ABSTRACT: In recent years, the rise of the China, apparent isolationism of the United States and renewed assertiveness of Russia have led to calls in Europe for a more assertive role in international politics for the European Union. However, whether the European Union can fulfill such a role is a topic of heated debate. The EU is a regional institution whose role has heretofore been mostly restricted to economic issues; as a result, it is undeniably powerful in trade but its ability to generate leverage in international relations in a wider sense remains to be seen. Most literature on the EU’s role in international relations debates its ability, or lack thereof, to foster unity among its members in dealing with external parties. This research will contribute to the debate on the EU’s role in international relations by exploring an underevaluated concept from the literature, that of the ‘shield effect’. The shield effect is a hypothesized protective effect of the EU’s institutions on member states. Whether and to what extent this effect exists will be investigated through four case studies situated in EU member states’ relations to China, two in the field of economics and two in the field of human rights policy. The research aims to contribute first and foremost to knowledge on the functions of the EU itself. In addition, the insights derived in this research will hopefully increase our understanding of regional integration in general, by shedding light on the ways states can creatively use regional institutions to further their own leverage in international relations.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Laurens Hemminga joined Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong to pursue his PhD in 2016. He holds Master degrees in International Relations from the University of Groningen (2012) and Policy Economics from the Catholic University of Leuven (2014). He previously interned at the Netherlands embassy in South Korea and at the Netherlands Institute for International Relations Clingendael.

‘A Tale of Two Insurgencies’:
How the effects of a-historical analysis, oversight of literature from other disciplines, & misplaced assumptions concerning the development of separatist movements in Southern Thailand since the early-Cold War have hindered analysis of the current conflict in decline.

by Mr Gerard Brian MCDERMOTT (Presenter 2, 3:45 - 4:30 pm)
PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

ABSTRACT: Since 2004, the Malay-speaking provinces of south Thailand have been the stage for a surprisingly brutal wave of violence between the security agencies of the state supported by local defence organisations and an insurgent movement that is highly-secretive and excessively non-communicative. Since 2014, the level of violence has gone drastically into decline, without any substantial, thorough or convincing explanation being put forward by seasoned experts. This presentation aims to provide an explanation by analysing previous patterns of violence in the region and providing a survey of works from the fields of ethology and anthropology.

Firstly, concerning the Cold War era insurgency (1960 - 1990), I offer an alternative point of view on the connection between this conflict and later patterns of violence, developing on Helbardt’s assertion that the failures of the previous conflict shaped the development of Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) in the 1990s: I argue that both conflicts have essentially fallen into decline for the same or similar reasons. I also argue that certain factors at work during the late cold war intensified during the interregnum period (1990 - 2004) and went on to shape patterns of violence and target selection during the current conflict.

Secondly, this presentation also attempts to identify shortcomings in previous literature produced during the first ten years of southern Thailand’s most recent separatist conflict (2004 - 2014). Nearly all of the main works produced have suffered from the same or similar short-comings: (i) a-historical analysis; (ii) a Thai-studies centred approach; (iii) omission or oversight of literature on the same topic from different disciplines, and (iv) lack of application of theory from the field of conflict studies. I argue that these shortcomings have led to an inability for most analysts to explain why the conflict has gone into decline. Overall, the omission of literature, both older literature on the Cold War conflict and literature from the fields of ethnology and anthropology, have severely undermined the ability of analysts to explanation the decline of the conflict since 2014.

Lastly, I argue that the shortcomings of recent analyses (2014 - 2019) can be explained by a continuuation of the short-comings of earlier analyses, ultimately leading to a failure to predict or explain the current decline. I argue that by relying on these old frameworks, misplaced assumptions and accepted ‘wisdoms’, analysts have failed to provide a complete or reassuring explanation of this conflict in decline.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Gerard McDermott is a researcher, writer & photographer from the Republic of Ireland. He has previously published with Peace Review, Politico and Peace Research. His research interests include separatism, resource-related conflict, ethnicity, nationalism, imperialism, and state-building.