

# 21st Century Philippines Piracy



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*The Abu Sayyaf Adds a New  
Dimension to Terror*

By

Bob East

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Victor and I, together with an Australian victim of Abu Sayyaf kidnapping, Warren Rodwell, were interviewed by the Canadian radio personality, Roy Green. Thanks are given to Roy for allowing us to expand on the Abu Sayyaf criminality to his Canadian and United States audience.

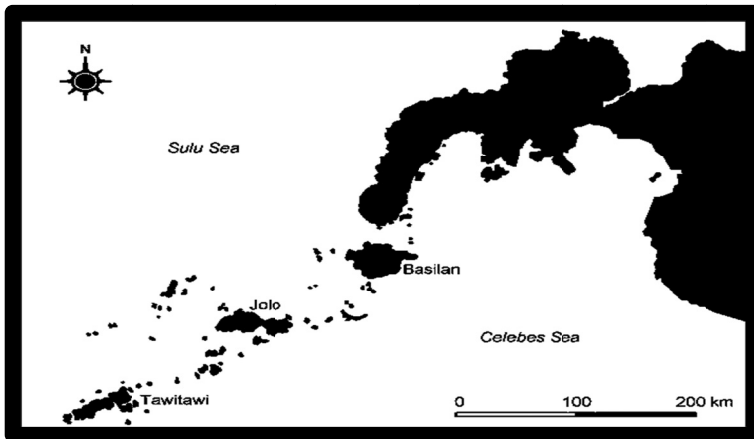
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## PREFACE

For over 20 years the name Abu Sayyaf has been synonymous with terror, kidnapping-for-ransom, extortion, beheadings and associated criminality in the southern Philippines region of greater Mindanao. Arising from a coterie of perhaps a dozen like-minded and strict adherents of Islam, whose wishful goal was the establishment of a self-governing Islamic State in the 125 islands of the Sulu Archipelago region, the group grew to over 1000 by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Some estimates put it over 1500).

Since the year 2000 the Abu Sayyaf numbers gradually decreased until in 2006 when their internationally recognised leader, Khadaffy Abubakar Janjalani was killed—or mortally wounded, in a clash with members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)—in Patikul Municipality, Jolo Island, Sulu Province. Sulu Province is a predominately Muslim province in the south-west of Mindanao, whose population has remained virtually static in the last decade at around 800,000.

Fig. P.1. The greater Sulu Archipelago region including the Zamboanga Peninsula of south-west Mindanao.



The Philippine media as well as the Philippine Government of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo were quick to claim the Abu Sayyaf was in a state of confusion and decline and virtually leaderless after the death of Khadaffy Janjalani—true to some extent but not conclusive. Of course, the old names of Isnilon Totoní Hapilon, Radullan Sahiron, and Albader Parad were resurrected and given new status.

Inter alia, Sahiron had not positively been seen for years and close to 70 years old, with one arm missing, would hardly be expected to command much authority. He had a folk-hero aura about him having been involved in various Moro peace initiatives and self-determination issues. (En passant, *Moro* refers to the 13 ethnolinguistic Muslim tribes of the southern Philippines of which the Maguindanaon, the Maranao, and the Tausug constitute the majority).

On the other hand, Hapilon was still involved in kidnappings and killings and would remain in this egregious trade for the next decade or so. Parad's reputation was overstated and eventually he was killed on 21 February 2010, also in Sulu Province in an encounter with the AFP.

After the death of Khadaffy Janjalani the Abu Sayyaf did lapse into a state of confusion but not to the extent that was publicly stated. This situation and wishful thinking was short lived. The name Abu Sayyaf was feared, and with fear comes the possibility of opportunistic criminal individuals wanting to adopt the mantle for profitable exploitation. Consequently, this is exactly what occurred especially in the archipelago provinces of Sulu and Basilan. The Abu Sayyaf was resurrected, but in name only. Numerous groups, all claiming to be the “genuine” Abu Sayyaf sprang up, and of course, all groups needed a leader or commander, or in some cases a duumvirate or diarchy depending on the size and composition of the group. When the various leaders and commanders were eliminated—as invariably they were, given the dangerous nature of their enterprise—other individuals eagerly took their place. This led to a situation where it was impossible to correctly identify who was directing the various groups and whether there was dialogue between them.

Whilst the Philippine media in general, and the administrations of Presidents' Arroyo, Aquino and Duterte liked to believe Isnilon Totoní Hapilon was the Abu Sayyaf supreme plenipotentiary this was simply not true. Hapilon may have commandeered many brigands, criminals, terrorists, fanatics and any other name that may have suited his brutal and fanatical followers, but he certainly was not the “command-in-chief” of

the new Abu Sayyaf. He did publicly offer allegiance and accepted offers of support from *ISIS* (*ISIL*, *Islamic State*, *Daesh*) but this was more theatre than actuality at the time. (This was to change in January 2017 when *ISIS* promoted him to be emir of a de facto “Philippine Islamic Province”). Whenever a major encounter had taken place in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century between the AFP and Abu Sayyaf operatives, Hapilon’s name was mentioned as being the commander of the particular Abu Sayyaf group involved. Reports of his being wounded were also numerous.

Hapilon had a USD \$5 million reward on his head. This was being offered as part of the U.S. “Rewards for Justice” program, established in 1984. Hapilon had been wanted by the U.S. since his involvement in a major kidnapping event in 2001 in a western Philippine province—Palawan—the largest province in the Philippines. In that crime over 20 hostages were taken, including three U.S. citizens, of whom two were killed. One, Martin Burnham, was killed in cross-fire during a rescue attempt, whilst the other, Guillermo Sobero was beheaded. Justice sometimes is long in coming, however, Hapilon was killed by members of the AFP on 16 October 2017 in the southern Philippines town of Marawi.

As the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century progressed the Abu Sayyaf in all its fractured forms and complexities survived and—so it would appear—flourished. As mentioned, new and eager young criminals “adopted” the tag “Abu Sayyaf” and formed gangs of varying sizes and with each new gang a leader took charge. The groups—or subgroups of the Abu Sayyaf as they became known—sprang up predominately in Sulu Province and Basilan Province. Sulu Province, or more precisely the island of Jolo was more “attractive” as a base for these criminal gangs. The dense jungles and medium to high hills afforded these gangs a degree of protection from pursuing Philippine troops. (It must be remembered as with the Viet Cong—local communist insurgents—in the Viet Nam War of 40 years before, the terrain was their “territory”. Born, bred, raised, “educated” in all its complexity, it was theirs). And the population, in the main, are close both geographically and in terms of “brotherhood”. The population of Sulu is almost static and most of the population is related in some way to each other, making betrayal very uncommon. That is not to say the local population supported the crimes of the Abu Sayyaf, but right or wrong, for the most part, the predominately Christian AFP—of which there was a sizable contingent—9000 by mid-November 2016—were seen as the greater of two evils.

This lack of “interest” or “support” from the Sulu population at large was confirmed by the AFP Chief, General Ricardo Visaya. He estimated his troops outnumber the Abu Sayyaf militants by a ratio of 14:1. He further went on to say “...the Abu Sayyaf are known to have a good relationship with [Sulu] residents because they give the people money from the ransom[s] they get” (CNN Philippines, 2016). That the various leaders, commanders, sub-commanders and major-domos of these various groups all wearing the tag of “Abu Sayyaf” are known—or known to—in some way by the local population of Sulu, and to a lesser extent Basilan, is beyond doubt.

Meanwhile the kidnappings continued. Ransoms in many cases were paid—some in the USD \$millions—and the various Abu Sayyaf groups grew rich. Rich enough to purchase automatic weapons and rich enough to purchase fast-moving sea vessels that could transport their ransom victims to the jungle “prisons” of Sulu and Basilan. Then some enterprising Abu Sayyaf commander came up with the idea of using their fast-moving water craft to stop foreign ships and private yachts and take the occupants hostage.

## INTRODUCTION

An editorial in the *Philippine Daily Enquirer* of 04 May 2016 discussing the spate of Abu Sayyaf acts of piracy and attempted piracy, in the Sulu Sea region in 2016 made the following statement: ‘The problem becomes worse when considered in view of the new reputation that part of southern Philippines is gaining: A possible “new Somalia,” treacherous waters where unsuspecting travelers and sailors are abducted at gunpoint and held for ransom’ (*Daily Enquirer*, 2016).

Piracy in Asian waters has existed for as long as sea-going vessels have been used in trade or general travel—there is nothing new in this regard. The participants in this crime may have been of any nationality and their targets the same. It was an exercise in theft and in most cases the unfortunate victims suffered paid the ultimate price—death. Additionally, most pirated vessels were usually sunk after being plundered—unless the pirated vessel was more seaworthy or more sophisticated than that of the pirates!

In Southeast Asian waters in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, piracy was rampant. Dr Carolin Liss, writing for the APSNet Policy Forum in October 2007, said in part:

‘While the vast majority of pirate attacks on merchant vessels in Southeast Asia today are simple “hit-and-run robberies”, long-term seizures and hijackings of merchant vessels, including cargo ships, bulk carriers and tankers, also occur. In these cases, a vessel and its crew is held hostage for a limited time, or the entire vessel is ship-jacked by pirates and is then turned into a *phantom ship*’. (Liss, 2007).

The salient words here are “held hostage for a limited time”. Contemporary history has now shown the Abu Sayyaf, in the main, has no concept of time as such. One day is just the same as the next or the one before unless a worthy event has occurred or is anticipated. Many hostages are held in appalling conditions for years normally resulting in severe weight loss and other medical problems. Piracy committed by the Abu Sayyaf has one purpose—to obtain hostages that it is hoped will be exchanged for hefty ransom amounts. The amounts demanded are huge—

in most cases in the millions of USD \$ dollars. It is irrelevant to the Abu Sayyaf criminals that in most cases, if not all, the amounts demanded are impossible to raise: “find it somehow or your family member, or employee, will be beheaded”.

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—specifically 2016—the Abu Sayyaf added a ransom demand to the age-old crime of piracy in Southeast Asian waters. Piracy accompanied by kidnap-for-ransom was nothing new in other parts of the globe, but it was rare in this part of the world. Prior to 2016 the Abu Sayyaf had kidnapped two foreigners from a private yacht and three Philippine nationals from a commercial fishing boat. The question to be asked is whether these two acts of piracy were opportunistic or calculated—more than likely opportunistic. These two events will be examined in some detail in chapter one. It can be argued the success of these two kidnap-for-ransom episodes was the catalyst for the piracy in the Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea region in 2016 by the Abu Sayyaf.

In order for the Abu Sayyaf to be successful in their kidnap-for-ransom piratical enterprise it was necessary for them to have fast-moving, small, maneuverable motorized watercraft. These would be a costly item to purchase. However, the Abu Sayyaf had amassed millions of USD \$ dollars—hundreds of millions of Philippine pesos—in ransom monies, especially in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Many countries, especially European and American—North and South—had for years been issuing warnings to their travelling citizens about the possibility of being kidnapped in the southern Philippines, especially the Sulu Archipelago region—including the Zamboanga peninsula provinces. Regardless of these warnings, scant regard was paid to the unlikely event of being in danger on the waters surrounding the thousands of islands that make up the Philippine Republic, a situation destined to change in early 2016. Many countries now included the waters specifically in the Mindanao region in their travel warnings—three are named here—there are many more. The United States “Department of State” issued the following warning:

‘U.S. citizens should continue to defer non-essential travel to the Sulu Archipelago, due to the high threat of kidnapping of international travellers, increased threat of maritime kidnappings against small boats in the vicinity of the Sulu Archipelago, and violence linked to insurgency and terrorism there’ (U.S. travel warning 2016).



Canada issued similar travel warnings having a poignant reason for doing so. In September 2015 two of its citizens, John Ridsdel and Robert Hall were kidnapped by 12 heavily armed Abu Sayyaf terrorists from the Ocean View Samal Resort on Samal Island, Davao City, Mindanao. Both Ridsdel and Hall were kidnapped whilst on a yacht moored at this resort. The perpetrators of this crime used small fast-moving ocean watercraft to transport their captives almost 1000 kilometres by sea to Sulu Province in the west of Mindanao. Both Ridsdel and Hall were beheaded in 2016 after exorbitant ransom demands were not paid. The Canadian Government, like many other foreign governments, had a policy of non-payment of ransoms for its citizens. The families of Ridsdel and Hall were unable to raise the millions of USD \$ dollars demanded so they were beheaded—this had also occurred before to hostages when ransom money was not forthcoming.

Global Affairs Canada issued a warning to its citizens advising against ‘all travel to the Sulu Archipelago and through the southern Sulu Sea, including the waters off southern Palawan Island, due to the threat of piracy and kidnappings in this area’ (Government of Canada, 2016). Ridsdel and Hall may not have been victims of piracy on the high sea, but they were kidnapped from a yacht—albeit moored—and transported to their eventual place of execution by sea travel. The Abu Sayyaf who committed this crime could in some way be described as “pirates” even if the interpretation is somewhat “stretched”.

The Australian Government was a little more specific. They already had a travel warning for the general Mindanao region—especially the Sulu Archipelago area. Simply, “do not travel”. However, an additional warning was issued with the wording ‘Warning for sailors: Yachts and other vessels in the southern Sulu Sea and those sailing between Sabah, Malaysia and Palawan in the Philippines are also at risk from kidnapping’ (Australian Government, 2016). Australia has already had one of its citizens kidnapped—Warren Richard Rodwell—in December 2011. However, Rodwell was kidnapped from a land location, Zamboanga Sibugay, not on the high seas. He was moved from island to island by watercraft before being eventually released upon the payment of a ransom by his family. Rodwell was to become the norm later on, losing almost 35 % of his body weight. He only survived because of his determination to survive—other Abu Sayyaf kidnap victims in the past were not as determined to survive as was Rodwell. Others succumbed to trauma associated with brutal treatment, whilst others were beheaded.

Governments of various countries were not the only ones to issue warnings to ship owners and sailors, yachts-people and so forth—various organisations had also issued warnings. This in turn had led to security companies offering to protect vessels using the Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea as a route for transporting goods.

The multi-lateral agreement, ReCAAP, ISC (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combatting Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia), released an incident report on 21 November 2016 about piratical events attributed to suspected Abu Sayyaf operatives since 21 March 2016. It listed 11 incidents—nine actual and two attempted—that resulted in 44 crew members being kidnapped. At the time of the report 33 had been released—presumably after ransoms had been paid—and 11 were still prisoners somewhere in either Sulu or Basilan Provinces. The report went on further to say ‘The ReCAAP ISC reiterates its advisory to all ships to re-route from the area where possible’ (ReCAAP ISC, November 2016).

The international maritime operations company, Dryad Maritime, gave notice in December 2016, it was expanding its Vessel Safety Monitoring (VSM) service to the greater Sulu Sea area. This was in response to the number of incidents of piracy and attempted piracy in the region in 2016. It offered support to track clients’ vessels and deliver ‘the most up to date intelligence picture to Masters and shore teams on the latest emerging threats in the area’ (Maritime Global News, 2016). These two international maritime security organisations are examined more closely in Chapter Six, “Regional & International Intervention and Concerns”.

The situation was becoming serious and more and more complex. It had now become an international concern. The following chapters will chronologically trace the acts of piracy—and attempted piracy in the Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea region from early 2016 attributed to the Abu Sayyaf. Isolated acts of piracy involving small private yachts prior to 2016 will also be examined.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PRE-2016 ABU SAYYAF PIRACY

It would be all too simplistic to believe the kidnap-for-ransom piracy committed by the Abu Sayyaf in 2016 was a “spur-of-the-moment” action taken by the various factions of the Abu Sayyaf. The planning of such a maritime crime would take considerable effort, not the least, resources such as suitable fast watercraft, men with knowledge of how to board a moving vessel, intimate knowledge of the number of sailors on a particular ship, the nationality of the sailors on the vessels, the “wealth” of the company that owned the vessels, where the vessel would be at a particular time and importantly, the security situation on the ship to be pirated. This knowledge, manpower and planning, indicated a high degree of sophistication was needed by the pirates. Whoever was behind the idea of piracy, not for materialistic benefit, but for cash from ransom, was obviously a shrewd criminal with a calculating mind and with that in mind, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon certainly comes into calculations. He was well educated—he was no simple peasant criminal, having graduated from the University of the Philippines School of Engineering in the late 1980s—so he must have been high on the list of eligible suspects. However, as time would tell, Hapilon was remarkably quiet when it came to commenting on, or claiming any responsibility for the burgeoning Abu Sayyaf piracy—strange for somebody who was considered by the various Philippine authorities—especially since the death of Khadaffy Janjalani to be the “*El Supremo*” of the Abu Sayyaf.

It is also suggested here that the perpetrator/s of the crimes of piracy beginning in earnest in early 2016 had not acted alone, but were privy to information that was not easily obtainable—graft by corrupt officials cannot be ruled out completely. The Philippines is a poor country by world standards—it is a third world country—and the Abu Sayyaf was flush with cash from huge ransom payouts, especially from 2010 to 2016—a recipe for opportunistic corruption and graft.

The piracy-for-ransom by the Abu Sayyaf may have begun in earnest in early 2016 but there were two other incidents involving piracy and

kidnapping-for-ransom prior to that year in the Sulu Sea region. Both crimes were committed by recognized members of the Abu Sayyaf. They were: in March 2011 three employees of the Zamboanga-based company Mega Fishing Corporation; and a little over three years later—May 2014—two German tourists-come-seafarers. Both kidnappings were different in many regards—not the least being one involved Philippine nationals and the other, European citizens. However, both involved being taken hostage from sea-craft, and both involved large ransom demands. These are now examined in detail, the similarity to later Abu Sayyaf piratical crimes would suggest the perpetrators, if not the same involved in 2016, at least passed on their experience to their colleagues-in-crime.

### **19 March 2011**

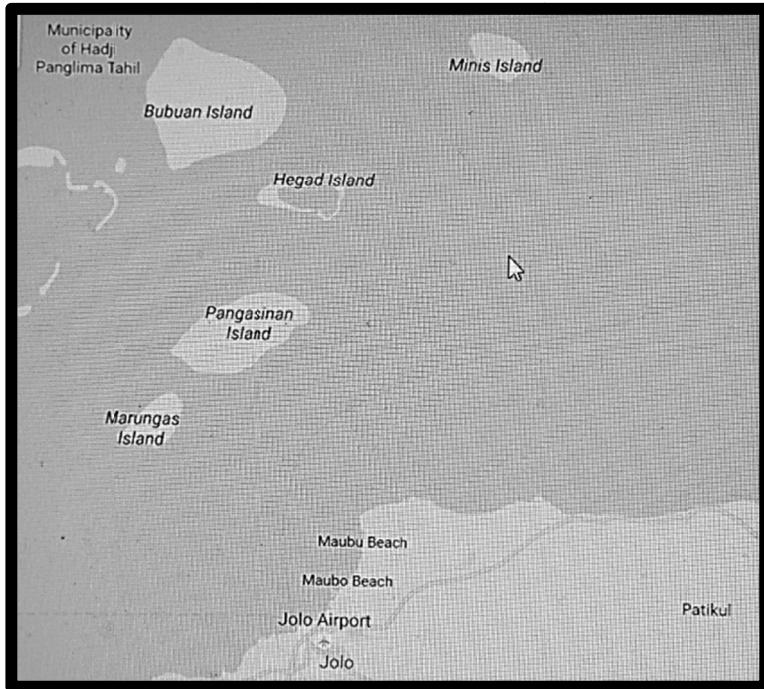
In the early hours of 19 March 2011, the Abu Sayyaf carried out its first recorded act of piracy in the Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea region involving the taking of hostages for the purpose of ransom. Kidnapping-for-ransom was a hallmark of the Abu Sayyaf, but it had always been a land-based “operation”. Fast-moving water craft were certainly used by Abu Sayyaf members to transport the kidnap victims to their place of confinement—in most cases Sulu Province or Basilan Province—but up to this time kidnapping on the high seas was not on their crime agenda.

At approximately 2 am on Saturday morning 19 March 2011, a number of heavily armed Abu Sayyaf members boarded a small fishing vessel owned and operated by Mega Fishing Corporation. As was to be expected the majority of the crew members, at that time of the night, would have been asleep. (The number of Abu Sayyaf pirates who boarded the fishing vessel is unknown but later estimates put this at five or six). The crew consisting of officers and lower ratings were surprised, possibly not outnumbered, but at that time and against heavily armed pirates were at the mercy of their kidnappers. Only the officers were taken hostage, whilst the other crew were unharmed. The three officers were made to leave their vessel—time did not permit the sending of a mayday or SOS message—and transported by fast watercraft to Sulu Province. (Jolo Island is the main island in Sulu Province and its capital bears the same name).

The piracy and kidnapping occurred in the waters off Minis Island. Minis Island is a small island—approximately two square kilometres in area. It is located approximately 12 kilometres to the north of Jolo Island. The trip to Jolo Island would have taken less than 30 minutes and being night would have been advantageous to the kidnappers. The victims were

eventually unloaded at Patikul Municipality—northern Jolo—a known stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf and the scene of much fighting between the Abu Sayyaf and members of the AFP over previous years.

Fig.1.1 Minis Island is approximately 12 kilometres north of Jolo Island



As mentioned, the victims of this March 2011 crime were mariners employed by Mega Fishing Corporation, a large commercial enterprise that not only caught their product but processed it as well. The three victims of this crime all lived on Negros Island, central Philippines. Negros Island consists of two Provinces, Negros Occidental on the west side and Negros Oriental on the eastern side. It has a total population of some 4.4 million inhabitants according to the 2015 census.

It was from Negros Occidental that the following victims of this Abu Sayyaf piracy and kidnapping came. The captain in charge of the fishing vessel was Renato Panisales. His assistant engineer was Wennie Ferrer and the third victim was Jonald Ocsimar, the quarter master. Panisales and Ocsimar were from the municipality of Hinoba-an whilst Ferrer came from

Sipalay City—a component city sharing a common border with Hinoba-an.

Fig. 1.2 Philippines. Negros is in red. The Sulu Sea lies to the west of Negros



The municipality of Hinoba-an—which has a town of the same name—and the component city of Sipalay, are at the southern end of Negros Occidental Province, Negros Island, Visayas, Central Philippines. Both Hinoba-an and Sipalay City have extensive shorelines which are washed by the Sulu Sea. (The map left shows Negros—in red—and how its western shore is lapped by the Sulu Sea) It is to be expected that both Hinoba-an and Sipalay City would produce their share of fishermen.

However, being Negrense—a native of Negros—and a fisherman, and working for oneself in a tropical paradise may sound romantic, but in all probability it can be a recipe for poverty—especially if one has a family to support.

Panisales, Ferrer, and Ocsimar were, or so it would appear, just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Their particular fishing vessel was not specifically targeted, but the Abu Sayyaf pirates obviously had in mind to make a Mega Fishing Corporation vessel the target of their crime. It was reported in some Philippine media outlets after the event that the pirates, who contacted the wife of Panisales informed her their human target was the owner of Mega Fishing Corporation. Obviously, the Abu Sayyaf pirates had only done superficial research into the company. The owner of Mega Fishing Corporation was a Mr. William Tiu-Lim, a graduate of the University of the Philippines, Diliman, and a very wealthy entrepreneur. There would be no chance whatsoever, that he would be on one of his fishing vessels, unless of course it was for official inspection purposes.

Mega Fishing Corporation was no small player in the Philippine fishing industry arena. It boasted a total of 55 fishing vessels of various sizes and had been operating in the Sulu Sea area and adjoining regions for over 20 years. (The company also employs thousands of local people in its manufacturing plants as well as on its fishing fleet). Its vessels all displayed prominently the name “MEGA”. The Abu Sayyaf pirates would have been in no doubt as to the ownership of the vessel they were targeting. The Sulu Sea is a rich fishing ground and Mega Fishing Corporation would not have been the only company with vessels in these waters.

Whoever masterminded the piracy and associated kidnaping of the Mega Fishing Corporation employees knew the company was wealthy by Philippine standards and was well able to afford a ransom payment in the millions of pesos. (It was reported later—after initial contact with the company—that Mega Fishing Corporation had a “no ransom to be paid” policy). Exactly how the company had adopted such a policy when there had been no kidnappings of its employees in the past was unclear. Perhaps it was a management decision to adopt this stance after initial contact—and ransom demand—was made by the Abu Sayyaf. In what can only be described as callous—if indeed it is true, and all indications point to it being accurate—Renato Panisale’s wife, Jocelyn, was told by the management of Mega Fishing Corporation to do her own negotiations with the Abu Sayyaf pirates. (This was reported on 16 April 2011 by GMA

News Online). This would only have occurred if the initiative was on the side of the Abu Sayyaf pirates.

As was now becoming the normal practice, when the Abu Sayyaf kidnapped people, exorbitant and “impossible” demands were forthcoming. It was also reported in GMA News on 16 April 2011 that the Abu Sayyaf had initially demanded 20 million pesos for the release of each of the three fishermen, then ‘later reduced to P10 million, and recently to P4 million for each of them’. The report in the GMA News was disjointed. It did say that Renato Panisales’ wife, Jocelyn had been contacted by the Abu Sayyaf, so it is safe to assume the amounts mentioned above were given to her in conversation with the Abu Sayyaf “negotiator”. (Mega Fishing Corporation had already refused to negotiate in any manner, so they were ruled out of the equation).

In the same GMS News article reference was made to an encounter between the kidnapers and the AFPs elite Scout Ranger Regiment on 31 March 2011 in the municipality of Patikul, Sulu Province. It was reported this encounter occurred in an outlying barangay—village. (A barangay is the smallest administrative division in the Philippines—Patikul Municipality consists of 30 barangays). In 2011 Patikul had a population of approximately 45,000. Most barangays in this third-class municipality would be expected to be similar in population numbers—1500—and are very close-knit communities. Of interest: in the encounter of 31 March 2011 it was reported three members of the Abu Sayyaf were killed whilst the Scout Ranger Regiment had suffered no casualties.

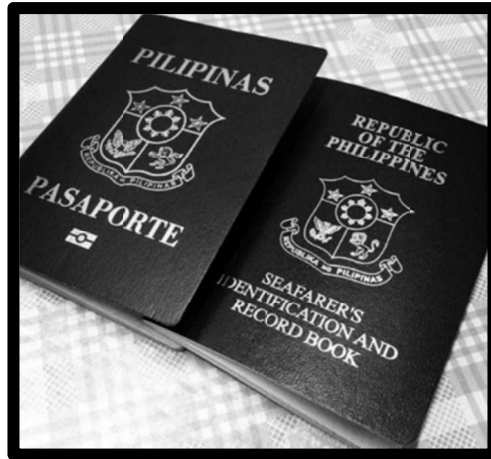
When the kidnapers retreated into the relative safety of the denser jungles, the “seaman’s book” (*seafarers identification and record book*) of Renato Panisales was found at the site of the encounter. This would not have been by mistake or oversight but a conscious act by Panisales to “inform” the attacking unit that they had indeed targeted the kidnapping group holding him and his companions. Without this tangible evidence the attacking force of the Scout Ranger Regiment may have been of the impression this was just another episode in the ongoing pursuit and encounters of the Abu Sayyaf in this troubled municipality—indeed province.

Panisales’ seafarer’s identification and record book was a valuable document and would not have been “left behind” easily by him. The Philippines is the largest supplier of maritime labour in the world and numbered almost 1.5 million mariners worldwide in 2010. It is a robust



document/book—as can be seen by the figures below—and would have had to be hidden in a place where the attacking force would look for evidence at the same time not being visibly obvious to the fleeing kidnappers.

Fig. 1.3 Philippine Seafarer's and Identification and Record Book. (For example purposes only).



Keterangan Pemegang / Description of Bearer		No. Pendaftaran / Reg. Number
Tempat & Tanggal Lahir / Place & Date of Birth	Jawa Timur 28 April 1981	U 025663
Alamat Tetap / Permanent Address	A. RAHMAT LUKAS W/P KORPRI KORPRI	No. dan Tanggal / No. & Date
Warna Rambut / Colour of hair	Hitam	
Warna Mata / Colour of eyes	Coklat	
Warna Kulit / Colour of skin	Cemerlang	
Tinggi Badan / Height	176 cm	
Golongan Darah / Blood Group		
Tanda-Tanda Lain / Other Visible Marks		
		 Tanda-tanda dan Tanggal / Signs and Date Tanda-tanda Pemegang / Signature of Bearer

## **Conflicting evidence & negotiations**

For most of the complex issues facing authorities, and also to those endeavouring to negotiate the release of Abu Sayyaf hostages, is to know what Abu Sayyaf sub-group is holding the hostage/s, and more importantly, who is the leader of that group. In many instances there may be a number of persons who claim to be the leader, commander, majordomo, or any other title that may fit. This will always ensure his cut of the “take” will be the most. However, it is not always that straight forward. There will be subordinates and local helpers and suppliers, and perhaps sometimes officials on-the-take, who must also be compensated. Conversely on the other side of the equation, if negotiators are involved they also have to be compensated in many cases.

When it comes to the negotiating table it becomes even more complex when third party hostage negotiators, “professionals”, are brought into the state-of-play. International Association of Hostage Negotiators (IAHN) is one such entity. They run special courses designed to train their staff and the staff of associated members, the majority of whom are U.S. organisations. Their success rate—as can be imagined by the experience and professionalism of those employed in the “trade” is excellent. They are a predominately U.S. entity whose aim is to secure the release of hostages. This may be by negotiation or force—within the law of course—(loosely speaking). IAHN has to the beginning of 2018, not been involved in negotiations to secure any hostages taken by Abu Sayyaf pirates, or indeed by land-based Abu Sayyaf kidnappers, but this may change in time. Many of the hostages taken in the southern Philippines region come, or came from, wealthy families or organisations who could afford the cost involved in employing the skills of the IAHN professionals. Perhaps the complexity of the “ill defined” Abu Sayyaf organisation had prevented IAHN from investigating, or indeed pursuing these crimes.

To return to the kidnapping of the three seamen on 19 March 2011. There were two sub-groups of the Abu Sayyaf that were immediately identified by authorities, or better still suspected, of being the kidnappers—the Jamiri Jawong Jaw(h)ari faction and the Nasir Timbang faction. It is almost certain the Nasir Timbang faction was the sub-group of the Abu Sayyaf responsible for the crime—as we shall see later. Exactly why the authorities would have suspected the sub-group Jamiri Jawari to be involved is something of a mystery. They had, in the main, operated in Basilan Province, whereas the Nasir Timbang sub-group were Sulu based.

The Jamiri Jawari faction of the Abu Sayyaf had been in the news in early 2011 and their composition and crimes are worth mentioning—especially in relation to the time of the kidnapping of the three seamen in March of the same year. The media were given, over time, the names of five alleged sub-commanders of this faction—Patti Kabulot, Ustadz Salim Tado, Sali Sa'id, Amil Sa'id—cousins—and Suhud Tanadjalin. On 09 January 2011 Patti Kabulot was killed in an encounter with the AFP in Barangay Baguindan, Tipo-Tipo Municipality, Basilan—that ruled him out of the 19 March 2011 crime. On 08 February 2011 Suhud Tanadjalin was also killed by members of the AFP whilst he was performing his Salat—Islamic Prayer. He was also eliminated from participation in the crime.

On 01 March of the same year both Amil Sa'id and Sali Sa'id were captured by members of the AFP. Amil Sa'id was captured in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi—Sulu Archipelago. He was wanted in connection with an attack on Camp Bautista—Marine Headquarters—Jolo Island the previous year. Exactly why he would have been in Tawi-Tawi and how he was “recognized” was unknown, however he is also deleted from the “suspect” list as is Sali Sa'id. He was captured the same day as his cousin, Amil, but close to 200 kilometres north in Jolo City—Sulu Province. Sali Sa'id had a long history of crime including being involved in the kidnapping of an ABS-CBN correspondent, Ces Orena-Drilon in June 2008, and the following year being in an Abu Sayyaf sub-group that attacked a Marines' 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in Sulu. And all before he had turned 18 years of age!

Having all but ruled out the Jamiri Jawari faction of the Abu Sayyaf as being responsible for the kidnapping of Panisales, Ferrer, and Ocsimar attention is now turned to the Nasir Timbang faction of the Abu Sayyaf. Little was known about this sub-group apart from intelligence suggesting it had a sub-commander simply known as Palu. That the group of Nasir Timbang was responsible for the kidnappings was confirmed in July 2011 when quartermaster Ocsimar was released after his family paid a ransom of 300,000 Philippine pesos—approximately 6,000 USD \$ dollars. Unable to secure any support from Ocsimar's employer, Mega Fishing Corporation, the family had in some way been able to raise the amount paid to the pirates.

Ocsimar was released at 8 pm in Barangay Kaunayan, Patikul Municipality, Sulu. (Three years later this same barangay—Kaunayan—was the scene of the release of another Abu Sayyaf kidnap victim, Archie Hablo. His family raised the ransom money eight months after his

kidnapping. It is unclear whether the Nasir Timbang faction was the perpetrator of this crime).

The day before Ocsimar's release, his family—including his wife Marivic—had gone to Barangay Kaunayan and began negotiations with members of the Nasir Timbang faction. The amount of ransom money Ocsimar's family had offered the kidnapers obviously was acceptable. It was reported he was seen being led by members of the Nasir Tambang faction to a predetermined rendezvous point. As is the norm in many kidnapping negotiations in the Sulu Archipelago region, authorities are only informed after successful negotiations have taken place and the victim has been released. The act of not notifying authorities in advance of negotiations, or indeed the place of negotiation, may on face value appear vacuous. However, the opposite is the case. It is about survival of the victim. In the past, kidnap victims have been killed either as collateral damage when authorities have clashed with the kidnapers or retribution for betrayal to authorities.

The release of quarter master Ocsimar still left Captain Panisales and assistant engineer Ferrer in captivity, and at January 2018 there had been no indication of the whereabouts or fate of either Panisales or Ferrer. In the intervening six years no demands had been made to any family members—or indeed Mega Fishing Corporation. Panisales and Ferrer have just disappeared. Given the period of time, and intensive research conducted, it is assumed both have been killed by their captors.

## **26 April 2014**

The Sulu Sea—equidistant between Mindanao, southern Philippines, and Sabah, Malaysia—contains some of the most pristine tropical islands in the world. It is also abundant with fish-life, making it a very attractive destination for recreational travelers who sail the region in whatever ocean-going vessels to which they may have access. En passat, the Sulu Sea also boasts the World Heritage area of Tubbataha Reef National Park—100,000 hectares—home to hundreds of species of coral as well as hundreds of species of fish. In December 1993 the Paris based United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Tubbataha Reefs a “World Heritage Site”. This immutable wonderland shares with other reefs such as Australia's Great Barrier Reef—declared 1981—the quintessence of all that is beautiful in the natural world.

It was in this area two German nationals, Dr. Stefan Viktor Okonek, 72, a cardiologist, and his companion, Henrike Dielen, 47, had indulged in “island hopping” on many occasions. They were not tourists as such but long-term residents of Palawan. In April 2014 they had decided once again to “island hop” and travel to Sabah, Malaysia. They had moored their yacht off the coast of Palawan Province near the barangay of Rio Tuba some distance south of Puerto Princesa—capital of the Palawan—and were in the process of preparing for the sea journey to Sabah when the Abu Sayyaf criminals struck. Had it been a little later—perhaps May—the German travelers would have been on the high-sea and the chances of success for the Abu Sayyaf in this criminal act would have been considerably less. However, the Germans were kidnapped and were dealt a somewhat somber fate—kidnapped for ransom. Although in the true meaning of the word, piracy is used to denote robbery at sea, nonetheless Okonek and Dielen were on a vessel—albeit a yacht—and were on the waters of the Sulu Sea.

Fig. 1.4 Sulu Sea region



Once the kidnapers had secured their quarry, they were transferred to a fast-moving water vessel and transported approximately 500 kilometres to Jolo. (Their yacht was left adrift and was located by authorities off the coast of Bataraza—the southernmost municipality of Palawan). It was later revealed the vessel used in the transporting of the kidnapped couple

belonged to a commander—Idang Susukan—of an Abu Sayyaf sub-faction. Whether Susukan was personally involved in this kidnapping is unknown. However, he went on to become a feared member of the Abu Sayyaf and became complicit in many major crimes including the beheading of kidnap victims whose families or employers could not—or indeed would not—pay ransoms.

When the kidnapers together with their victims had reached the shores of Jolo they were then taken to various barangays in Patikul Municipality. (This was reminiscent of the three seamen who were kidnapped a little over three years before at Minis Island, north of Jolo). They were transferred to these various barangays including Buhanganin and Kabbon Takas, all strongholds of various factions of the local Abu Sayyaf. The map in Fig 1.5 shows the municipality of Patikul. Of interest, to the north-east of the municipality of Hadji is a small half-circle island. This is Minis Island where the three seamen working for Mega Fishing Corporation were kidnapped in March 2011—two to whom have never been found.

Fig 1.5 Patikul Municipality, Jolo Island, Sulu Province



A Muslim Mindanao State University academic, Professor Octavio Dinampo, an authority on the Abu Sayyaf and all its complexities claimed the group responsible for the kidnapping of the two German nationals had dual leaders, Ambrin Absara and Maummar Askali—quite unusual if correct. Little is known of Absara, but Maummar Askali also known as