Abstract

Violence is endemic in the southern Philippines. While grisly tales of beheadings, massacres, and even the pillage of entire towns are common, there is little or no agreement about the causes of such atrocities. Kidnap-for-ransom (KFR) gangs like the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) bask in media-driven notoriety, but there is a shortage of critical analysis and only minimal understanding about this explosive environment. Much is at stake in Mindanao, a resource-rich, underdeveloped, excruciatingly poor part of the archipelago. My paper argues that the bloody regional contest over wealth and power can be explained in terms of class, land ownership, economic rivalries, ethnicity, separatism, and religion, issues inflamed by national and sub-national tensions – especially warlordism [or so-called politico-strategic “decentredness”] and militarization. It could be ventured that local factors might very well explain local problems. Yet Mindanao was quickly dubbed the Second Front in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), drawing the island into a US agenda from which it could not protect itself. Indeed, terror experts like Zachary Abuza and Rommel Banlaoi have defined Philippine security almost entirely in terms of 9/11 and global terrorism. Banditry became piracy; piracy became terror at sea. And now jihad is back in the picture. This paper cautions against the all-too-prevalent rush to judgment about who is doing what to whom – and why!

Bio-data

Dr Peter Sales is a Fellow of the Arts Faculty, University of Wollongong, where he taught US foreign policy and various other subjects over many years. He has been associated with the Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention since its inception. He publishes widely on counter-insurgency, human rights, and regional issues. He has a special interest in the southern Philippines, where he presently resides.

If you would like to attend this session please contact Ms Luanne Mott by Tuesday 26 April for catering purposes: lmott@uow.edu.au.

This schedule will be updated throughout spring session: