot succeed alone, mid-level government and military officials are uniquely placed to promote such a paradigm shift from within because they have vast organizational experience in performing border security and already possess the necessary authority to do so.

Methods
The question of how an author chooses to research and study border discourses is an important one. I have employed an interdisciplinary theoretical approach in order to draw from a wide variety of sources and materials that would not normally reference one another. I have sought insights from several fields of study, including geography, political science and international relations, anthropology, feminist studies, sociology and security studies. My intent in doing this is to identify research questions and bring novel insights to the study of border security. For instance, in this study I have examined border security cooperation and threat framing from the perspective of geography and sociology rather than from the perspective of security. In so doing, I have been able to investigate emerging security subjectivities within discursive structures as well as exercises of power and resistance. It also allows me to demonstrate how border policy changes are as much about internal governmental considerations as they are about territoriality and maintaining a border regime.

National boundaries are the most tangible features of sovereignty and are often understood as the front lines in national defense, it is no surprise, then, that research on boundaries can be a sensitive topic fraught with “national security” concerns. Indeed, this inquiry considers the time period from 2001 to the present, an era characterized by an increasingly securitized global landscape in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror; violent unrest in the Deep South provinces of Thailand; political instability in Malaysia; and most recently a military coup in Thailand. This research does not seek a particular “truth.” On the contrary, it seeks to understand the role that the central governments play in publicly articulating security concerns of the state, sometimes in spite of the realities at the local level.

\(^2\) My methodology is explained in further detail in Appendix B of this thesis.
I relied heavily upon two particular sources in my research. 1.) Personal interviews with officials of the central governments in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur and military officers and US government officials assigned to the US missions in Thailand and Malaysia. 2.) Contemporary media archives obtained through a database of local news reportage in both countries. The primary method in this study was discourse analysis of personal statements and opinions obtained from interviews with mid-level government officials and published statements of more senior officials obtained from local media sources. Let me be clear: these do not, in any way, constitute national policy nor do they reflect an official government opinion; however, in this study, they do serve as inputs into the discourse that contributes to the national decision-making processes in both countries and allowed me to construct a meta-narrative of the official border articulations from the capitals.

**Chapter Overview**

This thesis is laid out in five chapters. Chapter One serves as the theoretical basis for the rest of the thesis, and begins by providing an overview of the literatures on border studies and placing my approach in conversation with some of the writers who have made important contributions to the field. As the thesis seeks to understand the processes and effects of security policies implemented by the central governments of Thailand and Malaysia, the chapter proceeds by looking at the concepts of security, performativity and imaginative geography. I begin my interrogation of these key concepts with a discussion of the nexus of security and geopolitics and introduce the concept of securitization. Next, I present the notions of imaginative geography and performativity as fundamental state practices that bear on geopolitical relationships among states.
and their people. The chapter concludes by arguing that as a subjective process, security is best understood through its discursive structures.

In Chapter Two, I address the specific context of the Thailand and Malaysia case. I first situate the border geographically by providing an overview of the site as well as the historical and cultural meanings and practices associated with it. This discussion provides a basis for my exploration of the evolution of the border as an institution and security cooperation between the two countries.

Chapter Three offers an overview of the dominant international relations theories as they pertain to Southeast Asia in general, and the relationship between Thailand and Malaysia in particular. I argue that the traditional realist and liberal approaches to international relation and security are ill-suited to explain the cooperation exhibited by the two states as they promulgate policy and perform security along their border. Instead, I see constructivism, with its basis in social theory as the most appropriate lens through which to understand the border. It is with this in mind that I investigate the strategic cultures of Thailand and Malaysia by looking at the security cultures of both states side by side. This demonstrates the influential role of domestic and regional characteristics in shaping the agenda of international institutions, and offers insight into the value of the constructivist approach.

Throughout Chapter Four, I employ insights gathered from the earlier discussion of strategic culture to assess the discursive construction of security along their Thailand-Malaysia border. This chapter focuses on the ideational and institutional aspirations at the highest levels of government. It assesses the basis for the narrative of cooperation, and reviews specific and tangible results of this discourse. In so doing, I discuss the processes of security cooperation
between Thailand and Malaysia along their terrestrial and maritime borders. The chapter also looks deeply at the role of the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area and the General Border Committee as key institutions in the development of the cooperative regime as well as the role of other institutions that make up the regional security architecture of Southeast Asia. In this chapter, I argue that the production of imaginative geographies about the border is a key for both countries to claim the moral high ground on security-related matters. At the same time, internal politics and the influence of a unique Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) culture equip both states ideologically and provide them with the impetus to perform the work together cooperatively. The resultant wall between Thailand and Malaysia defies global convention that dictates most international security barriers are built unilaterally; instead, the wall between Thailand and Malaysia serves as a symbol of cooperative border performance.

In Chapter Five I present the competing narratives of border security as articulated by journalists and personal interviews with mid-level government officials in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. Thus, I use interviews and media reports as the subjects of analysis. In this chapter, I do not seek to validate the authenticity of any particular source. Rather I take the heterogeneity of my results as crucial to a better understanding of the security cultures of Thailand and Malaysia.

I conclude my thesis by assessing the utility of current security cooperation efforts and pondering the future of cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia in light of shifting geopolitical dynamics in the region. As both states are as much discursive productions as they are physical and material spaces, I recapitulate the most important processes of reiterative and citational discursive statecraft that Thailand and Malaysia perform and offer a prescription for
more productive cooperation in future between the two states themselves and the wider region by offering two proposals for re-thinking border security.
Chapter One: On Borders, Geopolitics and Security

“This country built a Panama Canal in the 19th century. I think we’re up for a fence in the 21st.”
–United States Congressman Ryan Zinke, 14 January 2015

Former Navy SEAL and freshman congressman from Montana, Ryan Zinke expressed succinctly how the public view border security. As his analogy suggests, for him and many others, most border issues are little more than engineering projects to be solved. For in this view, just as physics dictates that the Panama Canal should allow for the safe passage of ships from Atlantic to Pacific, so too should a border fence be able to restrict the movement of migrants across the US-Mexico frontier. Partisan debates and normative judgments about the practicality, necessity or morality of constructing such a fence aside, it cannot be denied that this view serves as an influential input into what constitutes security in the United States. My point then is to show how the notion of security is created and employed within the public discourse by beginning with an example that is relevant to most readers. Much of the literature has tended to treat security as an eminently knowable thing that can be guaranteed or protected through the use of force or other means. This chapter will show that security is more subjective than that, for it is the product of many inputs and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Looking specifically at border security complicates things further still, given the deeply emotional role that borders seem to play in our lives, and their interconnections with the most basic conceptions of the state itself.

In order to conduct a proper analysis of the way that security is conceived and performed along the boundary between Thailand and Malaysia, I must first situate my work within the

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broader security and geographical literature pertaining to borders. Following this literature review, I will provide a brief treatment of the relationship between security and geopolitics and introduce the notion of securitization as an important driver in the security discourse. As it is my intention to show the subjective nature of security, I further explore the concepts of imaginative geography and performativity that serve to underpin the national debates on border security in Thailand and Malaysia. An in-depth discussion on these concepts in theory will allow me to test their application in context in the following chapters, and in so doing help to appreciate the process that has led the two countries to deepen their cooperative endeavors along the border.

*Literature Review*

A great number of scholars have analyzed borders before me, and a brief survey of their findings is a useful introduction to this study and to my own point of view. The task of analyzing border dynamics is not a straightforward one, and a number of viewpoints have something meaningful to say about the topic. People create borders to simplify their lives. Although most observers will agree that borders serve as a means to separate things that are different and create distinct categories, they can be approached from a variety of angles. Of course, there is a certain irony in attempting to draw borders between scholars in this way, but then, this merely demonstrates the utility of borders as a means to simplify our world and make it more readily understood. In general, there have been three typologies that have served to deepen our understanding of borders and the mechanisms of their creation and maintenance. The geopolitical approach is the most realist ontology, characterizing borders by their territoriality and emphasizing their role as the defining characteristic of the international system; then there
are those who have dismissed national borders as an anachronism in a globalized era or otherwise as inconsequential to grander international projects; and finally is the most common approach to studying borders from a post-modern lens, viewing them as praxis. While these approaches diverge considerably, they each all emphasize the objects of borders as the primary locus of inquiry, that is to say they explore the effects of borders on people and the built environment.

There is no question that borders have long been most commonly associated with division of states into the world we see on maps. Salter describes borders as the “primary institution of the contemporary state, the construction of a geopolitical world, and the primary ethico-political division between the possibility of politics inside the state and the necessity of anarchy outside the state” (Johnson, et al. 2011: 66). Traditional political geography and boundary studies characterized boundaries as modern developments (Giddens and Pierson, 1998). Yet, as far back as the turn of the 19th century, Friedrich Ratzel applied biological characteristics to states based on their size, shape and the velocity of their expansion or contraction. This thinking is largely a reflection that in earlier eras, geographers saw natural features such as rivers and mountain ranges as the only boundaries of any consequence (Paasi, 1999). Many of the geographers who engaged in this type of study sought to answer the question “where?” And a number of more contemporary studies have continued to view borders as fixed artifacts that have a set of innate characteristics (e.g., Alvarez, 1995; Zartman, 2010). Moreover, in the popular press, two-dimensional maps with their pastel palettes and black lines of separation continue to be described as “the spatial representation of humanity’s divisions” (Kaplan, 2013: 27). The borders drawn in these maps serve as a key instrument of state power.
Whereas the strictly geopolitical approach suggests a positivistic notion of legality that lends credibility to the state, Anssi Paasi is keen to note that this conception misses the point. For Salter (2004; 2008), Paasi (2005; 2009), Popescu (2012), and others, borders are not quite so sterile; they all view borders as unfixed objects of variable depth that evoke emotive responses that can employed for both progressive and regressive purposes (Johnson et al., 2011; Popescu, 2012). This argument against realist geopolitics is undoubtedly true, but it is at best, simplistic. My reservations about the value of this response are effectively that it overgeneralizes the geopolitical approach and tends to stymie rather than advance serious research. There are certainly other actors out there and more variability than the geopolitical approach would suggest, but the role of states and the continued importance of the international system cannot be dismissed out of hand. At the same time, it is clear that other voices are needed as the geopolitical approach fails to tell the complete story of bordering.

A second and entirely different set of explanations of borders is that of those I call ‘soft power globalists.’ There has certainly been considerable opprobrium directed toward those who, around the turn of the 21st century, predicted a borderless or ‘flat’ world (e.g. Friedman, 2005; Öhmae, 1990; Julius, 1990; Reich, 1991; O’Brien, 1992). Indeed, much of their argument was hot air that failed to reflect the reality that the legal and political framework of the state system will continue into the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the thesis of the globalists to which I refer, is that network effects of financial, social, ethical and market forces are making international borders less relevant. This is a compelling argument that draws heavily on the works of Cashore (2002) and Cashore, et al. (2004) who refer to governance structures that derive their authority from stakeholders and can be termed “non-state market-driven.” Similarly,
Held, et al. (1999) see globalization as a phenomenon that both accelerates and intensifies interconnections in a meaningful way across borders. They see it as “a process which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions–assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power” (16). Their approach differs from others in that they offer a methodology for analyzing integration projects, and they demonstrate the increasing connectivity of various networks over time.

There is no unified corpus of authors subscribing to this view, but rather the view is reflected in the writings of authors in a wide variety of disciplines. Exemplars of the soft globalist school of analysis do not literally assert that international borders will be eliminated, but they imply that the state is becoming less prominent as various non-state organization and mechanisms have taken on a wider role in governance of social systems (Cashore, 2002).

Robinson (2007) argues that borders are fast becoming more complex and differentiated entities and points to the development of trade and governance structures such as the World Trade Organization, the European Union, and various international judicial bodies as evidence of a momentous shift in the ways in which borders are being defined along the lines of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984). At the same time, Rhodes (1994, 1996, 1997) views the role of the European Union as a supranational governance body and local councils in Britain as two forces working in concert to ‘hollow-out’ the role of the central government in its running of the state. Ngaire Woods (e.g., 2006) is prolific in her examination of the Bretton Woods institutions and their role in global governance. She researches the role of entities such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade
Organization that promote a neo-liberal democratic-capitalist order, attaching ‘good governance’ principles to favorable aid and development policies while supplanting local traditions and cultural mores.

A number of scholars, particularly those doing research on public policy have examined the ‘re-scaling’ of governance (e.g., Brenner, 1999; Bulkeley, 2005). There are several points to be made. The first is that while the role of networks of non-state actors has certainly had a substantial impact on international trade and the movement of resources, as well as on environmental and public health issues, there are clear limits to the phenomenon. National governments retain both the ability and the will to foster the networks that are beneficial to state aims and hamper the rest. Indeed, global governance does not so much supplant the role of governments, but rather is contingent upon their cooperation in order to succeed. Thus collective interests are only upheld insofar as they conform with national priorities.

Thus I come to the final school, in which I place myself, the school that employs post-modern analysis and looks at bordering (or b/ordering some of its theorists call it) as a practice (Bauman and Gingrich, 2000; van Houtum et al., 2005; Newman, 2006). This literature de-centers borders from the spatial domain and instead emphasize the less visible and more complex role they play in the world today. Scholars within this school prefer to look at borders with respect to their relationship to the imagination (van Houtum 2012). Within the field of anthropology, a number of scholars have focused on frontiers and borderlands, studying local populations in diverse conditions, seeking to give agency to the people in these spaces of exception (Donnan and Wilson, 2010; Roitman, 2005.) Operating within a post-Westphalian worldview, these analyses and others in this oeuvre emphasize localized meanings over physical
representations. Indeed, as van Houtum, et al. (2005) make plain, borders are best understood not from their material manifestations but rather from what they represent. I quote extensively:

Border objects are not relevant in themselves, as are the objectification processes of bounded spaces informing people's everyday spatial practices. This power of borders, that which exceeds their constraining material form, is derived from their specific interpretation and a resultant (often violent) practice. Most importantly, a territorial b/order is a normative idea, a belief in the existence and continuity of a territorially binding and differentiated power that only becomes concrete, objectified and real in our own everyday social practices. The border of a province or a nation-state is first and foremost a legal fact, one that is reproduced, literally kept alive by a large ensemble of connected practices, ranging from printed bodies of law and maps to corporeal inscriptions and the surveillance of boundaries on the landscape. The b/order is an active verb. (van Houtum, et al., 2005: 3)

In post-modernist thinking, borders are often seen through the lens of local communities; and a number of scholars have conducted intensive ethnographies attempting to place ethnic minorities at the forefront of the discussion of border practices. Alexander Horstmann has written prolifically on the borderlands of Southeast Asia has conducted extensive field work in Thailand and Malaysia. In his works (e.g., 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011) he has sought to question the monopoly of the state as the arbiter of identity. Moreover, without essentializing the communities themselves, he sees those living on the border as powerful actors in challenging basic assumptions of social anthropology that tie people into a spatial system dominated by the nation-state (2002: 13). To be sure, this is a valuable contribution to the literature and indeed informs my own approach, but it takes for granted the actions of the state in creating the border in the first place.
My aim is to add to the post-modern discussion of borders and their creation, but from a different perspective. Rather than employing an ethnographic approach, this work considers and seeks to understand the discourse on borders from the perspective of the bureaucrat, the politician, the security practitioner and the state-dominated media because it is they who articulate the border’s meaning in the first place before local communities can respond to it. In a review essay of relevant border scholarship in Southeast Asia, Horstmann (2008) asserts that the concept of transnationalism suggests that the nation-state does not impinge on the lives of migrants, yet this perspective is belied by the increase in border control and immigration activities around the world (15). Based upon his study of the transborder peoples of Southeast Asia, he calls ours a post-national world, but it seems that someone forgot to tell the governments and powerbrokers that articulate the border from the national capitals in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok.

The problem is that although the transborder population believes the line on the ground is arbitrary, the government believes it is sacrosanct. The everyday acts of refusal by borderlanders are surely significant, but these are contingent on the government’s articulating a border in the first place, and actively performing the border in the second. Indeed, many local studies of borders “that take actual fences and walls as sites of a border’s enunciation and actualization” overlook the fact that “statist logic is nevertheless central to border practices as limit markers” Soguk, 2007: 285). It is for this reason that analyzing the border from the center is still important. Huge sums of money are spent enforcing the border; countless jobs are created surveying, mapping, policing and reifying the border regime with technology. Militaries patrol in boats and by foot. Fences are erected and repaired. These are the real results of government
articulations and performances. Transborder people will argue that the border doesn’t exist; however, it would be more prudent to acknowledge that while all these performances occur, people simply adapt to them and act out their own performances.

Similar to Horstmann, Baud and van Schendel (1997: 212) “seek to redress the imbalance of state-centered studies, and to discover which social forces originate in borderlands along with the effects they have had both locally and beyond the borderlands.” They admit that “borderlands in recent historical scholarship are placed at the center of study” yet they and others have continued to neglect the other half of the equation. There are two border narratives according to Horstmann: “that by the state and that by the populations which inhabit the borders” (2002: 15).

Whereas Horstmann and Baud and van Schendel are interested in the latter group, they neglect the former. This study will attempt to correct that. Focusing on the borderlands and its people is certainly a worthwhile endeavor and should be continued; however, eschewing the center in favor of the periphery provides us with only half the story. As Horstmann readily admits, “borders are markers of statehood,” thus a useful place to start would be to look within the bureaucracy of the state and determine how government officials are creating the discourses that justify the reification of borders (2002: 8).

This approach does not seek to remove agency from those living in borderlands, or in any way diminish their capacity to form identities that cross the spatial boundaries established by the state, instead as I have alluded to earlier, this research attempts to bring the state back into the conversation about borders. There is a paucity of research on the Thailand-Malaysia boundary in general and there exists no systematic theory-based study of cooperative strategies to combat the effects of transnational security threats emanating from the border. Moreover, English-language
scholarship has been silent on the tactical tasks and strategic implications of border cooperation as seen through official Thai and Malaysian discourses. This thesis ambitiously aims to offer a corrective to the shortcomings in the research.

The Nexus of Security and Geopolitics

Geopolitics re-emerged in the past thirty years as a useful field of inquiry that moves beyond the strategic ambitions of its imperial past that largely described “great power rivalries and geographical dimensions of global power” (Dalby, 2010: 50). Critical geopolitics was first theorized in response to nuclear crises in the Cold War and the nascent discussion of Orientalism in other disciplines, but it now increasingly engages with the geographical representations in politics by exploring concepts such as the war on terror (e.g. Amoore, 2006; De Goede, 2008), regulation and the police state (Goodwin, 2006; Williams, Johnston and Goodwin, 2014; Oc and Tiesdall, 2014) and contested concepts of security (Smith, 2005). Gearóid Ó Tuathail describes critical geopolitics as a tactical form of knowledge that “is distinguished by its problematization of the logocentric infrastructures that make ‘geopolitics’ or any spatialization of the global political scene possible. It problematizes the ‘is’ of ‘geography’ and ‘geopolitics,’ and their status as self-evident, natural, foundational, and eminently knowable realities” (1996: 68).

Scholars of critical geopolitics have recognized that while convenient, spatialization necessarily obscures the world it purports to describe. In the late 1990s, critical geopolitics scholars (e.g. Dalby and Ó Tuathail, 1996; Ó Tuathail, 1998) began to argue against the most commonly accepted ideas of political space and the production thereof. The development of critical
approaches in geopolitics has informed similar trends in the study of both international relations and security studies and has led to questioning the construction and use of international borders.

Borders, first and foremost are tied to concepts of security. Yet, security is a more complicated notion than it appears. The term traditionally incorporates military, political and economic concerns, and has latterly been associated with other broad issues including the environment, food, water and others. But, in its most general sense, security can be understood as the “safety of life-support systems and the absence of threats to the life of the people and their activities” (Kolossov, 2005: 621). While security is often regarded purely as a private concern, the idea that governments ought to provide security on a larger scale can be traced to the enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke who both believed that it was the responsibility of the state to provide security for its citizens. Both understood this type of security in a limited and specific sense of military protection against external threats. However, over the past two hundred years, this notion has been "expanded to include virtually any adverse event such as natural disasters, economic depressions, and social movements that could disrupt the economic production of the state" (Cosmas and Jones, forthcoming).

Although security is typically viewed as a domestic concern, it has tangible geopolitical consequences (e.g. changes in migration and trade flows). Securitization, or the process of identifying problems as security issues is, as Lipschutz notes, “meaningless without an ‘other’ to help specify the conditions of insecurity” (1995: 9). While undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States is often treated as a security concern within the United States, for a variety of reasons of historical, economic and cultural importance, migration from Canada to the United States has not traditionally been viewed in the same light. Similarly, nuclear weapons do
not, in and of themselves, constitute a security threat, for as Ackleson (2005) observes, their possession by France and the United Kingdom is unproblematic to most commentators in the United States. But, that the Western discourse has been successful in presenting the far less advanced nuclear capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a source of insecurity demonstrates that securitization of an issue is a contextual process that succeeds or fails depending upon the degree to which a rhetorical “other” has been created. Tracing these discourses, we can see how something becomes securitized and observe the geopolitical ramifications thereof; however, there is still a theoretical debate surrounding why certain issues are securitized in the first place and the best ways to analyze them once they are elevated to the sphere of security.

The process of securitization relates very closely and is often presented with respect to its relationship to a variety of concepts including militarization and militarism, i.e. the provisioning of civil entities with military equipment, resources and training or expanding the role of the military in domestic affairs (Philo, 2012; Campbell and Shapiro, 2007); bordering (Kolossov and Scott, 2013; Boedeltje and Van Houtum, 2011); the habitus of security practitioners and the objects of fear (Hyndman, 2007; Huysmans, 2006). In light of this confusion, various scholars, notably Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver have sought to establish a generally accepted definition and broaden the use of securitization theory; while their effort to fashion a hegemonic definition has been not been wholly successful, their contributions have been employed in the present study.

This ongoing debate on securitization has served to expand the scope of issues that can be regarded as security threats, and largely centers on the question, what is security? The backdrop for this was that beginning in the 1970s, political science and security studies theorists debated
the relative benefits and drawbacks of wide and narrow conceptions of security. Traditionalists who viewed security strictly as military threats to the state argued that it was important to place limits to what could be defined in terms of security, lest every political issue be addressed as such. Opponents of this view argued that under certain conditions it would be possible to expand the concept of security into other sectors and referent objects and still maintain the utility of the idea by limiting it in other ways.

The main argument of securitization theory from the perspective of the Copenhagen School (CS), whose main contributors include Buzan and Wæver, is that a political problem becomes a security issue not because it objectively is one, but rather because it is presented as such by a securitizing actor to a relevant audience (Wæver, 1995). Moreover, the securitizing actor must present the issue as posing an existential threat to some referent object that has a legitimate claim to survival, e.g. the state. And finally, once the issue is identified as a security issue it is dealt with immediately through extraordinary measures (Buzan, et al. 1998: 21). While this approach shares with traditional security studies the notion that states are the primary security referents, or “things that are seen to be existentially threatened and have a legitimate claim to survival” (Buzan, et al., 1998: 36), CS scholars employ a variety of social constructivist and neo-realist concepts to expand the scope of issues that can become securitized.

The CS approaches security as something that is socially constructed; however, theorists of the school are keen to point out that this does not open the door to any issue’s being easily securitized; as pointed out earlier, there are checks built into the theoretical construct, namely that the issue proposed as a security problem must not only be articulated as such but also accepted as a security problem by a relevant audience before extraordinary response measures
can commence. Moreover, the fact that security is socially constructed does not limit its tangible effects in the world. On the contrary, that the social construction of security is often related to issues of ethnicity, nationalism, identity politics or polarizing political issues such as environmentalism makes the securitization of issues under the CS rubric even more consequential. The CS recognizes the contentious nature and deleterious impacts of many of these issues and, treats security in a negative light “as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics” (Wæver, 1995: 29). Therefore, the Copenhagen School advocates de-securitization, i.e. moving issues back into the ordinary public discourse from the domain of exceptional politics.

This mistrust of security stems from the CS view that security is far too often invoked to legitimize anti-democratic and authoritarian measures such as the use of force and the expansion of the role of the state in the lives of its citizens. According to Wæver, de-securitization is the “optimal long-range option, since it means not to have issues phrased as ‘threats against which we have countermeasures’ but to move them out of this threat-defence sequence and into the ordinary public sphere (or the economy, or letting religion be religion, or what other mechanisms it is then left to)” (2004: 5). In sum, the de-securitization model, aims first to identify issues that have been securitized, then to begin the process of conflict resolution by returning the issues to normal political procedures; it is a rejection of both the traditional approach that views security almost as a stabilizing force against military threats, and the other critical approaches that seek to widen the debate but nonetheless accept security as a force for good.

*Securitization as a Performative Act of Imaginative Geography*
The historical links between geography and international security are deep and can be evidenced by the works of figures such as Mackinder (1904) and Mahan (1898). The geopolitical thinking of the past is now returning to the field of security studies as it has begun to encompass more non-traditional approaches to recognizing what security means to people. Although most contemporary geopolitical discourse falls under the umbrella of critical geopolitics, its intellectual basis still lies in these great thinkers of the past. Stuart Croft argues instead that spatiality and memory should be used as rubrics under which the field should be expanded as a way to research “the lived experience of those affected by (in)securities” (2008: 506).

Bialasiewicz, et al. (2007) connect the employment of geographical imaginations as a tool of states and seek to better understand the US-led “War on Terror,” through the lens of Edward Said’s ideas about the production of space through imaginative geographies (1978, 1994). In so doing, they stress that the “production of this imaginative geography should be understood in terms of performance rather than construction” because of the intersection of “…an assemblage of practices - state policy, non-state scribes, and representational technologies of popular geopolitics (419). Indeed, this method of deploying geographic knowledge performatively as a tool of modern statecraft is widespread and this section will show the linkages between imaginative geographies and the geopolitical performances that reinforce them.

Although all geographies are imagined in a sense, Edward Said (1978; 1994) coined the term “imaginative geographies” to describe the subjective creation of space through the interplay of discourses, identity and traditional geographic knowledge. That this concept has not been undertaken widely in political science, security studies and cognate disciplines represents a serious shortcoming, for discursive structures largely inform our knowledge of geography and
allow for the appropriation of space by the modern state. In arguing that imaginative geography can “help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself,” Said demonstrates the power and ubiquity of our human need to view the world through a geographical construct that makes a complex landscape legible (1978: 53). Indeed, it shows that imaginative geographies have material consequences. Said sees a mutual constitution between imaginations of spatiality and the production of identity templates of the self and other. That is to say, the subjects of imaginative geographies: “Orientals” or “Occidentals” in Said's work, and "Thailand" and "Malaysia" in the present case serve to define a space, and at the same time, the spaces themselves produce the subjects that inhabit them.

As the first writer to discuss imaginative geographies at length, Said necessarily focuses on the construction of imaginative geographies and their role in shaping identity. Building on insights from Said, Derek Gregory sees imaginative geographies as pointing to a world mapped with “ideological landscapes whose representations of space are entangled with relations of power” (1995: 474). While Gregory shares with Said the belief that the relationship between reality and the representation of the world through imaginative geographies is tenuous at best, he differentiates himself from Said by recalling Judith Butler’s argument that social reality is not given but rather, continually created as an illusion “through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign.” (1990: 270). In The Colonial Present, Gregory emphasizes the importance of performativity in sustaining the meanings created through the use of imaginative geographies, and asks two important questions:

First, who claims the power to fabricate those meanings? Who assumes the power to represent others as other, and on what basis? Said’s answer is revealed in the epigraph from Marx that he uses to frame his critique of Orientalism: “They cannot represent
themselves, they must be represented.” This attempt to muffle the other – so that, at the
limit, metropolitan cultures protect their powers and privileges by insisting that ‘the
subaltern cannot speak’ – raises the second question. What is the power of those
meanings? What do those meanings do? (2004: 8)

This approach leads us to a more nuanced understanding of imaginative geographies that
critiques the assumption that the relationship between representation and agency is
straightforward. Angharad Closs Stephens (2011) observes that by following Gregory’s logic to
its conclusion, imaginative geographies could be disrupted by means of one of three possible
strategies – “i) replacing the agents, ii) highlighting the ‘fabricated’ nature of the agent’s
enunciation, or iii) disputing the authority of certain agents in representing others” (261).
However, as Stephens goes on to show, none of these strategies are effective: national
imaginative geographies persist through leadership transitions and have persisted even after their
fabrication was revealed by the likes of Anderson (1983) and Said. Thus, Gregory’s emphasis on
performativity within imaginative geographies is insightful because it is through both of these
lenses that we can comprehend the state’s role in both mobilizing an imaginative geography and
performing statecraft in a manner that imprints its imagination on the material world.

Tracing the performativity of states in their claims-making allows us to observe the ways
that discursive representations shape political outcomes. As Judith Butler asserts
“…performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the
reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993:
2). In his investigation into the manner and modes that “performativity can become a process of
political empowerment,” Robert Kaiser proposes one reason that “events are immanent to
performativity has to do with how sociospatial border effects are produced” (Kaiser,
forthcoming: 123-124). While Kaiser’s notion of performativity and his sociospatial border refer specifically to intrastate dynamics undertaken as elements of the construction of Estonian identity in his research site, it is in the same way that all boundaries are reiteratively and discursively performed. For their part, Dittmer, et al. (2011) explore the same processes at play in the geopolitical empowerment of the state through the use of “sovereignty patrols” in the Canadian Arctic. Although the military patrol of international boundaries is one of the most visible tropes of geopolitical performance, far more common and less obvious geopolitical performance comes in a variety of flavors.

In many states, maps are some of the most powerful tools of this performance. In their research on nationalism, Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) observe the many ways that states attempt to place citizens within a certain categories. They see national boundaries as tools meant to support the production and reification of imagined national geographies in the minds of citizens. Tonghchhai Winichakul similarly observes that not until the idea of Siam was represented on a bounded map for the first time, did the ‘geo-body’ of Siam became a reality. The map became an “active mediator” in structuring Siam in the minds of its people and this had the effect of creating an official narrative of national space and identity that was pervasive in its reach. (Winichakul, 1994: 130). Problematizing the use of cartography, he argues that in the development of the Siamese state and nation, “[m]apping was both a cognitive paradigm and a practical means of the new administration” (Winichakul 1994: 120). Radcliffe, for her part, maintains that “the need for citizens of the nation to place themselves imaginatively within a ‘known’ territory, and to possess a ‘geographic common sense’ of belonging are part of the processes which produce and sustain nationalisms” (as cited in Torres, 2011: 321). These
arguments lead us to interrogate questions of how history is constructed, how nations are created and how maps are used for these purposes. Once formed in public spaces, nationalism has serious consequences on the world stage. In Radcliffe’s research, she identifies national stories that highlight border disputes and the loss of territory as crucial factors in the development of a national consciousness in Ecuador. And in the case of Siam, Winichakul argues that the origin of the geo-body is not from the past, but has been constructed by a historical projection of the present. That national narratives are important in shaping shared consciousness, is of course, not a groundbreaking finding, but by connecting the idea of imaginative geographies with identity in this manner, it becomes possible to see the role of subjectivity in the creation of nationalisms.

As all states engage some form of geopolitical performance, the question remains, for whom are they performing? Bialasiewicz et al. (2007) see the domestic audience as paramount and employ the concepts of geopolitical performativity and imaginative geographies as lenses through which we can view domestic politics. In particular, they look at the role of key neo-conservative think tanks and public intellectuals in the United States who defined national security issues during the first decade of the 21st century. For the authors, the imaginative geographies that these individuals and organizations created through the use of simplistic binaries, terms such as “axis of evil,” American “homeland” and “rogue states” provide government actors with ready justification for war. They note poignantly that “in the imaginations of the security analysts [figures such as Francis Fukuyama, Thomas Barnett, Robert Kagan, et al.]…there is a direct relationship and tension between securing the homeland’s borders and challenging the sanctity of borders elsewhere” (419). They observe that the doctrine of “integration – into a western and American set of values and modus operandi…” has served
“as the basis for the imaginative geography of the ‘war on terror’ and note its performative nature as an “assemblage of practices – state policy, ‘non-state scribes’ and the representational technologies of popular geopolitics – which together produce the effect they name, stabilizing over time to produce a series of spatial formations through the performance of security” (419).

The insights from Bialasiewicz et al. are not limited to the United States during the presidential administration of George W. Bush; rather they can be applied more broadly to a variety of spatial and temporal contexts. First, their observations about the use of binaries and labels to citizens and ‘others’ serving as justifications for security interventions can be applied anywhere. In Thailand, for instance, adherence to ideological pillars of national identity (the nation, the Buddhist religion and the monarchy) has long been considered tantamount to acting as a good citizen of the state (Musikawong 2010: 261). Although the government legally permits other religions and does not officially discriminate against minority ethnic groups, this official notion of ‘Thai-ness’ persists and can just as easily serve as justification for security policy as can the US framing of the ‘homeland.’ Second, the influence of non-state scribes in the security sector is far from unique to America. For instance, the Malaysian think tank, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) was founded in 1983 and often serves as the country’s designated representative in promoting research and thinking on regional security affairs, especially in promoting confidence building measures with its ASEAN neighbors (Stone, 2000: 38). Like the Project for a New American Century, the bugbear in the tale of Bialasiewicz et al., ISIS is politically connected, it was “created by the president as a mechanism that allowed him to circumvent the power of the bureaucracy and have more impact on policy matters” (Nachiappan et al, 2010: 17). Finally, while the US promotes a policy of integration “whereby states are
encouraged, [emphasis added] through a range of measures, to mesh with attitudes and perspectives on the world,” (Bialasiewicz et al., 2012: 405) even states with less global ambitions engage in the same types of ‘encouragement’ to uncooperative groups within the territory ostensibly controlled by the state.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that contrary to public perception, security is neither self-evident nor tangible. Instead, it is a socially constructed concept that manifests itself when performed by securitizing actors. As a discursive act, securitization relies heavily upon imaginative geographies in order to cast a particular problem as an issue of security. The study of securitization, then must account for the manner in which geographical knowledge is articulated to a relevant audience and deployed in the interest of advancing political projects (Ó Tuathail, 2000). For this reason, representation, and methods of narration and performances that are based upon and mutually constituted by geopolitics are critical to an appreciation of security and the process of securitization. The importance of security in producing concepts of place and space will inform my treatment of the following chapters, in which I discuss the production of a geographic imaginaries in Thailand and Malaysia that are deeply interwoven with the history and culture of both countries. During the colonial era, Western Enlightenment thinking that stressed scientific certainty influenced the cartography of desire that has characterized the countries in the years hence. After WWII, the spaces and places on the margins of both states were transformed materially and discursively into sovereign spaces. This evolution is reflected in the discourses of security that materialized during the Cold War and continues to this day. I now turn to discuss
the context in which Thailand and Malaysia have been framed by imaginative geographies and how they have sought to absorb the full extent of their national spaces outlined in 19th century British and French maps.
Chapter Two: The Geographical and Historic Setting

With some of the fastest growing economies of the world and home to more than half a billion people, Southeast Asia is a difficult (sub-)region to comprehend. It is not dominated by any single military or economic power, hegemonic culture or religion. Among Western scholars it has often been regarded as a marginal space consisting of those places east of India and South of China. Depending upon who is counting and for what purpose, Southeast Asia comprises about a dozen political entities and is typically broken down into two categories: mainland and maritime. A natural place to divide Southeast Asia, if one endeavors to do so, would be somewhere on the Malay peninsula where the region's archipelagic states break off from their mainland neighbors. Indeed, it would seem that the international boundary separating Thailand from Malaysia is a natural zone of transition along both confessional and linguistic lines, serving as the nexus of Buddhist and Muslim, Tai-Kadai and Austronesian. But such a binary division tends to obfuscate more than illuminate, for it oversimplifies a complex landscape.

This chapter aims to bring these borderlands into sharper relief by exploring the regional context first by situating the border geographically and placing its creation historically. Then it will briefly address the economic and social considerations at play within the border region and finally discuss some of the challenges presented by the borderlands.
Figure 1: The Thailand-Malaysia Border Area

4 Map courtesy of Robert O’Connor
Geographic Context

Although much of the boundary between Thailand and Malaysia is fenced along the 314-mile snake-like border through dense jungle, steep mountains, and numerous streams and rivers, there is a deep cultural and religious division farther north. At the narrowest point of the Kra Isthmus where the Andaman Sea is separated from the Gulf of Thailand by only 27 miles, largely Buddhist Southeast Asia gives way to a Muslim-dominated southern Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The construction of a canal cutting through Thailand, with its obvious benefits to the international shipping industry, has been mooted since at least the 15th when a Kra Canal was first proposed by the Siamese monarchy (Sulong, 2012). While such a project would certainly save precious time and fuel in allowing sea-going cargo to bypass the Strait of Malacca and shorten the oceanic journey from Europe to East Asia, not a shovel-full of earth has yet been moved. The project, such a powerful symbol of division, has long been stymied for both internal and external reasons of geographic and historic importance. Many of the same reasons, in fact, that the boundary walls separating Thailand and Malaysia, another symbol of division farther south, has been the object of so much attention.

Thailand is a classic example of a state with a prorupted shape, in which there is an elongated tract of territory attached to a central core. Although geography is not destiny, it is no coincidence that central Thailand, the seat of national government and the country's economic engine, dominates the country politically and economically. The vast network distance between Bangkok and Tak Bai on the Malaysian border, for instance, precludes any meaningful connection between the two places. Indeed, the infrastructure connecting Bangkok and the whole of peninsular Thailand is quite weak. Mountain ranges and thick jungle in the area have long
impeded travel and trade with the industrial and cultural center of Thailand. Although there are modern road and communication networks, their capacity to facilitate trade is limited; railroads operate inefficiently throughout the country and there is no one trade shipping entrepôt that could effectively transmit goods between center and periphery. Although these factors are by no means insuperable, they have served to accentuate the distance between Bangkok and the southern provinces.

Siam's imperial expansion from its heartland in the Chao Phraya Basin during the 19th century was largely the result of the monarchy's socialization with the West. British and French officials held sway within the Siamese court and insisted upon formalizing the borders between Siam and British possessions in Burma and Malaya and French possessions in Indochina. Whereas the Siamese had hitherto conceived of the kingdom's boundaries with respect to mountains, forests and streams, animal habitats, as well as marking devices such as pagodas and piles of stones, by the 1840s, British authorities in Burma began insisting that the Siamese adopt a Western approach to boundary formation that could easily be expressed in terms of thin lines on a map (Winichakul, 1994). For the British, the “non-bounded kingdoms” of the region with ambiguous limits were distinctly lacking in Western logics of space (Winichakul, 1994: 74). When Siam finally complied with British demands to demarcate their borders in 1846, the extant mandala system, whereby weaker kings paid tribute to more powerful neighbors in exchange for protection, would soon disappear (Wolters, 1999: 28). This marked a radical change in the local conception of space, and while it appeased the British, it resulted in an entirely new form of politics that forever altered regional dynamics. Through the de jure incorporation of a majority Muslim Malay community into the state, the Thai Kingdom bound itself to embrace the south as
an integral part of the Kingdom. Thus, the construction of a physical barrier to separate Thai possessions from any outside influence became a top priority for the state. The intent would not only be to keep others out, but also to keep all of Thailand in (Winichakul, 1994).

Malaysia, for its part, follows the pattern of the fragmented state, composed of two main land masses separated by the South China Sea: peninsular Malaysia on the Southeast Asian mainland and East Malaysia situated on the northern part of the island of Borneo. With a sparse population and a largely agricultural economy, East Malaysia is something of a backwater. Although there are a number of sizeable cities and population centers close to the border with Thailand, a north-south mountain range running through the center of the peninsula often makes overland coast-to-coast travel and trade impractical. For Malaysia, its economic engine is dominated by manufacturing and services in the capital Kuala Lumpur and on the central west coast along the Malacca Strait (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). The south, with its proximity to Singapore, has undergone a development boom over the past ten years owing to the creation of a development corridor in the region. With these geographic and economic factors at play, there are number of important political considerations at both the domestic and international levels.

Similar, in some respects, to Thailand's relationship with the Deep South, Malaysia's relations with its northeast can, at times, be fraught. Throughout much of the Cold War, the Communist Party of Malaya, with a base in the northeast, fought a brutal insurgency campaign in the country. Waging a counter-insurgency in the area, the central government worked closely with counterparts in Thailand to pursue rebels across the border (Bath, 1988). And while the communist threat has since been extinguished, other threats remain. Kelantan, a Malaysian
sultanate\(^5\) on the border with Thailand, exhibits strong support for the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), which is seeking to increase the role of Islam in the governance of Malaysia. This support is not well-received by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which has been in government since independence (Stark, 2004). In general, Kelantan, whose Malay Muslim population is proportionally larger than anywhere else in the country, is viewed with some suspicion within the rest of Malaysia for its deep ties with Malay communities in Thailand, its distinct dialect and writing system, and its unique politics (Joll, 2012; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). While there is a greater threat of rebellion on the Thai side, the tension with Malaysia’s northeast is palpable, and certainly plays a role in shaping the national security discourse.\(^6\) Moreover, the presence of a violent outsider across the border affords the central government, whose remit includes border security, the ability to project power in Kelantan and other northern states. At once this allows the government to curry favor with locals concerned about security, and at the same time chip away at the power of the PAS to govern.

Centered near the border of present-day Thailand and Malaysia, the Kingdom of Patani,\(^7\) a religiously Muslim and ethnically Malay sultanate, was for centuries a vassal of the Buddhist Ayutthaya Kingdom. In exchange for its tributary offerings, the Patani Kingdom maintained a largely independent religious, cultural and political status until the late 1700s when the Chakri

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\(^5\) In Malaysia, sultanates are sub-national administrative units equivalent to states; the main difference between the two being that hereditary rulers who are titled sultans head the latter.  
\(^7\) Not to be confused with Pattani, which is the name for a province in southern Thailand, the term “Patani” often refers to a more loosely defined area that is coterminous with the Islamic Sultanate of Patani. Patani has since become a politically charged term, serving to unite a community increasingly estranged from both Thai and Malaysian society. It has been adopted by perpetrators of violence in Southern Thailand and connotes a desire for an independent Patani state.
Dynasty ascended to the Siamese throne (Joll, 2012: 35-37). In 1785, Rama I annexed the Patani Kingdom and sought to administer the territory directly. Despite the advances by the Siamese, the kingdom retained its *de facto* independence for much of the 19th century until the reign of Rama V (r. 1868-1910) who, under Western influence, sought to modernize the kingdom through territorial consolidation and the centralization of political power (Joll, 2012: 38). Integrating marginal areas into the core of the Siamese Kingdom, Rama V pursued a policy of internal colonization that alienated the Patani community, among others. In so doing, he planted the seeds of what, for many in the Patani community, has been a painful history of oppression and abuse by an occupying power that continues to this day. Although the trends leading to Bangkok's domination of the area had been underway for many years, they became formalized when the British forced the Siamese monarch to accept Western notions of space by signing a border treaty in 1909.

The British Imperial government, representing its interests in Malaya, signed a treaty with the Kingdom of Siam that established an irregularly-shaped boundary meandering along 251 miles of watersheds in the west and central regions of the Malay peninsula, covering the length of the 59 mile Golok River, and extending four miles into the coastal waters of the Gulf of Thailand (US Department of State, 1965). The treaty sought to establish a border from the west on the Strait of Malacca to the east on the Gulf of Thailand littoral. In seeking to reify the international boundary, politicians and government functionaries in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok established the limits of the two states on a two-dimensional map without much regard for the impact on the region that they drew their line through. Indeed, this line cut right through what had been the Patani Kingdom, an area with a large population of ethnic Malay Muslims.
straddling the border. The communities on either side of this border shared not just a culture, but a language, religion and history as well. The mapping exercise that stemmed from the treaty was, at first, merely a cartographic representation that had little bearing on the local reality in the borderlands. But once drawn, the line was followed by a series performances on both sides. First, the governments in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok sought to delimit the boundary through high-level negotiation. Next, they dispatched survey teams and commissions who emplaced boundary markers on the ground with mathematical precision. And while these efforts sought to align the diplomatically negotiated limits of the state with the physical environment, the markers were unsuccessful in their aim to establish sovereign power or bring the communities along the border into the fold of their respective national governments. Only much later, after Malaysia’s independence from Great Britain in 1957, did the governments begin to enforce the boundary treaty with more vibrant security technologies, walls and fences, border patrols and military operations.

_Bilateral Relations_

The conflict between a restive and at times violently rebellious Malay Muslim minority and a predominantly Thai Buddhist state with the former seeking to foment rebellion and loosen the grip of the latter, has long been the most visible symbol of politics in the border area. Yet, the border dynamics have had a unique impact on relations between the two countries themselves. While the Thailand-Malaysia border has never been the site of outright military confrontation between the two sides, there is a good deal of mistrust on both sides, creating something of a binary that pervades national discourses. In Malaysia, Thailand is viewed as rife with criminality and is notorious for its sex-tourism industry. Moreover, the trafficking of persons and arms are
seen as issues that bleed from lawless Thailand into a pious Malaysian homeland. On the Thai side, there is a suspicion that the Malaysians have long harbored and supported leaders of the Patani community out of some religious or cultural affinity for one another (Liow, 2004). Some in Bangkok once suggested that Kuala Lumpur covertly supports an independence movement with irredentist designs on the four Southern Thai provinces (Suhrke, 1975). With little in the way of concrete evidence, these suspicions have continued to mount, in large part, because many residents of the border provinces of Thailand’s Deep South do not adhere to a Thai national identity, and instead share a close affinity with the northern sultanates of Malaysia (Jory, 2007; Liow, 2004, 2011). It is thus through this lens that the border between Thailand and Malaysia is “discursively constructed in narratives of the self and the other” justifying the construction of a wall separating the Thai and Malay states from their stereotypes and aspersions of the “Other” (Horstmann, 2006: 159).

Notwithstanding long-held mistrust on both sides, the governments of Malaysia and Thailand have made efforts to promote overtly cordial relations with one another. Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, both sides began to cooperate in policing the border to prevent internal enemies of each state from seeking refuge on the other side. Thailand supported Malaysian forces in their protracted campaign against a communist guerrilla movement by allowing Malaysian forces to actively pursue retreating insurgents into Thai territory until the surrender of the latter in 1989 (Funston, 2010). And in 2001, when the conflict in southern Thailand flared up again, Malaysia was forthcoming with assistance in addressing Thai security concerns. Meanwhile, in light of September 11th and the US-led “War on Terror,” Malaysia engaged in its own battle against militant Islamist groups, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia and
*Jemaah Islamiyah* which demonstrated to Thailand that it was possible for Malaysians to act in good faith to combat Muslim-led violence (Funston, 2010).

Though the measures undertaken by the central governments to assert sovereignty within the limits of their states have been uniform neither through time nor across span of their terrestrial boundary, there has been a clear trend on both sides toward increasing the physical manifestations of national power in this periphery. At times working jointly, both Thailand and Malaysia have erected physical security walls and fences along the most populated areas near the international boundary. This began when both states simultaneously undertook the construction of separate barriers along their common border (Bath, 1988). Initially, the two sides built walls constructed of steel-reinforced concrete and capped with barbed wire. As both states built into their own territory, the result was a large ‘no-man’s land’ that harbored smugglers and gangs trafficking in drugs, weapons, persons and otherwise legal foodstuffs from one side to the other (Wain, 2012). In response, the states increased cooperation along the border, with jointly constructed fences that eliminated some of the no-man’s land areas, as well as joint border patrols by police and border officials from both sides.

Despite significant progress, escalating violence between Malay Muslim insurgents and the government in the Far South provinces of Thailand beginning around 2004 interrupted the efforts to complete the process of boundary demarcation. By this time, only the boundary along the channel of the Golok River between Kelantan and Narathiwat remained un-demarcated. Both sides have long accepted the thalweg, or the line of continuous deepest water, as the boundary.

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although Malaysia has pressed for a static boundary that would not shift should the course of the river change (Wain, 2012). While this technical issue remains to be settled definitively, both sides have recently proposed installing a fence on their own shores as a practical matter to prevent the passage of illegal migrants, smugglers and other criminals. Such a move would have broad implications at the local level, for it has long been common for residents on both sides to cross the international boundary without submitting to the formalities of state border control practices in order to take part in cultural and economic exchange. Deciding how to balance the competing interests of cultural integrity and economic prosperity with national security is a public policy problem faced by the governments on both sides of the border for whom there is no clear answer.

The case for sealing the border

Looking into the role of the Golok River separating Malaysia and Thailand, Irving Chan Johnson takes an ethnographic approach to analyzing the landscape and demonstrates that the river provides a mode of cultural and economic exchange for the people living along its banks.

He offers a poignant portrayal of the river and the border it represents:

Long tailed boats ply between Narathiwat and Kelantan, their otherwise illegal courier services transporting people, produce, and ideas between both nation-states. Rice, cows, drugs and women merge with fresh vegetables, counterfeit clothes, motorcycles, dried fish, fruit, pornographic vcds and so forth, in a plethora of activity that never seems to stop on either side of the river. Even in the evenings when border officials formally end their work day and the nation-state is symbolically sealed [sic] with the closing of the immigration check points, criss-crossing movement continues. Cattle and rice are often smuggled from Thailand at night to waiting Malaysian vehicles for sale throughout Kelantan. The night is also a time when eager young Kelantanese men seek out the sexual services of Thai girls at the many bars that have sprung up in Taba and Sungai Golok to cater to the rising affluence of Kelantan's rural citizenry. Others go to shop, eat, drink (beer is cheaper in Thailand they say), and gamble, sometimes even bringing with them their prized fighting cocks. (Johnson, 2005: 2)
The continual movement across the border that Johnson describes does not indicate that those inhabiting the border region fail to recognize the political boundary. On the contrary, this movement is instead an affirmation of its importance, for the economic and culture exchanges that result are largely the product of the border’s impact on everyday life. It provides unique economic opportunities for traders on both sides of the river and serves as a useful cultural divide that accentuates the sense of adventure when traveling from one state to another. While this depiction can make the border seem almost idyllic, there are real dangers to the citizens on both sides of the border. Powerful gangs and armed criminal traffickers operating along the border represent a pervasive threat to security in the region. Moreover, an ongoing Muslim insurgency in Southern Thailand threatens not only the peace and stability of Thailand, but the whole of Malaysia as well.

In the aftermath of 9/11 in the United States, dozens of militants with ties to Al Qaeda were arrested and charged with attempting to overthrow the Thai government by use of force, while others escaped to northern Malaysia (Funston, 2010). Thai officials allege that Al Qaeda-linked militants continue to ply the border region, seeking refuge in Kelantan and other northern Malaysian states (Abuza, 2009). During this time, the Thai government has deployed more than 60,000 police and military personnel to the region in order to quell the violent separatist

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9 The International Crisis Group estimates that during this time period, approximately 30,000 troops were deployed to the region on a temporary basis in addition to a around 30,000 soldiers and police permanently assigned to the Deep South for counterinsurgency operations. The ICG report does not explicitly mention a total of 60,000 troops, but rather addresses the two 30,000 figures separately. This sum reflects the common perception of troop numbers that I heard from members of the Thai security community, and is additionally offered in an analysis by Kevin T. Conlon in *Ethnic Violence in Southern Thailand: The Anomaly of Satun*, M.A., Naval Postgraduate School, 2012.
movement (International Crisis Group, 2010). The most common targets of attack by insurgents have been military installations and personnel, police, government officials and their offices, publicly run schools and teachers, and Buddhist temples; although civilians, too, have often been victims of these attacks (Melvin, 2007). As of 2012, it is estimated that the southern Thailand insurgency had inflicted over 5,500 deaths and roughly 10,000 injured (Abuza, 2013).

Owing to the lack of state control over the region, the most powerful actors in borderlands are criminal gangs and terrorist cells that effectively arbitrage the economic disparities between Thailand and Malaysia and lack of state control over the region. Operating largely outside the remit of the state, these organizations must often resort to deadly force in order to assert their authority and unfortunately civilians can get caught up in the violence that results. In this context of transnational terror and crime, politicians in Thailand and Malaysia have suggested that increased border controls on both sides would benefit the local populations by making the border area safer. But at the same time, sealing the border would undoubtedly eliminate the primary source of income for both violent criminals and non-violent opportunists looking out for their families and loved ones on either side of the border.

Conclusion

A 'natural border' between Thailand and Malaysia simply does not exist. Instead, as I have shown here, there is a natural zone of transition somewhere in the region that the central governments of Thailand and Malaysia are keen to replace with a fixed line that can be fortified and policed in accordance with the cartographic limits of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. This chapter has sought to provide the local context of the international boundary by offering a glimpse into the history and geography of the region. In so doing, I have alluded to the utility of
key concepts that shape the geographic imagination of border security and the performances that aim to turn geographical imagination into reality. As the next chapter shall show, the national security cultures of each state further shape the border discourse and have created a unique bilateral security paradigm.
Chapter Three: Building a “Wall”

“In the context of globalization and the borderless world, issues related to migration, fragile border areas and the country's entry points should be viewed with a strict and serious attitude.”
– Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs Datuk Sri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, 28 October 2010

“It is impossible to keep an eye on the 600-km border all the time and some spots are narrow waterways. We don’t have a problem with demarcation; so building fences along the border could be one of the solutions;”
– General Prayuth Chan-ocha, Royal Thai Army Chief, 27 May 2013

Where communities sitting astride international boundaries share a common identity, central governments on either side often have difficulty asserting sovereign control in their claimed territories. In a strictly legalistic sense, there should be no contradiction between the concepts of sovereignty and territory, as the former is defined in terms of the latter in all matters of international law. As a practical matter, however, sovereign power is not evenly dispersed throughout any national territory. Typically, power dissipates as one moves from center to periphery, but is then rearticulated at the border forcefully. In some ways the border has a much stronger performance of sovereignty than other places inside state territory (Jones, 2009). Nevertheless, the lines on the map that mark the edges of a territory are central to concepts of national identity and the state. Yet, there is considerable subjectivity in the concept of borders themselves. As Henk van Houtum argues, “the reality of the border is created by the meaning that is attached to it. A line is geometry, a border is interpretation” (2012: 412). Thus, the manner in which the border has been constructed in the mind and the lens through which it is understood is of particular interest to political geographers.

As the two epigraphs above suggest, the central governments of Thailand and Malaysia approach the boundary between them through the same lens, translating geographic imaginaries
into national policy by employing logics of security. Indeed, with an ethnic Malay population in Thailand’s Deep South and a northern Malaysian state of Kelantan that is in thrall of the major opposition party in the country, there is a strong case for the central governments of Thailand and Malaysia to securitize their shared border, thereby removing it from the normal political decision-making cycle and elevating it to the sphere of security.

This chapter argues that although most central decision-makers view national security through the lens of international relations, the largely cooperative nature of the Malaysia-Thailand border can be better explained by the relevant domestic and regional strategic cultures. I thus begin my investigation of the security situation of the Thailand-Malaysia border with a brief discussion of international relations theories. I do this not because the discipline of international relations has any exclusive claim to the objective ‘truth’ about how states interact, but rather because the field continues to dominate security discussions within policy-making circles, despite the many questions it leaves unanswered. By problematizing Constructivism alongside the most traditional approaches in the field, i.e., (neo-)Realism, (neo-)Liberalism within the context of contemporary Southeast Asia, I expand the security discourse and incorporate voices that do not typically receive such prominence in the realm of security studies.

Next, building on the constructivist approach, I offer an overview of the strategic cultures of Thailand and Malaysia, focusing on how concepts of national security are intertwined with the

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10 While classical realism and neo-realism are both state-centric and largely empirical, they differ several key aspects, including their view of power and agency. Shimko (1992: 281) argues that “neorealism is best understood as an alternative to classical realism shaped by enduring liberal traditions in the United States…”

11 Neo-liberalism is often understood as a structuralist or institutional approach, differing from orthodox liberal schools such as republican, commercial and sociological liberalism. See Baldwin, 1993.
national imaginative geographies, and incorporating many of the ideas from all sides of the debate on the utility of strategic culture. After looking at each state individually, I propose the influence of ASEAN as the overarching ideational backbone of the security strategies in both Thailand and Malaysia. In so doing, I reveal many of the implicit assumptions and beliefs of government decision makers as they promulgate border policy. The use of exploring strategic culture in this way is that affords us insight into the common operating picture in the minds of government officials charged with performing border security and therefore influences the statements, practices and policies that govern border security.

The Weaknesses and Strength of International Relations Theory

Realism has long been hegemonic in the discourse on international politics and much of the literature on security cooperation reflects this (Jervis, 1985, 1988 and 1999; Gilpin, 1975; Krasner, 1976). Of particular interest to realist thinkers is the security dilemma in which actions taken by a state intended to enhance security, such as forming military alliances or buttressing internal military strength, can lead rivals to respond similarly, thereby producing increased tensions and potential for conflict (Herz, 1950). In this worldview, states are seen as the primary actors in an international environment that severely penalizes them if they fail to protect their vital interests or if they pursue objectives beyond their means; hence, states are “sensitive to costs” and behave as unitary rational agents (Greico, 1988: 488). Moreover, realism assumes that anarchy is the principal force shaping the motives and actions of states, predisposing them
towards conflict and competition with one another in pursuit of power and security. The result is that states often fail to cooperate, even on common interests (Greico, 1988: 488)\textsuperscript{12}

Underlying these propositions, the Realist School approaches world politics in terms of two basic assumptions: that in an anarchical world, states seek to maximize their own self-interest by means of self-help measures, and that the security of each individual state is enhanced when there is a balance of military, economic and other sources of power. In the context of contemporary Southeast Asia, it would appear that the states of the region are actively pursuing a self-help strategy in line with realist logic by increasing their defense outlays. Based on military expenditure data obtained from the Stockholm Peace Research Institute, Zachary Abuza notes that with the exception of Brunei and Myanmar, military and defense spending has increased by 147 percent from $14.4 billion in 2004 to $35.5 billion in 2013, with 10 percent of that increase in the last two years surveyed. He adds further that Southeast Asian states are expected to increase collective spending to over $40 billion in 2016.\textsuperscript{13}

Why these increases have occurred is, of course, open to debate, but realists would argue that it is because the relevant states are acting out of a rational fear that political and territorial disputes in the region could lead to military conflict. Moreover, that Southeast Asian states are increasingly reaching out to engage militarily and diplomatically with extra-regional powers such as the United States and China demonstrates the relevance of balance of power in their logic. Indeed, both of these trends seem to indicate that political leaders in Southeast Asia

\textsuperscript{12} Helen Milner, in her influential article “The assumption of anarchy in international relations: a critique,” (1991) begins with the epigraph “Anarchy is one of the most vague and ambiguous words in language.” Nonetheless Wendt’s definition (1992) is the most often cited: “Anarchy is what states make of it.”

recognize that their actions must lead to either hegemony or conflict. That is to say, they “can either exercise self-help by arming themselves or create alliances in order to maintain a stable balance of power or, more precisely, a balance of threat” (Busse, 1999: 41).

Although this rational choice model is commonly accepted within the realist school, it depends upon the existence of a clear hegemon, which is conspicuously absent in the Asia-Pacific region. “Instead,” Simon argues, “political, economic and social networks proliferate” (2008: 196). Indeed, a security architecture exists in the region that allows all states to participate meaningfully in the conduct of regional affairs, not just the ones with the most military or economic clout. Owing to this status quo, security in the Asia-Pacific region, and Southeast Asia in particular, takes on a much more transnational nature that defies realist logic. Here, it is not a particular hegemon that drives security in the region, but rather, there is something else at play, for despite the centrality of ASEAN and its sometime aspirations otherwise, it is not a security alliance with the capability to balance major world powers.

While the balance of power logic at the heart of realism is unsatisfying in its explanation of relations within and among Southeast Asian states, those who approach international relations from the neo-liberal school, on the other hand, seek to explain the world in terms of international cooperation that results from either idealism or something other than rationalism. Neo-institutionalists Axelrod and Keohane (1985) demonstrate that the realist conception of rational choice, in fact, predicts cooperation among states and leads to the establishment of international norms and institutions. The institutional argument proposes that economic forces encourage states to cooperate and avoid conflict that would threaten their way of life. Two derivatives of this argument exist. The first is that the proliferation of democratic ideals ensures lasting
international peace because at least since the end of WWII, the theory goes that democracies have been more peaceful than non-democracies. The second is that international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations attenuate states’ desire to solve problems through violence (Walt, 1998: 32).

Although the neoliberal argument contains some convincing features, notably its emphasis on cooperation based on international norms and institutions, it does not fully explain the world. First, the theory continues to privilege the role of the nation-state as the only relevant actor. This view is too simplistic, for there is ample evidence that intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, criminal networks, and other non-state actors play a role in international affairs that cannot be explained by state action alone. The assertion that democracies promote peaceful interaction among states is similarly wrongheaded, first because it is based on an exceedingly small time period dating from WWII to the present and second because it is relies upon the presumption of an acceptable definition of democracy that simply does not exist. Lastly, while it proposes that democracies do not go to war against other democratic regimes, it seems to cast aside as unimportant the violence committed by democracies against non-democracies.

In the case of Southeast Asia, liberal theory incorrectly describes the role and function of regional organizations and organizations such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Under the model proposed by neo-liberal theory, these and other regional organizations should serve to offer mutual economic and security benefits; however, Simon points out that during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 they were wholly unsuccessful in this. “Neither ASEAN, the ARF, nor the Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum were able to cope with financial distress in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia” (Simon 2008: 197). While this one incident in a particular region does not disprove the entire liberal tradition in international relations, it suggests that there is scope for further inquiry using other avenues.

Onuf (1989) first proposed a constructivist approach out of the belief that a paradigmatic theory in international relations had little utility. This view contradicts that of realists who aim to explain the world within an anarchical framework. Onuf does not deny the incidence of anarchical events, of course, but rather he believes that such events can be characterized without claiming that anarchy is the defining feature of international relations. While liberal theorists agree with Onuf in that anarchy is not the default position, like the realists, they attempt to impose their own institutional framework to explain international relations (Finnemore, 1996). Constructivism instead emphasizes the power of ideas and norms as well as historical experiences, such as colonialism, national liberation and revolution. Each of these antecedents helps to shape the formation of state identity, interests and behaviors (Alagappa, 1998). In this formulation, “power is not irrelevant,” instead, “constructivism emphasizes how ideas and identities are created, how they evolve, and how they shape the way states understand and respond to their situation.” (Walt, 1998: 41). This observation, of course builds upon the observation from Wendt that serves as the title of his seminal work: “anarchy is what states make of it” (1992): This, as with the constructivist approach in general, assumes that processes matter more than structures. Indeed, ideas, culture, identity and norms cannot be separated from the actors in international relations. These inputs serve as the bases for the material factors upon which the other two theories rely.
It is important to note that the theoretical foundations for constructivism can be found in social theory, and that more than anything else this is what differentiates it from the two structural approaches identified earlier. All human organizations are governed by social behavior and thus an understanding of the social psychology of actors on the world stage is more useful than attempting to ascribe some abstract principles to international politics. As Busse notes, apart from “some very fundamental interests, such as mere survival, actors do not carry around a portfolio of interests independent of social context” (1999: 45). Walt (1998: 43) argues that realism is the most compelling rationale for state behavior because “states continue to pay close attention to the balance of power and to worry about the possibility of major conflict;” however, this presumes that states are monoliths and it misunderstands the social forces within the halls of power. Moreover, such explanations inexplicably privilege one norm –self-help– above all others and entirely neglect the role of non-state actors, thus attempting to simplify the world into what can be drawn neatly on two-dimensional map. Contrary to what realism and liberalism say, most states follow most international rules most of the time without enforcement and often without clear economic incentive (Meron, 1989).

Although an understanding of international relations theory is helpful in the case of Southeast Asia, it does not go far enough. I have attempted to show that the two structural theories – realism and liberalism – neglect important considerations, but I do not propose constructivism as the natural remedy by itself because its central failing, as Müller (2002) has pointed out is that it lacks the power to produce hypotheses about the future. As a descriptive rather than prescriptive tool, constructivism should then be used to improve our knowledge of
how discourses shape the political arena, which in this region is dominated by a peculiar regional strategic culture and security architecture.

*The Concept of Strategic Culture*

The introduction of strategic culture into the discussion of security studies is relatively recent and reflects a cultural turn in the discipline. Colin Gray, among the first to employ the term argues that we can regard strategic culture as “a rich and distilled source of influence which might 'cause' behaviour” (1999: 50). And it is based on an assumption that "different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites" (Johnston, 1995: 34). The concept is not without its critics. Michael Desch, for his part, argues that culture is so hard to define that operationalizing the concept is a fraught exercise (1998). Moreover, that a large part of the strategic culture enterprise is an attempt to classify the characteristics of a state and its citizens based on nebulous criteria, some critics argue that strategic culture can lend itself to determinism. This criticism is off the mark, for the concept’s strength lies not necessarily in its predictive capability, but rather in its ability to answer the question, “what does the observed behaviour mean?” (Gray, 1999: 56). The behaviors of most interest here are those of the ‘strategic community,’ i.e. “the groups of people responsible for making strategic decisions in a given

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14 In his essay, “Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz to Constructivism, Lantis, outlines eleven of the most common criticisms of culture in general and strategic culture in particular. See Lantis, J. S. (2006). Strategic culture: From Clausewitz to constructivism. *Strategic Insights, 4.*
state,” for it is their imprint on the cultural landscapes that serve as the backdrop for performances of security by the state (Ming-Tzu Kao, 2011: 17).

Although Gray (1988: 43) reminds us that "social science has developed no exact methodology for identifying distinctive national identities and styles,” it is my contention that the inquiry remains useful because it is uniquely situated to extract the impact of collective ideas and values concerning security within states and plays a constitutive role in the formation of national policy. In this way, strategic culture operates as an intervening variable that plays into national-level decision-making. It is a tool that helps us to the answer to the question ‘so what?’ that policy-makers constantly ask. Southeast Asia is more than simply a realist battleground for great powers, and strategic culture has become an increasingly common means of understanding the way that security is rooted in the historical and cultural condition of the region. In fact, in 2014 the journal *Contemporary Security Policy* devoted an entire issue to the concept of strategic culture in the broader Asia-Pacific region, in part because it offers an alternative way of viewing the region outside of the dominant paradigms, offering a bridge, as Lantis argues, between “material and ideational explanations of state behaviour” (2014: 166). This bridge will offer a way of thinking that allows us to gain a deeper appreciation of how performance of border security in Thailand and Malaysia is conditioned by historically rooted strategic preferences, rather than the objective strategic environment.

A state whose identity is defined by three core values: the Thai nation, religion [Buddhism] and the monarchy, Thailand has a strategic culture that has traditionally been dominated by a military bureaucracy that pervades all facets of society. Indeed the most recent military coup in May 2014 attests to the important domestic political role of the military as part
of an elite that “have essentially controlled the government institutions, defined national security, implemented their ideas through a hierarchical structure, and mobilized support using cooperative or even suppressive measures” (Wattanayagorn, 1998: 417). The strategic culture of the country is partly grounded in a national imagination as an independent and homogenous people, and it is imbued with a rich martial tradition. The Royal Thai Army (RTA), in particular, sees itself as the guardian of a country that prides itself on never having been colonized by European powers, and sees as paramount its domestic role in maintaining political order. Indeed, the most recent military coup of 2014 was led by senior RTA officers who meant to restore a civil order that the civilian government of Yingluck Shinawatra had failed to impose.

Together with its focus on instilling a sense of Thai-ness into a population that does not wholly identify with the Thai ethnic group, the government in Bangkok is confronted with a troubled geography that presents the state with a number of external strategic concerns. Among these are its long coastlines that make it susceptible to amphibious assaults by belligerents; vibrant transportation links between the capital and the country’s eastern neighbors; and finally, vulnerable borderlands in all directions that are both difficult to police and inhabited by groups with loyalties to Thailand’s neighbors (Satha-Anand, 1999). In large part because Thailand’s threat perception is focused internally, the “bulk of Thailand’s regional security outlook focuses more on problems emanating from border security: territorial disputes, illegal drug trade, human trafficking, small arms smuggling, infectious diseases, terrorism, and nuclearization by its neighbors” (Ming-Tzu Kao, 2011:116). Addressing these military challenges has long been a concern for the central government, and over the last twenty years, its approach has been to build on existing linkages within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in order to
address its own strategic shortcomings (Satha-Anand 1999: 148-149; Wattanayagorn, 1998: 442). In particular, Thailand has often sought to work bilaterally with its neighbors to police borders that have long been seen as vulnerabilities to the security of the state as a whole, although “Bangkok is quite selective on how and with whom cooperative security should be carried out” (Ming-Tzu Kao, 155). Sometimes at odds with the country’s historical strategic preferences, this trend toward cooperation is not unique among members of the regional club which are all facing a rapidly changing security landscape in the Asia-Pacific.

Whereas the strategic culture of Thailand is influenced by both internal and external factors, in Malaysia, the strategic focus has long been domestic. Continually in a state of becoming a reality, the “concept of ‘Malaysia’” embodies the “interplay between ‘nation’ and ‘state’” where the state and its formal institutions have come before a uniquely Malaysian identity (Nathan, 1998: 513). For Malaysia, its history of colonization, its bout with communism and its ethnic identity continue to shape its national strategic outlook and influence national policy. Malaysia’s geostrategic location, straddling the South China Sea at the crossroads of Asia, affords the country a unique place in the region, for it shares terrestrial or maritime boundaries with all of Southeast Asia bar landlocked Laos, as well as China. Despite these many linkages, and vulnerabilities, Malaysia’s inward focus reflects a lack of credible outside military threats to the country.

Though Malaysia lacks any real external threats, the state’s defense has not been frictionless. Since independence from the United Kingdom in 1957, a number of national security threats presented themselves, including a communist insurgency that waged until the 1989; ethnic riots in which minority groups sought redress from restrictive and racist government
policies; and military confrontation with Indonesia stemming from a border dispute on the island of Borneo. These past threats were all addressed militarily, but there is a growing recognition of the notion that national security is no longer confined to the military domain.

In 1986, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed declared that “national security is inseparable from political stability, economic success and social harmony” (Caballero-Anthony, 2004: 159). Since this pronouncement, Malaysia has sought to promote its economic interests in favor of traditional security issues. As a recent report on U.S.-Malaysia Security Cooperation observes, Malaysia’s “overriding concerns for the past several decades have been economic development, trade and the maintenance of social harmony” (Sullivan, 2014: 4). Indeed, in Malaysia today there is a strong drive to promote economic development for its perceived benefits in bringing about political stability, improved quality of life, societal integration, and environmental preservation. By addressing these needs, the government seeks to enhance national security in a non-traditional manner. And increasingly, Malaysia is linking these prerogatives together with its interest in promoting regional security. Although this doctrinal shift toward regional security has certainly gained traction, given the overwhelmingly non-interventionist manner of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia, it actually reflects consistency with the country’s deeply embedded inward orientation. The state’s border security policies, too, are largely congruent with this cultural norm, for they seek to reify boundaries on the ground that are often disregarded at the local level by articulating narratives of self and other

ASEAN Security Cooperation
Although there is a strong normative case for security cooperation within ASEAN, the security it seeks can never be achieved in an absolute sense. This is because regional security can best be represented as a continuum where perfect states of security and insecurity are purely hypothetical (Baldwin, 1997; Caldwell and Williams, 2006). Regardless, the pursuit thereof remains the most basic role of the state. Within the international relations literature, cooperation, competition, and community building are all seen as viable strategies in pursuit of security. Cooperative security strategies, therefore, can be useful in mitigating the international security dilemma under certain conditions, and possibly even in overcoming it, leading to the formation of a pluralistic security community.

Müller (2002), for his part, calls security cooperation a “collaboration between conflictuous parties” (478). In a similar vein, Axelrod and Keohane attempt to clarify what they perceive as a realist misconception of cooperation by differentiating it from harmony, explaining that “cooperation is not equivalent to harmony. Harmony requires complete identity of interests, but cooperation can only take place in situations that contain a mixture of conflicting and complementary interests. In such situations, cooperation occurs when actors adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others. Cooperation, thus defined, is not necessarily good from a moral point” (1985, 226). Though, as Axelrod and Keohane (1985) argue, cooperation is not morally good in an absolute sense, it is a construct worth exploring because it remains one of the most common tools of states as they address their security challenges. Indeed, like security, cooperation is best explained with an emphasis on ideas and the cultural grounding of the behaviors it comprises.

Central to an understanding of security and the level of cooperation between Thailand
and Malaysia is the influence of ASEAN. Indeed, for Buzan and Wæver, attempting to analyze security at the national level is a fraught exercise “because security dynamics are inherently relational, no nation’s security is self-contained….” Moreover “studies of ‘national security’ often implicitly place their own state at the centre of an ad hoc ‘context’ without a grasp of the systemic or subsystemic context in its own right.” And they add that “global security in any holistic sense refers at best to an aspiration, not a reality” (2003: 43). In this view, the regional level of analysis is most appropriate then, because it is here that the realities of national security meet the hopes and fears of global security.

The ASEAN Way is a concept first introduced in 1976 at the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and serves as the modus operandi of a bloc that is characterized by a style that is both personal and informal. The Economist describes it as favoring “…consensus over confrontation, conviviality over candour and process over substance. It is credited with keeping the peace in what was once a strife-torn region. And co-operation within ASEAN not only enhances its economic coherence and attractiveness to outsiders, but also gives it a diplomatic clout its individual members could never attain” (2014). Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in ASEAN forums are at the core of the region’s security architecture, and the association functions as its central political, social and economic community. Like many regional security groupings, then it is “more than the sum of its parts, and thus it is able to intervene between intentions and outcomes” (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 50).

In large part, ASEAN’s dominance of the region is a result of its culture, which emphasizes dialogue among its members and promotes consultation more than action. Hiro Katsumata stresses that the brand of cooperative security espoused by ASEAN makes it effective
as an institution because its culture is “in line with what [its members] perceive as an appropriate approach to security; moreover, it is important as its promotion has been increasingly beneficial to their strategic interests defined in egoistic terms” (2009: ix). Although the organization is slow to act, its emphasis on mutual respect and non-interference in domestic affairs has served as a strong foundation for its successful, if informal, management of conflict and maintenance of regional security. However, it must be noted that the non-intervention norm championed by ASEAN is not simply a reflection of its love for the concept of borders, but rather it is about defining the inhabitants of an area as citizens of a particular state. That is to say, it is about the promotion of national identity just as much as sovereignty (Mak, 2009: 117). Furthermore, it has inculcated in both Malaysia and Thailand similar strategic cultures that emphasize tenets of international law including sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes (Lim, 2005: 9).

Conclusion:

Although this treatment of strategic culture has not been exhaustive, it has bolstered the view that in order to understand how security is operationalized at the regional and national levels, it is necessary to explore the unique characteristics of the strategic community whose “shared beliefs, assumptions, and behavior patterns over time have attained a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of culture rather than policy” Ming-Tzu Kao, 200: 17 quoting Snyder 1977). It is with this knowledge of strategic culture and those who create conceptions of security that we can begin to see how the border is performed from the center.
This context for security policy and its implementation in Thailand and Malaysia thus points to the highly subjective nature of security.

Given that at its most basic sense security is the maintenance of a state’s core values, it is confounding that dominant international relations theories have for so long neglected much of the social interaction that governs state behavior. This chapter has instead argued that strategic culture is a more appropriate lens through which to view the cooperative interstate relations between Malaysia and Thailand than traditional international relations approaches. Indeed, as Yu Hui remarks, cooperation in the form of joint development is “a device of particular interest and appeal to Asian societies” owing in large part to an Asian cultural predilection for the pursuit of harmony through “consensus-building as well as in cooperative behaviour governed by rules that emphasize the collectivity rather than the individual” (1992: 112). With this cultural foundation as well as an institutional imperative from ASEAN, Thailand and Malaysia often employ the rhetorical and practical tools of cooperation.
Chapter Four: The Aspiration of International Cooperation

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
“Stay where you are until our backs are turned!”
–Robert Frost, “Mending Wall” (1914)

While a physical border and the tactical means of supporting it are important, it is the “objectification process of the border, the socially constituent power practices attached to a border that construct a spatial effect and which give a demarcation in space its meaning and influence” (van Houtum 2012: 412). Thus, while “the border may communicate a truth, …this truth is crucially dependent on constant border work to make this truth real and trustworthy” (van Houtum 2012: 412). Although it is clear that for both Thailand and Malaysia, the central governments have an interest in presenting their shared border as a security concern, there are several competing explanations for the desire of Malaysian and Thai officials to turn the common border into a securitized political entity that conforms to Westphalian logics of space.

Not least, the existence of a Patani Malay community of southern Thailand and northeastern Malaysia certainly presents a threat to deeply embedded core values of the central state apparatuses. In most international border areas throughout the world, there is clearly one side that is keener to assert control and enforce the border. However, at least since the 1970s the borderlands between Thailand and Malaysia have been the target of similar aims and the site of overt cooperation at all levels of government. Since Malaysia’s independence in 1957, the
national leaders of both Thailand and Malaysia have sought to administer their shared border jointly. The two states patrol their common border cooperatively, and have implemented various bilateral security measures with police, military and border security forces – for instance, the two states began to conduct joint naval patrols along their maritime border in 2003 (Rosenberg, 2011). Although there have certainly been challenges in this relationship, it has persisted for over a half century and it has, in fact, deepened to encompass both rhetoric and tangible security infrastructures that are more than simply military and border control measures. In many respects the most compelling view of this cooperation is in the ideational and structural framework that has been set up by the two states to jointly administer their border. It is in these domains that we can clearly see the impact of an ASEAN-influenced strategic culture that emphasizes cooperation and the use of specific bilateral measures as the solution to thorny political problems.

The central argument of this chapter is that at the highest levels of government in both Thailand and Malaysia, there is a single dominant narrative that views the shared border as a cooperative endeavor meant to support mutually-held interests. Security, defined broadly to encompass non-traditional domains such as the economy, underpins this narrative of the border and the relationship between the governments. Indeed, it serves as the ideational foundation for a number of institutional frameworks and agreements that have been brokered at the strategic levels of government that help to turn geographical imaginations into reality. As bilateral cooperation is the hallmark of the register in which the two states converse, this chapter proceeds by first looking at the ways that the two states act publicly in accordance with the values of neighborliness and cooperation espoused by ASEAN, the region’s primary talking shop. The statements and messages I analyze offer insight into the thought processes of national leaders and
I situate their arguments within the broader social practice of governance. Thus, in analyzing the Thailand-Malaysia border I look at those discursive structures that create and maintain the border from the point of view of the center. As I will make clear, the border and its security are largely the products of specific acts of speech, and in this chapter I reveal how their meanings are communicated and received by relevant audiences both at home and abroad.

Despite the central role of narratives in constructing security, discourse is not constitutive in itself of the relationship between Thailand and Malaysia or the physical border. Instead, their relationship and the way they define security at their border must also be viewed in light of “the wider social practice, since [it] encompasses both discursive and non-discursive elements” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 69). Hence, this chapter takes as equally important the signifying practices that put into effect many of the high level speech acts spoken in the bilateral register (De Certeau and Rendall, 1984: 116). Specifically, it examines the General Border Committee (GBC) and the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Authority (MTJDA) as key institutions of cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia. The former operates as the political forum for traditional security cooperation between the two countries while the latter serves as a significant mode of economic engagement. These constructs are joined by many others, including the Joint Development Strategy, which is meant to offer “a degree of integration of the five southern provinces of Thailand and the northern Malaysian states of Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan…across a wide range of economic and social issues in the border region” (Funston, 2010: 59).

Although Frost’s “Mending Wall” is by now a familiar trope in the boundary literature, several insights make it uniquely relevant in the case of Thailand and Malaysia. Just as the poem’s speaker and his neighbor agree to meet annually to repair the wall between their
properties under the guise of civility, the governments of Thailand and Malaysia employ a variety of aspirational institutions meant to represent the border as a site of fraternal collaboration in support of shared interests. Moreover, Frost’s narrator casts futile spells upon the boundary wall, willing it to remain intact, all the while knowing that he will be undertake the Sisyphean task of replacing stones again and again. In the same way, government representatives in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok earnestly proclaim their desire for neighborly cooperation and fraternity between Thailand and Malaysia, despite the powerlessness of either side to effect their desires at the local level. In neither case, does futility preclude the actor at the center from either articulating a specific vision for the wall or performing a type of theater along the boundary. In fact, the speaker and the governments seem to embrace the task.

Making the border real through imagination

Although the international boundary between Thailand and Malaysia is often disregarded or defied by those living nearby, the respective central governments have long sought to actively produce and maintain a discourse of military and political power as a necessary and normatively positive task. In this way, the central governments do the heavy lifting of transforming the fantasy of their cartographic representation as unitary nation-states into something like reality on the ground. This undertaking requires considerable effort, and language is one of the most commonly deployed tools of border construction, conveying the dominant bilateral narrative as the border as a site of mutual trust, cooperation and amity. As such, the Agreement between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of Thailand signed on May 18, 2000 serves as the moral and legal basis for a large body of cooperative efforts undertaken by the central
governments on both sides. It seeks to promote security cooperation as well as social and economic development along the shared border. Furthermore, language serves as the impetus for a particular type of bilateral management infrastructure on the border, and guides the states’ interactions while underpinning the narratives of sovereignty on either side.

The language used in the 2000 Agreement produces a discourse of fraternal relations between the governments, and specifically commits them to curbing illegal smuggling; restricting illegal entry by unauthorized persons; encouraging cooperation in socio-economic development activities; facilitating disaster assistance measures; and promoting security cooperation (e.g., joint training, exercises, patrols and exchanges of military, border and police personnel) (Agreement, 2000: 3-4). As the most comprehensive agreement on border-related matters between the two states, this document and its sentiments represent the “starting point” for all other contemporary border narratives. In reifying the border, it deploys the imaginative geographies of both states while symbolizing the dream of an ordered territory that is uniformly peaceful and secure from an undifferentiated threat of the ’other’ at their margins.

Unsurprisingly, both governments hew to this line in their official narratives on border security at the highest levels. Although the military services play an influential role in shaping strategic culture, border relations for both states are largely within the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) before and then delegated to other agencies and ministries as necessary. This is not to say that the Ministries of Defense or Home Affairs, National Security Council, National Police forces, Southern Border Provinces Administrative Committee and others have no influence in the discourse; they all most assuredly do (in fact, the Ministers of Defense serve as

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15 This memorandum of agreement was signed by the Ministers of Defense of both states, and enshrines the role of the defense establishment as the agents of border policy
heads of one of the most important bilateral instruments of cooperation), but policies and objectives articulated by the MoFAs offer something of a point of departure for competing narratives. Dominated by professional diplomats, the MoFAs in Thailand and Malaysia are bureaucratic agencies with a certain “stickiness” in their organizational psychology, regardless of political shifts in the rest of the executive branch.

The Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs remarks on its public-facing website:

“Developing close bilateral relations with our neighbours remains a high priority. A constructive approach had [sic] been taken to resolve outstanding problems including those related to overlapping claims and the determination of land and maritime boundaries. Every diplomatic effort is made to ensure that bilateral relations do not become adversely affected on account of such problems with all our neighbours concerned“ (Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.)

While this statement refers to all of the Malaysia’s borders, certain words in this mission statement such as “constructive,” “diplomatic,” and “bilateral” are deployed to support a particular ideological representation to the public that its actions are normatively good (Fairclough, 1992). Moreover, this language allows the government to craft a discourse arguing for the necessity of any actions undertaken on behalf of its stated goal to “resolve outstanding problems,” be they related to the technical delimitation of boundaries as specifically mentioned, or any other “problem” that may arise.

Shifting from generic boundary issues to its relationship with Thailand, the Malaysian MoFA assures the public that “Malaysia and Thailand continue to have fruitful bilateral cooperation and partnership in various areas of mutual interests [sic]” (Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). And it goes on to list the various bilateral border mechanisms that are used
to manage border issues in the political sphere, including a high-level Annual Consultation between the Heads of Government, the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation (JC); Committee for Joint Development Strategy for Border Areas (JDS); Joint Trade Committee (JTC); and the General Border Committee (GBC). Apart from these political mechanisms, the MoFA argues that the government works closely with Thailand under the auspices of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) to “improve the connectivity and socio-economic developments of the peoples in both countries” (Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Furthermore, it emphasizes the increasing levels of bilateral trade, investment, and tourism. In so doing, adding to the narrative of ideational cooperation with a neo-institutionalist (Hirsh and Lounsbury, 1997) discourse that emphasizes geopolitical and geoeconomic tools of spatiality that are meant to “define, bind, reify and control space as a means toward some social end” (Steinberg 1994: 3) The effect is the creation of a space that is dominated by the politics of those in positions of power.

For its part, the Thai MoFA contributes to the narrative of institutional cooperation, noting, for instance in its 2013 Annual Report, that “cooperation [with Malaysia] was intensified in several key areas such as border development projects, infrastructure development, development of rubber city, and cross-border security…” Moreover, reflecting the popularity of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as a tool of Southeast Asian policymakers, the MoFA adds that the Thai and Malaysian Prime Ministers signed the “Agreement on Border Crossing between Thailand and Malaysia, and the MOU on the Proposed Development by Private Sector in the Border Area…” (Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013: 17). As one of the Ministry’s annual “Urgent Policies” for 2013 was to “expeditiously restore relations and enhance
cooperation with neighbouring countries...,” this MOU can be interpreted as an effort to
“...promote close cooperation with Muslim countries and international Islamic organisations to
create a correct understanding that Thailand is working on resolving the issue of the Southern
Border Provinces, as an important internal issue, by following His Majesty the King’s advice to
‘Understand, Reach Out, and Develop’” (Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013: 7-8). As this
royal advice suggests, government messaging about the border is deeply intertwined with its
conflict with the South.

In Thailand, the MoFA is not alone in articulating national border security priorities. The
National Security Council – a permanent bureaucratic organization that operates almost
independently of the elected government – plays a significant role in the administration of the
country’s borders with its Bureau of Border Security Strategy. In a state that sees its borders as
focal points for the majority of its threats, this bureau seeks to keep the executive informed about
all aspects of border security and adds another facet to the bilateral border cooperation narrative
that is not quite so prevalent in Malaysia, i.e. the need for concrete and measurable markers of
success against violence in the Deep South, and an emphasis on development. With this in mind,
the repetition of the word “development” in the MoFA Annual Report reflects the utilitarian
nature of the cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia. The cordial relations between
neighbors are not just friendly, but meant to support the national strategy of development as
solution to the problems in the Deep South. In this way, the ideational and aspirational narrative

While conducting my fieldwork in May 2014 there were many anti-government protests in the
vicinity the permanent government offices, in Bangkok so the National Security Council
conducted its work in a large convention center-like facility nearby. They had moved to these
temporary offices when protests first began in early 2014. When the RTA announced the
implementation of martial law and later the ouster of the sitting government in a coup d’etat,
work continued in the National Security Council as per usual.
of bilateral security cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia meets more functional aims of the security establishment.

“Brothers Drinking from the Same Well”

The motto of the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Authority (MTJA), “Brothers Drinking from the Same Well” needs little explanation. As a rhetorical device, it is meant to appeal to the audience’s pathos, evoking a sense of fraternal love between neighbors. Moreover, as the Authority’s ethos, it describes a communal relationship between Thailand and Malaysia, so willing, as they are to share earth’s bounty with one another, irrespective of their longstanding territorial disputes in the Gulf of Thailand. The governing body of the innovative and widely-respected Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area (MTJDA), the MTJA is the product of extensive negotiation and concession by both sides, and along with the General Border Committee, serves as the backbone of a robust cooperative institutional framework. This institutional backdrop transforms the border into a tangible entity that fulfills the desire of both states to be good neighbors through the creation of a highly regimented bureaucratic structure that encompasses the diplomatic, military and economic domains.

When in 1979, Thailand and Malaysia established a JDA for exploiting oil and natural gas reserves along their (as yet unresolved) maritime boundary in the Gulf of Thailand, their approach was seen as quite innovative (Rosenberg, 2011). This is because although the two states entered into the arrangement partly out of necessity (Davenport, 2012: 137), the MTJDA has allowed the states to exploit petroleum resources in the Gulf of Thailand, even in the absence of a conclusive settlement to their ongoing boundary disputes. In particular, Article VI of the
MOU that established the MTJDA provides that should “both Parties arrive at a satisfactory solution to delimitation of the continental shelf, the Joint Authority shall be wound up and its liabilities and assets shared and borne equally between the parties” (Memorandum of Understanding, 1979).

Figure 2: Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area\(^7\)

Within a continuum of cooperation in joint development zones around the world that at the low end entails one state’s unilateral occupation of an area and expulsion of other claimants, this

\(^7\) Obtained from [http://www.mtja.org/](http://www.mtja.org/)
arrangement is clearly at the other end. In this, the Malaysia-Thailand model of setting “aside the boundary dispute and agree[ing] to jointly explore and exploit any hydrocarbon resources there” has largely been successful in maintaining a pacific relationship between the parties (Valencia, 1985: 575).

This approach is reflective of the influence of the ASEAN Way on the strategic culture of both states, with both sides casting aside their conflicting claims and demonstrating a commitment to cooperate without impinging on the sovereignty of either side. Moreover, it is an acknowledgement of their responsibilities pursuant to Article 74(3) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which says that if an Exclusive Economic Zone is disputed, “the States concerned, in a spirit of understanding and cooperation, shall make every effort to enter into provisional arrangements of a practical nature and, during this transitional period, not to jeopardize or hamper the reaching of the final agreement” (UNCLOS-III, 1982). This spirit of cooperation is part of a larger trend in the history of the two states, in which they have worked to resolve their boundary disputes in “original and innovative ways” (Camilleri, 2008: 69).

The Social Practice of Border Construction

Meant to address a host of transnational border issues, the General Border Committee is a uniquely Southeast Asian approach to resolving disagreements and preventing confrontation. The construct is employed in light of a clear preference within the region to contrive bilateral solutions to common problems in a way that does not privilege the sovereignty of one state over another. Just as the MTJDA was established as a means to set aside long-term territorial disputes in favor of economic development in the nearer-term, the General Border Committee is offered
as a pragmatic approach to traditional security issues that respects the deeply-embedded non-interference paradigm of the region. After the communist threat subsided in the early 1990s, the drive towards bilateral security cooperation contributed materially to the decline of insurgent activity in the Deep South by the end of the same decade (Croissant, 2005). The GBC has thus been part of a much longer trend that has spanned many years of constructive engagement.

The GBC, whose organization is shown in Figure 1 was formalized in the signing of the 2000 Agreement between the governments of Thailand and Malaysia. It effectively has a three-tiered structure with the ministers of defense representing the national governments at the apex of the GBC (represented by the ministers of defense). Below that is the High Level Committee (HLC) which offers a venue for the senior military officers from each country to refine strategic-level guidance and delegate operational-level tasks to the Regional Border Committee (RBC), i.e. the joint Thai–Malaysian committee subordinate to the HLC and “responsible for the execution of operational policies and directives…against the common problem activities along the Thai/Malaysian border, and for the proper co-ordination of combined intelligence efforts relating to the common problems activities along the border” (Regional Border Committee Standard Operating Procedure, 2005: xii).

In addition to these joint committees, the structure provides for the establishment of national Border Coordination Offices that are meant to translate national objectives into bilateral action through the RBC. The responsibilities of the RBC were further refined in a nearly 250-page Standard Operating Procedure agreed in 2004 that governs every aspect of military-to-

military engagement between the two states.

Under the auspices of the RBC, the governments of Thailand and Malaysia have six distinct lines of effort through which they perform border security measures, each outlined in the SOP and meant to “promote co-operation for the enhancement of security and stability in the border area by the resolution of common problems and the development and promotion of matters of mutual interest…” (RBC SOP, 2004: 1-2-8). These lines of effort include: the curbing of smuggling and illegal entry; the promotion of joint training and exercises; provision for

Figure 3: General Border Committee Organizational Chart
personnel exchanges and visits; cooperation in socio-economic development activities; providing technical assistance in delimitation and demarcation activities; and offering humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. In this, there is nothing surprising, but rather these functions serve as tangible representations of the ideational narrative articulated in national policy documents and by senior politicians.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the coherence and continuity of the security cooperation narrative spoken at the highest levels of government. It is a narrative framed through the lens of shared ASEAN values, and allows both governments to present their actions regarding borders as normatively good. Yet, given the importance of face-to-face negotiation and informal dialogue in Thai and Malaysian culture, the emphasis both sides have placed on the institutionalization of mutual cooperation through various legal arrangements is actually quite odd. Indeed, beneath the institutional and ideational veneer of cooperation that this chapter has presented, there is a deep-seated mistrust of the other on both sides of the border. Indeed, the narrative belies a long history of contention between Malaysia and Thailand that largely stems from issues related to violence in Thailand’s Deep South (Funston, 2010: 61). It may be true that cooperative arrangements can often “lessen the burden for elite decision-makers and prevent certain issues from becoming politicised at such a high level” (Lim, 2005: 29). But, because they fail to address the root causes of disputes, they are less dispute resolution techniques and more dispute management techniques that tell an incomplete story.
In “Mending Wall,” Frost’s neighbors seek to reify a particular vision for the boundary of their properties by employing both rhetoric and action, yet the reality they seek is subject to forces outside of their control. Missing in the poem are the narratives of the hunters who disturb the wall while stalking their quarry; the narrative of Mother Nature, who dislodges stones with the expansion and contraction of her ice and snow; and perhaps even the narrative of the elves, whom the poem’s speaker suggests may be not be so keen on walls. Indeed, while the aspirations of border security articulated by government officials in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok certainly contribute to the border discourse, the high-level narrative is not constitutive of reality by itself. As the next chapter will show, there are two additional narratives of the border that are revealed in the capitals of Thailand and Malaysia.
Chapter Five: The Media and Apparatchik Narratives: Adding Depth to Discourse

There are no facts, only interpretations.
–Friedrich Nietzsche\(^{19}\)

While the preceding chapter demonstrated the decisive role of the bilateral cooperation narrative in establishing the moral foundation for security practice at the national level, the stories told by the central governments are incomplete by themselves. The cooperative register certainly opens the “theater for practical action,” but it is joined by key contributions from elsewhere (De Certeau and Rendall, 1984: 125). It is evident that security is the dominant lens through which the Thailand-Malaysia border is viewed; nevertheless there are significant variations in the way the border is interpreted and understood by various audiences. Border security is an issue replete with narratives that compete with one another in terms of belief, identity and power. This chapter thus argues that analyzing narratives from the media and from military and government officials at the operational level in both states offers a fuller understanding of the discourse that creates the border between Thailand and Malaysia.

Taken together, the media and apparatchik narratives provide a necessary depth that is lacking in the official register of border security. And as this chapter argues, two key insights offer a more complete understanding of border security Thailand and Malaysia. The first is that while the official bilateral cooperation narrative may or may not be accurate, the official narrative misses the point, for there is a grave threat emanating from the border that must be met with a harsh (often joint or cooperative) military or police response. In Thailand, the threat is violence in the Deep South that persists in no small part because perpetrators receive succor in

\(^{19}\) Translated as “Facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.” Nietzsche, F (1967) *A Will to Power: A New Translation by Walter Kaufman and R.J Hollingdale*. p. 267
Malaysia as they plan and prepare attacks on Thai soil. In Malaysia, the threat is the criminal smuggling of all manner of vice into the country, to include weapons, drugs and counterfeit goods. The second finding that is revealed through analysis of the media and apparatchik narratives is that the official narrative has spawned a powerful and persistent derivative that sees the bilateral cooperation narrative articulated by both central governments as a normatively good aspiration, but it recognizes that the dream is hindered by its neglect by the other side.

Newspapers and other media are often seen as sites of ideological conflict among various interests, and given the obvious predilection for journalists to tell stories, they can offer unique insights into the study of discourses on any political issue given their important role in shaping public perception. Indeed, Livingstone (1996) adds, “the media have significant effects, even though they are hard to demonstrate, and most would agree that the media make a significant contribution to the social construction of reality” (319). In analyzing news media in this project, I used articles from 48 local sources, i.e. media outlets based in either Thailand and Malaysia; as the project’s aim was to analyze the narrative from the center, most of these sources were based in either Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur, although I also used several articles from sources based nearer to the border that offered additional perspective on the central narrative. Additionally, I gathered articles from a number of foreign media outlets.20

Media reportage analyzed in this project spanned the political and ideological spectrum, but an analysis of over 400 news reports during the timeframe between January 2000 and January 2015 reveals that the media’s border narratives can be divided into two broad categories that reflect distinct registers for relating issues of security along the border between Malaysia and

20 All media outlets used in this thesis are listed in Appendix A along with a brief description of the sources.
Thailand. The first emphasizes the idea of threat and danger emanating from the border. This was most commonly found in a number of media sources, particularly those with ties to the dominant political parties in Thailand and Malaysia, but during the term of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, which coincided with the height of the Global War on Terror, all media outlets that I surveyed saw a sharp increase in reports that emphasized the threat narrative. In large part, they accomplished this by emphasizing certain keywords mentioned previously. In this typology, bilateral cooperation is rarely addressed and in any case does not seem to mitigate the view of the border’s “badness” or the threat of violence from the border region, a loosely defined marginal space at the edge of the two states. The second narrative reflects the bilateral aspirations outlined by the ministers of defense in their 2000 Agreement and is characterized by cordiality and the promotion of mutual cooperation as the preferred solution to any strife; while there are many articles within this genre that address border violence and threat, this narrative most often views the border in a positive light, emphasizing the pursuit of security through constructive bilateral measures.

As government actions and official communications are often imbued with a certain delicateness, the discourses within government offices themselves on both sides often have a clearer direction, thus analyzing the border narrative from the perspective of government operatives is helpful in deconstructing the dominant security narratives found in the media and from official sources. In conducting twenty-six interviews with representatives from eighteen agencies, offices, directorates, and organizations in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Honolulu, I found several overriding themes that brought into clearer relief my findings from media and official narratives on border security. Charged with putting high-level government policy into
practice at the tactical level, mid-level government functionaries (those typically with between ten and twenty years of experience in their service or agency) have a difficult task. Individuals at this level operate within a deeply ingrained strategic culture and must chart the course between the demands of the public with whom they interact and the politicians who outline broad strategies, often at the whim of the election cycle.

This chapter proceeds by tracing the narrative of threat chronologically. I survey local news reportage from both sides of the border to look for clues into narratives and images that serve to fix ideas of border security in the minds of their audiences and to justify the official discursive reification and physical hardening of a border between the two countries. In so doing, I identify the ways that actors in the media and government ministries influence the discursive construction of the threat narrative. Next, I look at the functional cooperation between governments and conclude with an examination of its breakdown. In so doing, I attempt to single out the key variables that influence the success or failure of the cooperation regime.

Narratives of Threat: Producing (In)security on the Thailand-Malaysia Border

Even prior to the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the reporting of violence in newspapers served to shape the narrative of threat from the border, especially in Thailand. As Prime Minister from 2001 to 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra demonstrated a particular seriousness in combating the separatist threat in the Deep South. In the spring of 2001, The Bangkok *Nation*, a daily newspaper widely read by the Thai elite reported with the headline, “Thaksin vows to crush
Irrespective of the validity of the claims made in this headline, of which I am in no position to adjudge, the text is effective in conveying a clear a narrative of existential threat to the Thai state. The promise by the Prime Minister to “crush” separatists securitizes the entire region, thus reflecting a desire to use violence and separatism as justifications for removing the space from the level of normal politics, and replacing it extraordinary measures under the label of “security.” Furthermore, by invoking the image of the “Middle East” the report creates distance between ideas of self and other in its readership, abstracting the perpetrators of violence by associating them with a “known evil” in the “Middle East.”

Although there were certainly many critical voices in the Malaysian press to the draconian approach taken by Thaksin to curb violence in the border area, the Kuala Lumpur Utusan Malaysia, a Malay-language daily controlled by the government, printed an editorial in July 2002 that was sympathetic to the plight of the Thai government in combatting violence in the Deep South. Citing the grave threat posed by militants who had murdered 21 police officers in the previous six months the author of this editorial emphasized the randomness of violence and was “puzzled” by the contradictory information put forward by the Thai government in articulating the motivation for recent attacks. By employing terms such as “audacious” to describe the manner of attacks and “anxiety” to convey the effect on the local population in the affected Thai provinces, the author’s language served to stoke fear on the Malaysian side of the border and corroborate the narrative of threat that had already been advanced in the Thai media.

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The marketing of this narrative of fear based on the provision of violence in southern Thailand encourages the reliance on police, military and other security forces to combat embedded security concerns and threats along the Malaysia-Thailand border. Furthermore, it serves as a clarion call for more security as the solution to the problems of the region.

While violence in the Deep South abated somewhat after the ouster of Thaksin in September 2006, Thai media continued to present a narrative of the border as a threat to national security. Owing to the religious and cultural affinity between ethnic Malays in Thailand and Malaysians across the border, Thais commonly suspect that perpetrators of violence sneak out of Thailand to seek refuge with relatives living across the Malaysian border. The Issara News Centre, which was established during the height of violence in the early 2000s, is meant to offer an alternative viewpoint in a restive region, quoted retired Thai General Kitti Rattanachaya in a 2007 article, saying “[w]hen militants finish their missions in Thailand they cross over and take refuge on the Malaysian side of the border.”23 More recently, Agence France-Presse published a report in December 2014 arguing that one of the obstacles to peace includes misplaced loyalties within “Muslim-majority Malaysia – where some insurgent leaders are believed to be holed up…”24 Invoking the shared confessional ties between rebel fighters and their co-religionists in Malaysia reflects the belief of many within Thailand that Malaysia cannot act as an honest broker in peace talks between the Thai government and the rebels, owing to the central role of Islam in Malaysian national identity. Furthermore, such discursive practices serve to effectively produce a sense of division between Thailand and Malaysia by naming it (Butler 1993: 13).

23 Waedao Harai. “Caution urged over talks with rebels: Moves toward peace talks ‘should be secret’” February 27, 2007.
24 Agence France-Presse “Southern Thailand Peace Talks On Agenda As Thai Prime Minister Visits Malaysia” December 1, 2014
While the narratives of threat have continued to present themselves in media reporting on both sides of the border since the end of the Thaksin/GWOT era, they have more recently followed a somewhat different pattern. Specifically, the narratives in the two states have bifurcated. Whereas the most important concern for Malaysia is smuggling, in Thailand, the border remains conflated with violence in the Deep South. For many Thai officials with whom I spoke, there is a belief that certain factions within Malaysia are supportive of the rebel cause in the Deep South. And in Malaysia, there is a suspicion that some Thai officials harbor an anti-Muslim sentiment and act in a heavy-handed manner towards Muslims; thus creating a space of insecurity in the Deep South that is then co-opted by some nefarious actors who incite violence and smuggle drugs, guns, persons and contraband goods along the border. Indeed, this key difference between the two narratives of threat is reflected in the media as well.

Looking in particular at the Thai media, Hortsmann notes that the “media discourse has fueled the discourse on otherness, in which the Malay-speaking Muslim majority becomes vulnerable for being un-Thai” (2007 :153). Indeed, in my own analysis of the discourse, I find that the Thai press emphasize this otherness in their reporting on the fear and suspicion of rebels’ alleged use of Malaysian territory to plan and stage violent attacks on Thai soil. The Malaysian press, for its part, focuses its reportage on the danger associated with transnational criminal issues such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, refugees and illegal migration, human trafficking and organized crime. Although Thailand has long seen its porous borders as conduits for these same ills, there is has been considerably less reporting on these issues in the Thai press than in the Malaysian press. This may be due, in part, on the former’s preoccupation with ethnic violence and the latter’s discourse of “Islamic piety” that includes an aversion toward drugs and
weapons. Regardless of the cause, the disparate treatment of these issues across the border is striking.

Although the two sides have largely taken on different narratives, they both employ labels of threat in the same way. Such “labeling of a particular place as ‘dangerous’ and/or ‘threatening,’” can have deleterious effects on local populations, for this discursive act, “can invite military assaults from land, sea, and air…” (Dodds, 2007:1). Although Dodds specifically refers to international interventions, his observation just as easily applies to the domestic context where central governments intervene to “secure” their own peripheries. Indeed, *Bernama* published an article in October 2012 lauding the improved enforcement measures undertaken by the Malaysian government to curb the illegal entry of firearms from Thailand.25 In the newspaper’s coverage of the issue, the author was keen to offer quotes from a representative of the Home Minister’s office who emphasized the government’s ability to “control” the situation. In this way, the sense of threat from evil is meant to be tempered by assurances that the government was capable of handling the issue, thereby using threat as a subtext to strengthen the public’s perception of government. Although the binary “good vs. evil” narrative that results from these discourses is certainly powerful and has gained traction on both sides of the border, it is destabilized by the re-introduction of a long-mooted border wall.

*Something there is that doesn’t love a wall*

An impermeable wall or fence running the entire length of the Thailand-Malaysia border has been the dream of the two states since at least the 1970s when both began independent

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fortification efforts along their shared boundary. Initially, these walls were constructed of steel-reinforced concrete and capped with barbed wire. As both states built into their own territory, the result was a large ‘no-man’s land’ that harbored smugglers and gangs trafficking in drugs, weapons, persons and otherwise legal foodstuffs from one side to the other (Wain, 2012). On countless occasions since 2001, both states have sought to improve the fencing project by working cooperatively and employing new technologies meant to reduce or control security threats on the border.

Despite these efforts, the vision of a bounded and ordered landscape that conforms to logics of national sovereignty remains unrealized. Regarding border walls, Wendy Brown observes that, “while they may appear as hyperbolic tokens of such sovereignty, like all hyperbole, they reveal a tremulousness, vulnerability, dubiousness, or instability at the core of what they aim to express–qualities that are themselves antithetical to sovereignty and thus elements of its undoing” (Brown 2010: 24). In 2007, Bernama, Malaysia's state-controlled news agency, seemed to suggest as much, reporting on the powerlessness of Malaysian authorities who had just “declared an all out war against smuggling along the border.”26 Citing the lack of adequate fencing and inauspicious jungle-like conditions as impediments to the guarantee of security in the area, this report articulated a renewed interest in the fencing project on the part of the central government. Certainly, invoking the label “war” in this way is meant to elevate the issue, emphasize its urgency and prescribe a particular (violent) course of action. The report went on to quote a high-ranking member of the Malaysian National Security Division as saying “we are maintaining the best possible vigilance for now.” In this, the author demonstrates the

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importance of building a fence so that agency can be returned to the police and border patrols, and they can go on protecting national security interests. “Hence, the visual paradox of walls: What appears at first blush as the articulation of state sovereignty actually expresses its diminution relative to other kinds of global forces…” (Brown 2010: 24).

Acknowledging Malaysian fears of smuggling as well as addressing long-held Thai suspicions, former RTA Chief and current Prime Minister Prayuth Chanocha proposed in November 2013, the construction of a fence to restrict the movement of insurgents responsible for the southern violence who were “operating across the frontier and bringing in explosive materials. The fence would also help stop drug trafficking and the smuggling of illegal fuel and other contraband while allowing security forces to reduce the manpower assigned to patrols along the border,” according to the report. In this view, the proposed wall is meant as an expression of sovereignty and the potency of government in its fight against its enemies. Notably, not one government official that I interviewed thought that the proposal to erect a border wall between Thailand and Malaysia would be effective in eliminating the threat emanating from the border. However, its symbolic value was not lost on a senior military official from the Royal Thai Armed Forces Border Committee, who proposed that in Thailand, a border wall would serve the same function as a prison’s walls—to keep people in. But for Malaysia, the wall would be meant to keep people out. Nevertheless, according to him, the difference in symbolic intent would be meaningless, as most people living near the border would defy it unless the two governments addressed the underlying causes of border threats.

The Promise of Cooperation

Although a wall is in some respects a powerful symbol of a state’s desire to impose sovereignty on an area and act in its own self-interest, as a symbol of division, it seems to belie the level of bilateral cooperation undertaken by both states over the years. Despite the poignancy of competing narratives that emphasize threat, the use of words such as “cooperation,” “bilateral agreement,” “joint,” “security,” and “relationship,” as well as references to pacific institutions like ASEAN, are often invoked by media and government officials to convey the cooperative narrative of the border.

In interviews with members of the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN), Royal Thai Navy (RTN), Royal Malaysian Army (RMA), Royal Thai Army (RTA) two notable congruencies emerged. In the first place, military personnel viewed the border in a decidedly holistic manner, downplaying the military function of the international boundary while emphasizing its social, cultural and economic role. In the second, military personnel from both sides believed that their cooperative relationships with counterparts on the other side of the border were stronger and more effective in supporting their respective national strategies than their relationships with members of other branches of government within their own borders, e.g. the RMA and RTA work better with one another than the RMA does with the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs.

The former theme is, at first glance, quite surprising. Intuition would suggest that military personnel would approach their role as guardians of the state from the perspective of traditional security; however, the military has served as the primary tool of border control and enforcement at the tactical and operational level by the two governments for decades, yet the same problems
have persisted. That the military should look for answers from the perspective of non-traditional security issues is actually quite logical. As one RMN official explained to me, “either we must admit that we are failing [as a military] and ask the government to find more capable officers or we must re-frame the problem.”

In reframing the problem in this way, the Malaysian military has sought to emphasize the existing concept of KESBAN (Keselamatan dan Pembangunan, i.e. Security and Development) that served as an integral part of the strategy to combat the communist insurgency in the country during the second half of the twentieth century. The strategy reflects the realization that developing the socio-economic well-being of the population, particularly those living in isolated regions creates a stable and secure society. Similarly, in Thailand, a senior official from the Royal Thai Armed Forces Border Committee suggests that part of the reason long-standing border security issues remain unresolved is that the Thai side relies too heavily on the military.

Chiding a member of the NSC Board of Directors sitting nearby, he remarked that the NSC must develop a better border security plan. The Army would, of course implement whatever it is told, but it will be to no avail, unless the strategy is more comprehensive and provides necessary funding to the implementing agencies.

On further inspection, the revelation that militaries view their relationship as more cooperative and productive than any domestic relationship with other agencies is actually unsurprising. Indeed, the same is true within nearly every pair of countries across the globe. Certainly the militaries of Thailand and Malaysia do much of the heavy lifting, but border security is undertaken with a whole-of-government approach that involves the armed forces,

29 Interview with author, May 11, 2014. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
police, immigration authorities and various smuggling and counter-drug units. Yet cross-border military relationships are strongest owing largely to the verisimilitude of military organizational structures; frequent contact and socialization through military training exercises and deployments; and shared martial traditions. Indeed as a faculty member at the Thai National Defense College noted, “IMET (International Military Education and Training)-trained officers from both sides are beginning to have more influence in the two countries and they are able to leverage their understanding of the other side from their shared experiences.”

For its part, the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College, where I conducted several interviews, prides itself on the diversity of officers that train at its facility. As part of the Malaysian Defense Cooperation Program (MDCP), the College invites officers from dozens of countries in order to improve mutual understanding among them all, not only between Thai and Malaysian officers. For a variety of reasons including budgets and strategic culture, other agencies and organizations within government simply do not have this type of experience, and the result is the creation of a military that is seen as an “indispensable force” which is called on to resolve all border issues regardless of capacity to do so. The continued reliance on the deployment of soldiers, in favor of police officers and border guards to the Thailand-Malaysia border is thus unfortunate because deploying the military is a decidedly more violent act and sends a negative message, even when it is done with cooperative intent.

Given their more bureaucratic function, the members of civilian branches of government in both Thailand and Malaysia who I interviewed were more apt to emphasize the institutional and ideational cooperation between the two countries. Citing the robust institutional

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31 Interview with author, May 13, 2014, Bangkok, Thailand.
infrastructure, a bureau director in the Thai National Security Council, for instance, was keen to point out the robust nature of the Joint Development Strategy and the GBC. He saw these structures and others like them as the chief reason for the positive and productive relationship between Thailand and Malaysia, which he called, a “best friend of Thailand.” In outlining the effectiveness of this structure, he suggested that both countries have long shared the same understanding of the importance of transnational criminal threats emanating from the border. Further, he made it clear that in his view as well as that of the NSC, the unrest in the Deep South is neither ideologically nor religiously-motivated. Instead, any violence in the region is the product of criminals who lack a political agenda. Thus, it was important for other Thai agencies and ministries to begin using the term “perpetrators” instead of insurgents or terrorists in order to accurately reflect the criminal nature of any violence at the border. Incongruously, in answer to my question about peace talks between the central government and armed groups in the Deep South, he suggested that Malaysia would be welcomed as a facilitator in peace talks between the Thai government and leaders of rebel groups in the Deep South, not as a mediator as some in Malaysia desired. The former type of assistance would be much better received than the latter by the Thai government and people, owing to continued suspicions of Malaysian sympathy for the cause of perpetrators in the Deep South. It seemed lost on him and another member of the Thai NSC with whom I spoke that peace talks between the central government and criminal groups with no ideology or political agenda would be exceedingly difficult.

33 Interview with author, May 15, 2014, Bangkok, Thailand.
On the Malaysian side, narratives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs similarly focused on the criminal element of border relations. An official from the MoFA ASEAN Political-Security Community Division added that many people living in the border region abetted criminals because they lacked an understanding of their nefarious nature. He stressed that Thailand ought to trust Malaysia as an honest broker as mediator in peace talks with rebels, citing the productive role of Malaysia in the Philippines, but he recognized the importance of sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in the ASEAN context.

*The Center Cannot Hold*

Although the preceding cooperation narratives articulated by government officials the media and largely follow the pattern outlined by the 2000 Agreement between defense ministers and listed on official webpages, it differs in one key respect from the official version, namely that there is a sense from both sides of the border that the other is disingenuous in its approach to cooperation. In this view, the border is indeed defensive and meant to protect each state from an ‘other’ that at best fails to uphold the aspirational narrative through some sort of benign neglect, and at worst actively supports nefarious agents of national destabilization. As I have shown, this mistrust does not prevent degrees of cooperation across the entire spectrum of relations, from economic to diplomatic to military and social; however, it does ensure that both sides keep their hands on their holsters.

In 2001, at the beginning of the Thaksin era, Thai suspicions of Malaysian intent increased in parallel with the violence in the Deep South. Without specifically implicating his

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34 Interview with author, May 12, 2014. Putrajaya, Malaysia
counterparts in Kuala Lumpur, Thaksin was quoted early in his premiership on Bangkok Radio as saying, “the two countries must be sincere and engage in joint efforts to seek solutions to the problems, such as border demarcation and security problems in Thailand's southern region.” In a culture that often eschews open criticism of others, it is quite clear that Thaksin was accusing Malaysian leaders of being dishonest in their approach to ethnic Malay rebels seeking refuge south of the border.

Similarly, in a more recent article, then-RTA Chief Prayuth used the word “hope” in such a way that he effectively accused the Malaysians of being uncooperative in the fight against separatists in the Deep South, when he was quoted as saying: “Thailand hopes Malaysia will cooperate in jointly building a concrete and barbed wire wall along much of the border to counter the insurgency and deter smugglers.” For its part, Malaysian mistrust of Thailand stems largely from a belief that Thailand is too heavy-handed with its ethnic Malay rebels and Muslims in general. At various times over the last fifteen years there have been large numbers of refugees transiting the Thailand-Malaysia border area as they have escaped hardship farther afield. During a particularly violent phase of fighting in the Deep South, Agence France-Press cited Malaysian religious leaders who believed “Thai Muslims have been given a raw deal by the Bangkok government, [and] said they will welcome any refugees and offer them food and shelter. Together these instances of mistrust point to cracks in the publicly close bilateral cooperative border regime established by the two countries. Indeed, this nuance in the cooperation narrative

was one of the most common features across all of my personal interviews with academics as well as government military and military officials in Thailand and Malaysia.

Conclusion

In both Thailand and Malaysia, frontiers serve as loci of contested identities and political allegiances, yet despite the complex situation along the Malaysia-Thailand border, both states maintain an idealized vision of a border as a normatively good thing that should operate as a sieve to allow good in while filtering out the bad. Indeed, they overtly support this vision through their outward respect for the institutional framework that governs the border and the ideational foundations of ASEAN that guarantee cooperative and peaceful neighborly relations, yet as this chapter has shown, there is more to the story.

Juxtaposing the official narrative of mutual cooperation with the media and apparatchik narratives reveals that while there is some degree of convergence among the three, the instances of divergence are significant. The positive and aspirational narrative of the border as a site of bilateral cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia disconnects the site with the practical reality of border administration that can be messy. Conversely, the negative threat-based narrative dominant in the media that simply sees the border as a site of danger to be feared ignores the many decades of joint economic development and legal innovation rather than armed inter-state conflict over border issues. The gulf between these narratives leaves room for debate about the real meaning of the border as constructed from the center. The apparatchik narrative with its acceptance of the ideational narrative of cooperation and its reservations about the earnestness of its implementation by the other side certainly fills some of the gap. Certainly most
government officials I interviewed see security in the region as a realistic goal and attempt to cooperate on a variety of matters. Yet, the cooperation between the countries is functionally limited to the border site and little else. And most important, a real divergence in threat perception is the reason that bilateral security cooperation cannot be effective at present.
**Conclusion**

Employing Frost’s “Mending Wall” as my central conceit, this study has sought to understand how the border between Thailand and Malaysia is narrated from the center, for it is in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok that the border was first created and is continually repaired and maintained in accordance with current policies of the central governments. All border practices since the Anglo-Siamese Treaty 1909 have been replies to that which the governments in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur have created. Therefore, ignorance of the central discourse necessarily reduces the value of any subsequent inquiry. Whether the issue is the religiously inspired-violence in Thailand’s southern periphery, economic integration in ASEAN, Malaysian domestic politics, or the long-mooted Kra Canal, all are incomplete without an understanding of the way in which the border between Thailand and Malaysia has been constructed in the first place, from the center. In this way, I have filled a gap in the general border literature, as well that of the specific site on the Thailand-Malaysia borderscape. Many researchers before me have conducted discourse analyses from the point of view of the periphery, but until now, not one has looked at how the border is constructed in the center. By analyzing the border in this way, I reveal many lessons for those interested in the way the borders are constructed.

As my findings suggest, borders “not only create or highlight existing differences but also reveal the extant commonalities,…” and furthermore, “point to future convergences of relations yet to be formed. Ultimately, borders inexorably reveal as they are revealed, contributing to the opening and maintaining of a field of borderizations” (Soguk, 2007:286). Indeed, as Soguk, implies, there is no monolithic discourse to be found in the borderlands between Thailand and Malaysia, for borders are in a constant state of becoming. Surely, the narrative of bilateral
cooperation performed in accordance with traditions espoused by ASEAN is important, but this view is too simplistic. It neglects important contributions from the media and government apparatchiks. While I have argued that the cooperative aspirational vision of the border is the starting point, it is not constitutive of the border’s construction in itself. There are two reasons for this: 1) aspirations must constantly be reinforced with social practice in order to become real; and 2) as my project has shown, there are clearly other inputs into the discourse. Indeed, the media offer a compelling case for viewing the border as the site of threat, whether in the Thai archetype that conflates it with violence in the Deep South, or through the Malaysian lens that understands the border as the source of untold ills ranging from drugs and guns to subsidized Thai rice and trafficked persons.

Media emphasis on threat perception offers necessary depth to the aspirational narrative of mutual cooperation underpinned by ASEAN ideals. It reflects an understanding that while structures such as the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area contribute to the discourse, they do not produce anything by themselves. Instead, the JDA, like any framework is a tool. It is simply a “most feasible mechanism to shelve dispute[s] so as to pave the way for cooperation pending the settlement of the territorial and/or maritime disputes over a certain sea area due to the overlapping claims” (Keyuan, 2006: 90). That is to say, it requires social practice to reinforce it and create meaning. But, the threat narrative is incomplete by itself, for it fails to differentiate baby from bathwater and attempts to displace the cooperative narrative in its entirety. This is wrongheaded because there is indeed some substance to the cooperation argument that I revealed in my explication of the government apparatchik narrative. Namely, as I identified earlier, mistrust exists between Thailand and Malaysia because there is a belief that either side should
cooperate with the other, but is disingenuous in upholding its end of the promise. The Thais argue that the Malaysians aid and abet rebels from the Deep South, while the Malaysians argue that the Thais are creating the problem for themselves by violently suppressing its minority Muslim population.

In reviewing the three strands of the border security narrative, then, it becomes clear that the mid-level government official is an important actor with an outsized level of influence on the performance of border security. It is at this level that government officials have the power and prerogative to translate official policy into action as they see fit. While they must abide by the demands of their superiors, the level of effort put forth by government apparatchiks in performing border security is directly proportional to its effect. For instance, the decision to dispatch elements of the border security apparatus to a particular area is entirely within the purview of a mid-grade official in the Ministry of Defense. If the official were Malaysian and the forces were meant to prevent the infiltration perpetrators of violence from the Thai Deep South into Malaysia, he or she could slow the process of funding for that movement, or direct troops elsewhere. In this way, the daily routine actions and decisions taken by mid-level officials have an outsized strategic impact on national outcomes and border security than any other actor.

The Vision for a Shared Perspective

As this thesis has shown, there are significant obstacles that must be overcome before the official government narrative of cooperation can become a reality. The fear and mistrust that currently characterize these borderlands are not unique, and are likely to be found in most border areas throughout the world. However, in their high-level agreement on maintaining a principled
border regime, Thailand and Malaysia are privileged with a unique opportunity to resolve many of their challenges, improve their security relationship and fulfill promises to secure their borders. As a senior uniformed Thai official informed me, much of the institutional success of the Regional Border Committee, and indeed of many other security arrangements between Thailand and Malaysia, is in large part the result of the personal relationships between military officers on both sides who share an understanding and appreciation for the culture of the other.\textsuperscript{38} In most cases, according to him, these relationships formed during shared military education courses; however, not enough military officers on either side have this type of opportunity. Furthermore, where this opportunity does exist, it is only open to uniformed military officers and not officials in civilian branches of government. There are certainly liaison officers working in various departments on either side of the border, but as rule, they report to their national chain of command and do not play a meaningful role within their host agency across the border. This arrangement affords some officers additional contact with new ideas, but fails to inculcate a spirit of cooperation between representatives of the two governments because liaison officers have little functional interaction with their peers at host agencies.

In 2013, one of the United States Department of Defense’s six geographic combatant commands, United States Pacific Command (PACOM), headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii, began a program of high-level exchanges between the United States and its allies that could serve as a model for Thailand and Malaysia. Under this program, a number of PACOM offices are staffed by senior military and civilian officials from countries including the United Kingdom,\textsuperscript{38} Interview with author, May 14, 2014, Bangkok, Thailand.
Australia and Canada. Foreign officials in this program are not simply liaison officers meant to offer a perspective on their home country. Instead, they are embedded with the staff at PACOM and work with US counterparts up and down the chain of command. In so doing, US and foreign officers develop a level of trust with one another that can only be achieved through the routine interplay of “people’s values, attitudes, and moods and emotions” (Jones and George, 1998: 531). Although most successful managers and organizational theorists will agree with the utility of this approach in building international trust, nothing of the sort exists in Thailand and Malaysia. By exchanging personnel from all relevant border security agencies in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok in this way, the two states would certainly come to develop a more coherent threat perception that reflects the cultural imperatives of both sides. I do not mean to imply that this shift would occur overnight, for it most assuredly will not, but if the governments of Thailand and Malaysia are serious about fulfilling their narratives of cooperation, this modest proposal would have lasting consequences for interstate peace.

“To whom I was like to give offense”

Those people, such as the narrator’s neighbor in “Mending Wall,” who subscribe to the view that ‘good fences make good neighbors,’ do not necessarily have malignant intentions. On the contrary, most proponents of hardening border walls have a respectable goal of protecting people from harm. They are simply ignorant of the fact that, as Jones (2012) asserts, “[p]eace and

stability are more often created through mutual understanding, respect, and trust, rather than simply through separation.” Referring to the wall separating Israel and Palestine, he continues: “[r]ather than producing peace by preventing contact between peoples, the barrier produces further instability in that it allows larger and larger discrepancies and fears to develop between the populations” (Jones, 2012: 169). These unsettling facts demand a change to the dominant paradigm, not only because it has been unsuccessful in bringing about peace and stability, but also because of the violent effects of barriers on the lives of people living nearby. Indeed, to paraphrase Frost, it is these local populations who are most often offended by the construction of border walls.

Not least, for their sake, the time is nigh for a reconceptualization of border security in a way that begins to place the needs of individuals on par with that of states. Following the de-securitization model (Wæver, 1995), which seeks to resolve conflict by returning security issues to normal political procedures, this thesis has rejected the notion that security is necessarily a stabilizing force, instead viewing security in a negative light “as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics” (Wæver, 1995: 29). Indeed, far too often, the label of security is applied to problems in order to ensure regime survival at the expense of both personal safety and also societal security.

On the margins of Malaysia and Thailand, there is hope for the successful de-securitization of the border, in large part because both sides agree in principle to the importance of cooperation with one another. Tellingly, they expend significant energy supporting an infrastructure of cooperation. With political capital always in short supply, and the ASEAN Way looming over the region as it continues preparing for deeper economic, political and social
integration, it is quite possible that the threat narrative will collapse under its own weight, and be replaced by a more constructive model of engagement between the central governments, regional bodies, and local populations.
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**Appendix A:** Description of Media Sources and Number of Articles Addressing Thailand-Malaysia Border (Red font indicates online-only source or article published online only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE NAME</th>
<th>NO. ARTICLES</th>
<th>SOURCE DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur BERNAMA Online in English</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Website of Malaysia's state-controlled news agency. Known for in-depth coverage of national and international political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Post in English</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Daily newspaper widely read by the foreign community in Thailand; provides good coverage on Indochina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Bernama in English</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>State-controlled news agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok The Nation in English</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Daily newspaper widely read by the Thai elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur NST Online in English</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Website of Malaysia's government-controlled New Straits Times daily newspaper, owned by New Straits Times Press (Malaysia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Post Online in English</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Website of a daily newspaper widely read by the foreign community in Thailand with conservative stance typically critical of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the ruling Phuea Thai Party; provides good coverage on Indochina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur The Star Online in English</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Website of Malaysia's highest circulation English newspaper, owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Utusan Malaysia in Malay</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Government-controlled daily newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>The Star in English</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily newspaper owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association, widely read by the Chinese business community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>New Straits Times in English</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government-controlled daily newspaper, widely read by the business and international community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>The Nation Online in English</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Website of a daily newspaper providing in-depth business and political coverage; observed to be critical of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the ruling Phuea Thai Party.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>Utusan Online in Malay</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Website of Malaysia's government-controlled daily newspaper Utusan Malaysia, owned by Utusan Melayu (Malaysia)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattani</td>
<td>Radio Prince of Songkhla University</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radio station run by the state-owned university. Carries current affairs, talk shows, and entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Matichon in Thai</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily newspaper providing good coverage of domestic political and economic affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Thai News Agency in English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National news agency run by the government's Mass Communications Organization of Thailand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>The Malaysian Insider in English</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online news website created by seasoned journalist Peng Hong Kwang and Sreedhar Subramaniam, former chief operating officer of ntv7. It aims to create an Internet newspaper which offers &quot;an unvarnished take on events and personalities&quot; in Malaysia. Offers stories with insight into the latest political developments;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Thai News Agency</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Website of the national news agency run by the government's Mass Communications Organization of Thailand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petaling Jaya</td>
<td>Sin Chew Daily in Chinese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily with the highest circulation in Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper/Media</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur <em>Berita Harian</em> in Malay</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Most widely-read, government-controlled daily newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>Krungthep Thurakit</em> in Thai</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daily newspaper providing good coverage of current economic, investment, and trade activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>ISARA INSTITUTE</em> in English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>English-language version of the website representing the news center of the Thai Journalist Association, offering in-depth and alternative reporting on the situation in southern Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>MCOT</em> in English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>English-language version of the website of the government's Mass Communications Organization of Thailand. Carries reports from the national Thai News Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bangkok Thai Day</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Website of a newspaper published Monday through Saturday by business-oriented daily Phuchatkan and distributed with the International Herald Tribune.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Radio Thailand Network in Thai</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Government-run radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>Daily News</em> in Thai</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Second-largest Thai daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>Siam Rat</em> in Thai</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daily newspaper focusing on political and international issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>Phuchatkan</em> in Thai</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Business-oriented daily newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur <em>Berita Minggu</em> in Malay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sunday edition of Berita Harian, most widely-read, government-controlled daily newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur <em>RTM 1</em> in Malay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Government-owned television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok <em>Thai Rat</em> in Thai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Largest circulation daily newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Wattatchak in Thai</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Daily newspaper providing in-depth news reports on local investment, trade, and industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Than Setthakit in Thai</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Biweekly newspaper focusing on business, trade, and economic issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Petaling Jaya Malaysiakini in Malay</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Homepage of the Internet based pro-opposition newspaper Malaysiakini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuala Lumpur The Malay Mail Online in English</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Website of a daily published by The New Straits Times Sdn. Bhd. Circulation figures unknown. Carries government views and mainly focuses on social and entertainment news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Deep South Watch in English</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English-language version of the website jointly set up by the Faculty of Political Science of Songkhla Nakharin University, Pattani Campus, and the ISARA INSTITUTE of the Thai Journalists Association as a project to study the unrest in Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani provinces and inform the public about the situation in these provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Putrajaya Ministry of Foreign Affairs in English</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Official website of the Malaysian Foreign Ministry. Carries official news and statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuala Lumpur Harakah Daily in Malay</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Official media outlet of the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). It carries news and information, caters mainly to party members and sympathizers, and has an anti-government and anti-Western editorial policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hat Yai Samakhom Nangsuephim Phak Tai Haeng Prathet Thai in Thai</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Website of the Press Association of Southern Thailand carrying news, articles, and announcements on activities in southern Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper/Website</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Post Today Online in Thai</strong></td>
<td>Website of a sister daily publication of the English-language Bangkok Post providing good coverage of political and economic issues and in-depth reports on defense and military affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Daily News Online in Thai</strong></td>
<td>Website of the second largest Thai daily newspaper, observed to carry both anti- and pro-government editorials and commentaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuala Lumpur Berita Harian Online in Malay</strong></td>
<td>Website of Malaysia's government-controlled daily newspaper Berita Harian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chiang Mai The Irrawaddy Online in English</strong></td>
<td>Website of a monthly magazine published by Irrawaddy Publishing Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok National News Bureau Public Relations Department</strong></td>
<td>Official website of the Thai Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Royal Thai Government Public Relations Department</strong></td>
<td>Official Thai Government website</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuala Lumpur Perajurit in Malay</strong></td>
<td>Magazine dealing with defense issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangkok Thai Day in English</strong></td>
<td>Newspaper published by business-oriented daily newspaper Phuchatkan and distributed with the International Herald Tribune</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Radio Thailand Network in Thai</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Government-run radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Mingguan Malaysia in Malay</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Sunday edition of Utusan Malaysia, government-controlled daily newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong AFP in English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Hong Kong service of the independent French press agency Agence France-Presse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow ITAR TASS</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Main government information agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo Kyodo News Service in English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Japan's largest domestic and international news agency, owned by nonprofit cooperative of 63 newspaper companies and NHK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakarta The Jakarta Post in English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Newspaper tailored for the foreign audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIS: Fish Information and Services</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Fish Information and Services is an Internet-based daily newsletter providing global coverage of fisheries news and the seafood industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnom Penh Television Kampuchea in Cambodian</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>Government-run Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taipei Central News Agency</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>State-run corporation, only nationwide news agency in Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing Xinhua in English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>China's official news service for English-language audiences (New China News Agency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singapore Channel NewsAsia Online in English</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Website of Singapore-based regional satellite news channel, which is owned and managed by MediaCorp News Pte Ltd. Carries in-depth reporting of domestic and regional news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tokyo Kyodo World Service in English</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English service of Japan's largest domestic and international news agency, owned by nonprofit cooperative of 63 newspaper companies and NHK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New York Times</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Largest circulation newspaper in the United States with an emphasis on national and world news as well strong local content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Methodology

Introduction

I spent three weeks during the May 2014 in Malaysia and Thailand conducting fieldwork for this project. Prior to this, I conducted interviews with personal contacts from both countries at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies that helped me to narrow my topic and develop my research questions. I then used these preliminary interviewees to assist me in recruitment of additional, more knowledgeable subjects. Because the subject matter under investigation involves issues of “national security” and issues not necessarily accessible to the general public, I had to depend on sources of information such as interviews with government officials, as well as policy and legal documents pertaining to border controls and cooperation efforts that are not always open to the general public. These crucial sources of research have supplied actual information on border practices and a deeper understanding of the discursive underpinnings of the subject of border security. In utilizing these sources, my purpose has been to analyze the information in terms of what it reveals about the logic of practices of government in the border area.

Positionality

Before proceeding it would be wise to offer a brief explanation of my positionality as a researcher. Feminist research has demonstrated the value of reflecting on the position of the researcher and the researcher’s relationship to the subject. England (1994) cites an understanding of one’s positionality as an integral element of conducting qualitative research, and Rose (1997) goes further, emphasizing the importance of looking “both ‘inward’ to the identity of the
researcher, and ‘outward’ to her relation to her research and what is described as ‘the wider world’” (309). As such, throughout this analysis, I have made an explicit attempt to incorporate reflexivity in my own work.

It is often assumed that researchers who conduct interviews with foreign elites are at a disadvantage because they do not possess emic knowledge of the culture they are studying (Herod, 1999), though in the present study of security cooperation, I was advantaged by the historical and cultural impact of Western influence on the strategic cultures of the subject states. Moreover, the prestige and backing related to my position as an officer in the United States Army provided me with credibility when interviewing local elites, for they understood that I possessed some knowledge of military and security concerns. As military rank structures are widely-known in civilian branches of government and nearly equivalent between the United States and the subject countries, my relative “juniority” to those I interviewed served as an asset. There was little concern that the subjects would use these interviews as an opportunity to curry favor with the US government or tell me what they think the US government wanted to hear because they recognized that I have little influence at strategic levels. Thus, I believe that I was able to obtain honest personal narratives on border security that reflected the assumptions, beliefs and biases of the subjects, and not a sanitized version meant for someone in my specific position.

*Interview Methodology*

Borders are powerful media through which states transmit messages about their cultures and societies in part through through the use of spoken language. Thus, I conducted twenty three interviews with apparatchiks in the strategic communities in both states. Recognizing the
importance states tie to the notion of “state space” in making their territories legible and governable (Scott 2009: 40), I take official government statements and media reporting of high level events seriously. But, in my interviews, I go further by offering an analysis of the commentary and narratives offered by the strategic and policy communities in each state at the level of the functionary. I do this in part because they are the ones who do the work of abstracting space and implementing policy from their offices in the capitals. Furthermore, my off-the record, and unattributable by name interviews at times elicited more direct perceptions than official government rhetoric that is often constrained by the need to be diplomatic.

As a large part of my study consisted of interviewing personal and second-hand contacts who are mid-level government, police and military officials from both Thailand and Malaysia, my sampling techniques must be addressed. My procedure for selecting participants was certainly not random, and can best be described as a convenience sample, that is to say I drew from subjects that were “both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study” (Teddle and Yu, 2007: 78). Without discounting the value of my own contacts, I also used them to open doors for me and introduce me to others, thus employing the snowball method of subject recruitment (Browne, 2005). The selection of my subjects was biased towards English-speakers in order to facilitate smooth communication. While this may have precluded some otherwise credible voices, most mid-level government officials in both Thailand and Malaysia officials speak English, and there is no cause to believe that those who do not would have articulated border issues differently than their English-speaking colleagues.

While seemingly obvious, the utility of a given research method depends primarily upon the purpose of the research and the research questions themselves. In the present study, I have
asked several questions that I believe are best answered through the sharing of lived experience. By interviewing respondents, I was able to capture ideas, feelings and perceptions of those charged with border security as people related their own stories. The ability to tell stories is at the heart of what it means to be human. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to understand human experience and behavior without the use of language. As such, interviewing others is one of the most basic forms of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). My research interviews went further than simple inquiry and sought instead to describe and give meaning to the central themes in the life in the subject (Kvale, 1996). This can be accomplished in a variety of ways within a spectrum from ‘unstructured’ to ‘structured’ where ‘unstructured’ is closely related to participant observation, and ‘structured’ interviews which employ closed-ended questions (Becker and Geer, 1957). The interview format in this study can be described along the continuum as ‘semi-structured’ (Cohen et al., 2007).

For a variety of reasons, interview data cannot always be trusted to convey reality (Davies, 2001), but for a project such as this, in which the subjects were asked to convey their knowledge of bordering practices as seen from Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, I was not seeking an objective reality. Rather, I sought to gain an appreciation for the manner in which government officials viewed the border through the lens of their own personal biases and idiosyncrasies. This interview approach allowed me to tie the physical “thing” or the border to its official representations. Thus when juxtaposed with the extensive ethnographic fieldwork of the borderlands that many other scholars have conducted, my contribution provides for a fuller understanding of the borderlands national-level security issues regardless of how the landscape is actually perceived and comprehended by different national groups at the local level.
Media Methodology

During my fieldwork, I gathered texts related to border security and analyzed over four hundred news articles and reports from various local sources in Thailand and Malaysia as well as select media from international outlets over the last fifteen years. In employing local media as a source for this project, I was keenly aware that Thailand and Malaysia are both ranked quite low in the annual press freedom index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). In its 2014 index, RSF ranked Malaysia 147 and Thailand 130 out of 180 countries assessed, reflecting the relatively low levels of freedom enjoyed by journalists, news organizations and netizens in both countries (rsf.org, 2014). While press freedom is typically understood as an unequivocal public good, the relative lack of freedom to publish independent journalism free of government meddling in Thailand and Malaysia actually makes the use of media report more useful in the present study. Although some news may have been stymied because it did not conform to the central governments’ ‘official narrative,’ it is more likely than not that we can rely on local news to report events in a manner that, if not directed by the government outright, is at least influenced by it. Thus news media can serve as a useful approximation for the discursive structures of the central governments as they related to border issues.

In addition to limiting sources themselves as identified in the body of the thesis, I chose to limit my data collection to the 15-year period from January 2000 to January 2015 for several reasons. First, while there was certainly cooperation prior to this period, the 2000 Agreement discussed in the previous chapter was more robust and far-reaching than the ad hoc and incidental cooperative arrangements found earlier. Second, this timeframe coincided with a number of important security-related events at the global and regional levels, not least the
terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States and subsequent US-led Global War on Terror. Given this backdrop, at the local level, a more focused spotlight shone on all activities that could be connected and framed in terms of labels *inter alia* insurgency, terrorism, separatist, extremism, and indeed Muslim. Third, border security became an important political issue during this period as violence increased in Thailand’s Deep South, owing to domestic factors such as policy decisions undertaken by administration of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that were viewed unfavorably by many ethnic Malays in the region (Aphornsuvan, 2007). Fourth and finally, the 15-year timeframe encompasses a number of changes of government in both states, as well as changes in the global strategic landscape that afford the opportunity to analyze the narrative over time, ensuring that we do not simply capture neither a snapshot nor the results of a single anomalous event.

*Data Analysis*

In gathering meaning from the texts I gathered, I have employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which in Foucault’s view “consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” (1972: 49). As all texts reflect a particular point of view, and are built upon various assumptions and beliefs held by those who articulate them, statements about border security are no different. Thus, I have undertaken to analyze the discursive construction of border security policy and praxis from the center in both Thailand and Malaysia from three perspectives: official, journalistic and bureaucratic. Considering language as a social practice that serves to materialize the concepts of security and
borders, I have sought “to illustrate and describe the relationship between textual and social and political processes” (Jackson, 2009: 67). In my CDA, I have employed many of the contextual insights from my understanding of the strategic cultures of Thailand and Malaysia and sought to reveal some of the implicit arguments and meanings that underpin the texts that I analyzed.