# EDITORIAL – Kidnapped in Mindanao | Philstar.com

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About three decades ago, kidnapping for ransom reached crisis proportions, with Chinese-Filipinos the favored targets of organized crime rings. A deadly crackdown put an end to the kidnapping spree, but the problem did not completely go away.

It didn’t take long before national attention shifted to another kidnapping spree, this time carried out by the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in Mindanao targeting anyone who could pay ransom including foreign tourists and missionaries.

The kidnapping spree, which reportedly earned for the Abu Sayyaf millions of dollars, wreaked havoc on Philippine tourism and the economy in general, particularly in Mindanao, which became one of the fronts in Washington’s global war against al-Qaeda-linked terrorism. The task of crushing the Abu Sayyaf led to the return of US troops to the Philippines for the first time since the shutdown of their bases.

Kidnapping for ransom by organized crime rings and Islamist terrorists abated. In recent years, however, there have been reports of ransom kidnappings perpetrated by law enforcers themselves, with cases spiking alongside the bloody campaign against illegal drugs in the previous administration. Among the most notorious cases was the kidnapping of South Korean businessman Jee Ick-joo from his home in Angeles City on Oct. 18, 2016, together with his housemaid, by members of the Philippine National Police Anti-Illegal Drugs Group. Jee’s wife paid ransom of P5 million but never saw her husband again. He was strangled to death by AIDG members in his own car right inside Camp Crame. His body was cremated and the ashes flushed down the toilet of a funeral parlor. The convicted mastermind, former police superintendent Rafael Dumlao of the AIDG, is at large.

Alongside the abuses in the war on drugs were the ransom kidnappings related to Philippine offshore gaming operator firms. Most of the victims were Chinese and other foreigners, with the perpetrators mainly Chinese POGO workers, some of them reportedly assisted by Philippine police. State security forces are now bracing for criminal activities of POGOs that have reportedly broken up into micro or guerrilla operations.

Now, apart from the ransom kidnappings linked to POGOs and organized crime rings, the threat appears to have resurfaced in Mindanao. Police have confirmed that four gunmen kidnapped Elliot Onil Eastman, a 26-year-old American, last Thursday night from his home in Sibuco town in Zamboanga del Norte. A witness told probers that the gunmen, clad in black and armed with M-16 rifles, had introduced themselves as police. Eastman reportedly tried to escape but was shot in the leg and then dragged into a speedboat that quickly sped away.

The government must act decisively in rescuing Eastman and capturing his kidnappers. Otherwise, ransom kidnapping may again become a cottage industry in Mindanao.