

Santos, Soliman L., and Paz Verdad Santos. 2010. *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*. Quezon City: South-South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement. 440 pp.

The Philippine state has been under siege since its creation. Postcolonial state building has not only been under siege from outside forces; it has also fallen prey to the transactional and predatory contests of the ruling classes. This explains why the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has been one of the busiest and politicized armed forces in the world after World War II. The wounds that bleed the Philippine state of its legitimacy and purpose are bored from within and without.

Does knowledge of the primed and purposeful nonstate armed actors prime the state into acting as an institutional whole, free from the transactional interests of ruling parties? Will it move the state to reconsider, i.e., to engage the armed groups as part of the solution rather than treat them as a security problem? Does the same knowledge prime the public into arguing for its own sake rather than allowing political elites to take command of the bargaining process towards peace and human security?

In *Primed and Purposeful*, Soliman Santos, Paz Verdad Santos, and a group of contributing authors pose these challenges to a broad public—be they from the government, civil society or the business sector—who interact with, affect, or are affected by Philippine armed groups. It also calls on the academic community to investigate less-known insider information and the proposition that the non-state armed groups should be engaged as part of the solution.

What makes the book a compelling read is that the authors come from the very publics to whom they direct the book's message. The group consists of academicians, academician-advocates, a lawyer-advocate, a journalist-advocate and a writer-advocate. They speak from the audience with brown bags of hefty information derived from conversations rather than pelican briefs of stolen data. No prior study in the Philippines has yet dared to undress the armed groups in public in this manner.

The book also heaves with the freshness of recent conflict events, including accounts of informant deaths taken before the manuscript was finally sent to press. The conduct of the study is as meticulous as the anatomical dissection of each group. The principal authors first

came out with findings from a small arms survey, arguing that the proliferation of small arms is fueling the armed conflict. This volume brings to the fore the actors that pull the trigger. It focuses on two main groups in two insurgencies: the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) on the communist front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the Moro rebel front—nonstate actors that pretend to be and act like a state wherever they hold sway.

It is this purposeful character that persuades the authors to describe them as predictable groups that should be engaged. In real life, however, the Hydes of their Jekylls act unpredictably in the military sphere, as demonstrated by the unpredictable tactical movements that the public could only observe after the fact—when bomb fragments are analyzed, corpses are counted or blood trails are traced to determine the number of wounded bodies dragged or carried on makeshift stretchers. Every armed group wishes not to be telescoped by the perceived enemy even as it publicizes long-term wishes to suggest non-negotiables and predictability.

The long-term wishes are in fact the core topics of peace talks because it seems easier to protractedly deal with strategic options and possibilities of accommodation rather than talk about who goes to prison for human rights violations. Justice is usually shelved when both sides have accountabilities that they prefer to settle bilaterally than explain to the public.

Besides the two groups is a chorus line of other armed groups, some of whom are hardly known to the public except through sporadic accounts of bombs, deaths, kidnappings and capture in the evening news. Everyone knows about the Abu Sayyaf and the oft-published names of Janjalani and the Oakleys of Abu Sabaya not only because of the killings and kidnappings committed by them, but also because the United States insinuates that they are linked to Jemaah Islamiya and Al Qaeda. But who would know about the Bungkatol Liberation Army except for Department of Environment and Natural Resources personnel in Caraga Region who, apart from tirades regarding neglect of ancestral domain claims and illegal logging issues, are forced under duress to sign resource use permits? Who would know about the Lumadnong Pakig-bisog Sa Caraga-Bagani Warriors, also in Caraga, except for the AFP that aims to use indigenous peoples (former NPAs) against fellow indigenous peoples, who still support the CPP-NPA-NDFP (National Democratic Front of the Philippines)?

The authors argue that all armed groups should have redeeming value. The working hypothesis is to create such value by transforming them into solution partners. By engagement, the immediate gain is mitigation of losses in human security and development. Evidence shows that peace talks create environments of suspended violence in addition to expectations of lasting peace.

The keyword used is “engage,” akin to the post-9/11 Western call to engage the Islamic world. Nonetheless, the authors recognize the dilemmas of engagement. Previous engagements leading to documents such as the 1996 Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)-Government of the Republic of the Philippines Peace Agreement or the 2000 Government of the Republic of the Philippines-Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino [Revolutionary Worker’s Party of the Philippines]/Revolutionary Proletariat Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPMP/RPA/ABB) Interim Peace Agreement, either led to the collapse of one party (the MNLF) or fragmentation (such as the split of the RPMP/RPA/ABB)—all in less than five years.

The nonmonolithic characterization of the Philippine state even tends to be less problematic compared to the chorus line of nonstate armed groups arising from splits and mutation. From such occurrences, one group claims to be *the* group that the state should deal with and most often, the best way to get attention is to activate unpredictable behavior. The MILF got away with the anger of commanders Bravo and Umbra Kato over the outcry resulting from the suspension of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain. It read the government’s Medium Term Philippine Development Plan commitment to ink peace agreements by 2010 as good enough reason to place on the negotiating table whatever elements of “un-peace” it chooses to. The CPP-NPA-NDFP also gets away with human rights violations by arguing that the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law is an obligation of the state and not its own.

The authors clearly posit the potential positive outcome of engagement—it could possibly lead to human security. The compilation of hitherto publicly unknown data of structures, formations, armaments and bases of operations is a daring attempt at undressing the nonstate armed groups. The investigative dimension of the research is in fact reflective of rigor against every conceivable odd. It is a feat that one would normally attribute to clandestine operations of intelligence services. For military strategists, the information is a useful element for

the Sun Tzu approach (of knowing the enemy and knowing one's self) to winning battles. The challenge is how to convert this information into a political instrument with redeeming value and for the collective good rather than the decimation of one or the other. Past pitfalls point to the use of the negotiating table as façade for other veiled intentions.

The authors have also lucidly laid down the pitfalls of engagement by looking at historical facts or even the grim impossibilities of accommodation by looking at the strategic and seemingly irreconcilable positions of the parties in conflict. In fact the working hypothesis could breed a number of counter-hypotheses based on "if" conditions:

- What if the state uses hard data on the actual strengths and capacities of nonstate armed groups to reinforce the military approach to elimination of security threats?
- What if the state is not ready to engage due to lack of or incoherent peace policy?
- What if the armed groups use engagement to reinforce legitimacy here and abroad?
- What if the armed groups use engagement as a shield against government attacks and use the opportunity to recover lost ground?
- What if the parties are not even prepared to engage either due to thin legitimacy and mandates or pure lack of capacity to negotiate?

The authors chose not to deal with the voices of the affected with a valid argument that that subject has been examined by other studies. They also chose not to suggest engagement of other non-state armed groups whose priming and purpose are less predictable. More interestingly, there is no explicit suggestion about the justiciability of unpredictable acts—the kidnappings, bombings, killings, banditry, rent from protection and all other acts that make humans and their economic endeavors less secure.

If there is one other thing assumed or lightly undressed in this volume, it is the Philippine state—the most primed and purposeful leviathan that has always poised itself against any nonstate armed group with a singular and oft-repeated proposition: uphold the Constitution, national security and integrity of the republic. In its current form,

whoever occupies central authority is willing to decentralize violence to secure ruling class predations. The state and the other primed and purposeful groups belong to a constellation of armed actors in a seemingly endless dance of peace and violence while the international community is off-and-on invited to intermissions of gunless dialogues. Meanwhile, the public struggles hard to interpret their motions on the daily news with the hope of finding meaning to it all.

There might yet be another possibility—that the affected publics might reject the engagement as an elite spectacle as they wait until the moment is ripe to make better sense of their lives. In the concluding chapter, the authors suggest the possibility of positive outcomes outside the peace process but not necessarily in the theater of war.—ED QUITORIANO, CONSULTANT, RISKASIA CONSULTING, INC.

Plummer, Michael G., and Chia Siow Yue, eds. 2009. *Realizing the ASEAN Economic Community: A Comprehensive Assessment*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 252 pp.

The nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are challenged to form an economic community, much like the European Economic Community, after forming a free trade area. The ASEAN rose to the challenge. At the Twelfth ASEAN Summit in Cebu in January 2007, the ASEAN decided that it will create the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015. The AEC will create an opportunity for the region to enhance its competitiveness through economic liberalization, reform, and cooperation.

Realizing the ASEAN Economic Community: A Comprehensive Assessment is edited by Michael G. Plummer and Chia Siow Yue. The former is Eni Professor of International Economics at The John Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies-Bologna and former Senior Fellow at the East-West Center; his main academic interests are international trade, international finance, and economic integration, especially in the Asian context. The latter is a Senior Research Fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. Her main areas of research are development economics and international economics, with a focus on Southeast Asian economics, especially Singapore.

The introduction written by Plummer and Siow Yue assesses ASEAN economic growth and performance: a) while economic