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THE RISE OF DUTERTE

A Populist Revolt against Elite Democracy

Richard Javad Heydarian

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"Richard Heydarian's book in its meticulous unpacking of Duterte's presidency will no doubt contribute to deepening our understanding of the man and of the world historical moment of his rise to power."

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—Howie Severino, *award-winning anchor/Journalist, GMA News Network, Philippines*

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Acknowledgements

This isn't my first book, yet it was the most challenging so far. Not so much due the lack of material or impetus. If anything, it is perhaps for the exact opposite reasons. Rodrigo Duterte—the tough talking, unorthodox, and invective-laced Filipino president—is a story that just keeps on giving. Following his long-winded speeches—often resembling Faulknerian stream of consciousness if not Freudian free association rather than the business-as-usual statesmanlike sloganeering—is, to say the least, a formidable task, requiring utmost patience and diligence on the part of any conscientious researcher.

Since this is a scholarly work, I made the extra effort of making sure my understanding and analysis of Duterte, and his unique rhetorical style, isn't jeopardized by the ubiquity of sensationalist journalistic coverage, which has dominated popular imagination of the highly controversial and popular Filipino leader. Understanding the context, background, and intent of his speeches and actions is no easy feat, yet it is indispensable to a fair and objective assessment of his unique and mindboggling and aggressive brand of politics, which has jolted the liberal elite out of its stupor. And given his larger-than-life ego, and the far-reaching impact of his rhetoric and action on my country and beyond, I never really lacked any impetus in terms of writing on, reading about, or observing him. Since Duterte's rise to national prominence in late 2015, I have written hundreds of articles and papers, not to mention countless interviews with practically all major national and international media outlets;

these were collectively an excruciating exercise in making sense out of a kind of rhetoric and behavior that often seemed, at least on the surface, beyond reason and comprehension.

Writing this book, however, was particularly exacting, not only because of the constant stream of media and writing requests—especially every time Duterte made an outrageous statement, which he often did and continues to do—but also the attendant necessity to constantly step back and see the bigger picture beyond the oppressive, distortionary fog of the immediate present. To ensure the depth and preserve the integrity of this work, I had to, with varying degrees of success, constantly take off my pundit hat in favor of my scholarly one as soon as I got back to conceptualizing and writing my manuscript. The challenge—following French historian Fernand Braudel's distinction—was to make sure that I didn't lose sight of the Longue durée (long-term structural shifts) in light of the mélange of histoire événementielle (ephemeral changes driven by daily events) in understanding what was happening in the Philippines.

And this is precisely why the book kicks off by providing a broader understanding of the phenomenon of populism around the world, including in emerging market democracies. This is why it also looks at the promise and peril of liberal democracy in deeply unequal nations such as the Philippines—and reasons behind the rise of right-wing populists such as Duterte. This is why the book looks at the deep history of Philippine-American relations before delving into the Filipino president's anti-American tirades and strategic flirtation with China and Russia.

The other challenge was the fact that the object of my study always felt too real—pungent and overwhelming. Some pages of this book were written while I came under a barrage of systematic cyber-harassment—mostly from pro-Duterte trolls—including death threats and myriad of insults levied against my loved ones and me. Other pages came after I personally met the president in Malacañang Palace—an experience that, paradoxically, felt surreal and manufactured. Some others came after conversations with human rights activists and some of Duterte's fiercest critics. There were times when I felt like the whole country was on the verge of crashing into a frenzy of anarchy, swallowed by a mindless orgy of violence, hatred, and intolerance. There were nights when one was not sure whether you would still wake up to a democratic society. The above-mentioned issues, however, are just a foretaste of the extreme emotional and psychological challenges, which I had to go grapple with in penning this book.

Given the growing polarization of political discourse in the country, it was also particularly challenging to make sure that one fully and fairly incorporates the views of individuals from the opposite sides of the fence into a coherent narrative. In this highly charged political environment, I couldn't help but notice that even arranging interviews with key figures was often affected by questions and speculations vis-à-vis my supposed loyalty and political leanings. But above all, penning this book was challenging, because it is perhaps the first effort to provide a systematic and coherent analysis of the roots and trajectory of Duterte's presidency and, in the words of Filipino Sociologist Randy David, the attendant phenomenon of "Dutertismo." This is the first effort to provide an extensive analysis of the Filipino president, his rhetoric and action, and his national and international impact beyond media headlines and ideological debates.

Let me thank all individuals, from the government, academe, media, and the civil society, who helped me to put this (hopefully pioneering) work together. In particular, I would want to extend my gratitude to senior government officials, particularly Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Press Secretary Martin Andanar, and Philippine Ambassador to China Jose "Chito" Sta. Romana for sharing their valuable views with me, including on very sensitive issues and despite their heavy schedule.

I am also very grateful to other senior (current and former) government officials, from the Philippines and across the Asia-Pacific region, who agreed to share their valuable views, though off-the-record due to the sensitivity of the matter under discussion. This book, particularly Chap. 2 and areas that concern foreign policy issues, were deeply enriched by candid and extensive conversations (mostly confidential) with several heads of state, senior cabinet officials, members of the armed forces, and the broader defense establishment in several key countries in the region throughout the past three years. Without a doubt, the insiders' view of the inner workings of government and policy-making were indispensable to the formation of this book.

I am also thankful to those on the outside, who provided a sober analysis of the outward workings of the government, particularly under the Duterte administration. Thus, I would want to thank my colleagues in the academe, especially Dr. Walden Bello (State University of New York), Dr. Jay Batongbacal (University of the Philippines), and Dr. Vicente Rafael (University of Washington), among many others, for sharing their

valuable and sobering views on Philippine politics, foreign policy, and history, respectively. I would also want to thank colleagues in the media, namely Marites Vitug (Rappler), Howie Severino (GMA Network), and Antonio Montalvan II (Philippine Daily Inquirer) for their sharp and candid assessment of the current state of media and political freedom in the country. I am also grateful to Manuel Quezon III, a leading pundit and former assistant secretary for strategic communications in the Benigno Aquino III administration, for his cogent and candid views on what has gone right and wrong in recent years.

Without a doubt, there are countless more people, including my undergraduate and graduate students, who played a key role not only in the development of this book, but also my inexplicable audacity to try to pen the first book on the presidency of a highly complex character with often frighteningly perplexing policies and pronouncements. I sincerely hope that this book will mark the beginning of a fruitful and enriching literature on Duterte, Dutertismo, and the new emerging chapter in Philippine political history, which has, so far, proven to have far-reaching consequences for the country and beyond.

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CHAPTER 1

Democracy Under Siege

"*All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away… All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned…*" Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (Page 38).

Abstract Drawing on the works of ancient political thinkers, Plato, and Aristotle, the chapter looks at the concept of political decay, inherent structural vulnerabilities of democratic regimes, and the attendant emergence of demagogues amid a popular backlash against the oligarchy. Utilizing theories of democratization by leading political scientists such as Huntington, Diamond, Carothers, and Przeworski. This chapter looks at the ambiguities, inherent contradictions and non-teleological nature of political development in post-colonial Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It provides a background of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte and the relevance of one sociologist termed as "Dutertismo", a distinct form of right-wing populism brought about by the controversial Filipino leader.

Keywords Political decay · Illiberal democracy · Democracy fatigue

Reflecting on his country's transmogrification in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci lamented how the "the old [order] is dying and the new cannot be

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born," warning how "in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms [begin to] appear." With the liberal bourgeoisie discredited, socialists and fascists fought for the soul of the Iberian nation throughout the first half of the century. As Gramsci (in Hoare, Quintin, & Nowell 1971: 178) observed in his home country, "incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves…and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure," as the establishment elite hopelessly makes "every effort to cure them." The upshot was a political deadlock, which paved the way for the rise of the most pernicious perversion of populism: fascism. It was not until the end of World War II, which led to the decisive defeat of fascism and morbid demise of its leadership (i.e., Benito Mussolini and his wife, Donna Rachele, in particular) that Italy began to reconstitute its foundations, and embark on a new phase of economic expansion and democratization (Anderson 2014). Almost exactly a century, Gramsci's portrayal of his home country eerily resembles the *zeitgeist* among many troubled emerging as well as mature democracies in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. Throughout out the world, recent years have seen the liberal elite suffering one electoral setback after the others, as demagogues and strongman populists dislodge the establishment in favor of a new brand of politics, which seems both familiar and new. The specter of what Fareed Zakaria calls "illiberal democracy" is haunting the democratic world, as a distinct process of "authoritarianization" puts into question the durability of democratic values in one nation after the other (Zakaria 1997, 2016; Taylor and Frantz 2016).

This is particularly true among the members of the so-called third democratic wave, which swept across the developing and post-Soviet world in the past four decades (Huntington 1991). In fact, as early as mid-1990s, Zakaria (1997) observed how, "just as nations across the world have become comfortable with many variations of capitalism, they could well adopt and sustain varied forms of democracy." This means, "Western liberal democracy might prove to be not the final destination on the democratic road, but just one of many possible exits." What Zakaria saw was the emergence of hybrid forms of regimes, which combine elements of electoral democracy with autocratic governance, characterized by limited respect for liberal constitutional values. "Far from being a temporary or transitional stage, it appears that many countries are settling into a form of government that mixes a substantial degree of democracy with a substantial degree of illiberalism," Zakaria argued (Ibid.).

For long, the standard political science literature was found upon a teleological paradigm, purporting a linear progression of democracies across a continuum with a definite terminus in sight: liberal democratic capitalism. This was precisely what Francis Fukuyama (1989) foresaw in his "end of history" treatise, which Zakaria's "illiberal democracy" hypothesis sought to interrogate. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, which was followed by rapid spread of democracies across Eastern and Southern Europe, and the advent of the Arab spring, which saw the dislodging of autocratic regimes in one country after the other, initially reinforced both Fukuyama's Hegelian "end of history" thesis as well as dominant theories of democratization in political science. According to the conventional democratization theory, post-autocratic societies, particularly the third wave democracies, go through several stages, often in succession, though often far from smoothly. First comes the "opening", a transition out of an ossified autocratic rule, which usually comes after a period of political liberalization. This is followed by a "breakthrough", giving birth to *minimalist-procedural* democracy, which, at the very least, maintains fair, competitive and popular elections. Under this regime, all adults, regardless of gender, religion, and socioeconomic background, are allowed to vote in an exercise of universal suffrage. Ex ante uncertainty—namely, that there is a significant chance for the incumbent to lose the elections—is essential to the electoral process. The electoral contest is competitive, because, in the words of Adam Przeworski, the principle of "organized uncertainty" is built into the fabric of democratic exercise. The incumbent doesn't enjoy an unfair access to resources that are crucial to self-entrenchment in elected office. Fairness is ensured by equal access by both opposition and incumbent to means of political organization, mobilization, and promotion. The integrity and independence of electoral watchdogs, namely the commission on elections, should also be secured. Ex post irreversibility, namely the ability of the opposition to smoothly take over in an event of victory without the fear of the losing party's coercive usurpation of elected office, must be guaranteed. The next stage of political evolution is democratic *consolidation*, as key political actors, including the military, accept that (fair, competitive, and popular) electoral competition is the only game in town—namely, the sole legitimate means for acquisition and transfer of state power. At this stage, there isn't only a strategic-instrumental acceptance of and compliance to democratic principles, but also an element of normative compliance and institutional internalization of democratic values by all pillars of the state and society. Democracies reach a level of maturity, or *deepening*, where there systemic

internalization of civil liberties and political rights by both the state and civil society. Deepened democracies also tend to have robust welfare programs, with individual citizens enjoying a relatively high level of living standards, thanks to universal healthcare and education, progressive taxation, and median income rates than can support a "dignified" living (Diamond 1999; Carothers 2002; Przeworski 2000).

In reality, however, only a few nations have gone through that linear process of progression. Empirical observation has revealed a less encouraging and more indeterminate trajectory for fledgling democracies of recent decades. As Thomas Carothers (2002: 9–10) notes, most third wave democracies, from the Philippines to Mexico and Ghana, "have some attributes of democratic political life, including at least limited political space for opposition parties and independent civil society, as well as regular elections and democratic constitutions." But once you scratch below the surface, Carothers observers, it is easy to notice how these transitional democracies "suffer from serious democratic deficits." Beyond the facade of lively democratic politics embodied by hotly contested elections among colorful politicians, Carothers (Ibid.) observes, there is "poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of the law by government officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy, very low levels of public confidence in state institutions, and persistently poor institutional performance by the state." Two decades after the advent of what Samuel Huntington classified as the third wave of democracy, beginning with the fall of the dictatorial regime in Portugal and reaching a crescendo with the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989, "the majority of third wave countries has not achieved relatively well-functioning democracy or do not seem to be deepening or advancing whatever democratic progress they have made" (Carothers 2002: 9).

Joshua Kurlantzick, author of *Democracy in Retreat,* has made a similar observation: "While some countries in Africa, the Arab world, and Asia have opened slightly in the past two years, in other countries once held up as examples of political change democratic meltdowns have become depressingly common. In reality, democracy is going into reverse." Often the culprit behind democratic decay and degenerative mutation is the absence of functioning state institutions, which have the capacity to discipline rapacious elite, enforce laws, and insulate the bureaucracy from the undue influence of interest groups from without

(Fukuyama 2014). In fact, as Huntington (1968: 392) himself warned in the mid-twentieth century, "[i]nstead of a trend toward competitiveness and democracy, there has been an 'erosion of democracy' and a tendency to [lapse into] autocratic…regimes." For Huntington (1968: 392), the fragility of democratic institutions had something to do with the "decay of the administrative organization inherited from the colonial era and a weakening and disruption of the political organizations developed during the struggle for independence." Almost half a century later, same issues bedevil third wave democracies the world over. As democratic degeneration sets in, the polity becomes ripe for the picking by demagogues and despots. This was precisely the milieu within which classical Greek thinkers, particularly Plato and Aristotle, developed their political theories, which exhibit an unmistakable aversion to democracy. In *The Republic,* Plato (1973, p. 6) described democracy as, "a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike." Aristotle (1946, p. 163) was equally, if not more, critical—dismissing democracy as an adulterated form of governance, "analogous to tyranny, where law has ceased to be sovereign and the notion of a constitution has practically disappeared." As Plato's protégé saw it, democracy is "a constitution in which the free-born and poor control the government—being at the same time the majority" (Aristotle 1946, p. 164). Countless citizens as well as intellectuals across democracies, both emerging and mature, are beginning to exhibit similar levels of skepticism, if not aversion to democracy. And such sentiments have fed off on each other across nations and regions. After all, as Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Human Condition*, we live in a globalized world, where "[e]very country has become the almost immediate neighbor of every other country, and every man feels the shock of events which take place at the other side of the globe." (Mishra 2017: 8). We are beginning to experience a troubling phenomenon, which can be called "democratic fatigue" (See Fig. 1.1), as a growing share of citizens, including in developed societies, become more comfortable with the notion of military rule and autocratic takeover (Foa and Mounk 2017).

The zeitgeist of democratic decay and democracy fatigue—namely, the deepening public dissatisfaction with business-as-usual practices of the (democratic) political elite—is most acutely apparent among Asia's oldest democracies such as the Philippines.

Fig. 1.1 Global Survey of Share of Citizens Preferring a Strong Leader "Who Does Not Have to Bother with Elections". *Source* European and World Values Survey; Mounk and Foa (2017); Journal of Democracy

Man of the Hour

Few, if any, saw it coming. Within months, the Philippines transformed from a hopeful *narrative* of simultaneous democratic reform and economic boom to a cauldron of political and ideological transformation, which has cast a dark shadow on both the country's democratic institutions as well as economic momentum. It's hard to understate the sheer breadth and speech of change: The Southeast Asian country went from one of America's staunchest regional allies to one of its most

vocal critics; it went from a bastion of human rights and liberal values in Southeast Asia to a new haven for "Asian values" and strongman leadership. While in the past decades the Philippines stood as an advocate of human rights and democratization in the region, it is now an inspiration for decisive and single-minded—if not ruthless—brand of leadership. In a strange turn of events, the Philippines has now become a voice for the so-called Asian values argument, which was generously deployed by autocratic leaders in Singapore and Malaysia, namely, Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad, to justify suppression of individual civil liberties for the supposed benefit of the community (Zakaria 1994; Lingle 1996; Zakaria 2009).

At the heart of this great transformation stands Rodrigo Duterte, the tough-talking mayor-turned-president, who has single-handedly transformed the Philippines' domestic and foreign policy trajectory unlike any of his predecessors. More than a leader, he represents a movement, what one sociologist termed as "Dutertismo", which is shaking up the Philippine political system with far reaching consequences at home and abroad (David 2016a, b). Drawing on the works of Robert O. Paxton and Thomas Mann, Randy David's has described "Dutertismo" as a movement that has "unleashe[d] a torrent of aggressive and resentful impulses not previously seen in our society, except perhaps in social media." It is a movement that explicitly "targets….the drug syndicates, criminals, and government functionaries who spend more time making money for themselves than in serving the public," David explains. "In the future, they can be any group that is perceived to stand in the way of genuine change."

By far, as scholars such as Walden Bello argue, Duterte could be considered as the Philippines' most powerful president since the fall of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship in 1986. Some would go so far as arguing that Duterte is even more powerful than Marcos, since he has consolidated his grip over state institutions without even declaring Martial Law—or feeling the need to do so yet (Cabacungan 2016). As Bello[1] explains, Duterte has a deep and diversified base, who "came to power with an anti-crime agenda and an anti-elite and anti-liberal discourse" but, quite paradoxically, "rules with the support of most of the elite and the direct assistance of a section of the left."

[1] Interview with the author, February 26, 2017.

Duterte, who is almost exactly as old as the post-independence Philippine state, is a man of many firsts. He is the first Filipino president from the southern island of Mindanao, the country's most impoverished and conflict-ridden. He is the first Filipino politician who leapfrogged from local politics, as mayor of Davao City, straight to the *Malacanang*, the seat of presidential power in Manila. He is also the first self-described leftist, "socialist" Filipino leader, who has given multiple cabinet positions to figures associated with the Philippine communist movement. He is the first Filipino president, who has openly boasted about his (real and imagined) Chinese and Muslim ethnic heritage and never failed to remind the Catholic majority about the "historical injustices" against the minority Muslims. He is the first mainstream Filipino politician, who has cussed and cursed at every sacred national figure and institution, including the highest authorities, namely the Pope, in the Catholic Church, the spiritual guardian of the majority of Filipinos. He is the first Filipino president to have openly questioned the Philippines's century-old alliance with America, while calling for ideological alignment with Eastern powers of Russia and China. He is the first Filipino leader to have openly threatened to use maximum violence, often in graphic language and macabre description, to restore law and order in the country. Ideologically, he oscillates between Marcos and Marx, combining the rhetoric class-warfare rhetoric with strongman fantasies. For Filipino historian Vicente Rafael,[2] Duterte is a unique figure in Philippine history, who "combines a canny ability to charm and weave self-deprecating stories with a menacing bearing that signals his willingness to destroy–figuratively and literally–all those who oppose him." In a departure from his predecessors, Rafael observers, Duterte's has "gone out of is way to criticize if not alienate many elements of the establishment: the Catholic Church, the press, and major section of the Manila elites," and "does not hide his disdain for the criticism of others."

Quite simply, the Philippines has never had any leader like him—a man full of chutzpah, cuss, and conviction. Above all, he is a man of extraordinary contradictions. In the word of Pia Ranada, a Filipino journalist who closely covered Duterte's rise to presidency: "He's a [self-described] Leftist but with strongman tendencies. He's a sexist but a mayor who has implemented some of the best pro-women policies

[2] Interview February 20, 2017.

in local government. He's a professed stickler for [compliance with] the law but has advocated mass murder (though he'll say, it was just a joke). He was Mindanao's first choice for president, but he was Metro Manila's first choice as well."

Duterte is often portrayed, by both supporters and critics, as a maverick and "political outsider" *par excellence*, though Duterte, whose children currently occupy the top elected offices in his home city, is related to one of the country's most powerful political dynasties, the Duranos and Almendras of Mindanao, and the Roa clan of the Visayas. His father was mayor of Danao in Cebu and a provincial governor of Davao, who later became the interior minister in the early years of Ferdinand Marcos administration (Ranada 2016; David 2016a, b). Duterte's presidency has also been accompanied by a major overhaul of the country's foreign policy paradigm, as he played one superpower against the other. After single-handedly redirecting the destiny of his nation and jolting the Asian geopolitical order, Duterte became the first Filipino leader to land on the *Forbes* magazine's list of most powerful persons on earth (Romero 2016).

The rise of Duterte, his unlikely election victory, his mind-boggling popularity, class-transcending charisma, and curious mélange of rhetorical overdrive and policy equivocation can't be understood in isolation. It has to be situated within a broader context of how populism takes root in rapidly modernizing nations like the Philippines, because Duterte is, first and foremost, a populist, who uses a "political style that features an appeal to 'the people' versus 'the elite', 'bad manners' and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat." (Moffitt 2016: 45). And the rise of populists like Duterte is part of a global trend, which has inundated the establishment in both fledgling and developed democracies.[3] Stylistically, as a president, and substantively, as the former mayor of Davao, Duterte is also a strongman—a hands-on, macho leader who has little appreciation of institutional checks and balances as well as political opposition, one who is eager to bend existing rules and traditions to his personal preferences and priorities.[4]

[3] Interview with Benjamin Moffitt, the author of "The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation." March 2, 2017.

[4] Both Bello and David, two of the Philippines' leading sociologists, have argued that there are elements of fascism in Duterte, namely, the celebration of violence and unbending mass support; sentimentalized patriotism and disdain for the cosmopolitan elite; identification of an "other" (i.e., drug users) as the enemies of the state, who deserve the worst

To understand Duterte, one must investigate how societies come to embrace, if not surrender to, outside-the-box leaders like him, who have promised overnight national salvation for a broken society—often in defiance of facts, common sense, and history. As Gramsci (1971: 178) warned in the Prison Notebook, "[a] common error in historico-political analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural." For the Italian thinker, it is critical to bear in mind the "distinction between organic 'movements' and facts and 'conjunctural' or occasional" developments. Otherwise, as in the case of the Philippines and Duterte, the essence and true significance of recent developments will be lost in translation amid the torrent of media headlines.

The book has three main arguments. First, Duterte's rise to power came on the back of simmering public dissatisfaction with the post-Marcos "elite democracy,"[5] which miserably failed to live up to its initial promise of social justice and sustainable development (Anderson 1987; Mendoza 2009; Timberman 2016). The Philippines represents a classic case of how, as the Harvard Political Scientist Samuel Huntington (1968) foresaw, it is precisely the rapidly developing countries that are most vulnerable to political breakdown and autocratic takeover. It must be noted that Duterte's rise is also part of a broader wave of populist ascendancy across Asia and beyond, as the liberal establishment fails to inspire public support and cope with new challenges of globalization. This will be the focus of this chapter.

Footnote 4 (continued)
punishment; and a political charisma that transcends socioeconomic and ideological divides. Their analysis tracks more closely with Umberto Eco's more wide-ranging, ahistorical definition of fascism, which has as many as fourteen elements (Eco 1995). A number of historians and political scientists, however, have sought to make a clearer distinction between populism and fascism, arguing that despite some similarities, the two are not the same (Ferguson 2016; Berman 2017). Under their definition, Duterte exhibits elements of right-wing populism, which entails mass-based popular mobilization against the liberal elite, rather than fascism, which means black guards, totalitarian ideology, genocidal violence, and transformation of patriotism into aggressive wars abroad.

[5] 'Elite democracy' is the oxymoronic label attached to the political system installed by the 1986 People Power Revolution, which saw the removal of one-man dictator supplanted by the reign of a liberal oligarchy, which has hijacked democratic institutions and occupied almost all relevant elected offices.

Second, there is an underlying method to the seeming madness of Duterte's foreign policy, which has caught both political insiders, including top administration officials, and external observers off-guard. While his tactical maneuvers are often amateurish, and create excessive uncertainty, Duterte follows a strategic logic, which is sensible for smaller powers precariously caught between competing superpowers. Duterte's emerging equi-balancing strategy holds the promise of allowing the Philippines to maintain robust relations with both America and China without choosing between the two. While such strategy is common among Southeast Asian countries, which follow what Mohammed Ayoob (2002) called "subaltern realism,"[6] it is revolutionary in the case of the Philippines, since it ended a century of "special relationship" between Manila and Washington. Duterte has abandoned strategic subservience to America in favor of a more transactional dynamic, whereby the alliance is a product of constant strategic bargaining rather than fixed expectations and sets of incentives. This will be the subject of Chap. 2.

Third, Duterte can't be reduced to one persona or trait. Duterte's electoral success and popularity is a byproduct of a dynamic deployment of fear, utilization of mass entertainment, and reliance on Machiavellian calculus. Through fear and threatening rhetoric, he disciplines the opposition, impresses the insecure sections of the society seeking law and order, and addresses criminality with tried-and-tested scorched-earth policies. Through a folksy, humble demeanor, he charms the masses and projects "authenticity". And yet, as his survival in Davao's vicious politics as well as perfect electoral record demonstrates (i.e., having won all elections in a landslide in his life), Duterte is far from an unhinged madman, but instead has often been deliberate in matters of governance and power-consolidation. Duterte is a folksy, "Dirty Harry," who possesses the *Virtù* to discern *Necessità* and cope with *Fortuna*. Throughout his political career, stretching over almost three decades, Duterte has displayed an uncanny ability, so far, to build alliances out of a Lincoln-like "team of rivals," pre-empt opposition, and, at least in the case of Davao, get things done in administrative terms. Yet, Duterte's attempt

[6]The problem with standard IR theory, particularly Waltzean neorealist traditions, is how little they have to say about the historical conditions, strategic predicament and corollary behavior of nonindustrialized/developing states, which have limited agency, hence follow a different strategy that shapes their patterns of behavior in the international system.

to replicate his "Davao model" on the national scale has been far from successful and is fraught with risks of unintended consequences for his administration and the well-being of the Philippines. His signature "war on drugs" campaign has—even by his own admission—fallen short of its objectives, while triggering domestic and international backlash. This will be the subject of the final chapter.

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CHAPTER 2

Modernizations and Its Discontents

"*[People] will tolerate poverty, enslavement, barbarism, but they will not endure aristocracy*," Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

Abstract It discusses the unlikely electoral success of Rodrigo Duterte, a provincial mayor with limited resources, who astutely tapped into widespread grievance among a disillusioned electorate, which was fed up with broken promises of the liberal oligarchy. Drawing on the works of Hannah Arendt, Karl Polanyi, and Samuel Huntington, among other leading thinkers, it analyzes how Duterte's brand of right-wing populism—dubbed as "Dutertismo"—gained traction in a booming economy like the Philippines. The chapter places the rise of Duterte within a broader wave of populist ascendancy across Asia and beyond, as the liberal establishment failed to inspire public support and cope with new challenges of globalization.

Keywords Grievance politics · Populism · Hannah Arendt · Samuel Huntington · Karl Polanyi

One of the key contributions of Fernand Braudel and his *Annales* School was the crucial distinction between *Longue durée* (long-term structural shifts), on the one hand, and what François Simiand called

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histoire événementielle (ephemeral changes driven by daily events), on the other (Kaplan 2013). This analytical distinction helps us to understand a fundamental fact that populism and strongmen don't emerge out of thin air. They are the product of tectonic shifts in the underlying mechanism that determines political order, namely the process by which a society establishes, amends, and preserves a set of rules for self-governance, as well as a society's political culture, namely the process by which citizens relate to the ruling class and institutions of government (Heywood 2013; Fukuyama 2012).

In her classic account, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt provided a pioneering psycho-sociological analysis of how rapid modernization tends to be accompanied by a profound sense of dislocation and alienation among the populace. In particular, she focused on the emergence of the "mass society," the large collection of marginalized, disaffected individuals who, "are not held together by a consciousness of common interest" and "lack that specific class articulateness," thus, unable to meaningfully participate in mainstream politics as active and empowered citizens. A cocktail of frustration, anger, humiliation, and grief soon congeal into an insatiable desire to be heard—to have a voice in a political system, which excludes them, in the words of Franz Fanon (2005: 42), as "hordes of vital statistics…hysterical masses…faces bereft of all humanity, those distended bodies which are like nothing on earth, that mob without beginning or end, those children who seem to belong to nobody." It is precisely within this specific milieu of political Ressentiment, the upshot of rapid modernization and erosion of the *Gemeinschaft* (highly networked, personalized community) in favor of the *Gesellschaf* (highly impersonal, market society), that a new breed of leaders, often with autocratic bent, gain unexpected prominent among the masses and, in some cases, even capture the seat of power (Polanyi 2001). The enthusiasm and the profound yearning to gain political voice against seemingly hostile and uncaring elites, however, comes at a cost: susceptibility to the charisma and mobilization prowess of a breed of leaders, who, in the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, have a knack for exploiting "vulgar timeliness and popular hysteria" (Fitzgerald 1922: 245).

"[Mass] [s]ociety is always prone to accept a person offhand for what he pretends to be, so that a crackpot posing as a genius always has a certain chance to be believed," Arendt (1973: 305) warned in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. To ancient Greek thinkers, particularly Aristotle and

Plato, these breed of "crackpot posing as a genius" leaders were demagogues: opportunistic politicians, who are skillful at tapping into the darkest instincts of and harnessing the grievances of the masses at the expense of what Jurgen Habermas (1985) termed as "communicative action:" rational, responsible, and mutually respectful public discourse among citizens as the foundation of a democratic polity. Demagogues, as Nietzsche (in Mishra 2017: 9) would put it, find a particularly receptive audience among "men of r*essentiment*," who are stuck in a "whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge" and "inexhaustible and insatiable" in their "outbursts against the fortunate and happy [elite]."

In fact, ancient political thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle lamented a similar dilemma in their own societies. For this reason, they never had much confidence in democracies, specifically in Athens of their period, precisely because of the propensity for demagogic takeover amid cyclical decay in democratic institutions driven by oligarchic maleficence and socioeconomic upheavals, particularly wars and sustained periods of economic growth or contraction. The masses, scholars such as Arendt perpicasiously observed, have proven susceptible to mobilization by demagogues and strongman leaders, who offer not only simplistic solutions, but also overnight salvation and a utopia of collective empowerment (often in the name of the country) in exchange for unbending obedience to their absolute authority, as Il Duce or Der Führer. The product is a distinct form of modern fanaticism, even to the point of some followers losing "interest in their own well-being" for the fulfillment of a higher cause. In the case of Germany and Italy during the interwar periods, the higher cause was amorphous, abstract goals such as "national glory" or making a broken nation "great again."

Of particular interest is the fact that not only the masses, but also members of the upper echelons of the society, including the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia also supported the would-be-dictators and strongmen leaders. As Karl Polanyi (246) explains, while fascism is "usually aiming at a mass following, its potential strength was reckoned not by the numbers of its adherents but by the influence of the persons in high position whose good will the fascist leaders possessed." The tragic experience of fascism in Western Europe, which was previously a cradle of early liberal democracies, underscores the fragility of democratic practice and shallow roots of liberal, enlightenment values even among the wealthiest and most educated societies. What began as a nationwide submission to values of hierarchy, conformity, and blind obedience found its denouement in the horrors of the Second World War. Arguably, Arendt's greatest contribution was

her ability to lay bare the dark underbelly of modernity and the limits of democratic institutions in containing man's self-destructive instincts—his Freudian death drive.

Many of Arendt's observations and arguments are relevant to understanding contemporary challenges in the democratic world: the rise of far-right parties across Europe, with Central and post-Soviet nations such as Poland and Hungary increasingly resembling "illiberal" democracies, while populist movements and strongmen have taken over the world's oldest democracies. The "Brexit" vote—led by Nigel Paul Farage of the nativist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)—and the shocking presidential victory of Donald Trump Jr., who ran a controversial campaign tinged with anti-globalization and anti-immigration slogans, potently reflect the crumbling foundations of the oldest democracies. In France, the cradle of republicanism, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front (FN) party, made it to the second round of the presidential race, garnering the support of close to 40% of voters in her race for the Élysée Palace. Though formally hailing from Republican Party, Trump's ascent has provoked panic even among neoconservatives such as Robert Kagan, who has gone so far as likening the rise of Trump to the arrival of fascism in Europe a century earlier. For Kagan (2016), Trump's (successful) presidential campaign has been accompanied by "unleashing of popular passions [that] would lead not to greater democracy but to the arrival of a tyrant, riding to power on the shoulders of the people."

Political events, however, can't be understood in isolation from underlying structural economic conditions. The dissipating appeal of liberal values, vengeful return of nativist sentiments and Jacksonian populism are partly, if not largely, driven by a combination of large-scale immigration, rising economic inequality, declining trust in existing state institutions, and economic shocks (Ferguson 2016; Russel-Mead 2017). As early as 1994, Edward Luttwak, in a prescient essay titled *Fascism is the Wave of the Future* (1994), warned about how (neoliberal) globalization, which largely relies on outsourcing of jobs to labor-rich Global South and finance-driven wealth-generation in the Global North, will sow the seeds of democratic collapse in the West. Few years earlier, in response to Fukuyama's "End of history" thesis, leading conservative Philosopher For Luttwak (1994), the latest mutation of globalization "inflict[s] more disruption on working lives, firms, entire industries and their localities than individuals can absorb, or the connective tissue of

friendships, families, clans, elective groupings, neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, or even nations can withstand…" Allan Bloom (in Mishra 2017: 44) echoed Luttwak's assessment, when he argued that in a globalized world, where the only goal is "to minister to men's bodily needs and whims," a growing number of people are bound to seek an alternative, where "fascism has a future, if not the future." For long a partner of democracy, post-Cold War capitalism is beginning to devour democracy (Luttwak 1994; Piketty 2014; Reich 2009). As mainstream political parties fail to provide sufficient safety nets for the losers of globalizations, Luttwak predicted, there emerges a new "space that remains wide open" to demagogic-fascist elements, who promise "the enhancement of the personal economic security of the broad masses of (mainly) white-collar working people" and whose "real stock in trade would be corporativist restraints on corporate Darwinism, and delaying if not blocking barriers against globalization."

In recent years, both Francis Fukyama (2016) and French economist Thomas Piketty (2016) argue this was precisely the dynamic that gave rise to Trumpism. In Piketty's (2016) words, "Trump's victory is primarily due to the explosion in economic and geographic inequality in the USA over several decades and the inability of successive governments to deal with this." As for Fukuyama (2016), he wondered in bewilderment: "Given the enormity of the social shift that has occurred, the real question is not why the United States has populism in 2016 but why the explosion did not occur much earlier," Echoing Luttwak's argument two decades earlier, Fukuyama observes: "[There] has indeed been a problem of representation in American institutions: neither political party has served the declining group [blue-collar white American workers] well."

The democratic troubles of the Western world are bound to have global reverberations. From Huntington (1991) to Diamond (2016), political scientists have underscored the key role America and Western Europe have played in promoting democracy, whether by serving as an example of its virtues and/or supporting democratic movements in overseas. Huntington (1991: 14–15), who famously coined the term "Third Wave of democracy," emphasized how "the European Community (EC) played a key role in consolidating democracy in southern Europe," beginning in Portugal, then gaining steam in both Spain and Greece in the 1970s, while "[d]uring the 1970s and 1980s the United States was a major promoter of democratization." More recently, Stanford University scholar Diamond echoes Huntington's earlier observation:

"A crucial factor in the success of the third wave of democratization was the unparalleled power of a seemingly successful US democratic model… a "shining city on a hill"—to inspire admiration and emulation around the world." As Diamond (2016) argues, "Europe and the United States provided both an end state toward which emerging democracies could move, and support to help them get there."

Outside the West, fledgling democracies, many in the grip of economic takeoff, are going through a similar period of upheaval and disruption. As Diamond 2016) observes, across the world "space for civil society is shrinking. Freedom and democracy are in recession." In the twenty-first century, so far as many as 27 democracies have suffered either a temporary or permanent breakdown. Surprisingly, some of them, namely Russia, Thailand, Turkey, and Kenya, have been among the brightest economic stars, belonging to the so-called basket of emerging markets. In fact, the past two decades have been extremely auspicious for emerging markets. From 2000 to 2005, the total amount of capital flowing into these economies expanded by 92%. From 2005 to 2010, it reached a new record, expanding by 478%. The rapid infusion global capital allowed the developing world to double (from 20 to 40%) its share of global GDP within a decade. Between 2003 and 2007, they saw their average GDP growth rate almost doubling compared to the previous two decades (1980s and 1990s), from 3.6 to 7.2% (Sharma 2013: 2–14). While globalization gradually undermined democracies in the West, it wasn't necessarily helpful to democratization across the developing world. If anything, recent years have seen the reemergence of autocratic style of governance in various forms across even the most successful emerging market democracies. Though the majority of countries around the world hold regular elections, few of them can qualify as liberal democracies with fair and competitive elections. From Malaysia to Singapore and Turkey, elections are largely designed to reinforce the hegemony of the ruling party than providing a fair chance for alteration of power. More worryingly, "majoritarianism" has become a common phenomenon, with ruling parties opportunistically harnessing the nativist sentiments and exclusionary worldviews of the majority at the expense of religious and sexual minorities.

Even the world's most prosperous non-Western democracies have exhibited signs of democratic backsliding. In Japan, the return of Shinzo Abe to the helm of government has gone hand in hand with a precipitous erosion of press freedom and civil liberties. Between 2010 and

2015, the Northeast Asian country saw its rankings in the Press Freedom Index dropping from the 11th to the 61st spot, among the most dramatic cases of press freedom reversal anywhere in the world. This has been mainly due to the Abe administration's draconian measures, which curtail criticism of the government's policies—namely the not-so-subtle celebration of Japan's imperial legacy—and determined efforts to overhaul the country's postwar pacifist constitution (McCurry 2014). Citing alleged political pressure from right-wing elements in the government, at least three prominent newscasters, Ichiro Furutachi, Shigetada Kishii, and Hiroko Kuniya, have resigned from the jobs after finding almost impossible to freely express their more liberal points of view (McCurry 2016). The situation is unlikely to improve, as Japan experiences a resurgence of one-party rule under Shinzo Abe, who enjoys robust support among the electorate and the ruling party and, more crucially, faces no credible challenge either within the ruling coalition or among the opposition, who are in total disarray. In South Korea, the disgraced president Park Geun-hy, who was eventually impeached in 2016 on grounds of corruption and abuse of power, initially advocated state-sanctioned historical textbooks that, according to leading academics, were a historically revisionist attempt to whitewash the crimes of her father, the former dictator Park Chung-hee (Power 2015). Park's tenure also saw growing harassment of foreign press, particularly Japanese, as she opportunistically ramped up anti-Japan sentiments to score patriotic points at home. The case of Tatsuya Kato, the bureau chief of Japan's *Sankei* newspaper, who faced Lèse-majesté-style charges of defamation, reflected the growing climate of state-led intimidation of media (Economist 2014).

In India, the world's largest democracy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the controversial and charismatic former chief minister of Gujarat, who has been accused of criminal neglect during an interethnic pogrom in early 2000s, is strengthening his hold on the Indian political system. His tenure at the helm of the Indian government has gone hand in hand with the empowerment Hindu-nationalist elements to the detriment of the country's secular traditions and large non-Hindu, particularly Muslim, minority. A decisive and incorruptible leader to his legions of supporters, Modi has come under criticism for the gradual erosion of liberal, pluralistic values, and growing harassment of local and international civil society groups and intellectuals, including award-winning author Arundhati Roy who faced trial on charges of contempt after openly criticizing the illiberal tendencies of the ruling party (Marszal 2016).

Even leading technocrats have been alienated by the Modi administration. Amid growing disagreements with the ruling party's policies, Raghuram Rajan, India's celebrated central bank governor and former IMF chief economist, was eased out of office (Cloudhury 2016). Similar to the case of Japan, Modi seems in a strong position to refashion Indian democracy in his own ideological image. Authoritarianism has trickled down to the state-provincial level. Demagogic-strongmen figures such as Mamata Banerjee and Jayalalitha Jayaram from the populous states of West Bengal (91 million) and Tamil Nadu (72 million), respectively, have had equally successful electoral experience, reflecting the widespread appeal of authoritarian figures in Indian democracy (Chandra 2016).

In West Asia, a similar trend has emerged in recent years. Long hailed as a model of Islamic democracy, Turkey has rapidly morphed into a proto-authoritarian state, where former prime minister and current President Recep Tayip Erdogan has neutered democratic checks and balances. Under his rule, Turkey is cracking down on any voice of opposition, with major newspapers such as *Zaman* being entirely shut down; purging moderate elements within the ruling bloc, particularly former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and former president Abdullah Gul. Turkey has now emerged as the biggest jailer of journalists in the world, surpassing both Iran and China, as an alarmingly large numbers of journalists face long-term incarceration and worse for criticizing a government, which has described any voice of opposition as "terrorist". The failed 2016 coup against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has also strengthened the hand of President Erdogan, who is pushing for greater concentration of formal power in his office (Akyol 2017).

In Southeast Asia, democratic reform in places such as Myanmar and Vietnam seems to be stalling. Meanwhile, Malaysia has transformed from one-party rule to a personalistic regime under Prime Minister Najib Razak, who confronts massive corruption scandals and a burgeoning opposition composed of former regime insiders, namely former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad and his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim. One-party/man rule seems to be the norm across much of Southeast Asia, from Singapore to Brunei and Cambodia, with dim indications of a decisive democratic breakthrough. Southeast Asia's two leading democracies are also beset by acute challenges. In Indonesia, the charismatic

Joko Widodo, affectionately known as "Jokowi", almost lost the 2014 presidential elections to Prabowo Subianto, a former general accused of gross human rights violations, who promised a return to the Suharto-era style of autocratic leadership. Frustrated by widespread corruption in the *reformasi* period, a significant plurality of voters proved receptive to Prabowo's opportunistic harnessing of autocratic nostalgia among Indonesians, who yearn for a steady hand at the top. Ultimately, the 11th-hour mobilization of middle class and millennial voters helped Jokowi to secure the presidency. Though not a strongman, Jokowi's meteoric rise to power was fuelled by a distinct form of populism built on the promise of inclusive development, disciplining of the Jakarta oligarchy, and a hands-on, grassroots-driven style of leadership. Less than two years into office, Jokowi began exhibiting strongman tendencies as he struggled to overcome vested interested and opposition from within and outside his party. For instance, he adopted protectionist-nationalist economic policies, particularly in the mining sector, and a tougher approach to law and order challengers by controversially restoring an execution of suspected drugs traffickers (Liljas 2014; Pamuntjak 2015; Rieffel 2016). In the Philippines, the world saw a strange synthesis of Prabowo's strongman style of governance and Jokowi's anti-establishment populism. Similar to leaders of Turkey, Russia, India, and Indonesia, Duterte promised decisive, single-minded leadership as a one-stop, swift solution to all the maladies of emerging market democracies. While Erdogan, Modi, and Jokowi built their national profile based on their local government stints in Istanbul, Gujarat, and Solo/Jakarta, respectively, Duterte banked on his "Davao model" of public safety, bureaucratic efficiency, and economic prosperity. Similar to his counterparts in other emerging market democracies, Duterte presented himself as an antiestablishment statesman, who is capable of overhauling a dysfunctional political system, dominated by a rapacious oligarchy and corrupt patron-client electoral practices. The appeal of this new breed of leaders, in the words of Indian essayist Pankaj Mishra (2016), lies in "offering not so much despotic authority as a new relationship between the rulers and the ruled." Their electoral success, Mishra (Ibid.) continues, is build on how they "shrewdly grasped a widely felt need for a new mode of sincere, dedicated leadership, as well as a more energetic way of involving the masses in politics."

Trouble in Paradise

"It is not a revolution…it is perhaps the first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane," French philosopher Michel Foucault described the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which toppled one of the most modern and rapidly growing economies in Asia (Afary and Anderson 2010: 222). Throughout the 1970s, the Persian strongman Reza Shah Pahlavi oversaw one of the fastest growing economies on earth, a country well-positioned to join the exclusive club of industrialized countries before the turn of the century. Buoyed by petrodollars, the Iranian economy witnessed rapid technological modernization, social transformation, expansion of the middle class, and establishment of a nascent industrial base. By the end of the 1970s, however, one of the world's most powerful potentates was on exile, desperately searching for a safe haven away from revolutionaries in Tehran. The 1979 revolution took almost everyone by surprise, since only few paid attention to the teeming and increasingly potent dissatisfaction among the middle classes, who sought greater political freedom beyond material satisfaction, and the working classes, who lamented the rapid erosion of traditional values and their precarious working conditions. Charismatic leaders, namely Ali Shariati, who was popular among the students and secular middle classes, and Ruhollah Khomeini, who enjoyed a large support base among the largely traditional-conservative masses, wasted no time in tapping into the wellspring of social discontent (Kinzer 2008; Ansari 2007). Analyzing the crises in Greece and Turkey in recent years, the Slovenian Philosopher Slavoj Zizek aptly described what happened in Iran as the first "trouble in paradise." In Zizek's (2013: 11) own words, we should "see the [Ayatollah] Khomeini revolution of 1979 as the original 'trouble in paradise', given that it happened in a country that was on the fast-track of pro-Western modernization, and the West's staunchest ally in the region." What happened was a classic case of what Karl Polanyi termed as "double-movement", a situation where a befuddled society desperately "protect[s] itself against the perils inherent" of rapid modernization and market-driven growth (Polanyi 2001: 80). In recent years, a similar dynamic has been at play in other emerging market democracies such as the Philippines. Once again, we are witnessing political crises in the unlikeliest of places.

In recent years—not too dissimilar from the case of Iran in the 1970s and other succeeding "paradises" more recently—the Philippines has

been the toast of the town among global investors and media. The Philippines, under Aquino, not only discarded its decades-long notoriety as the "sick man of Asia," but also became a poster child for democratic reform. It became a new-found "paradise", as the world began to view the Philippines in a new light. For six years, the country experienced a virtuous cycle of political stability and business optimism. Similar to Dutetre, Benigno Aquino III came to power on the back of massive popular support. The son of two of the country's most revered democratic icons, Corazon and Ninoy, he ran on a moralistic campaign against the allegedly corrupt practices of the outgoing president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who was accused of plunder and abuse of public office. His presidential bid was based on an anti-corruption slogan, promising good and conscientious governance ("Daan Matuwid") to the Filipino people. It was *Moralpolitik* at its finest. Amid rising public discontent against the Arroyo administration, among the most unpopular elected leaders in Philippine history, Aquino's political message struck a chord. Nowadays, people often talk about Duterte's popularity, but in fact, Aquino garnered even a higher share of total votes (42.08%) in the presidential elections, with almost three times higher pre-inauguration net trust rating (74%) than his successor (26%). Aquino stepped down from office with a "very good" net trust rating (50%)—higher than any of his predecessors at a comparable period in their administration (Sabillo 2016; Mangahas 2016). Astonishingly, he stepped out of office almost as popular as he stepped in—a remarkable achievement for any popularly elected leader. Few contemporary democratic leaders, namely Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva of Brazil and Barack Hussain Obama of America, have achieved a similar feat. This wasn't to say that he didn't have his own share of critics. One Filipino columnist, a stalwart of the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo administration, went so far as describing Aquino as the country's worst president ever for supposedly placing "the Philippines a decade back in building a modern, prosperous nation-state that uplifts the welfare of all its citizens." (Tiglao 2015) But for the majority of Filipinos, Aquino was arguably the best president in recent memory, or at least that is what authoritative surveys demonstrate. As popular as Aquino was at home, he was even a bigger celebrity outside, especially to the global-media-business complex. Taking note of the Philippines' economic dynamism in recent years, Steve Forbes, Editor-in-Chief of the influential Forbes magazine, ingratiatingly told Aquino, upon the conclusion of his term, to "come to the [United States] and give us some of the 6-percent growth

rate" that the country has generated in the last few years. It goes without saying that the flattering remark comfortably ignored the fact that America and the Philippines are on significantly different levels of development, but it poignantly reflected the awe Aquino's policies inspired among international observers (Dizon 2015).

In 2015, the Philippines was at one point the 4th fastest economy in the world. In the first quarter of 2016, it became—thanks to an uptick in election-related spending—the fastest growing economy in Asia. There has also been an element of institutional development. Under Aquino, the country leapfrogged in major economic indices such as economic competitiveness (World Economic Forum) and economic openness (Heritage Foundation), signaling the greater and more auspicious integration of the Philippines into the global economy (Kathleen 2015; Martin 2015). Under his watch, the Philippines transformed from a developing country into a full-fledged emerging market. In fact, under Aquino's stewardship, the Philippines experienced its highest average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate (6.26%) in the past half-a-century (see Fig. 2.1)—almost twice faster than the Marcos (3.43%) and Estrada administrations (2.3%), which were toppled by "people power" revolutions (Ibid.).

Recent growth rates were even higher than post-recovery administrations such as Cory Aquino (3.85%), Ramos (3.75%), and Arroyo (4.46%) (see Fig. 2.1). Thanks to the country's economic performance in recent years, the Philippines has been described by the World Bank and the *Wall Street Journal* as Asia's "new tiger economy" and Asia's "rising star," respectively. Emerging market's guru Ruchir Sharma bullishly celebrated the Philippines as among world's most promising breakout nations (Sharma 2013).

Aside from institutionalizing sound macroeconomic policy, which was aided by steady hands at the Department of Finance and Philippine Central Bank (BSP), the Aquino administration was also credited for kick-starting anti-corruption initiatives to cut red tape, suppress bureaucratic graft, and restore confidence in state institutions. The first few years saw determined and partly successful efforts to impeach Arroyo-era holdovers in the Supreme Court and the Ombudsman office—paving the way for a potential conviction of the former president. The anti-corruption initiatives reached a critical stage when several high-profile senators were placed under corruption investigations, leading to their removal from the upper house of the Philippine legislature (Heydarian 2016).

His greatest contribution, however, was primarily ideational: namely transforming the fight against corruption into a centerpiece of national

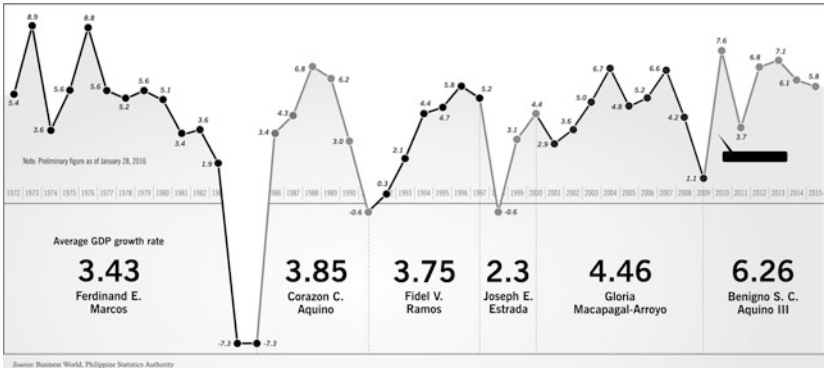

Fig. 2.1 Philippine economy from marcos to aquino (1972–2015). GDP year-on-year growth rate (at constant 2000 prices). *Source* Business World, Philippine Statistics Authority

political discourse. Aquino rekindled a national yearning for combating what many not long ago considered as a ubiquitous aspect of Philippine politics—too entrenched to confront and too endemic to root out. He transformed a relatively technocratic issue into a populist rhetoric, though rather simplistically by blaming widespread poverty and all of the country's predicaments on a singular issue: corruption. His "*Daan Matiwid*" mantra and Moralpolitik may have lost its luster nowadays, but his main argument continues to resonate among Filipino voters: "If there is no corruption, there will be no poverty" (*Kung walang kurapt, walang mahirap*). The astonishing defeat and poor performance of some high-level officials, who were accused of massive graft and corruption, in the 2016 elections stand as a testament to the strength of the anti-corruption rhetoric of the Aquino administration. Yet, it also paved the way for the rise of Duterte, who pushed Aquino's populist rhetoric to its logical conclusion, declaring war on no less than the entire political establishment. This way, Duterte and the phenomenon of "Dutertismo" represented a Hegelian negation of negation.

Grievance Politics

In *Political Order in Changing Societies,* Huntington provided a persuasive, albeit counterintuitive, account of why it is precisely the rapidly developing countries in the postcolonial world that are most susceptible

to political breakdown or/and autocratic takeover. The process of modernization, Huntington surmised, isn't a straightforward path, where all good things go together: It is highly possible that economic development will come at the expense of social instability or breakdown of state institutions. In particular, Huntington warned about the prospects of political decay, once governments fail to live up to expectations and accommodate rising demands from an increasingly more mobilized and assertive populace amid a period of economic boom. Soon, aspirational middle class or/and charismatic populists will take the initiative to challenge the system in favor of radical reform. Paradoxically, therefore, just when economic conditions seem most fortuitous, and social forces are most empowered, breakdown of the existing order becomes highly likely. In *Political Order and Political Decay*, Francis Fukuyama also made similar observations about contemporary democracies, which have failed to supply sufficient public goods due to the rigidity of state institutions or/and their capture by narrow interest.

In many ways, the Philippines experienced political decay in spite of rapid economic development. As one former senior Aquino administration official admits, "things were being fixed in a painstaking—and painstakingly slow—manner, particularly for things that mattered to the urban middle class."[1]

Boosted by highly positive global coverage, the Aquino administration continuously promised the impossible: eradication of corruption, economic miracle for average income-earners, peace in Mindanao, and responsive governance. Paradoxically, the faster the Philippines grew, the more obvious its poverty became. This is mainly because of the utter failure of the country's economic system to provide inclusive development and efficiently supply basic public goods, from affordable electricity and water to modernized public transportation in megacities like Metro Manila. Above all, the Aquino administration's moralistic rhetoric began to backfire, as critics began to portray it as self-righteousness and hypocritical.

First of all, the Aquino administration was accused of lopsidedness and inefficacy in its "good governance" maneuvers. This was most pronounced when the Supreme Court declared the controversial

[1]Interview with Manolo Quezon, Aquino's Assistant Secretary for Strategic Communications, on February 27, 2017.

Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP)[2] as partly unconstitutional, lending fuel to accusations that the government was illegally using discretionary funds to advance its political interest and buyoff. In response, Aquino lashed out at the country's highest court and refused to press ahead with any investigations into possible misconduct among the leadership of the Department of Budget and Management, particularly Butch Abad, a longtime ally of Aquino. There were also accusations of corruption levied against other high-level officials, particularly in the Department of Agriculture and the Philippine National Police. In all cases where Aquino's key allies were involved, the president expressed unconditional support and blocked any thorough investigation to the detriment of democratic accountability. The growing impression among the public was that Aquino was shielding his own inner circle members from anti-corruption investigations. To many, this was nothing short of blatant display of hypocrisy for an administration, which extolled the virtues of accountability and transparency (Heydarian 2016).

The bigger problem, however, was efficacy, or lack thereof. Not a single high-profile suspect was put in jail, while Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, who was accused of massive corruption while in office, managed to post bail and return to the chambers as a leading opposition member albeit with the assistance of the Supreme Court. Major indices such as the Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* indicated only marginal improvement in the fight against corruption. In 2015, five years into the Aquino administration's term, the Philippines ranked 95th out of 186 countries, with paltry score of 35/100 in terms of transparency and accountability in state institutions (Viray 2015). The bigger problem, however, was that the economic boom was too concentrated to benefit the majority of the population, who were constantly bombarded with positive news but failed to feel it in their daily lives. Wealth was being generated on an unprecedented scale, but it failed to significantly trickle down the socioeconomic ladder. According to the World Bank, in 2013 the forty richest families swallowed up 76% of newly created

[2]The DAP was a discretionary fund, assembled by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), sourced out of unspent resources from other agencies of the government. Critics claimed that the DAP was a slush fun used for (i) buying the favor of Senators in the form of additional pork barrel, particularly during the impeachment of Chief Justice Corona, an Arroyo ally; and (ii) violated the Congress' constitutional prerogative over budget allocation.

growth, the highest rate of growth concentration in Asia. The capital stock of the super-rich increased by 37.9%, jumping by $13bn during the year 2010–2011. No wonder then, there was no significant improvement in basic development indicators, with underemployment and poverty stubbornly hovering in the double-digit territory (Keenan 2013).

Not only were the majority of people deprived of recently created economic growth, they also confronted an infrastructure bottleneck. Booming economy meant greater demand for public transportation, yet the Aquino administration was particularly slow in terms of finalizing the bidding as well as the implementation of big-ticket projects. According to the 2015 Global Driver Satisfaction Index, Metro Manila now has the world's worst traffic congestion. This was mainly because, in the words of *The Economist*, Manila's "transport plans have been terrible—among the most foolish adopted by any great city." (The Economist 2016). In spite of the government's promise to revamp the country's basic infrastructure, increasing infrastructure spending as a share of the GDP to around 5%, the capital has suffered frequent breakdown in the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) system, the main transportation means for millions of mainly working-class commuters. In another Public Relations disaster, the final years of Aquino saw embarrassing blackouts in the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), which later became, even more embarrassingly, a site of a "planted bullets" *modus operandi* against mostly elderly, foreign visitors, who were forced to pay bribe to avoid jail time. Despite all these disastrous outcomes, no high-level official resigned, was fired and/or held accountable. The traffic congestion and public transportation mayhem in Manila were particularly devastating for the incumbent. As a result, the Aquino administration proved particularly unpopular in the vote-rich National Capital Region (NCR), the ultimate "swing state." Toward the end of its term, Aquino had a net zero approval rating in the area. Thus, he even became a liability for his partymates, who vied to replace him. In fact, surveys showed that in Metro Manila Aquino's endorsement of any candidate carried a "negative 26 points" baggage (Inquirer 2015).

And this largely explains why Interior Secretary Mar Roxas, Aquino's anointed successor, performed poorly in the area, while his runningmate, Leni Robredo, had to spend months in the area to bolster her numbers with minimal reference to her party ties to the president. Meanwhile, political institutions remained ossified, captured by political dynasties and vulnerable to whims of special interest. Studies show that

around 178 political dynasties dominate 73 out of a total of 81 provinces in the country. The grip of political dynasties on the Philippines' elected offices dwarfs even Latin America, the world's most unequal continent, which has a very similar colonial and postcolonial institutional legacy (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). In the Philippines, political dynasties occupy vast majority of elected legislative positions (70%), an astonishing number even when compared to Argentina (10%) and Mexico (40%) (Heydarian 2015).

There was also the element of personal touch or lack thereof. Among many Filipinos, there was perceived insensitivity on the part of Aquino himself, who throughout various crises, particularly during the aftermath of Haiyan super storm and Mamasapano tragedy, proved intransigent rather than apologetic. Since the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship, the ruling elite has promised peace, prosperity, and rule of law to the people. But for many, these have been nothing but empty promises: They saw the Mindanao peace process in limbo, just as Islamic State (IS) affiliates carved out territories across the conflict zone; maritime borders came under assault by revanchist neighbors who operated with de facto impunity; key sectors of the economy were dominated by a few well-connected conglomerates and business families; bureaucratic corruption and endemic criminality remained endemic; and rural poverty and food insecurity still afflicted the countryside. After years of rapid economic growth, millions of Filipinos were still struggling with difficult working conditions abroad, while many more, out of sheer desperation, set their sights on distant horizons far away from domestic woes. According to one report, between 2009 and 2015, the number of Filipinos leaving the country for work abroad more than doubled, from a daily deployment of 2500 to 6092 (Jaymalin 2015).

One thing that caught the public's attention, and largely to the benefit of Duterte, was a sudden spike in reported crimes in the latter half of Aquino's term. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, between 2012 and 2014, total reported crimes jumped from 217,812 to 1,161,188, an almost fivefold increase in just over a decade. Index crimes and the overall crime rate saw an almost fourfold increase in the same period. Meanwhile, crime solution efficiency, namely the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in dispensing justice after the commitment of a crime, dropped from 89.86 in 2004 to 28.56 in 2014. Notwithstanding potential anomalies in recording of crimes, including tendency of some governments to fudge numbers for political purposes,

and the temporal variability in the propensity of victims to report to the police, the Aquino administration struggled to display competence in the realm of law and order (Ranada 2016b). As a result, a generalized sense of lawlessness took hold of public consciousness, just when millions of Filipinos experienced some marginal improvements in their basic living conditions, particularly the yuppies and members of the aspirational middle class, who benefited from concentrated growth in the retail, real estate, and business process outsourcing sectors, but now worried about their basic safety. As Teehankee and Thompson (2016: 12) explain, Duterte "enjoyed particularly strong support from taxi drivers, small shop owners, call- center agents, and overseas workers," the demographic that was concerned about "los[ing] their fragile gains from the Philippine's years of economic growth unless 'order' could be restored."

Against the backdrop of broken promises and rising expectations, particularly among the small but burgeoning middle classes as well as the aspirational middle class, a new form of grievance politics took over the nation. It wasn't rage against the Aquino administration as much as what could be called as "cacique democracy fatigue"—a raging exasperation with the liberal elite, who dominated the post-Marcos regime. This provided a fertile ground for populists and demagogic figures to step into the picture and exploit the wellspring of discontent across all sections of the society (Casiple 2016). To many voters, while Benigno Aquino may have been the most popular and competent post-Marcos president, his best was simply not enough—and no less than a new breed of leadership was now necessary to correct the mistakes of the past.

It is precisely within this political milieu of dissatisfaction with the democratic order that Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos Jr., who lost the vice-presidential race by a whisker, was able to gain ground. The son of the former dictator tapped into rising public anger and frustration, presenting himself as an effective leader who would usher in a mode of governance (supposedly) as decisive and effective as his father's. In fact, a growing section of the Philippine society has come to adopt a more sanguine view of the former dictator, while a significant plurality views him as a great president, at best, and a tragic hero, at worst. In a survey conducted from February 24 to 27 of 2016, as the elections reached a crescendo, 59% of respondents expressed support for the burial of Marcos with "official honors" at the cemetery of national heroes (Lirio 2016). Partly, the phenomenon of autocratic nostalgia—the yearning for a return

to the supposed good old days of dictatorship—could be attributed to the systematic efforts of the Marcoses to rehabilitate the image of the late dictator through investing in an aggressive Public Relations campaign over the years. But the improved standing of the Marcoses among the Filipino people is also a reflection of growing discontent with the post-Marcos elite.

The tough-talking, foul-mouthed mayor of Davao City was even more successful. Showing little respect for the mainstream political elite, Duterte astutely recognized a historic opportunity to contest the highest elected office. Aside from benefiting from the zeitgeist of grievance politics, Duterte's electoral success was built on three contingent factors: the fatal weaknesses of his opponents; the strength of his social media strategy; and his uncanny ability to portray himself as the only hope for national salvation.

Though a scion of one of the Philippines' oldest political clans, Duterte skillfully presented himself as *the* underdog, a simple folk and provincial mayor audaciously taking on the "big machine" and "Imperial Manila" elites. He turned his perceived weakness into an electoral asset by presenting himself as the David who is heroically taking on Goliaths of the ruling elite. Duterte's army of social media supporters, who were determined to compensate for Duterte's lack of presence in the mainstream media due to financial constraints, were not only effective in presenting Duterte as a decisive and competent leader, but also proved effective in creating what some critics see as manufactured crisis: They portrayed the country as an emerging narco-state beset by drugs and crime and in desperate need of strong leadership. Fake news and systematic intimidation of Duterte's critics became also prevalent (Williams 2017; Ressa 2016).

But Duterte also benefited from the pitfalls of his opponents, who spent considerable time undermining each other while—not until the last month of campaigning when Duterte began to lead in the surveys—ignored the provincial mayor as a glorified nuisance with growing media mileage. Few months before the elections, Vice President Jejomar Binay was still considered as a top contender in the race. He could boast about his "Makati model" and a nationwide political machinery, which was built on the back of years of meticulous patronage politics. But his candidacy was undermined by corruption scandals, which were at the heart of his opponents' sustained attacks during the three presidential debates that took place in the first quarter of 2016.

Meanwhile, Senator Grace Poe, who spent most of the campaign period as the leading candidate, faced not only concerns over her lack of relevant executive experience and citizenship eligibility, but, toward the end of the race, alienated a growing number of her supporters by floating in the orbit of controversial oligarchs as well as former President Joseph Estrada, a convicted plunderer, who endorsed her for the top office amid much fanfare.

As for Mar Roxas, the quintessential technocrat and liberal-democrat, he made the crucial mistake of presenting himself as a de facto referendum on the incumbent amid a climate of grievance politics. He was also at the receiving end of vicious attacks by Duterte, Binay, and, to a lesser degree, Poe, with respect to his competence as an executive, particularly during his stints as interior as well as transportation and communications secretary. His decent electoral performance among the poorest demographic (class E) shows that charisma wasn't his biggest problem, but instead his image as incompetent and out-of-touch by the majority of voters. Duterte, quite ably, managed to portray his opponents as either corrupt (Binay), or puppet of the oligarchy (Poe), or simply too incompetent to become a head of state (Roxas). Few analysts paid attention to Duterte's fourth opponent, the late Senator Miriam Defensor, who was initially seen as rallying the emerging "protest vote" against the establishment. Given her tough-talk, witty and unorthodox rhetoric, not to mention impeccable credentials as a highly decorated lawyer and the most prolific legislator in Philippine history, Defensor, who narrowly lost the presidential elections back in 1992, was in a strong position to present herself as the "alternative" candidate. But she began to lose momentum due to growing concerns over her health. Struggling with terminal cancer, the late senator didn't manage to build nationwide electoral machinery and conduct regular visits around the country to widen her support base. As her campaign lost momentum, protest votes gradually shifted to Duterte. In fact, to underscore the sense of solidarity between Duterte and Defensor during the campaign period, both candidates constantly praised each other, striking an unofficial alliance and expressing mutual support in an event of victory by either (GMA News 2016).

Similar to Trump, Duterte proved as unusually media savvy, constantly placing himself in the media headlines without spending a penny. The more controversial his statements, the greater media mileage he enjoyed. This way, the under-funded candidate managed to build a strong though polarizing presence in the national consciousness.

Duterte portrayed himself as a capable, decisive, simple-living "political outsider," who could address the country's predicaments head-on. To be fair, under Duterte's watch, Davao experienced economic boom and improved safety conditions. Surveys show that the southern city, which used to be a site of internecine warfare between communists and right-wing groups in the 1970s and early 1980s, is constantly rated as among the safest in the country and the region. By 1988, shortly after the "People Power" Revolution that toppled Ferdinand Marcos, Duterte became the city's mayor. Over the next decade, he reached out to paramilitary groups on both sides of the ideological spectrum and successfully negotiated a de facto ceasefire, which ended the years-long civil war in parts of the city, which were once likened to Nicaragua. Well acquainted with Marxist thinking, thanks to his former university professor and communist ideologue Jose Maria Sison, he managed to win the trust of far left groups. He even managed to strike long-term friendships with former communist rebels such as Leoncio Evasco, who would later become his presidential campaign manager and cabinet secretary. As for right-wing groups, Duterte's macho (*siga*) image and penchant for guns, motorbikes, and disciplinary style of leadership did the trick. As a mayor, he heavily invested in the law enforcement agencies, offering them among the best equipment and incentives anywhere in the Philippines. With a single-minded focus, he declared war on crime and proliferation of illegal drugs. Duterte employed an iron fist against drug suspects and corrupt officials, while cutting down bureaucratic red tape by instituting a three-day deadline on approval of business licenses and government transactions, which made Davao a leading city in terms of ease of doing business. Over the years, he oversaw steady inflow of investments that made Davao one of the fastest growing cities in the Philippines. It was this particular narrative of Duterte as a benign dictator that began to gain traction. In one survey, conducted by the Ateneo De Davao University in mid-2016, as many as 99% of Davao residents expressed satisfaction with Duterte's performance (De Jong 2016; Coronel 2016; Ranada 2016a). Duterte's brand of populism also allowed him to reach out to various socioeconomic classes and regions. To the middle classes and the rich, he promised rule of law by adopting a zero tolerance approach to criminality. To Metro Manila, he promised a swift solution to the traffic congestion. To the Ilocano ethnic-linguistic class, he professed his admiration for the late Marcos and forged a de facto alliance with the Marcoses, who were among his biggest campaign

supporters. To the masses, many of which relish his spontaneous storytelling style and folksy image, Dutetre promised a caring, humble, and accessible form of governance. Duterte also optimized his mixture of Visayan-Cebuano (via his father, Vicente, who was from Danao, Cebu) and Mindanaon-Moro (via his mother, Soledad, who was from Agusan del Norte) ethnic background to tap the Visayan and Muslim voters spread across the country, including in the industrialized north and Manila. More concretely, he promised more political autonomy and fiscal resources to Visayan and Mindanao regions, ending the reign of "imperial Manila." During the presidential elections, 96.6% of residents of Davao voted for him, a commanding performance that was replicated across Mindanao. He also had a strong electoral showing in (central) Visayan regions such as Cebu (53%), where his father came from, and Bohol (49.5%). Duterte presented himself as the voice of the margins, the leader of a "revolt of the periphery" against an uncaring center. This proved as a winning formula in the 2016 presidential elections, as he offered "real change" to voters across the ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic fault lines. In the Philippines' bizarre first-past-the-post, single-round presidential elections, all Duterte needed to get was more votes than his competitors. In the end, with only 39% of the votes, Duterte became, by Philippine standards, the overwhelming winner. Above all, Duterte's campaign was built on the wave of "protest vote," a negation of Aquino's negation (*Moralpolitik*) by promising competent, decisive, and inclusive leadership. And as he stepped into office, Duterte began to shake up the status quo, challenging the ideological hegemony of the ruling elite and their century-old tradition of American-leaning foreign policy. A new era had arrived, and few were ready for it.

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CHAPTER 3

Subaltern Realism: Duterte's Art of the Deal

Abstract It discusses Philippine foreign policy under Duterte and the method behind the seeming madness of his diplomatic lexicon. It analyzes how the Philippines' firebrand leader introduced a revolution in Philippine foreign policy by abandoning strategic subservience to America in favor of a more transactional dynamic, whereby the bilateral alliance is a product of constant strategic bargaining rather than fixed expectations, values and set of incentives. The chapter also discusses the personal and strategic motivations behind Duterte's pivot to the East, particularly the high-profile rapprochement with China, and its impact on the South China Sea disputes, regional security environment and the US pivot to Asia policy.

Keywords Equilateral balancing · Strategic bargaining · USA · China South China Sea

Various theories in International Relations (IR) emphasize the nexus between domestic politics, intra-bureaucratic jostling, and reflexive political leadership, on one hand, and state behavior in the international system, on the other (Allison and Zelikow 1999; Morvscik 1997; Putnam 1988; Wendt 1992) In developing countries, foreign policy decision-making is often personalistic, under-institutionalized, largely reactive rather than proactive, and significantly shaped by the behavior of great powers, which undergird the regional security environment (Weatherbee 2008). Thus, the evolution of Philippine foreign policy reflects the

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intersection of (subjective and objective) shifts in the strategic calculus and preferences of the ruling elite faction at home, on one hand, and the balance of power in the external environment, on the other. These two elements are mutually constitutive, thus it's impossible to understand one without the other. The often dramatic ebbs and flows of Philippine foreign policy, particularly vis-à-vis the great powers of America and China, are poignantly reflective of this mutually-constitutive dynamic. The analysis, however, is incomplete without taking into consideration regime typology. In open and democratic societies, the ability of the ruling elite faction to independently shape foreign policy isn't only constrained by the structure of the international system, but also the domestic political constrains, ranging from media scrutiny and legislative oversight to judicial review and interest group lobbying, whether from the civil society and/or business sector. In autocratic regimes, however, the ruling faction enjoys greater flexibility due to the absence of a functioning system of checks and balances at home. Thus, the ability of the Duterte administration to consolidate power at home and 'discipline' other pillars of the state in its own image has had—and will continue to have—significant bearing on the direction of Philippine foreign policy (see Chap. 4). Therefore, it is important to analyze the Philippines' foreign policy under Duterte on three-levels of analyses: The behavior of great powers towards the Philippines, particularly the carrots and sticks they offer the Filipino leadership; Duterte's personal preferences, strategic perceptions, and ideological leanings; and the ability of the Duterte administration to suppress transparency and accountability demands from other power centers, specifically in the realm of foreign policy decision-making. Though as Wendt (1992) notes, sometimes decisive and visionary leaders, as in Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, can have a decisive impact on the direction of a state's foreign policy. Any "exceptional, conscious choosing [by a state] to transform or transcend [its traditional] roles," Wendt (1992: 407–420) continues, entails the following preconditions:

> First, there must be a reason to think of oneself in novel terms. This would most likely stem from the presence of new social situations that cannot be managed in terms of pre- existing self-conceptions. Second, the expected costs of intentional role change – the sanctions imposed by others with whom one interacted in previous roles – cannot be greater than its rewards. When these conditions are present, actors can engage in self-reflection and practice specifically designed to transform their identities and interests and this 'change the games' in which they are embedded.

On the surface, the iliberal populism of Duterte, not to mention his undiplomatic rhetoric, seems to represent the antithesis of Gorbachev's technocratic-liberal lurch to the West. Both of Wendt's conditions, however, seem to be relevant in Dutetre's case. Thus, an analysis of the Philippine foreign policy under Duterte must first begin with how the new Filipino leader has engaged in strategic self-reflection to think of his country and its national interests in novel terms—and whether this has been a cost-effective approach for developing countries like the Philippines.

The Curious Case of Duterte

"I will be chartering [*sic*] a [new] course [for the Philippines] on its own and will not be dependent on the United States," Duterte declared right after securing electoral victory. Without a doubt, it was an audacious statement from the then newly-elected Filipino president, who was set to take over one of America's oldest and most loyal allies in history. At first, not many, including those within the diplomatic community, took his words too seriously, with some dismissing the "nationalistic" statements as soaring rhetoric bereft of policy substance. After all, Duterte himself began to communicate a more pragmatic strand of leadership as he inched closer to formally occupying the highest office in the land. Weeks before his inauguration, Duterte sought to reassure the media that it will be his "last time as a rude person." Duterte promised that, "[w]hen I become president, when I take my oath of office…There will be a metamorphosis," whereby he will "steadily [evolve] from a caterpillar [and] blossom into a butterfly." (Cayabyab 2016). The same message of reassurance was more than abundant during his inauguration and first State of the Nation Address (SONA) speeches.

"On the international front and in the community of nations, let me reiterate that the Republic of the Philippines will honor treaties and international obligations," he remarked during his unusually subdued inauguration speech (June 30). Minutes after the inaugural speech in *Malacanang*, Duterte offered a toast to dignitaries in the audience with reassuring remarks that his administration will "seek a nation living in peace and order. We shall engage the world and make a solid contribution for our stability and security. To our friends and partners in the region and the world over, we look to you for support as we continue to work together for peace, security, and progress." (Esmaquel 2016a). A month later (July 25), during his first SONA, he reiterated his administration's commitment to

"strongly affirm and respect the outcome of the case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration [sic] as an important contribution to the ongoing efforts to pursue the peaceful resolution and management of our disputes." (Esmaquel 2016b). During his first month in office, Duterte held broadly cordial conversations with senior American officials. He met Kristie Kenney, counselor at the State Department and former Ambassador to Manila and Bangkok, as well as then Secretary of State John Kerry, who vowed to beef up American assistance to Philippine law enforcement agencies. There were some disagreements over the direction of Philippine foreign policy, particularly towards China in light of the South China Sea disputes, but there was little indication of an outright, irreconcilable rift. Both sides vowed to continue their cooperation in the contested waters and advocated a rule-based resolution of the disputes. America, quite reluctantly, supported the Duterte administration's preference for détente with China, though it reiterated the relevance of international law, particularly the Philippines' landmark arbitration case at The Hague, as the ultimate basis to manage and resolve the maritime spats. In fact, right after Duterte's election victory, President Obama was the first foreign leader to call and congratulate the new Filipino leader. At this juncture, many observers presumed that bilateral relations would move forward without any major hiccup. Despite his prior misgivings about America, Duterte was clearly in his pragmatic, Machiavellian mode, realizing that as the president of the Philippines he should initially try to maintain some modicum of stable relations with America, which remains deeply popular among the security establishment and broader Philippine populace. But this didn't mean that Duterte would stick to the status quo and view Washington with the same level of deference as his predecessors. By now, the strategic terms of bilateral engagement had changed, but only a few noticed it.

Soon, it became increasingly clear that Duterte's ascent signaled the beginning of a new phase in Philippine foreign policy, particularly in terms of relations with the Southeast Asian country's chief security partner (America) and chief security concern (China). Under Duterte, relations with America became no longer as special and ties with China became no longer as hostile. In effect, the former mayor of Davao sought to anchor his country's foreign policy in a post-American episteme, where Western allies are just a component of a more geographically diversified basket of strategic partners and interlocutors. This was the true "revolution" in Philippine foreign policy under Duterte.

The Strategic Rupture Two months into office, Duterte upped the ante with even more headline-grabbing statements, directly threatening

the very foundations of the Philippine-American military alliance. Visible rifts began to emerge, when the foul-mouthed president, during a speech before military officers, insulted the American Ambassador to Manila, Philip Golberg, as a "gay son of a bitch." The shockingly undiplomatic remarks prompted an immediate diplomatic rebuke from Washington, which described Duterte's insults against America's highest diplomatic representative in Manila as "inappropriate and unacceptable." Months earlier, during the campaign period, the American ambassador, in solidarity with his Australian counterpart, criticized, albeit in a low-key manner, Duterte's inappropriate remarks about the rape and murder of an Australian missionary in Davao in 1989. Back then, Duterte responded with sound and fury, calling on the Western diplomats to "shut their mouth" and desist from what he saw as undue interference in domestic affairs of the Philippines (McKirdy 2016). A more careful analysis suggests that Duterte's main concern was America's criticism of his war on drugs, his main campaign promise. In a public statement in early-August, the US embassy in Manila, "strongly urge[d] the [Duterte administration] to ensure its law enforcement efforts are consistent with its human rights obligations." Washington also threatened to withdraw any assistance, which based on "rigorous vetting" of human rights record of recipient nations, to law enforcement agencies in the Philippines (Esmaquel 2016c).

Bilateral relations reached a nadir when US President Barack Obama promised to place human rights concerns front and center in his scheduled bilateral conversations with Duterte on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Laos in September. White House Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes reassured the Western media they "absolutely expect [President Obama] will raise concerns" over Duterte's human rights, while the White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said that the American president "is certainly not going to pull any punches" on the issue (Wescott 2016). Anticipating tough and potentially humiliating exchanges with his American counterpart, Duterte lashed out at Washington, accusing it of hypocrisy and reminding America of its historical atrocities in Mindanao, including the reported massacre of Moro Filipinos at the hands of American occupiers at the turn of the century. In a characteristically colorful language, Duterte boasted, "I don't give a shit about anybody observing my behavior." The expletive-laden rants went a step further, with the Filipino president even personally insulting Obama in a particularly heated late-evening press conference ahead of his visit to Laos for the ASEAN summit (Ranada 2016). In short, Duterte was seemingly provoked by his American counterpart. The Obama

administration adopted a tough langauge on the human rights records of its Southeast Asian ally, a remarkable departure from its generally tepid and carefully-crafted statements on the human rights record of Middle Easter allies such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

At this point, both allies were seemingly trapped in an inevitable collision course. The Obama administration faced the impossible task of maintaining a robust partnership with an irascible ally, while coming under increased pressure by the media, human rights groups and the US Congress to adopt a tough stance against the Duterte administration's scorched-earth campaign against illegal drugs. The Filipino leader, meanwhile, confronted the dilemma of risking all-out estrangement with America or maintaining his tough, nationalistic image before the local audience. In the end, both sides prioritized their domestic audiences and appealed to their respective constituencies, leading to an unprecedented exchange of criticisms, which marked the lowest point in Philippine–American relations in modern history. As a result, the bilateral talks were pulled off, though the two leaders held brief exchanges in a waiting room during the summit, which proved unfruitful. During the gathering of Southeast Asian leaders and ASEAN's strategic partners, including America, Duterte embarked on a long-winding tirade, flashing early-twentieth century images of American atrocities against Moro Filipinos. To make it even more personal, Duterte even framed those atrocities as a crime against his own ancestors. The speech, which took almost all dignitaries in attendance by surprise, was clearly directed at the American leader, who was among state leaders in attendance. After the ASEAN diplomatic fiasco, Duterte consistently refused to talk to and meet his American counterpart until the end of Obama's term. He even admitted to have skipped the photo-op session of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Lima, Peru, to avoid meeting Obama. As Duterte shared to the media: "Obama was there, and because we had an exchange of [unpleasant] words [in the past], I was just trying to avoid an awkward situation," thus the Filipino president's no-show during several occasions where Obama was in attendance (Sputniknews 2016).

In his first six months in office, Duterte didn't only express critical remarks vis-à-vis America, but also lashed at the European Union and the United Nations, which also raised concerns over human rights conditions in the Southeast Asian country. In response, on several occasions the Duterte administration went on the offensive, even questioning the utility of the UN system as well as the universality of the human rights regime. As the Philippines' president, who is constituently the chief

diplomatic architect, Duterte's statements represented nothing short of a volte-face in the country's decades-old foreign policy orientation. The Filipino leader wasn't only verbally attacking the Philippines' oldest allies, but he also questioned the country's longstanding commitment to the liberal international order.

As one of Asia's oldest democracies, the Philippines has been among the most enthusiastic supporters of the liberal international order. As an active member of the UN, the country played a pivotal role in the development of the universal doctrine of human rights. Filipino representatives to the UN, namely Carlos P. Romulo (as President of the United Nations General Assembly) and Salvador Lopez (as Chairman of the UN's Commission on Human Rights), played a central role in the establishment of the UN, its founding principles, and bureaucratic organization, especially during the global body's formative years. But now, the Philippines, under Duterte, was launching a direct assault on the doctrine of human rights as well as the legitimacy, utility, and mandate of the UN. Even during the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship (1971–1986), the country was a staunch ally of the capitalist powers against communist regimes and often paid lip service to human rights and democracy, whether in its diplomatic pronouncements or through holding (often flawed) elections (Mendoza 2009; Claudio 2016).

While signaling the Philippines' decoupling from the liberal international order, as well as age-old alliances with Western powers, Duterte sought to open a new chapter in his country's relations with Eastern powers, particularly China and Russia. During the ASEAN summit, where he officially took over the regional body's chairmanship on behalf of the Philippines, Duterte declared a radical reorientation in the Southeast Asian country's foreign policy: "I am ready to not really break ties [with America] but we will open alliances with China and … Medvedev [Russia]." But Duterte, who was aware of the Philippine security establishment's antipathy towards Beijing and (to a lesser degree) Russia, was careful to qualify that speaking of a full-fledged military alliance was still premature, because what he primarily had in mind was opening up "the Philippines for them to do business, alliances of trade and commerce." By October, about two months later, Duterte made another unprecedented move: A state visit, his first outside the ASEAN, to China ahead of traditional allies, particularly America and Japan. Historically, Filipino presidents visited China after meeting their counterparts in the White House and/or Tokyo. In fact, Duterte postponed and downgraded (from state to official visit) an initially scheduled trip

to Tokyo in favor of Beijing. In a move that caught even his own cabinet officials off guard, Duterte bid "goodbye" to and vowed strategic "separation" from America before his hosts in Beijing. He then offered to realign the Philippines with China's "ideological flow", beckoning a new alliance against the West. It was Duterte's way of embracing what he sees as an emerging new world order, where America is no longer in a position of strategic primacy (to dictate regional states and their domestic and foreign policy conduct). In succeeding weeks, Duterte became bolder by repeatedly threatening to end the Philippines' military alliance with America altogether in favor of new strategic realignments in the region. In one speech after the other, Duterte, with a mixture of unconventional political lexicon and emotional outbursts, shackled the core principles of Philippines foreign policy, inspiring profound uncertainty, if not full-scale panic, about the future of the Southeast Asian country's alliance with America (Heydarian 2017).

But, should there be any reason for panic? Did Duterte's tirades indicate a tangible and long-term shift in Philippine foreign policy? Should anyone have been surprised by his unconventional rhetoric and radical departure from the predictable foreign policy script of Filipino leaders? For those who were familiar with the Filipino president—especially his ideological upbringing, political acquaintances, and storied relationship with America—nothing was too surprising about Duterte's behavior in the presidential office. If anything, there is a remarkable level of consistency in Duterte's views about Philippine foreign relations. For decades, as a mayor of Davao, Duterte was a natural standout due to his penchant for breaking conventions, particularly in terms of his relationship with America as well as insurgent groups, whether communists or Islamists. As a mayor of Davao, he made the unprecedented decision in 2007 to block joint Philippine–American military exercises, while denying American armed forces access to the city's airport for drone operations. In 2013, he refused to grant Americans access to the Davao Airport for conducting drone operations in Mindanao. Not shy about expressing his emotions, Duterte has often described Americans arrogant and insensitive. But his reservations vis-à-vis America wasn't based on abstract principles alone. Two incidents, both in the year 2002, seem to have crystalized Duterte's antipathy towards America. One is, though unconfirmed and likely untrue, the alleged rejection of his visa application to America, preventing him from joining his partner, Honeylet Avanceña (Moss 2016). Based on investigations by a veteran Filipino journalist,

the visa rejection likely happened between 1998 and 2001 (not 2002), when Duterte was a Congressman traveling on a diplomatic passport, but failed to get through the LA LAX airport, where he was reportedly interrogated by immigration officers (Tordesillas 2016). The other incident, which seems factual and proved more crucial, involved Michael Meiring, an American treasure hunter and suspected Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent. After a bomb exploded in his hotel in Davao City, May 16, 2002, he was briefly taken to the hospital. But according to media reports then Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) officials quickly escorted him out of the Philippines without the permission of local officials, who were keen on investigating the circumstances of his injury and why he was carrying explosive materials in his hotel room. Duterte, who was the mayor back then, felt deeply disrespected and became even more suspicious of American intensions in Mindanao. As he told reporters later, shortly after his state visit to China, the Meiring incident "has not really appeased me at all. Binastos tayo ng Amerika [we were disrespected by America]" (Ibid.). For Duterte, rather than a trusted ally, America was more of a contributor to the conflict in his home island (Moss 2016; Ressa 2017).

But one can't fully discount the role of ideology in shaping Duterte's foreign policy mindset. He came of age during the Vietnam War era, when anti-American/anti-imperialist sentiment ran high across universities the world over, including in the West. To be fair, Duterte isn't the first Filipino politician to have been exposed to anti-Western, communist ideology. But unlike most mainstream Filipino statesmen, Duterte held on to his anti-imperialist (primarily directed at America) conviction long after the unification of Vietnam and the end of hostilities in Indochina. Cloistered in Davao, and constantly in contact with leftist-progressive elements and close enough to the protracted conflict in the Muslim regions of Mindanao, Duterte was almost immune to the ideological hegemony of the largely pro-American media-military-intelligentsia complex perched in 'Imperial Manila'. Unlike most of his contemporaries, who would end up adopting a more nuanced understanding of American strategic role in Asia, Duterte maintained a largely skeptical view vis-à-vis Washington's intentions in the Philippines. While many former leftists and communist leaders moved to the ideological center as they entered national politics, especially in Manila and the industrialized regions of Luzon and Visayas, Duterte rarely left his hometown. When he eventually stayed in Manila during a lackluster and brief stint as a Congressional representative for

Davao, Duterte was deeply forlorn, homesick and out of place. In both ideological and psychological terms, he never truly felt at home among the national elite, who frequently interacted with American offices, visited the country, and much like the majority of the Filipinos developed favorable views of the superpower and its role in the region. Keeping Duterte's unique background in mind, his behavior in office seems much less unpredictable and shocking. After all, one of the greatest outcomes of the 2016 presidential elections in the Philippines was not only the installment of a strongman populist, but also the first truly American skeptic in Malacanang. In contrast to his harsh anti-Western rhetoric, primarily targeted against America, Duterte, however, has proven largely conciliatory towards China, the Philippines' fiercest rival in the South China Sea. In a marked departure from the policy of his predecessor—Benigno Aquino (2010–2016), who initiated an unprecedented arbitration case against China and repeatedly likened the Asian powerhouse to Nazi Germany—Duterte opted for a more pragmatic, low-key approach in the disputed waters, placing economic cooperation ahead of territorial spats. Instead of viewing the Philippines' arbitration case against China as a game-changer, Duterte proved largely skeptical and unmoved. At the height of the presidential campaign, as he inched closer to securing the top spot in the surveys, Duterte was transparent about his misgivings vis-à-vis the arbitration case and its utility in shaping Chinese behavior in the disputed waters. In an interview with a Chinese news channel (CCTV, now renamed as CGTV), Duterte said, "If we cannot enforce [the arbitration ruling], and if the United Nations cannot enforce its judgment, then what the heck? What are we supposed to do? Just sit there and wait for somebody to take our cudgels and go to war or demand obedience from China? For what?" In the same interview, he expressed his skepticism on whether the Americans are reliable allies, suggesting that dropping the arbitration case (though he didn't clarify how) is an option he would consider. Instead, he called on China to be the Philippines partner in development: "What I need from China isn't anger; what I need from China is help develop my country." (Mollman 2016).

The Filipino Nixon Weeks ahead of the Election Day, Duterte remained consistent on his position on China, calling for development cooperation rather than (legal and diplomatic) confrontation over the South China Sea. "If you want, [let's consider] joint exploration [in contested waters. If I don't have the necessary funds for buying equipment, [China can] just give me my part [of the disputed resources]," Duterte

suggested a potential compromise with China in a press conference in Palawan, the Philippines' westernmost province, which lies close to disputed Spratly chain of islands and the hydrocarbon-rich Reed Bank. Emphasizing his preference for economic engagement over assertion of Philippine sovereignty, Duterte made it clear that if China will "build me a train around Mindanao, build me train from Manila to Bicol… build me a train [going to] Batangas, for the six years that I'll be president, I'll shut up [on the South China Sea disputes]" (ABS-CBN News 2016).

Interestingly, these seemingly controversial comments, which marked a huge departure from the popular position of the then Aquino administration, didn't have any discernible impact on Duterte's electoral chances. This showed at least three things: First, that Duterte's conciliatory remarks on China didn't register on the radar of voters. For some reason, none of his opponents tried to systematically capitalize on what could be interpreted as acquiescence to China on nonnegotiable territorial claims. If anything, many of his opponents were more focused on attacking the then vice-president Jejomar Binay, who was broadly perceived as a corrupt, traditional politician, who is too close to China due to business interests. Second, for ordinary voters, foreign policy isn't a primary issue (Pulse Asia 2017). They rather focus on the domestic agenda and leadership qualities of the specific candidates. And finally, Duterte's avalanche of controversial remarks throughout the presidential campaign seemingly desensitized a plurality of average voters. This is what some call the 'bed of nails' phenomenon: Duterte built his entire campaign on the basic principle of going farther than any of his competitors in terms of breaking orthodoxies in favor of a bolder and more audacious messaging, particularly on combatting corruption and crime. Once it became clear that presumed redlines weren't much of a redline after all, and that voters have a greater threshold of tolerance than initially considered, Duterte was able to constantly push the envelop, portraying himself as a maverick politician willing to bring in fresh ideas and approaches to tackling his country's policy challenges. If anything, Duterte even managed to turn the South China Sea issue to his favor by presenting himself as the only proverbial Nixon in the race who could go to China and cut a deal with Beijing leadership. But among all of his foreign policy-related statements, what caught the attention of the media (and the world) the most was when he memorably quipped, "I will ride a jet ski. I will carry a flag and when I reach Spratlys, I will erect the Filipino flag. I will tell them (Chinese), let's brawl or have a

duel?" Filled with bravado, quite consistent with Duterte's macho image, those statements (mistakenly) solidified his image as someone who would go tough on China. Upon closer inspection, those quotes completely missed the context of his broader statement. In the same press conference, he actually presented a binary choice between suicidal confrontation and rational accommodation, omitting the option of resistance: "I will not go to war because we will not win it. It will be a massacre. I will not waste the lives of Filipino soldiers and policemen. What am I, a fool? All of them will die." (Ibid). His "jet ski" and "planting a flag" statement was a satirical third option to break the deadlock created by his binary strategic choices. And yet, it was precisely the "jet ski" remarks that registered on the mind of most voters and observers. After his election victory, as he prepared to meet dignitaries from various states, Duterte once again emphasized his doubts vis-a-vis American commitment to the Philippines: "I would only ask the US ambassador, Are you with us [in the South China Sea]?," (Regaldo and Romero 2016). And by all indications, the meeting, as evident in their picture, was tense, cool and almost awkward. In contrast, Duterte's meeting with the Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua, who was among the first foreign dignitaries the then president-elect met, was extremely cordial. During his meeting with Duterte, the Chinese envoy even presented a copy of a book about Xi Jinping, which Duterte received with obvious glee and sense of admiration, as was prominently captured by the media. A more perspicacious analyst would have noticed that the main foreign policy theme throughout Duterte's campaign and ahead of his inauguration were two things: First, that America isn't a reliable partner; and second, the Philippines has limited options when it comes to China, therefore accommodation is the only rational way forward. In short, he was consistently an American skeptic and China dove. The implication was clear: The Philippines would take a different direction under its new president, yet few took him literally and seriously.

A look at Duterte's first year in office underlines the significance of political leadership and strategic reflexivity to reshaping the Philippines' foreign policy predisposition. It is a telltale of how strongmen populists can and may introduce, almost unilaterally, a significant change in a country's foreign policy. Understanding his impact on and views of Philippine foreign policy, however, should take place within the broader context of the Southeast Asian country's foreign policy since the end of Cold War.

Struggle for Autonomy

On the surface, President Rodrigo Duterte's call for an independent foreign policy is neither strange nor controversial. The Philippines' 1987 constitution itself enshrines the principle of independence. In unequivocal terms, the country's highest legal document behooves Filipino leaders to *"pursue an independent foreign policy"*, where the *"paramount consideration shall be national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest and the right to self-determination."* Instead, it is Duterte's emphasis on a foreign policy that "will not be dependent on the United States" that is unique and deserves closer scrutiny. Is there a historical justification for Duterte's distinct conception of independence in the Philippine context? Where does Duterte's skepticism stem from? Has the Southeast Asian country been too dependent on its former colonizer?

A cursory look at the Philippines' modern history reveals an island nation—perched at the Western tip of the Pacific and at the crossroads of Asian Rimland and Australia—broadly operating within America's ideological and strategic orbit. From its very inception, the Philippines confronted the shadow of American imperial designs. After years of armed struggle against the Spanish Empire, Filipino revolutionaries' late-nineteenth century quest for national independence was quashed by America's duplicity and firepower. Amid the Spanish-American war, Philippine indigenous nationalist movement mistakenly saw Washington as a potential ally to eliminate Madrid's last foothold in Asia. What began as a seemingly fruitful alliance of convenience between Washington and Filipino revolutionaries against Madrid turned into a bitter conflict when Filipino revolutionaries were notified, to their horror, about the 1898 Treaty of Paris, which set the conditions for America's purchase of the Philippine islands from a crumbling Spanish Empire. What ensured was a particularly brutal revolutionary war, the Philippine–American War (1899–1902), which saw Washington deploying state-of-the-art military technology against both armed combatants as well as civilians across the Southeast Asian country. Over the succeeding decades, American extended its brutal military campaign to semi-autonomous regions of the Philippines particularly the Muslim-majority provinces of Mindanao, which hosted proud and fierce Sultanates that successfully resisted Spanish inquisition. Found in a struggle for independence against British colonialism, Americans ended up extinguishing the first major anticolonial struggle in Asia (Anderson 1987; Mishra 2013). Duterte often harkens back to this dark period in American colonial

occupation of the Philippines, including in his full-throated anti-American tirades during the East Asia Summit in Laos, where Obama was uncomfortably present among leaders in attendance. For the Filipino leader, America's foray into Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines, is a clear demonstration of American hypocrisy and not-so-benign, if not nefarious, designs in the Philippines. America's consolidation of administrative control over the Philippines disparate islands and disjointed geography was accompanied by the often wanton use of violence by American soldiers, some of who seem to have relished their military campaign with sadistic glee. As one soldier described his battalion's slaughter of fleeing Filipino revolutionaries, it was "more fun than a Turkey shoot". President William McKinley conveniently invoked the doctrine of *Manifest Destiny* to justify a controversial colonial project that aimed to "educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them." American colonialism of the Philippines was veiled by sanctimonious imperialism and tinged with systematic denigration of the indigenous population as uncivilized people (Boot 2014).

To be fair, Washington's imperial adventures in the Philippines, its sole Asian colony, wasn't a one-dimensional military campaign. As soon as Washington crushed the revolutionary movement, it pushed ahead with building a showcase colony (Sheehan 1989; Bello 2005; Anderson 1987; 1988). This was part of a broader effort to appease anti-imperialist, pacifists, and isolationist elements back home, who fiercely criticized the brutal subjugation of Filipino people as a betrayal of America's founding principles. As Neil Sheehan (1989) explains, "[h]aving overt colonies was not acceptable to the American political conscience" for many Americans, who worshiped their own nation for its valiant war of independence against Britain and "were convinced that their imperial system did not victimize foreign peoples." Key to a more benign process of colonization, which meant massive infrastructure development and overhaul of the country's healthcare and education sectors, was the buy-in of the local elite, the so-called 'cacique' in Benedict Anderson's term. Instead of pushing for radical reform of the Philippines' highly feudal politico-economic system, America struck a strategic pact with the Spanish-era elite, who proved eager to preserve their old privileges, including ownership of large swathes of lands as well as domination of the trading sectors of the economy. The product was an American-style liberal democracy, dominated by a select group of landed gentry and tradesmen, who proved highly dependent on the good will and largesse of the new colonial master. As Anderson (1987) explains:

> Americans installed, by stages, a political regime, modeled on their own, which turned out, perhaps to their own surprise, to be perfectly adapted to the crystallizing oligarchy's needs…. the prominent collaborator oligarch Manuel Roxas became in 1946 the independent Philippines' first President.9 Before his death in 1948 he had achieved the following triumphs: amnesty for all 'political prisoners' (mainly those held on charges of collaboration); an agreement permitting the US to retain control of its bases in the Philippines for 99 years, as well as a US-Philippines Military Assistance Pact; and the amending of the Commonwealth Constitution of 1935 to give Americans 'parity' access to the economic resources of the 'independent' Philippines (and, of course, the oligarchy's continuing access to the protected American market).

But it was precisely the more 'benign' aspect of American colonization of the Philippines, which proved to have a long-term corrosive effect on the Southeast Asian country's strategic culture and state-formation process. The upshot was a desperately dependent, confused and self-doubting nation, afflicted with what James Fallows (1987) called a "damage culture". In an influential essay for the *Foreign Affairs*, Filipino national hero Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino (1968) lamented: "Almost half a century of American rule bequeathed to the Asian Filipino a trauma by making him uncomfortably American in outlook, values and tastes…" Especially among the political elite, he complained, "Filipinos are bewildered about their identity. They are an Asian people not Asian in the eyes of their fellow Asians and not Western in the eyes of the West." Among the diplomatic elites and strategic thinkers, some exhibited what Franz Fanon, Ali Shariati, and other key post-colonial thinkers saw as "internalized imperialism", namely what Persian writer Jalal Al-e-Ahmad called *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxification). This phenomenon was best typified in the words of Salvador P. Lopez, Philippine Ambassador to Washington and the United Nations, who tried to give a positive spin to America's quashing of the Filipino independence movement. According to Lopez, American colonization allowed the Philippines "to develop along more democratic lines" unlike its many Asian neighbors, which were under the occupation of European powers (Ibid.).

In the early-twentieth century, the island nation—as a colony and later a protectorate—stood shoulder-to-shoulder with America throughout the first and second World Wars. The terminus of America's half-century long colonization of the Philippines, which formally ended in 1946, hardly translated into the emergence of a truly independent nation-state. Over the succeeding decades, America exercised disproportionate

influence over the Philippines' ruling elite, which stubbornly refused to sever its umbilical cord with the former colonial patron. American export markets, investments, and military remained integral to the functioning and preservation of the Philippine polity. With the outbreak of the Cold War, the Southeast Asian nation was gradually transformed into America's forward deployment base in the Western Pacific and East Asia, with Subic and Clark hosting largest American overseas military bases. In effect, the Philippines served as a platform for the projection of American power in the region. The Philippines wasn't only a geographical launching pad and logistical hub for the American military, but also a key partner during major wars in Asia, namely the Korean War (1950–1953) and Vietnam War (1955–1975). More broadly, it served as a critical node in the Washington-led hub and spokes alliance structure in the Asia-Pacific theater (Anderson 1998; Bello 2005, 2010).

The Philippines' central role in America's grand strategic designs in Asia, however, came at the expense of its policy autonomy and the development of a mature strategic culture capable of striking a fine balance between non-aligned autarky and strategic subservience. The country that produced Asia's first modern anticolonial movement, inspired by the works of the polymath Jose Rizal, developed a perverse strategic culture, which effectively outsourced the Philippines' national security, particularly against external threats, to a foreign power, namely America. This would have a long-term impact on the Philippines' foreign policy tradition, stretching well into the twenty-first century, which saw successive Filipino administrations struggling to find an independent path amid rising Sino-American rivalry in Asia. In Japan, under the Yoshida doctrine, the post-war political elite deliberately outsourced short-to-medium-term security needs to America in order to concentrate on economic recovery at home (Pyle 2008). In the Philippines, however, the elite just drifted from one phase of dependency to another, without a clear strategy on how to establish an economically prosperous and militarily self-reliant nation.

A series of landmark agreements, namely Military Bases Agreement (1947), the Military Assistance Pact (1947), and the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) of 1951, transformed America into the chief guarantor of the Philippines' (now nominally a sovereign nation) national security. In short, the Philippines remained as an American protectorate in all but name (Bello 1982, 2005).

The Post-Cold War Phase The 'special alliance', however, faced renewed challenges with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Bereft of a common enemy, both allies contemplated a recalibration in their security relationship. On one hand, eager to optimize the peace dividends of the end of Cold War, the George H.W. Bush administration opted for a retrenchment policy under a "new world order". Thus, it became increasingly difficult for Washington to justify exorbitant strategic rents for maintenance of massive military bases overseas, particularly in Subic and Clark. As for the Philippines, nationalist and progressive elements within the legislature and civil society agitated for de-militarization and removal of American bases from the country. In ideational terms, regional leaders, including in the Philippines, came to embrace new conceptions of security. Cold War era zero-sum understanding of security began to lose traction and/or was dismissed as anachronistic and retrogressive. The emergence of an epistemic community with constructivist bent went along with liberal political leadership, which collectively advocated new norms of inter-state behavior. The final decade of the twentieth century also saw the advent of a more vigorous form of economic globalization, with East Asia emerging as a highly-networked production base, with trade and investment flows among regional states experiencing rapid expansion. With the support of major powers, the ASEAN, in particular, emerged as an engine of a more inclusive and pacifist regional security architecture. Meanwhile, other middle powers, from Australia to Canada and Japan, vigorously advocated alternative conceptions of security (common/human/comprehensive security), which emphasized shared interests and necessity for multilateral cooperation to deal with the challenges of post-Cold War order. In this milieu, a reduction in American military presence in the Philippines seemed almost inevitable (Goh 2013).

Influential figures such as then Senate President Jovito R. Salonga led the way for removal of American bases in the Philippines. Salonga led a nationalist bloc, supported by a coalition of progressive civil society groups, which emphasizes the environmental (e.g., the effect of toxic American military waste on surrounding communities), social (e.g., criminal activities perpetrated by American servicemen against local citizens), and strategic (e.g., Philippines becoming a target for American enemies) costs of sustained American military bases in the Philippines. The then outgoing Cory Aquino administration (1986–1992) argued

in favor of retention of American military bases in the country, but she failed to convince the Senate—which has the constitutional mandate to ratify, abolish, and amend treaties—to extend the 1947 American basing agreement. At the same time, there was a change of heart also on Washington's part. First of all, it refused to raise the rent for Philippine bases, a key demand of the Aquino administration during negotiation over basing agreement extension. America offered only $203 million in annual aid for an extended lease for the 60,000-acre Subic base. More importantly, the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in June 1991 heavily damaged American facilities in Subic and Clark. Refurbishment costs proved too unattractive to consider under existing circumstance. In the end, American forces stationed in Subic and Clark were issued an ahead-of-schedule notice of exit in light of the Senate refusal to extend the basing agreement. By 1992, American military presence in the Philippines was dramatically reduced, leaving a precarious strategic vacuum in the region. It didn't take long for China to press its advantage, presenting the Philippine government its first major external security threat *without* any guarantee of American military assistance.

Dealing with the Dragon

Decades before Duterte's rise to power and his strategic flirtation with Asia's most powerful nation, one Filipino president confronted an impossible crisis in the South China Sea, which eventually forced him to consider direct engagement rather than confrontation with Beijing. In 1995, the Philippines met its first major test vis-à-vis an assertive China in adjacent waters. Only years after the exit of American military based from the country, the Fidel Ramos administration (1992–1998) was notified about Chinese occupation (in earlier months) of Philippine-claimed Mischief Reef, a low-tide elevation, which lies within the Southeast Asian country's 200-nautical-miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Previously, the Philippines' territorial disputes were primarily with Malaysia (over Sabah), Vietnam (over disputed land features in the Spratlys), and Taiwan (over Itu Aba, the largest naturally-formed rock in the Spratly chain of islands). Now, to the Philippine government's horror, China, which engaged in various skirmishes against Vietnam in 1974 and 1988, pushed into its EEZ. China began building rudimentary structures to permanently house its troops over the disputed feature, which lies close to Palawan and the energy-rich areas in Reed Bank.

The Ramos administration considered various options, including a military standoff to assert the country's claims over the disputed feature and its surrounding waters. But given the Philippines' emaciated military capacity, thanks to protracted insurgencies in Mindanao and rural areas as well as systematic corruption within the defense establishment, armed confrontation was never an attractive option. Meanwhile, America signaled its neutrality over the maritime dispute, finding no vital national interest at stake in order to warrant military support for the Philippines in an event of contingency (Batongbacal 2014).[1]

So Ramos, a veteran military official and former defense and army chief who would later become Duterte's chief foreign policy adviser, opted for a mixture of multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, while focusing on developing the Philippines' deterrence capability as well as revitalizing defense cooperation with America. He pushed ahead with rapid implementation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Act in order bulk up the Philippines' defensive capabilities. After all, the country could hardly a muster a squadron of operational fighter jets, while the Philippine Navy was historically sacrificed for financing the Philippine Army, which has been at the forefront of containing communist and Islamist insurgencies across the country. Under the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), which came into effect in 1998, the Ramos administration also sought to plug any gap in Philippine–American bilateral security cooperation. The VFA was not a military basing agreement, but it provided a legal framework for expanded American rotational military access to Philippine bases, joint military exercises, and transfer of military aid and intelligence to Philippine forces. The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995–1996), which saw Washington deploying two aircraft carrier battle groups (carrier group five and seven centered around USS *Independence* and USS *Nimitz*, respectively), convinced the Clinton administration to double down on security cooperation with regional allies and strategic partners. On the diplomatic front, Ramos adopted what could be called as "bi-multilateralism", directing engaging with the Chinese leadership while rallying regional support to rein in Beijing's maritime ambitions in the South China Sea. The upshot

[1] Prof. Joseph Nye, a senior Defense Department official during the Mischief Reef crisis, in the course of the Boston Global Forum, corroborated this portion 2015, which was also attended by the author on April 17, in Harvard University.

was the 1996 visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin to Manila, which was characterized by so-called "Karaoke diplomacy", as Ramos and his Chinese counterpart literally sang together in the spirit of maintaining robust bilateral relations *in spite* of the Mischief Reef crisis. The Ramos administration also launched a pro-active diplomatic campaign in the ASEAN. The aim was to establish a semblance of regional unity to pressure China against further provocation in disputed waters. In 2002, the ASEAN and China signed up to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), a declaratory document that espoused a dialogue-based, peaceful management of maritime spats among claimant states and China. The DOC was supposed to pave the way for an eventual legally binding Code of Conduct (COC), which would regulate the behavior of claimant countries based on a series of agreed upon rules. Under the short-lived Joseph Estrada administration (1998–2001), the Philippines maintained broadly stable relations with China, arguing that the country couldn't afford confrontation with its giant neighbor. For some observers, the Estrada administration in effect adopted what could be charitably termed as "strategic neglect" as far as Manila's claims in the South China Sea are concerned. On January 21, 1999 the Philippine government convened a high-stakes National Security Council meeting to discus Philippine options over the Mischief Reef and across the disputed waters. But President Estrada reportedly "dozed throughout most of the [National Security Council] meeting" (McCarthy 1999).

It wasn't until the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo administration (2001–2010), when the Philippines and China began to upgrade their relationship into what was a de facto strategic partnership. At first, President Arroyo's foreign policy was broadly shaped by Washington post-9/11 "Global War on Terror". The George W. Bush administration pursued an obsessively narrow agenda in Southeast Asia, focused on rallying regional states. At first, the Philippines, along with other regional allies such as Thailand, proved broadly cooperative, themselves concerned about the spread of religious fundamentalism and infiltration of global terror franchises, particularly al-Qaeda, into their own backyard. Less than a year into office, after replacing Estrada who was toppled by massive civil protests over corruption allegations, Arroyo saw her country hosting what a *New York Times* reported described as "the largest single deployment of American military might outside Afghanistan to fight terrorists since the Sept. 11 attack." (Schmitt 2002). In December 2001,

the Bush administration launched the "Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines", which saw hundreds of American commandos establishing the Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) to the Mindanao. Over the next decade-and-half, American forces would be embedded in a systematic effort to degrade and neutralize extremist groups. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the al-Qaeda regional offshoot Jemaah Islamiya (JI) were a particular source of concern. Two years later, US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a joint operation with Filipino military against the ASG, prompting allegations of direct American participation in combat operations on the country's soil in violation of Philippine constitution. However, subsequent investigations, led by the Senate and fuelled by incessant media scrutiny failed to produce any damning outcome for the bilateral alliance, which was now largely focused on counterterrorism. But the war in Iraq, and the quagmire and anarchy that followed would eventually drive a wedge between the two allies. Initially, the Philippines was among a handful of nations, which joined the US-led 'Coalition of the Willing' forces that overtook the joint administration of post-Saddam Iraq. As an expression of its gratitude, the Bush administration lavished the Philippines with praise, expressed support for President Arroyo, who made a controversial decision to contest the 2004 presidential elections, and promised upgraded military and developmental assistance to its Southeast Asian ally (Morada 2006a, b; Acharya and Acharya 2007).

But an incident undermined the bilateral alliance. In 2004, when al-Qaeda affiliates took a Filipino worker in Iraq hostage, promising to behead their victim unless Manila withdraws its troops from Iraq, the Arroyo administration gave in. Though it was a domestically sound political decision, which helped prevent widespread backlash after a contentions elections that saw Arroyo winning the presidency amid massive allegations of electoral fraud, the impact on Philippine-American relations, however, was immediate and negative. The Bush administration threatened to downgrade its assistance to the Philippines, chiding Manila's decision to cave into pressure from extremist groups. Worried about the strategic consequences of her decision in Iraq, Arroyo immediately used the China card. What ensued was a brief golden age in Philippine-China relations, as the two neighbors rapidly expanded their areas of cooperation. In September 2004, Arroyo made a high-profile state visit to China, a clear signal to America that the Philippines has alternative options and isn't shy to leverage it accordingly. (A decade later, Duterte would pull off a similar maneuver,

but with characteristically over-the-top rhetoric, which placed the future of Philippine-American alliance in doubt.) During her meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao, the two sides signed a whole range of agreements aimed at upgrading their bilateral relations to new heights. True to form, China offered large-scale investment schemes, particularly in the Philippines telecommunications and public railway sectors. Both sides also agreed to expand their bilateral trade, which almost doubled in three years, rising from $17.6 billion in 2005 to $30.6 billion in 2007 (ASEAN Affairs 2010; Morada 2006a, b). Crucially, they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Defense Cooperation, with Beijing offering $1.2 million to modernize the Philippines's defensive capabilities. It was a classic exercise of checkbook diplomacy during a new era of charm-offensive in Chinese foreign policy (Kurlantzick 2007; Baviera 2015). The two parties then proceeded with peacefully settling sensitive issues, particularly their disputes in the South China Sea. Under the Joint Maritime Seismic Agreement (JMSU), which came into force in 2005 and lasted until 2008, the Philippines and China (along with Vietnam) decided to effectively set aside their territorial claims and compromise on their sovereign rights in the disputed areas through a joint exploration scheme, which could eventually graduate into a full-blown joint development agreement in the South China Sea. Recognizing the rapidly improving relations between its treaty ally and China, the Bush administration realized that it was better to maintain robust relations with its ally in spite of the earlier disagreement over the Iraq war issue. In fact, Washington even welcomed improved relations between the two neighbors and saw the JMSU as a potentially effective means to peacefully address intractable territorial disputes in the South China Sea. By the mid-2000s, the Philippines managed to adopt a quasi-equi-balancing strategy, which preserved robust military cooperation with America, while expanding investment and trade relations with China. (Morada 2006a, b; Acharya and Acharya 2007; Heydarian 2015; Baviera 2015).

As the Arroyo administration approached its final years, controversies began to envelop her diplomatic outreach to China. On one hand, the two major Chinese investment schemes in the Philippines, particularly the NBN-ZTE agreement (to upgrade Philippine ICT sector) and the North Rail project (aimed to overhaul the railway sector in the northern island of Luzon), would be mired in corruption scandals and/or bidding anomalies. This became a rallying point for main opposition leaders, including Arroyo's successor, Benigno Aquino III, who would

successfully run on an anticorruption agenda in the 2010 presidential elections. Moreover, the JMSU also came under question, with some critics accusing the government of committing treason. The trilateral agreement allegedly violated the Philippine constitution, particularly in terms of ensuring transparency (on its key provisions), sufficient consultations with relevant stakeholders (including the legislature), and protecting the country's sovereign claims and sovereign rights within its EEZ, specifically in accordance to Art. VII, Section II of the National Economy and Patrimony Provision of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines. In 2009, tensions in the South China Sea flared up when China, in response to the joint Malaysian-Vietnamese submission of their extended continental shelf to the United Nations (UN), officially declared a nine-dashed-line claim over much of the disputed waters (International Crisis Group 2014; Colmenares 2008).

Paradoxically, the lowest point in bilateral relations between the two neighbors soon supplanted the golden age of Philippine–China relations—just for Duterte to make another radical swing in reverse direction less than a decade later. Running on a moralistic platform of good governance (*Daan Matuwid*), Aquino presented himself as the antithesis of his predecessor, rejecting the latter as a morally bankrupt and fundamentally corrupt administration, which supposedly undermine Philippines democracy and eroded public trust in state institutions. The NBN-ZTE scandal, which implicated key administration officials in collusion with their Chinese counterparts, became a rallying point for Aquino and his "yellow army" of passionate supporters, who saw were bent on purging Arroyo and her allies from the Philippine political landscape. For many, especially Aquino's supporters, the kickbacks from the NBN-ZTE project, among other Chinese economic carrots, were a form of bribery in exchange for the JMSU and the Arroyo administration's 'soft' approach to the maritime disputes. No wonder then, Aquino was considerably more reticent in pursuing strong economic relations with China, which was perceived to have exploited the corrupt tendencies of the Arroyo administration to forward its own interests in the South China Sea. Thus, the Aquino administration saw amending the mistakes of its predecessor as its primary duty. An additional source of tension for Arroyo's successor was the revanchist shift in China's behavior in adjacent waters. Aquino stepped into office just as Beijing ramped up its assertiveness in in the South and East China Seas, provoking a region-wide panic about

the security implications of China's rise (Pillsbury 2016; Paulson 2016). Against the backdrop od rising Chinese maritime assertiveness, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, during the 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum in Vietnam, felt compelled to make a tough statement, reiterating that freedom of navigation in the South China Sea represents America's 'national interest' and discouraging claimant countries from coercive, unilateral actions, which undermine regional security. President Barack Obama also echoed Clinton's remarks during the ASEAN–US summit, with Aquino taking a prominent role among Southeast Asian states by promoting a more unified regional position against perceived Chinese threats. This stood in clear contrast to Arroyo's more pragmatic position vis-à-vis China. In fact, the Philippines refused to join other ASEAN countries, particularly Vietnam and Malaysia, in filing its continental shelf claims in the South China Sea to the UN Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf (CLCS). But aside from the NBN-ZTE scandal as well as China's rising assertiveness within Philippine-claimed waters, the Aquino administration confronted another area of contention with Beijing. The Manila hostage crisis in August 2010, which led to the tragic death and injury of several Hong Kong nationals, prompted officials in both Hong Kong special administration region as well as Beijing to demand public apology from the Filipino president. Blaming the incident on the Manila City administration, specifically for its bungled hostage rescue operation that led to the tragic outcome, the Filipino president refused to budge in. In response, Hong Kong authorities threatened diplomatic and economic sanctions against the Philippines, while governments in both Beijing and Taipei joined the chorus of Greater China criticism against the Aquino administration. Amid deteriorating diplomatic relations, Aquino still managed to find a common ground with China. The first opportunity for mending ties came when the Filipino president boycotted the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, which honored Chinese dissident and leading human rights activist Li Xiaobo. As a result, Aquino, the son of the of the most revered democratic icons (i.e., Ninoy and Cory) in the Philippines, found himself joining autocratic leaders, from Russia to Iran and Zimbabwe, who shunned the event per advice of the Chinese government, which saw the Nobel Prize award as a Western affront to its sovereignty and ideology. In response, to Chinese government expressed its utmost gratitude, with then Chinese Ambassador to Manila Liu Jianchao stating how Beijing "appreciate[d] understanding shown by the Philippine government of

the Chinese people and the Chinese government." A year after the Manila hostage crisis, Aquino embarked on widely anticipated state visit to Beijing, where he met President Hu Jintao. During the visit, which saw cordial and warm exchanges between the two leaders, the two neighbors agreed to explore a peaceful compromise in disputed waters, restore mutual confidence, deepen diplomatic channels of communicating, and expand their economic relationship, hoping to double bilateral trade to $60 billion before the end of Aquino's term in 2016. At this juncture, there was growing hope of a restoration of ties and a return to the golden age in the mid-2000s. China's expanding presence across the Spratly chain of islands and the Philippines' EEZ, however, kindled Aquino's suspicions towards Beijing. In 2011, there were at least two incidents involving alleged Chinese harassment of Filipino vessels in the disputed waters. The first one was during in February, with Manila accusing a Chinese frigate of making warning shots against a Filipino boat in the vicinity of the Jackson Atoll. The following month, a more troubling encounter was reported, with Philippine alleging that Chinese vessels harassed its energy survey ship operating near Reed Bank just off the coast of Palawan. In response, Aquino pushed for acceleration of Philippine defense spending by extending the Ramos era AFP Modernization Act, a measure that came into effect in 2012. But the situation reached a crisis point when a Philippine frigate (*Gregorio Del Pilar*) faced off with an armada of Chinese Coast Guard vessels over the Scarborough Shoal. What started as a seemingly routine mission to prevent Chinese fishermen from engaging in poaching activities within a Philippine-claimed land feature transformed into a full-blown diplomatic crisis, as China demanded the Philippine Navy to release the apprehended Chinese fishermen and withdraw from the disputed shoal, which falls within the Philippines' EEZ but lies 900 km away from nearest Chinese coastline. The crisis strengthened the hands of hardline elements on both sides. In China, some called for punitive sanctions and, if necessary, military countermeasures. Eventually, China imposed non-tariff barriers on import of Filipino fruit exports, particularly banana, while issuing travel advisory to discourage Chinese tourists from visiting the Southeast Asian nation. In the Philippines, China hawks, led by Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario, tried to reassure Aquino that America would come to the rescue in an event of armed confrontation. The Obama administration, however, made it clear that it took no position on the status of the sovereignty of Scarborough Shoal and encouraged

both sides to find a diplomatic resolution. With formal communication channels in disarray, backdoor diplomatic efforts, led by then neophyte Senator Antonio Trillanes (a former coup plotter), produced a seeming breakthrough, allowing both sides to stand down and avoid armed conflict. According to Philippine officials, under a mutual disengagement agreement, both sides were to withdraw their vessels from the shoal pending a formal compromise on potential resource-sharing and joint development in the area. To the Aquino administration's horror, however, it soon became clear that the withdrawal of the Philippine frigate was accompanied by de facto Chinese occupation and administrative control of the disputed shoal. In effect, Aquino lost what Philippine law considers as part of its national territory. The livelihood of thousands of fishermen, who relied on seasonal access to the fisheries-rich waters surrounding the shoal and within its inner lagoon, was also now in full jeopardy. Temporarily sidelined during the Scarborough Shoal negotiations, Del Rosario advocated for a full-blown diplomatic offensive against China. At the heart of this strategy was legal warfare (*lawfare*), with Manila becoming the first country to file an arbitration case, under Article 287, Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), against China over the South China Sea disputes in early 2013. By now, what China saw as purely bilateral disputes became a fully internationalized diplomatic crisis. Over the next three years, the Philippines and China would be embroiled in a bitter legal showdown. In fairness, there were some initial efforts to prevent the biggest crisis in Philippine–China relations in recent memory. Towards the end of Hu's term, Aquino sought a bilateral meeting to discuss ways to prevent full-blown crisis. To his consternation, however, the outgoing Chinese leader refused to meet him on the sidelines of the 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok, Russia. The second attempt at crisis management came when both leaders agreed to an exploratory meeting between their (actual and/or preferred) successors, who happened to be the leaders of the ruling parties in their respective countries. In September 2012, Aquino dispatched his vice-presidential mate and preferred successor, Manuel Roxas, to a special meeting with Xi Jinping, who was month away from formally taking over the Chinese Communist Party leadership, followed by the state and the central military commission. Though cordial, there was no specific breakthrough. The meeting was mainly an icebreaker maneuver to allow both sides to build the foundation for institutionalized dialogue amid the impending power transition in China.

The next attempt came almost exactly a year after, during the China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, China. As the rotational guest of honor, the Philippines was expected to dispatch its leader to meet and greet with his Chinese counterparts. Ahead of the scheduled trip, Aquino himself raised expectations, holding press conferences and holding various media interviews, where he laid out his hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough with the Xi Jinping administration. In an unusually undiplomatic move, however, China effectively disinvited Aquino, arguing the timing wasn't right in light of the Philippines' arbitration case at The Hague. Philippine officials, however, insisted that China placed preconditions for the visit, specifically the termination of the arbitration case. Regardless, both sides agreed that it was a lost diplomatic opportunity, which didn't benefit either side.[2] Towards the end of the year, Aquino once again sought to signal his goodwill to China by openly contradicting his own senior ministers, who claimed that China was on the verge of building (military) facilities in the Scarborough Shoal. During a press conference (October 23, 2013) with the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP), he sought to reassure the media that there was no impending plan of full Chinese occupation of the disputed feature, claiming that Filipinos "can still go there and we do have over-flight missions and we do monitor what is happening. Some of our fisher folk are still in that area." (Manila Times). Ultimately, Xi Jinping showed little interest in reciprocating Aquino's gesture of goodwill. Towards the end of 2013, however, certain officials in Chinese foreign ministry suggested that they are willing to reopen communication channels, negotiate a mutual disengagement deal in Scarborough Shoal, and offer large-scale economic incentives if the Philippines, at the very least, postponed the submission of its memorial on March 2014. But it wasn't clear whether the proposal enjoyed the support of the top leadership. In the Philippines, hardliners led by Del Rosario were adamantly against any diplomatic engagement, arguing that China can't be trusted and that international law as well as America could prove helpful in advancing Philippine interest in the South China Sea. In one interview, the Philippine foreign secretary, who constantly traded diplomatic jibes with his Chinese counterpart (Wang Yi), insisted: "We are for bilateral talks,

[2] Partially based on the author's numerous exchanges with senior foreign ministry Chinese officials in Manila and Beijing between 2015 and 2016.

but we ran into a dead end in terms of using that approach." Instead, Del Rosario successfully advocated lawfare and revitalization of military ties with America (Diola 2015).

From the very onset, the arbitration option was controversial, provoking fierce internal bureaucratic debate within the department of foreign affairs and, more broadly, the Aquino administration. Critics put forward at least three arguments: First, the decision, even if favorable to the Philippines, is nonenforceable, so it is ultimately fruitless. This is similar to Duterte's arguments discussed earlier. Second, if the decision doesn't go in the Philippines' favor, whether on the jurisdiction question or merits of claims aspect, it might end up weakening the country's claims and, correspondingly, strengthen China's legal argument. Finally, they argued that the move would only provoke China, turning the Asian juggernaut into an even more aggressive claimant state that will pursue de facto sovereignty by building facts on the ground regardless of its *de jure* basis.[3] Having sidelined Del Rosario during the Scarborough Shoal negotiations, which had a disastrous outcome for the Philippines (i.e., China's administrative control of the shoal), Aquino reluctantly decided to support China hawks' call for legal confrontation, while faintly hoping that sooner than later a diplomatic compromise would emerge on the horizon. In retrospect, the Philippines was left with few options during the Scarborough Shoal crisis and its immediate aftermath. First of all, it didn't have the requisite military capability to press its claim and hold Chinese ambitions over the contested shoal at bay. Second, the Obama administration was extremely reluctant to get militarily involved. Third, the ASEAN, then under the chairmanship of Cambodia, failed to even agree on discussing the South China Sea disputes. Above all, Aquino wrestled with the specter of becoming the first Filipino president to have lost a piece of Philippine (claimed) territory, thus provoking a potential domestic political backlash. In fact, right after his electoral victory, Duterte repeatedly implied treason against the Aquino administration: "I would like to know from anybody in the executive department of the past administration why we lost the Scarborough Shoal…but to lose our land…I can't take it." (Lacorte 2016). Cognizant of the attendant risks

[3] Based on conversations between the author and several ambassadors and high-ranking officials in the department of foreign affairs and the Aquino administration from 2015–2016.

of a legal-diplomatic offensive against China, the Aquino decided to fortify defense cooperation with America and other like-minded allies such as Japan and Australia. Throughout the latter half of 2013, the Philippines and America negotiated the contours of what would become the Enhanced Defensed Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which on the eve of President Obama's visit to Manila in mid-2014. Under the new pact, America is set to enjoy expanded rotational access to Philippine bases, while the host country will benefit from increased military aid, upgraded joint military exercises, and intensified logistical and intelligence support. The two allies would establish forward operating sites (FOS) and cooperative security locations (CSL)—which fall just short of the legal threshold of what constitute as "permanent bases", which, if ever established, would violate Philippine constitution—while presenting flexible arrangements for both parties to enhance their security cooperation (De Castro 2015). Initially, the Philippines was hoping that the could lease some of America's advanced naval assets for training in the disputed waters, but the Obama administration turned down the offer in order to maintain plausible neutrality in the South China Sea. There were also parallel efforts to enhance the Philippines' military cooperation with other strategic partners, particularly Australia and Japan. The Philippine Senate ratified the long-pending Philippine–Australia Status of the Forces Agreement (SOFA), paving the way for expanded cooperation in the realm of counter-terrorism and maritime security. As for Japan, thanks to the efforts of the Shinzo Abe administration to overhaul the Northeast Asian power's foreign and defense policy, prospects for expanded security cooperation seemed even more auspicious. Perturbed by Chinese maritime assertiveness across the so-called "first island chain", extending from northern Japanese islands southward to the East and South China Sea all the way to the shores of Vietnam, the Abe administration doubled down on reducing restrictions on Tokyo's ability to project military power beyond its immediate shores, build robust security cooperation with like-minded countries, and strengthen the ability of Southeast Asian claimant states to check Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea. In Abe, Aquino easily found a likeminded leader. From 2013 to 2016, there was a rapid blossoming in Philippine–Japan security partnership, culminating in the Defense Equipment Transfer Agreement, which provides the legal framework for transfer, lease, and export of increasingly sophisticated military equipment from Japan to the Philippines. The Abe administration also offered, via grants and/or leasing arrangement, several patrol vessels

as well as a surveillance aircrafts to the Philippines. While much of initial assistance focused on enhancing domain awareness and basic capacity of the Philippine Coast Guard, the Aquino administration considered the purchase of more high-profile military hardware such as submarines. Along with America, Japan also became among the most enthusiastic advocates of the Philippines' arbitration case against China (Heydarian 2016). Under Aquino's watch, the Philippines suffered significant setbacks in the South China Sea. Beginning in December 2013, China began a massive reclamation activity across the Spratly chain of islands, rapidly building a vast network of civilian and military facilities across the disputed land features in the area. Low-tide elevations and rocks were transformed into full-fledged islands, hosting several kilometers-long airstrips and advanced weapon systems. Under Chinese administrative control, Filipino fishermen struggled to access fisheries resources in the vicinity of the Scarborough Shoal, never mind within the contested feature's lagoon. Due to heavy Chinese presence in the area, the Philippines also failed to convince energy companies to push ahead with exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in the Reed Bank. On the legal front, however, the Philippines managed to pull off a surprisingly clear-cut victory. After more than two years of arbitration proceedings, the Philippines won a favorable verdict both in terms of jurisdiction (of the court to rule over its case) as well as the merits of its claims against China. The arbitral tribunal, constituted under the aegis of the UNCLOS, had no jurisdiction over questions of sovereignty claims, but it exercised jurisdiction on matters relating to sovereign rights and maritime entitlements, which were the bedrock of the Philippines' memorial. In the final award, the arbitration body ruled against China's 'historic rights' doctrine, which formed the basis of its expansive claims across much of the South China Sea. According to the arbitration award, "there was no evidence that China had historically exercised exclusive control over the *waters* or their resources."[4] The award also made it clear that there were no naturally-formed islands in the Spratlys capable of generating their own EEZ. By implication, there are no overlapping EEZs between China and the Philippines, since the nearest Chinese shorelines, particularly in Hainan, were too far to project an overlapping EEZ with

[4] Ibid.

the Philippines. The arbitration body also ruled against Beijing's massive reclamation activities, since they "inflict irreparable harm to the maritime environment" and "destroy evidence of natural condition of features" in the disputed island chain. Thus, the court decided, that China's actions are "incompatible with [its] obligations" a UNCLOS signatory. Based on the Philippines' interpretation, this reinforced its claim to explore and exploit natural resources within its EEZ sans interference from China.[5] In response, China, which boycotted the whole arbitration proceedings, dismissed the award as a meaningless "worthless piece of paper" that has no bearing on its "inherent and indisputable" sovereignty in the South China Sea (Wang 2016). The award, however, provided the Philippines a unique opportunity to rally multilateral diplomatic pressure on China; call upon likeminded states to effectively enforce its relevant provisions, particularly through s-called freedom of navigation operations in the surrounding waters of artificial Chinese-built islands in the Spratlys; consider additional and supplementary arbitration cases against any Chinese actions that prevent the Philippines from exploiting resources within its EEZ (Carpio 2016); and create a "legal multiplier" by encouraging and assisting other Southeast Asian countries, particularly Vietnam, who may be interested in pursuing lawfare against China. But the arbitration award came less than two weeks after a new government, under Rodrigo Duterte, came into power. True to his campaign period statements, Duterte didn't see any reason, in the Filipino president's own words rights after his inauguration, to "flaunt" the arbitration award to "taunt" China. Instead, his government called for "restraint and sobriety" and reiterated the necessity for direct engagement and dialogue with China (Philippine Star 2016). Thus, Duterte effectively abandoned his predecessor's strategy in the South China Sea, radically redrawing the geopolitical landscape in the region.

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[5] Ibid.

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CHAPTER 4

The Interregnum

"*Politics is magic. He who knows how to summon the forces from the deep, him will they follow*"—Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Schorske 2012: 134).

Abstract The chapter looks at Duterte's brand of governance, and how it is affecting the fabric of Philippine society and existing democratic institutions. Through fear and threatening rhetoric, he disciplines the opposition, reassures the insecure sections of the society seeking law and order, and addresses criminality with tried-and-tested scorched-earth policies. Yet, Duterte's attempt to replicate his "Davao model" on the national scale has been far from successful and is fraught with risks of unintended consequences for his administration and the Philippines' democratic as well as economic wellbeing. His signature "war on drugs" campaign has—even by his own admission—fallen short of its objectives, while triggering a domestic and international backlash. The chapter is a fearless prognosis of the trajectory of Philippine society under Duterte's shadows.

Keywords War on drugs · Martial law · Elite democracy · Antonio Gramsci

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To understand Duterte's emerging foreign policy, which has jolted both allies and rivals as well as much of the Philippine public, one should analyze the intersection of five key elements. The first thing to keep in mind is that Duterte's political success has been built on a full-fledged "anti-establishment" brand of populism, which represents a wholesale,—at least in terms of style and rhetoric—rejection of the Philippine political elite and their entire policy paradigm. It is a paradoxical form of populism, since it both rejects the traditional approach of the liberal elite as well as transcends current public opinion, both of which are heavily favorable to America. In the 2013 Global Attitudes survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center, more Filipinos (85%) expressed a favorable view of America than Americans themselves (81%). Two years later, as many as 92% of Filipinos saw the global superpower in a positive light, higher than any nation on earth (Wike et al. 2015). Views within the security establishment, including the American-equipped and funded AFP, is as, if not more, skewed toward Washington and, correspondingly, skeptical of China and, to a lesser degree, Russia.[1]

In this sense, Duterte shares significant similarities with other successful strongmen such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin, who upended the politics of their respective countries by promising an alternative form of governance and political worldview under a firm and decisive style of leadership. Both Erdogan and Putin, for instance, not only rejected the domestic policies of Atatürk's and Yeltsin's heirs respectively, but also their Western-looking foreign policy. The firebrand and tough-talking mayor of Davao, who was broadly seen as the initial underdog in a contest against well-moneyed establishment candidates, managed to capture the popular imagination by skillfully tapping into deep-seated grievances among the populace. For Dutetre, the presidential election wasn't only about selecting the Philippines' next political leader, but also a referendum on the three-decades-old elite democracy, which replaced the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, but miserably failed—even during its heydays under the Benigno Aquino administration—to deliver on its fundamental promise of freedom and prosperity for the majority of the population. Duterte's brand of populism was not only a rejection of the Philippines' noninclusive democratic capitalism, but also what many

[1] Partly based on conversations with senior defense officials between 2014 and second quarter of 2017.

observers legitimately see as a highly subservient foreign policy toward America. Meanwhile, critics of Duterte's foreign policy have been dismissed as naïve warmongers or pro-American stooges by the president's well-organized propaganda machine, which is very active on social media (Williams 2017). But Duterte's ability to overhaul the Philippines' business-as-usual politics and position on the South China Sea wouldn't have been possible absent his domination, albeit tenuous and temporarily, of the political class and, to a lesser degree, state apparatus. And this brings us to the second factor, which is the "authoritarianization" of Philippine political system. Within 2 months into office, Duterte managed to score the country's highest approval (91%) rating for any incumbent president ever; build a supermajority bloc in the Philippine Congress; and gain the full-fledged support of the law enforcement agencies and, to a lesser degree, the military establishment by promising better salaries, benefits, and equipment. His grip on the judiciary is set to strengthen too, since he will be appointing most of the justices in the coming years. The rapid concentration of power in Dutetre's hands, as normal institutions of checks and balances fell into a state of hibernation, provided him a unique space to almost unilaterally refashion Philippine foreign policy (Taylor and Frantz 2016).

The third factor is the lack of clear American commitment to the Philippines in the South China Sea. Year after year, the Obama administration refused to clarify whether it would come to the Philippines' rescue in an event of conflict with China in the South China Sea[2] (Batongbacal 2014). It is true that the Philippines is the biggest recipient of American Foreign Military Financing (FMF) in the ASEAN. Strangely though, the Southeast Asian country received more FMF in 2010, a year before the announcement of the Pivot to Asia policy, than in 2015, just as the South China Sea disputes entered a dangerous phase amid massive Chinese reclamation activities in the Spratlys and the Philippines' arbitration case against Beijing gained momentum. In absolute terms, Washington has been significantly more generous, both in quantity and quality of military aid, to countries such as Egypt, which neither face a direct threat from external powers nor have a formal alliance with

[2] Corroborated by the author during his on-the-record exchanges with senior American officials, namely former Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg during the 2015 US-Taiwan-Japan Security Dialogue and US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris during the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue.

America. Meanwhile, the Philippines has been the recipient of mostly antiquated, surplus American military handouts, some of which date back to the Vietnam War era (Council on Foreign Relations 2016). While surveys consistently show that majority of Filipinos view America in a positive light (see Table 4.1), Duterte's tirades against America—particularly his direct questioning of America's reliability as an ally—seem to be resonating. In a survey conducted between December 6–11 of 2016 by Pulse Asia, a leading public opinion polling body in the Philippines, 50% of respondents were either undecided (33%) or disagreed (17%) when asked if "security/defense relations with the US have been beneficial to the Philippines." That is a remarkably high number in a country, which has had a century-old security alliance with America. Meanwhile, in both December 2016 and March 2017 surveys by Pulse Asia, only 6% of respondents identified "Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners" as top three most urgent national issues, which has to be addressed by the Duterte administration (see Table 4.2).

The implication is clear: America suffers from a credibility gap, and Duterte has exploited this with conviction and verve. The survey also shows that foreign policy issues don't significantly resonate with majority of Filipinos, giving the political leadership enough leeway to introduce policy changes without suffering outright popular backlash. Interestingly, when respondents were asked, in December 2016, whether the "Philippines should explore security/defense cooperation with China and Russia than the United States," 47% expressed support (Pulse Asia 2017). And this brings us to the fourth factor, the strategic logic of Duterte's strategic flirtation with China. In contrast to the Obama administration's strategic equivocations, China made it clear, from the very onset, that it is willing to offer the Philippines both maritime and economic concessions in exchange for Manila setting aside the arbitration issue and, if possible, downgrading ties with America. In 2016, Chinese ambassador to Manila, Zhao Jian, met Duterte more than any other foreign dignitary. During these extensive discussions, which gained pace right after Duterte's electoral victory, Beijing and Manila discussed most sensitive issues, including the South China Sea disputes. Duterte is considering a joint development agreement with China in the Scarborough Shoal and eying billions of dollars of infrastructure investments, particularly in his home island of Mindanao, which is in desperate need of development. China, under Duterte, is expected to be, in tandem with the Asian Development Bank and Japanese investors, a key

Table 4.1 Awareness and trust ratings of selected countries and international/regional organizations. December 2016 and March 2017/Philippines (in percent)

Countries/organizations		*Aware*	*Base: aware of country/organization*						
			Trust			*Distrust*			*Don't know/ refused*
			Total	*A great deal of trust*	*A fair amount of trust*	*Total*	*Not too much trust*	*No trust at all*	
United States of America (USA)	Mar 17	100	79	29	50	20	16	4	0.4
	Dec 16	100	76	24	52	23	21	2	1
Japan	Mar 17	100	75	20	54	25	21	4	0.5
	Dec 16	99	70	17	53	29	24	5	1
Australia	Mar 17	98	69	12	57	30	24	6	1
	Dec 16	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Great Britain/ United Kingdom (UK)	Mar 17	95	53	9	44	44	35	9	3
	Dec 16	93	39	5	34	55	42	13	6
Russia	Mar 17	96	42	7	35	56	36	20	2
	Dec 16	95	38	5	33	58	41	17	4
China	Mar 17	99	37	5	31	63	35	28	0.4
	Dec 16	98	38	7	30	61	39	22	1
United Nations (UN)	Mar 17	98	82	22	59	17	14	3	1
	Dec 16	98	74	18	56	25	21	3	1
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Mar 17	97	81	22	59	19	16	3	1
	Dec 16	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Source Pulse Asia

Table 4.2 Most urgent national concerns. December 2016 and March 2017/ Philippines (multiple response allowed/in percent)

National concerns	*Dec 16*	*Mar 17*	*Change**
Improving/Increasing the pay of workers	45	43	−2
Controlling inflation	34	41	+7
Creating more jobs	31	39	+8
Fighting graft and corruption in government	31	31	0
Fighting criminality	33	28	−5
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	33	27	−6
Increasing peace in the country	23	18	−5
Enforcing the law on all, whether influential or ordinary people	70	16	−1
Stopping the destruction and abuse of our environment	11	15	+4
Controlling fast population growth	8	11	+3
Reducing the amount of taxes paid	12	11	−1
Protecting the welfare of OFWs	10	8	−2
Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners	6	6	0
Preparing to face any kind of terrorism	4	3	−1
Changing the constitution	4	3	−1

Source Pulse Asia

player in developing Mindanao's railway and basic infrastructure.[3] The Asian powerhouse also made the sticks clear: The Philippines risks military confrontation, diplomatic isolation, and significant foregone investment opportunities if it refuses to change gear in the South China Sea.[4] In fact, Duterte has met the Chinese ambassador in Manila more than any other diplomat during his tenure, so far.[5] Senior Western diplomats often quip that their Chinese counterpart has become a de facto adviser to the new Filipino president.[6] Some have described the Chinese envoy, quite derisively, as "the whisperer", given his unusual proximity to the Filipino president. In disputed areas, China could make life

[3] Based on conversations with industry insiders and government officials in first quarter of 2017.

[4] This part is based on discussions with well-informed diplomats and journalists.

[5] Partly based also on conversations with Chinese diplomats and experts from July to December 2016.

[6] Based on coversations with senior Western diplomats, including Ambassadors, in first quarter of 2017.

hard for the Philippines by imposing an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), pushing ahead with the establishment of military facilities on the Scarborough Shoal, and step up military and paramilitary deployments into Philippine waters. In fact, shortly after the arbitration award was announced, China deployed fighter jets and a long-range bomber to the Scarborough and simultaneously increased the number of military and quasi-civilian vessels in the area (Akita 2016; Gady 2016).

Lastly, it is important to take into account Duterte's "personalization" of foreign policy. Not only he has strengthened his grip on the state apparatus, but he has also injected more of his own personal emotions into the policy-making process as well as diplomatic pronouncements. As studies show, the emergence of such Sultanistic administrations is usually accompanied by wild swings, often both in rhetoric and susbtance, in foreign policy, as has been observed in the case of Turkey (under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) and Russia (under Vladimir Putin) (Taylor et al. 2016). His tirades against America, for instance, are largely driven by his personal antipathy toward America, which stretches back to his years as mayor of Davao (Todesillas 2016; Moss 2016). These historical wounds were rekindled when America began to criticize Dutetre's signature policy, the campaign against drugs, in his first month in office. Meanwhile, China has consistently expressed its support for Duterte's war on drugs and has offered to help in terms of logistics, equipment, criminal investigations, presidential security, and the establishment of rehabilitation center for drug users. Like a small-town mayor perched comfortably among familiar folks, Duterte often cites his own experiences, his personal preferences, and his emotions when discussing foreign affairs. His foreign policy-related discussions are more sprinkled with "I, me, and my" than any of his predecessors. He has often cited his bitter experiences with foreign powers, particularly during the Meiring incident or the alleged visa rejection and how he felt insulted and disrespected by American officials (see Chap. 3). In contrast, he has often emphasized how politely or generously he has been treated by Japan or China, two countries that seem to be close to his heart. The degree of Duterte's personalization of Philippine foreign policy is unprecedented, raising deep uncertainties over the trajectory of Manila's relations with the outside world. As one Chinese scholar bluntly shared his reservations: "[Duterte] still could change his words in the future…in the future nothing is certain [with him]" (Phillips 2016).

To be fair, there is a significant gap between Duterte's often-hyperbolic rhetoric, on one hand, and the more subdued policy of his administration, on the other. This is largely due to the fact that while Duterte

retains high popularity ratings and continues to enjoy firm grip over the other branches of the government, he has had to take into consideration the views of the powerful defense establishment, which toppled two presidents, Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada, in the past three decades. More conventional-thinking members of the security establishment, including former president Fidel Ramos (Duterte's senior adviser and a West Point Alumnus) and Secretary of Defense Delfin Lorenzana (former Veterans Affairs attaché at Philippine Embassy in Washington), have conscientiously sought to make sure Duterte's mouth isn't necessarily the policy of the state. The military brass, which is largely American-trained and equipped, consistently lobbies for maintenance of the foundation of existing security ties with Washington. No matter how popular Duterte is, ignoring the views of the armed forces is just one step too far. At one point, he half-jokingly suggested that the "military would oust me" if he were to make too many concessions to communist rebels during peace negotiations.

On multiple occasions, Ramos, who played a crucial role in assuage pre-election concerns among military brass about Duterte's perceived communist sympathies, openly expressed his opposition to any move that undermines the Philippine-US military alliance. In October, shortly after Duterte's visit to China, Ramos wrote in his *Manila Bulletin* column: "Are we throwing away decades of military partnership, tactical proficiency, compatible weaponry, predictable logistics and soldier-to-soldier camaraderie [with America], just like that?" (Ramos 2016). Since then, Ramos has consistently prodded Duterte, who during his inauguration address personally thanked the former president for his electoral victory, to adopt an "interdependent" foreign policy, which doesn't undermine traditional ties amid improved diplomatic relations with China and Russia. Cognizant of Ramos' continued influence among the influential military top-brass, *Malacanang* praised Ramos as "a senior statesman," who is "acting in the sense of like a father" and reassured the former president that Duterte will take his "opinion and he has concerns especially regarding foreign relations" into consideration (Kabiling 2016). Duterte's defense secretary, Lorenzana, who said the president needs to see the "real picture" before making any dramatic change in Philippine foreign policy, more subtly echoed Ramos' criticisms shortly after. And unlike Duterte, who has often portrayed China as a friendly neighbor and a partner for national development, Lorenzana has consistently and vocally raised concerns about China's activities in the South China Sea to the detriment of his country

(Heydarian 2017b). Many military officers, who spoke on the condition of anonymity with the media, were even more apoplectic, with one lamenting Duterte's "dangerous liaison" with China, which he, along with his colleagues, found "deeply troubling." (Acosta 2016; Blake and Calonzo 2016).

In short, insiders with more orthodox strategic thinking have acted as filters—making sure Duterte's often-excessive rhetoric isn't translated into final policy. And they made their opposition crystal clear by either openly or anonymously expressing their concerns with any direct assault on foundations of Philippine-American foreign policy (Heydarian 2017b).

Early in his office, from July 21 to August 12, Duterte visited as many 14 military camps[7] in less than a month. The bulk of his high-profile speeches, including his threat to declare Martial Law if the judiciary intervened in his war on drugs (see pages 15–16) was made before the military. During these visits, Duterte consistently promised the military brass that he will double their salaries, expand their healthcare facilities and welfare benefits, take care of their families, and even personally tended to injured soldiers under heavy media coverage (Ranada 2016a). The unmistakable charm offensive underscores how much importance Duterte attaches to civil-military relations and how much respect he accords to the security establishment. Together with the help of insiders such as Ramos, Duterte has been determined to dispel preconceived notions among the security establishments that he is a communist sympathizer and/or a pro-China president. On a whole range of critical issues, from relations with Beijing and

[7]Specifically, he visited the following camps respectively: 104th Infantry Battalion in Isabela City, Basilan (July 21); Western Mindanao Command headquarters in Zamboanga City (July 21); Camp Siongco in Awang Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao (July 22 and August 18); Fort Magsaysay in Palayan City, Nueva Ecija (July 26); Camp Guillermo Nakar in Lucena City, Quezon (July 28); 60th Infantry Battalion headquarters in Asuncion, Davao del Norte (July 29); Camp Victoriano Luna or AFP Medical Center in Quezon City (August 2); Camp General Macario Peralta in Jamindan, Capiz (August 5); Camp Panacan, Davao City (August 6); Camp Lapu-Labu in Cebu City (August 5); Camp Lukban in Catbalogan, Samar (August 8); Camp Edilberto Evangelista in Cagayan de Oro City (August 9); Camp Major Cesar Sang-an (1st Infantry Division or Tabak Division) in Labangan, Zamboanga del Sur (August 10); Camp Teodulfo Bautista in Jolo, Sulu (August 12).

Washington to the necessity for proclaiming Martial Law in light of threats of terror, the top brass has resisted any radical reconfiguration of the status quo. While far from monolithic, leading members of the defense establishment view China as a key external security threat, communist rebels as an implacable domestic security threat, and America as an indispensable partner as well as an insurance policy against both domestic and external security challenges. (Heydarian 2017c).

Opposition from without, particularly the business sector, members of former administrations, and the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, presented an additional layer of constraint on Duterte's pivot away from the US and toward China. The (compromise) product is a perceptible recalibration, rather than revolution, in terms of Philippine foreign policy toward America and China—a fluid strategic shift that can move in either direction depending on developments at home, specifically Dutetre's political capital, and abroad, specifically the matrix of carrots and sticks provided by great powers. In short, Philippine foreign policy will be based on a transactional logic and strategic opportunism, rather than tradition and doctrine. To be fair, this in itself is a radical, if not revolutionary, break from the past, since none of Duterte's predecessors, including Arroyo, ever dared to openly treat America as just one among many potential partners depending on what serves the Philippines' national interest, from the perspective of the incumbent. According to the Philippine Ambassador to China, Chito Santa Romana,[8] the Duterte *administration's* foreign policy is based on a pragmatic assessment of the country's national interests within the existing region order, rather than changing one strategic patron for the other. The new foreign policy paradigm, the Filipino diplomat explains, is based on the following pillars:

> There are several key pillars of [the new] diplomatic strategy: improving relations with China and Russia; moving away from the country's tight alignment with the US; and strengthening ties with ASEAN, Japan and other neighboring countries. However, this strategic shift does not mean that the Philippines will abandon its treaty alliance with the US or cut off its historic, cultural and economic ties with the US, nor does it mean that it will form a military alliance with China or Russia. Instead, the Philippines

[8] Interview with the author, January 22, 2017.

> will mainly focus on promoting political relations and economic partnership with China and Russia while exploring limited forms of military cooperation. Under this new approach, economics, trade and commerce–and not territorial and maritime disputes–will be the key driver of Philippines-China relations. The disputes will still be subject to negotiations but they will not be at the front and center of bilateral relations [with China], nor will they [serve as] an obstacle to the improvement of bilateral ties.

As Santa Romana, a veteran Beijing-based journalist who worked for leading American news networks, explains: "The overall goal of the Duterte foreign policy is to promote the Philippines' interests by reducing the country's historic dependence on the US, seeking a more balanced relationship with all the major powers, including the US, China, Russia, Japan and India, and promoting ASEAN centrality." As of this writing, security agreements with America continue to be respected. Deployment of American Special Forces to Mindanao has also gone per routine. Contrary to Dutere's radical pronouncements, there hasn't been, so far, any "separation" or rupture in bilateral security relations between the two treaty allies. But it is important to note that Dutetre's threats aren't' just pure bluster, since his administration has, despite swift opposition from within and without, downgraded relations with America. In basic qualitative terms, relations with America are more transactional than subservient—ending the century-old presidential tradition of internalized deference to Washington. Citing human rights concerns over Duterte's war on drugs, the Obama administration, in its twilight months, decided to withhold the shipment of 26,000 assault rifles, under a law-enforcement aid package, to the Philippine National Police (PNP). Otherwise, the Obama administration would have run the risk of directly violating the Leahy Law, which expressly bars the State and Defense departments from supplying weapons to any allies and partners, which may or have engaged in gross human rights violations. In a thinly disguised shot across the bow, Washington also postponed the renewal of the $400 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) aid package to the Philippines. The MCC is awarded to partner nations, which have exhibited their commitment to good governance and democratic reform, as was perceived to be the case during the Aquino administration. The Dutetre administration has responded in kind, scaling back military cooperation with America.

For instance, Washington, in the meantime, can't use Philippine bases to launch Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) against Chinese excessive maritime claims in the South China Sea. There won't also be any joint patrols in disputed waters as previously planned. The Duterte administration also canceled two major joint military exercises, the Cooperation float Readiness and Training Exercise (Carat) and the US-Philippine Amphibious Landing Exercise (PHIBLEX), while equivocating on the fate of the *Balikatan* exercises, which will likely be downgraded in terms of number of soldiers, weapons, and exercise involved and/or relocated away from the South China Sea (Gomez 2016). Duterte's decision to scale back military cooperation with Washington in the South China Sea was not only driven by growing diplomatic tensions with the Obama administration, but also a reflection of his rapprochement with China, which seeks reduced American military footprint in the contested area.

It is possible that this is simply part of an emerging "grand bargain" between China and the Philippines. The Obama administration's open criticism of Duterte's policies provided the latter the pretext to accelerate his detente with China. On its part, the Duterte administration is dispensing with major bilateral military exercises with the US, which were aimed at enhancing interoperability in an event of joint military operations against China in the South China Sea. Duterte has also made it clear that American access to Philippine bases will remain under strict conditions.[9] In exchange, China is expected to draw down its harassment of Philippine supply lines and reconnaissance activities in the South China Sea, grant access to Filipino fishermen in the Scarborough Shoal, and pour in major investments into the Southeast Asian country.

The future of the Philippines' China policy, however, isn't clear. So far, Manila and Beijing have struggled to find a common ground on the Scarborough Shoal, despite repeated talks of a joint development agreement, which could raise both political (due to the public opposition) and legal (due to constitutional constraints) controversies. It also remains to be seen whether China will actually translate its economic pledges into tangible and large-scale investments in the Philippines. As Jay

[9] The details on which specific joint military exercises will be canceled are still unclear.

Batongbacal,[10] a leading Filipino maritime law expert, laments, "Like an opportunity lost or a promise left unfulfilled. I would characterize [the current] foreign policy as very soft on the assertion of Philippine rights in the South China Sea, and even quite deferential to China, which entails unnecessarily high risks by depending almost completely on China's good will." Duterte's overtures toward China, Batongbacal explains, "has not diminished the real problem, which is China's expansion of all its activities into Philippines' EEZ, creating major negative impact such as overfishing, loss of coral habitat, degradation of marine environment, and a general diminution of [Philippines'] exclusive control and loss of security." Duterte's decision to set aside the arbitration award in its public pronouncements, he argues, also entails risks, since it leads to the "diminution of [Philippines' available strategic] options and [its] ability to substantially influence or create a more favorable outcome of any future settlement of its disputes with China." Batongbacal's reservations are widely shared among members of the security establishment, including some who have supported Duterte's diplomatic engagement with China.[11] If the two parties fail to find a common ground in the disputed waters in a year or two, it is highly likely that the recent strategic flirtation will lose steam, especially if Manila's relations with America begin to recover from recent dust ups. Not to mention, Japan, a key American ally, has also been engaged in a proactive diplomatic charm offensive vis-à-vis Dutetre, with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe offering multi-billion-dollar aid and investment packages in order to match any offer of economic incentives by China. Under the Abe administration, Japan has sought to act as a middleman, facilitating a recovery of bilateral relations between Washington and Manila. For Japanese officials, it is important to leverage longstanding cordial relations between Japan and Duterte in order to ensure that the Philippines remains as a pillar of the current US-led regional security architecture.[12] Japan, which maintains a consulate in Davao, has been a key partner in infrastructure

[10] Interview with author, February 28, 2017.

[11] Based on conversations with former and current senior officials and members of the security establishemnt, who spoke on the condition of anonymity with the author between July 2017 and February 2017.

[12] Based on discussions with senior Japanese officials at the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's office (i.e., National Security Cabinet), Foreign Ministry, and Defense Ministry throughout the first week of February 2017.

development in Duterte's hometown, while Japanese investors have been among the biggest business players in the southern commercial hub. On a national level, Japan has been the leading trade and investment partner of the Philippines and, by far, the largest source of official development assistance. Duterte himself has repeatedly recognized the depth of Philippine-Japanese economic entwinement. Shortly ahead of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visit to Manila, Duterte declared in a ceremony in Malacanang: "Tonight, let me reiterate that Japan is a friend closer than a brother. That means Japan is a friend unlike any other. Ours is a special friendship whose value is beyond any measure." During his October visit to Tokyo, just a few days after his state visit to China, Duterte said with conviction: "Japan has really been our biggest helper." Cognizant of the "personalistic" nature of Philippine foreign policy, Japan has adopted cutting-edge personal diplomacy, with Abe becoming the first foreign leader to visit the Philippines under Duterte. Japan has offered large-scale infrastructure investments in Mindanao and went even so far as expressing support, in principle at least, for Dutetre's controversial war on drugs, which has come under heavy criticism by almost all Western nations. During Abe's visit in January 2017 to the Philippines, Japan also offered help in terms of drug rehabilitation, having earlier dispatched a group of experts to the Philippines for a 5-day study in December. In fact, Abe, who was accompanied by his wife, went so far as having breakfast in Duterte's home in Davao, with the Filipino leader even inviting him for an unconventional photo-op in his bedroom. Any proper analysis of Duterte's foreign policy can't ignore how Japan has emerged as a fulcrum state, playing a critical role in shaping the Philippines' relations with the two superpowers (Heydarian 2017a). So far, there is clear indication that Duterte looks forward to a strategic reset with Trump administration. Though initially dismissive of Trump as a "bigot," Duterte began to sing to a different tune right after Trump's surprising election victory. Once it became clear that Trump will be the next American president, Duterte, in an uncharacteristically diplomatic fashion, expressed his best wishes ("*Mabuhay Ka*") to Obama's successor and reassuringly, although tinged with humor, said that he doesn't "want to fight [with America] because Trump is there." On multiple occasions, Duterte has described Trump as a kindred spirit, a fellow anti-establishment candidate bent on overhauling a broken system with decisive brand of leadership and orthodox rhetoric. So far, there are least three reasons why Manila

seems more optimistic about the direction of relations with America. First, Duterte expects his new American counterpart to take a softer approach on human rights and democracy promotion issues. Trump's Asia advisers have gone as far as calling for a "pragmatic" engagement and broader cooperation with the military junta in Thailand, the other US treaty ally in the region that has recently faced criticism from Washington. The Duterte administration was particularly pleased when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson refused to criticize the war on drugs in the Philippines during his confirmation hearing at the US Senate. As Secretary of State, Tillerson, a former ExxonMobil executive known for his close ties with Russia's Putin, made the unprecedented decision to skip the customary State Department briefing on human rights situation around the world (Schwartz 2017). Meanwhile President Trump, in his inaugural speech, promised, "not [to] seek to impose [American] way of life on anyone." During their second phone conversation in April, which the Trump administration described as "very friendly," Trump seemed sympathetic to Duterte's war on drugs and, to the chagrin of some senior American officials, invited the Filipino president for a state visit to the White House (Landler 2017). Duterte and Trump are expected to, among other opportunities, also meet on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit (November, 2017) in Manila. The second reason for Dutetre's optimism is the expectation that the Trump administration will take a tougher, Reagan-esque "peace through strength" approach in the South China Sea. For Manila, which continues to be worried about Chinese intentions in the area, this means it could outsource to or rely on America's containment of Beijing's maritime ambitions. Duterte himself has made it clear that he will adopt a more confrontational approach toward China if he discovers "minerals [within Philippine EEZ] are already being siphoned" by Beijing. The Duterte administration expressed similar concerns during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Boracay, the Philippines, where it criticized rapid militarization of the disputes in the South China Sea. In particular, Manila has been concerned about the reported deployment of Chinese advanced weapon systems to the Spratlys and the Paracels. Of biggest concern is potential Chinese reclamation on the Scarborough Shoal, which, if ever confirmed, would, in the words of former Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay, be a "game-changer" that could derail a rapprochement in bilateral relations (Esmaquel II 2016; Gotinga). Though a more robust American military pushback

against China runs the risk of escalation, it nonetheless could address lingering concerns in Manila over the reliability of Washington as an ally in the South China Sea disputes. Counter-terrorism concerns, particular in Mindanao, are also expected to play a key role in rejuvenating bilateral military ties. In an April speech, just weeks before a major terrorist attack in the Muslim-majority city of Marawi, Duterte underscored how shared concerns over the "menace of terrorism, violent extremism and transnational crimes such as the illegal drug trade" would continue to undergird bilateral Philippine-American security cooperation (Mendez 2016). Unlike Moscow and Beijing, Washington has enjoyed significant access to Philippine military bases and a long history of interoperability with Filipino soldiers, thanks to a package of existing defense agreements, namely the Mutual Defense Treaty, Visiting Forces Agreement, and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Moreover, the US also has a counter-terrorism edge in terms of equipment, high-grade intelligence, and experience. Any major security crisis in Mindanao is bound to bring the two allies closer together. Third, the Duterte administration is eager to rebuild frayed communications channels with Washington. It dispatched Jose Antonio, a former Trump business associate and owner of the Trump Tower in Manila, as a special envoy to the Philippine mission in Washington, DC. This way, Manila hopes to leverage Antonio's business ties to the Trump family to build a direct line to the White House. Given concerns over Trump's minimal regard for conflict of interest, this was a politically astute decision by Duterte. The new American Ambassador to Manila, Sung Kim, could also play a key role in reviving bilateral ties. A Korean-born lawyer, formerly involved in boiler room negotiations with North Korea, the new American envoy has gradually managed to build less hostile and more cordial communications channels with *Malacanang*.[13] Above all, the fundamental logic of the Philippine-American military alliance has reasserted itself in recent months. Since Trump's inauguration, Duterte has given the go-ahead signal for the implementation of the EDCA, an executive agreement that is subject to the prerogative of the sitting president, while welcoming expanded American FMF, almost doubled on a year-to-year basis. With the renewed outbreak of hostilities

[13] Partly based on discussions with Ambassador Sung Kim during a visit to his residence in February 16, 2017.

between the AFP and communist rebels and growing concerns over infiltration of transnational extremist groups, particularly the so-called Islamic State (IS) into Mindanao, the two allies are bulking up their counter-terror and counter-insurgency cooperation. America is still the biggest source of weapons, training, intelligence, and logistical support for the Philippines. For the Philippine military, America is a truly indispensable ally, even if Duterte has considered joint military exercises, equipment purchase, training, and intelligence cooperation with Russia and China. Not to mention, there are concerns over whether the heavily American oriented Philippine military can significantly incorporate alternative weapons system from the East (Torbati 2016).

Down the road, if the Philippines' maritime and domestic security concerns deepen, there is a distinct possibility that the Filipino president will swing in the opposite direction away from China and back to America. In short, the downgrade of security relations with America is reversible. As Duterte said ahead of his October trip to China:

> We can only take so much…cannot be slapped every day with (those) kinds of words [from China]. I hope China would realize that we went out of our way; we walked the extra mile to be conscious about this thing that we are not supposed to ignite. What I just want to know [is] if there is additional construction going on especially in the area of [Scarborough Shoal]. Because if it gets bigger and bigger and bigger, as much as I'd like to avoid trouble now…I'd like [the Chinese] ambassador to just answer me one question if there are any ongoing construction or expansion in the South China Sea; and whether or not, we can still have the fishing rights which is really the entitlement of our country having won the arbitration proceedings. (Jimenez 2016)

At this point, however, the Duterte administration is increasingly following in the footsteps of almost all ASEAN countries, which have adopted an equi-balancing strategy toward the two great powers. Duterte's ability to radically reshape the Philippine foreign policy, particularly, on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea or/and relations with superpowers, is highly contingent on his popularity at home, his relations with the top military brass and broader defense establishment, as well as the coherence of the (American-leaning) political opposition. He may be the most powerful Filipino president in recent memory, but his grip on the state apparatus is far from unshakable. Duterte doesn't have the ability

to unilaterally dictate Philippine foreign policy in ways that a security establishment insider like Putin was able to in the case of Russia (Gessen 2013). Given the fluidity of Philippine politics, Duterte may find himself in a radically different political position in a year or so.

Fear and Trembling

"War is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale…nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means," Carl von Clausewitz (in Lindell 2009) once famously wrote, "For political aims are the end and war is the means, and the means can never be conceived without the end." The aim of war, Clausewitz wrote, is to "compel [an] opponent to fulfill our will." [Ibid.] As far as Duterte is concerned, his controversial war on drugs is nothing but a continuation of his presidential campaign and nationalization of his notorious "Davao model" of law enforcement, which has been consistently criticized by human rights groups over the past decades. The political goal, it seems, is the realization of Duterte's electoral promises, namely the establishment of a semblance of law and order on Philippine streets and, ultimately, the vindication of his philosophy of governance, which largely contradicts the Philippines' foundational principles of human rights and due process.

"When I become president, I'll order the police and the military to find [criminals and drug pushers] and kill them," declared Duterte before a cheering crowd in the final weeks of his presidential campaign. "The funeral parlors will be packed… I'll supply the dead bodies," (Rodis 2016). It didn't take long for those who dismissed his macabre warnings as supposedly electioneering chutzpah to painfully realize that Duterte should, at least in terms of his key priorities, be taken both literally and seriously. In this case, Duterte meant what he exactly said. Early in his presidential campaign, Duterte didn't shy away from raising the stakes and making the war on drugs his raison d'être if and when elected to the highest office, "If I succeed [in stamping out the drug problem in six months] perhaps that would be my greatest contribution to the country, but if I fail, kill me." Having vowed to suppress proliferation of illegal drugs and crime in his first 6 months in office, Duterte was under tremendous public pressure to swiftly deliver (Ramirez 2016). His election victory was immediately followed by high-to-excessive levels of public expectation that the new president, who saw his trust rating experiencing a dramatic uptick right after assuming office, will indeed deliver

on his key campaign promises. Instead of trying to moderate public expectations, Duterte doubled down on his election promise during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA): "We will not stop until the last drug lord … and the last pusher have surrendered or are put either behind bars or below the ground, if they so wish." (Lopez 2016).

In retrospect, it is almost impossible to imagine that Duterte would have *not* acted upon his dire warnings of an aggressive crackdown against suspected criminals, especially drug pushers (Berehulak 2016). In his first 7 months in office, a staggering 1000 suspected drug users or/and pushers have reportedly died either at the hands of law enforcement officers, who claimed to have acted in self-defense, or vigilante groups, who have taken the law into their own hands (Evangelista 2017). Leading members of the political opposition such as Leila De Lima, a neophyte senator and former secretary of justice and head of commission on human rights, have accused the Duterte administration of unleashing so-called Davao-style death squads against suspected drug users and pushers. Several reporters, mostly from the international news media, as well as, international human rights groups have similarly claimed alleged state support for vigilante killings (Agence France Presse 2017a, b; Lamb 2016; Human Rights Watch 2017) In its annual report, Amnesty International blamed Duterte, along with Trump and other populist leaders in Turkey (Erdogan) and Hungary (Viktor Orban), for engaging in "divisive fear-mongering" and "wielding a toxic agenda that hounds, scapegoats and dehumanizes entire groups of people." In the case of the Philippines, the "other" are the suspected criminals and drug pushers/users (Mackintosh 2017). As a result, Duterte is the first Filipino president to face the prospect of prosecution by international courts, particularly under the aegis of the International Criminal Court (Caparas 2017). As early as October, the ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda expressed how "deeply concerned" he is with developments in the Philippines, warning "any person in the Philippines who incites or engages in acts of mass violence including by ordering, requesting, encouraging or contributing, in any other manner, to the commission of crimes within the jurisdiction of the ICC is potentially liable to prosecution before the Court." He made it clear that his office "will be closely following developments in the Philippines in the weeks to come and record any instance of incitement or resort to violence with a view to assessing whether a preliminary examination into the situation of the Philippines needs to be opened." (International Criminal Court 2016).

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has called for "[c]redible and independent investigations" to ascertain culpability for "the shocking number of killings that have occurred across the country since Mr. Duterte became president." (UN News Center 2016). The Human Rights Watch has warned about the negative impact on foreign aid assistance to the Philippines amid deepening concerns over alleged human rights violations (Kine 2016).

But the Philippine government and its supporters have categorically denied any wrongdoing, dismissing accusations of widespread human rights violation as biased, based on questionable evidence, and/or politically motivated. Senior officials don't seem to be worried about an impending filing of charges and prosecution of the Duterte administration under the ICC.[14] Despite repeated requests, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings Agnes Callamard has repeatedly failed to gain access on the ground to investigate the human rights situation in the Philippines. While agreeing in principle, the Duterte administration has placed preconditions that were not mutually acceptable (Viray 2016). Meanwhile, investigations by the Senate, which is dominated by Duterte's allies, yielded no conclusive verdict vis-à-vis the question of whether the president has ever been involved in any policy that deliberately circumvents human rights and due process (Santos 2016). A subsequent impeachment complaint in 2017, filed by opposition members, was also swiftly dismissed in the House of Representatives, where Duterte enjoys even a stronger majority. Shortly after, Senator Antonio Trillanes and Congressman Gary Alejano, both former members of the military, filed a supplemental communication[15] with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague as a potential prelude to full prosecution of the president. Some legal experts have argued that the ICC, based on the "principle of complementarity," could eventually step in if and when it deems national institutions (e.g., Ombudsman office, Congress, Commission on Human Rights) are unable or/and unwilling to properly investigate human rights-related complaints against Duterte (La Viña 2017). Other experts, however, contend that Duterte's opponents face

[14] Partly based on conversations with Philippine Ambassador to the United Nations, Lourdes O. Yparraguirre, November 9, 2016.

[15] Few months earlier, Jude Sabio, a human rights lawyer, filed a similar case with the ICC, accusing Duterte of committing crimes against humanity. A "communication" before the ICC is a preliminary move before an actual complaint.

an uphill battle in proving that the national institutions are unwilling or/and unable to properly investigate the matter (Marañon 2017).

By all measures, Duterte, so far, seems secure at home, having established firm grip over the political establishment. Even the historically outspoken and independent judiciary has demurred from directly confronting the president. In his first 3 months in office, Duterte released several lists containing the names of high-level government officials, including members of the legislature and judiciary. At first, the Supreme Court tried to put on some resistance. When seven trial court judges appeared on Duterte's drug list, Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno tried to draw a line, demanding observance of due process and specifically raised concerns over how the accused "judges may have been rendered vulnerable and veritable targets for any of those persons and groups who may consider judges as acceptable collateral damage in the war on drugs." (Torres 2016). But the tough-talking president immediately struck back, declaring his intention to defy any intervention by the highest court. Duterte even warned the head of the judiciary branch that he "will order everybody in the executive department not to honor [the Supreme Court]" and will even "declare martial law" if necessary in order to stop the scourge of drugs in the country (Ranada 2016b).

At the heart of Duterte's defiance was a simple argument, which resonated with many Filipinos: The existing criminal justice system is too slow and ineffective to be respected and relied upon. In a classic exercise of "penal populism,"[16] he presented himself as the sole guardian of the republic, the one man that everyone can rely on to get the "bad guys," no matter what it takes, including circumventing standard operating procedures of law. In a Carl Schmittean fashion, Duterte believes that, as a president, he has the prerogative of declaring a "state of exception" in defiance of existing in his war against drugs. Duterte's warning proved effective, forcing the head of the judiciary into "dignified silence." With one speech, delivered before the Philippine military, Duterte effectively extinguished, at least for the moment, the last pillar of the principle of checks and balances in the country. More curiously, to begin with, the Supreme Court criticized Duterte and demanded warrant of

[16]See for instance Pratt, John and Miao, Michelle, Penal Populism: The End of Reason (January 23, 2017). The Chinese University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper No. 2017-02. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2903819.

arrests only when the latter began pursuing members of the judiciary suspected of involvement in drug trafficking. But the highest court was largely mum when Duterte's drugs list involved officials and citizens, who didn't belong to the judiciary. By law, Duterte, as the president of the Philippines, enjoys immunity from prosecution until he relinquishes office, either through impeachment or conclusion of his constitutionally mandated term. And while in office, he has promised to provide maximum protection for law enforcement officers against prosecution. Fresh into office, Duterte reassuring told members of the Philippine National Police: "Do your duty, and if in the process you kill one thousand persons because you were doing your duty, I will protect you. And if they try to impeach me, I will hurry the process and we will go out of the service together." With a sentimental touch, he declared, "do your duty, [and] I will die for you." (Mendez 2016) With Duterte approaching his first year in office, not a single law enforcer or/and vigilante has been held accountable for the myriad of deaths supposedly under investigation, even if as early as August, PNP chief Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa, Dutetre's trusted police chief from his days in Davao, has promised that he "will not allow vigilante killings of illegal drug or crime suspects, and their unjust killing during police operations." (Gamil 2016).

Critics have blamed Duterte for creating an unprecedented atmosphere of impunity, which has encouraged a spree of what Panfilo Lacson, a senator and former PNP chief, described as "a clear case of extrajudicial killing" (EJK) across the nation (Quismundo 2016). There are also growing concerns over the impact of Duterte's scorched-earth approach on the country's fragile institutions, particularly the judiciary, which is in desperate need of manpower and capacity building. As Reuben James Barrete,[17] a human rights advocate put it, "The greatest threat to Philippine democracy next to the state's negligence of addressing human rights abuses is the people's increasing acceptance that it is permissible to take away those rights, and the lack of collective mass resistance to claim those inalienable rights." To be fair, under Duterte, there has been an increase in the budget of both the law enforcement agencies (24.6%) as well as the judiciary (21.5%). But this doesn't go nearly far enough. The judiciary's share of the total national budget increased from a paltry 0.78% to only 0.97%. In absolute terms, the total budget

[17] Interview with author, February 20, 2017.

of the judiciary amounted to only $698.18 million, about a quarter of the PNP's budget ($2.37 billion). Basic data shows that the Philippine criminal justice system is in dire need of investment. There is only one court per 50,000 individuals or around 2000 courts for a nation of 100 million individuals; lower courts grapple with an average of 4000 cases daily; a single judge is responsible for an average of 644 cases per year. The penitentiary system is equally overburdened. On average, prisons struggle with an overcapacity rate of 380%, with some reaching an overcapacity rate of up to 2000%. With pretrial detainees constituting at least 64% of the prison population, the Philippines has the second worst rate of pretrial incarceration in entire Asia (Abadines 2017). The implication is clear: the ineffectiveness of the existing criminal justice system isn't a byproduct of due process and human rights, but basic lack of state investment. Worryingly, however, Duterte's frontal criticism of the criminal justice system could undermine confidence in an already-fragile, low-capacity institution, which struggled to protect the basic rights of Filipino citizens.

There are also questions about the basis of Duterte's claims about the enormity of the drug problem as well as his notorious drug list. Eight months into office, the government hasn't ascertained, which intelligence agencies have helped the president assemble the list of suspected "big fish" drug traffickers within the government. As one *New York Times* reporter wondered, how people "ended up on the list, or even who exactly was on it, [is] a mystery…How you got off the list [is] even more mysterious." (Symmes 2017). It is not clear whether these are based on collation and triangulation of individual reports from varying state agencies and foreign partners. Back in Davao, where he used to assemble similar lists and often announce them on the air, Duterte reportedly relied on a triangulated compilation of intelligence from local government and barangay officials, the military, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, and Criminal Investigation and Detection Group. The other unexplained factor is the basis of Duterte's claims when it comes to the gravity of the drug problem in the Philippines. He has often warned about the emergence of a narco-state in Southeast country, similar to how countries like Mexico began to fall under the spell of major drug syndicates in the past decades. Duterte has often warned that there are as many as four million drug users in the country, who will "contaminate another 10 million" before

his term ends. At one point, the event went so far as comparing himself to Hitler, threatening to kill millions of drug users as a form of national cleansing.[18] But according to the Dangerous Drugs Board (DBB), a drugs-focused policy-making body under the Office of the President, the number is closer to 1.7 million. With a drug prevalence rate of between 1.7 and 2.3%, compared to a global average of 5.2%, the Philippines doesn't seem to face an existential crisis of turning into a narco-state. According to the UNODC data, the prevalence of amphetamine use in the Philippines (2.35%) is almost on par with US (2.2%), but significantly lower than Australia (2.9%). When it comes to illicit opioid use, the prevalence rate in the Philippines (0.05%) pales in comparison to US (5.41%) and Australia (3.30%). The rate of cocaine use in the Philippines (0.03%) is similarly dismal compared to developed countries such as US (2.1%), UK (2.4%), and Australia (2.1%). By international comparison, crime rates in the Philippines are also nowhere near apocalyptic. In 2014, the Philippines, with a population of 98 million people, registered a lower number (232,685) of crimes involving physical injury than the UK (375,000), which has a population of 64 million people. The same year, the Philippines reported 10,294 cases of rape, compared to 12,157 in France and 30,000 in the UK. In Sweden, with a population of 9.5 million, the number was 6294. The number of reported robbery (52,798) was almost identical to that of Costa Rica, which has a population of 4.7 million people, roughly half of that of Metro-Manila. In terms of gun ownership, the Philippines is ranked 105th in the world, with 4.7 guns per 100,000 people. It is in terms of homicide rates (9 per 100,000), which is more than twice that of the USA (four per 100,000), where the Philippines seems to rank slightly higher in the world and on a par with Russia. According to the PNP data, an average of 1202 individuals were murdered in the years between 2010 and 2015. In recent months, that has been reportedly the average on a monthly basis (Iyengar 2016; Diola 2016; Philippine Star 2016).

The above data, however, misses a number of important points. First of all, they ignore the possibility that there tends to be a lower rate of crime and drug use report in conservative countries like the Philippines,

[18] After facing global condemnation, including by the iinternational Jewish community, and fierce criticism among his own friends, Duterte made an explicit apolgy statement and went to a Synagogue in Manila to personally convey his regrets. This was among the few, if not the only, instances when Duterte expressed contrition without reservation.

where even victims of rape tend to shun police out of concern for honor and fear of social stigma. Second, while the rates of cocaine and marijuana consumption is relatively low in the Philippines, the Southeast Asian country has a relatively high rate of crystal meth ("Shabu") usage, the highest in Asia, which has a particularly devastating impact on users and the respective communities that host them. More worryingly, as Duterte correctly pointed out, global drug syndicates, including the Mexican *Sinaloa* gang, have gradually turned the Philippines into a transnational hub for global drug distribution. Third, personal safety has a strong subjective dimension. From 1986, when Corzaon Aquino took over the presidency to 2016, when her son Benigno "NoyNoy" Aquino stepped down from office, reported rates of victimization by Filipino families saw a dramatic downward swing from a high of 38% to a low of 6%. The mother and son ended their respective terms in office on reported victimization rate of 32 and 11%, respectively. Yet, fear of victimization has increased over the past three decades, particularly in the NCR, where Duterte performed well and Aquino's preferred successor, Mar Roxas, performed poorly in the 2016 presidential elections. Crucially, between 2006 and 2016, there was a significant increase, from 37% to more than 60%, in a number of respondents noticing the "presence" of drug users in their communities. This may explain why Duterte's claim that drugs is the root of all the social ills in the country, specifically in the realm of law and order, immediately gained traction. In the eyes of many ordinary citizens, drug usage is correlated to, if not cause of, all kinds of crimes (Mangahas 2016; Ranada 2016a, b; Shadbolt 2014). Increased news coverage of crime incidents, particularly, by the Philippines' highly sensationalist media industry, as well as the growing influence of social media, where fake news and sensationalized reports tend to gain traction, also played a key role in the increased sense of lawlessness among Filipino people. Another factor is the Duterte administration's effective communication of its supposed achievements, faciliated by a well-oiled communications machine made up of popular bloggers, allegedly fake accounts, and volunteer supporters. Under Duterte, around a million suspected drug users and pusher have surrendered and signed an affidavit, which contains their confession, apology, and vow to change their ways—although, as a spree of unexplained deaths show, there is no guarantee that this will protect them against EJK. Nonetheless, the government has celebrated the en masse surrender as an unprecedented feat. In the case of Thailand, when the populist

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra launched his own version of war on drugs in 2003, there were 3000 arrests, 1200 deaths, and around 36,000 who surrendered. Indonesia's former strongman Suharto conducted a similar operation in the early 1980s, more broadly targeted at suppressing crime rates. To tackle the drug menace, the Dutetre administration has also pushed for the reinstitution of death penalty similar to other Asian countries, from Saudi Arabia and Iran to Singapore and Indonesia (Human Rights Watch 2008; Iyengar 2016)

Neoliberalism with a Human Face

In spite of all its demerits, and widespread international concern over the human rights situation in the country, Duterte's crackdown on proliferation of drugs tracks closely with the public's demand for a more robust response to perceived lawlessness in the country. In the past year, surveys have consistently shown that fighting crime, which includes drug-related offenses, is among the top five priorities of the majority of Filipino voters. In a Pulse Asia survey, conducted on March 15–20, 2017, as many as 28% of respondents identified fighting criminality as among their fourth most urgent concerns, with as many as 79% of respondents favorably viewing the Duterte administration's performance in this regard. By far, respondents saw this as the strongest suit of the government. Yet, a far larger proportion of the population identified wage increase (43%), inflation-control (41%), and job-creation (39%) as their top three most urgent concerns—precisely the three areas, where the government received its lowest performance approval ratings. Interestingly, the ABC class (the wealthiest demographic) placed greatest importance on the issue of fighting criminality (38%), as opposed to those in class D (29%) and E (24%), who were more concerned with bread and butter issues (Pulse Asia 2017) (Table 4.3).

The policy implication is clear: That the government has to diversify its agenda beyond the war on drugs by focusing on more fundamental developmental concerns. Right after his election victory, Duterte unveiled a 10-point economic agenda, which was essentially a "status quo plus" proposal that embodies what can be termed as "Dutertenomics." In particular, he promised to continue the macroeconomic reforms of his predecessors, namely maintenance of a balanced budget, moderate interest rates, and low inflation, but with a more aggressive infrastructure spending (5% or above of the GDP) and

Table 4.3 Public opinion on perceived urgency of selected national issues (March 15–20, 2017)

Selected national issues	*% citing as one of three most urgent issues*	*Approve*	*Undecided*	*Disapprove*	*NAR**
Fighting criminality	28	79	16	5	+74
Responding to the needs of areas affected by calamities	–	77	20	3	+74
Protecting the welfare of OFWs	8	71	24	4	+67
Increasing peace in the country	18	69	25	5	+64
Stopping the destruction and abuse of our environment	15	68	26	5	+63
Enforcing the law on all, whether influential or ordinary people	16	68	26	6	+62
Fighting graft and corruption in government	31	70	21	10	+60
Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners	6	57	34	8	+49
Creating more jobs	39	58	32	10	+48
Improving/Increasing the pay of workers	43	55	32	12	+43
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	27	50	36	14	+36
Controlling inflation	41	45	33	22	+23

Source Pulse Asia

redistributive element. By signaling continuity, Duterte sought to calm market jitters. (Macas 2016; de Jung 2016).

Meanwhile, in order to push ahead with mixed economic agenda of continuity and change, Duterte assembled a Lincolnian "team of rivals," featuring both conventional technocrats, namely in the Department of Finance (Carlos Dominguez III), Department of Budget Management (Benjamin Diokno), and the National Economic and Development Authority (Ernesto Pernia), as well as a proportionally high number of

progressive individuals, who have been active in the civil society. The Filipino president, true to his pre-inauguration promise, offered as many as four cabinet positions, particularly the Department of Agrarian Reform (Rafael Mariano), Department of Labor and Employment (Joel Maglunsod[19]), Department of Social Welfare and Development (Judy Taguiwalo) and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (Liza Maza) to left-leaning individuals, some with either historic-ideological or/and active organizational ties to the communist movement of the Philippines. He also appointed Regina Lopez, a veteran environmentalist and a scion of the powerful Lopez clan, to head the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. His influential cabinet secretary and former campaign manager, Leoncio B. Evasco Jr., is also considered as a left-leaning individual, with deep historical ties to progressive movements. In fact, Evasco is considered as one of the most, if not the most, influential lieutenants of Duterte, the only ally who can reportedly stand up to the president if and when necessary. Some commentators have dubbed him as the "little president," analogous to Joseph Stalin's role during the early years of the Bolshevik rule under Lenin, who is in charge of "the reorganization of the entire executive department, and the creation of a mass movement to supplant traditional political parties." (Quezon 2016).

The noticeable presence of unorthodox cabinet members created a unique opening for pushing much needed redistributive reforms in the realm of land reform, labor rights, environmental suitability, pro-people urban development, and expanded poverty-alleviation schemes such as the famed conditional cash transfer program. In particular, the expectation was that the Duterte administration will place a moratorium on (opportunistic) conversation and reclassification of lands[20] that are subject to land reform; abolish the corrosive "contractualization" phenomenon,[21]

[19] Silvestre Bello III, who has had strong and cordial ties with leftist groups and is also chief government peace negotiator with the communist rebels, is the head of the labor department, though many of his deputies, including Undersecretary Joel Malungsod, come from progressive-leftist background.

[20] To skirt around land reform, a growing number of landlords have used the trick of reclassifying their lands into industrial parks rather than agricultural lands.

[21] To circumvent the Philippine law, which mandates employers to provide full benefits to employees that have surpassed the 6-month permanency threshold, some employers have engaged in an exploitative practice of constantly rehiring their workers every 5 months and just short of the 6th month so that they qualify as temporary rather than permanent workers.

whereby major employers deny regular benefits and job security to a huge section of the workforce; across-the-board increase in minimum wage and strengthening of unionisation; expanded scholarship and health coverage to children of indigent sectors; and suspension of the licenses of mining companies that violate environmental regulations. Duterte also appointed Arsenio M. Balisacan, the former economic planning chief and a celebrated development economist, to head a newly created Philippine Competition Commission, which is tasked with breaking monopolistic practices in the key sectors such as utilities and telecommunications.

To broaden his base, Duterte's cabinet strategically included key advisers and allies of former administrations. Leading military officials, peace negotiators, and national security officials, namely National Security Adviser Hermogenes Cendaña Esperon, AFP Chief of Staff Ricardo Ramoran Visaya, and Peace Negotiators Jesus Dureza and Silvestre Bello, tend to be holdovers from the Arroyo and Ramos administrations. Both former presidents Arroyo, who is now a Deputy Speaker at the Philippine Congress, and Ramos, who is somehow acting in a Singapore-style "mentor minister" fashion, are key advisers of the president. The Marcoses, who were among the biggest supporters of Duterte in the campaign period, are also a key ally, with Ferdinand Marcos Jr. potentially landing a cabinet position if his electoral contestation of the vice-presidential race in 2016 fails (ABS-CBN 2017).

Aside from ideological diversity, the defining element of Duterte's cabinet, however, was familiarity and loyalty. Old-time classmates, former college roommates, Davao-based movers and shakers and long-term allies largely filled Duterte's cabinet. The "Davao boys" and former classmates were now police chief, solicitor general, finance minister, foreign minister, transportation and communication minister, and in charge of sensitive departments tasked with fighting drugs, tax evasion, and corruption. Eager to avoid the fate of Joseph Estrada, the populist Filipino president who was toppled by the liberal middle classes, Duterte surrounded himself with trusted friends and long-term subordinates. In his first 6 months in office, Duterte acted like a king. He was in a position to declare a New Deal with the Filipino people, capable of mobilizing the public and sympathetic sections of the elite for national transformation. Leveraging fear and popularity, Duterte effectively enjoyed a political *carte blanche*, giving him a unique opportunity to lay down the foundations of long-term structural reform by taking on entrenched interest. In an episode that exhibited his extraordinary power and audacity, Duterte

forced one tycoon, Roberto Ongpin, to relinquish his monopolistic control over the highly profitable online casino business. The Ongpin-owned *PhilWeb* company saw its shares plunged by as much as 50% when Duterte vowed to go after oligarchs and destroy their fortunes, singling out Ongpin along the way (ABS-CBN News 2016). While the exact circumstances of the incident aren't clear, whether this was a random or targeted attack by the Filipino president, the "Ongpin affair" signaled a key shift in Philippine political economy: the emergence of a powerful president willing and capable to discipline the rapacious oligarchy. Thus, Duterte managed to put the oligarchs on notice unlike any of his predecessors.

It is precisely Duterte's perceived decisiveness and audacity that explains why he enjoyed significant support even among some liberal reformists, many in technocratic agencies such as department of finance and central bank, who saw in him the country's best hope to push ahead with difficult, risky structural reforms, which orthodox politicians were expected to shun. Despite the Aquino administration's macroeconomic achievements, the Philippines' growth has lacked both quality and depth, having been excessively reliant on the services sector, particularly in the retail, business process outsourcing, and real estate industries. Closer analysis also reveals that the Philippines' above-average growth rates in recent years had less to do with the policies of the Aquino administration than a serendipitous convergence of auspicious factors, ranging from consistently increasing remittances from Filipinos overseas workers, post-Quantitative Easing infusion of capital from developed markets with low interest rates to emerging markets with higher interest rates, and the global investment community's asset diversification from traditional emerging markets such as Brazil and China to newly emerging economies and politically stable nations such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Sharma 2013; Heydarian 2017c). Meanwhile, the manufacturing and agriculture sectors, which are crucial to employment-generation and sustainable development (Rodrik 2011), continue to underperform, mainly thanks to a combination of weak public infrastructure, regulatory uncertainty, and red tape. Dutertenomics was supposed to address these fundamental imbalances in the Philippine economy.

Three problems, however, undermined the Duterte administration's ability to make the best use of the "honeymoon" period to push for a transformative change. First was Duterte's single-minded commitment to the war on drugs, which overshadowed key components of

his national policy agenda. As Masha Gessen (2016), a keen observer of Putin-like leaders correctly points out, strongmen-populist tend to put what interests them personally before national priorities. So even if, in theory, they accept an optimal division of labor—leaving technocratic matters to the experts and advocates—they often end up not sufficiently empowering and supporting their subordinates, who lack their own political capital to navigate through difficult reforms. Time and again, Duterte fell short of using the bully pulpit to endorse the efforts of his progressive and competent cabinet members. The issue of drugs, and later on disagreements with America over human rights concerns, consistently dominated Duterte's prime time speeches. While Duterte was popular, many of his cabinet officials were seen as nameless, bland mandarins at the service of the emperor. As a result, Duterte's cabinet members failed to shake up the status quo. An illustrative case was the surprising failure of transportation and communication secretary Arthur Tugade to secure emergency powers from the Philippine Senate to expedite infrastructure development and tackle Manila's traffic congestion. Toward the end of 2016, it became clear that Duterte's popularity and political capital was not necessarily transferrable to his official alter egos. Second, the ideological diversity of Duterte's cabinet proved as increasingly untenable. The "technocratic trio" of Diokno, Dominguez and Pernia consistently opposed, and mostly blocked, reforms advocated by the more progressive wing of the presidential cabinet, ranging from across-the-board minimum wage increase and abolition of contractualization to proposed moratorium on land conversion, Christmas gifts and expanded bonuses for workers, and suspension of mining license of erring companies. The technocrats emphasized continuity to appease the markets, while progressives pushed for reform in order to appease the grassroots base of the president. The result is policy gridlock and regulatory uncertainty, with cabinet members desperately looking to Duterte to make the final decision on whether to support progressive reform or market-friendly orthodoxies (Calderon 2016). The socio-economic policy-making landscape resembled a gladiatorial battle, where the Emperor is left to make the final call. The third problem is that while opposing camps within the presidential cabinet fought their own trench warfare, Duterte ended up in a protracted showdown with key allies such as America, much of the local and international media, the liberal intelligentsia, and human rights and civil society groups over human rights concerns. The war on drugs, while popular at home, proved a public

relations nightmare for the Philippines, with investors holding back, credit rating agencies revisiting their assessments and business confidence on the decline. The upshot was a distracted presidency, widespread paranoia over deteriorating relations with America, and wasted opportunity to translate the honeymoon period into decisive structural economic reforms on the ground. In fact, even in terms of peace negotiations with communist and Islamist rebels, the Duterte administration is yet to make any significant headway.

Given Duterte's personality affinity with the leadership of the biggest rebel groups, there was initially high hope that the new president will break the deadlock in the decades-long (largely fruitless) peace negotiation (Santos 2010; International Crisis Group 2011, 2013; Heydarian 2015). By February 2017, barely 8 months into his term, Duterte effectively ended any hopes of a swift breakthrough in ongoing negotiations between the Philippine Government and the communist leadership. After regional communist groups launched attacks on a luxury resort, Pico de Loro (January 29) and ambushed soldiers in Davao del Sur (February 1), he declared the New People's Army (NPA), the armed-wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP), as a "terrorist" group, immediately ending a months-long tenuous ceasefire. Given festering concerns over whether the communist leadership is in control of its own rank and file, particularly certain regional commands; the deep roots of mistrust between the military and the communist rebels; and Duterte's personal exasperation with the rebel group's constant demand for concession amid ongoing negotiations, initial hopes for a swift breakthrough in peace negotiations has given way to skepticism and uncertainty (Tiglao 2017). Peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest rebel group in the country, are in a state of limbo, creating a perilously conducive environment for more extremist elements to mobilize support and engage in acts of terror. This is partly due to Duterte's earlier prioritization of negotiations with communist rebels, but it is largely a reflection of disagreements on the establishment of a Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which the Aquino administration failed to deliver amid deep public and legislative opposition. While Duterte has personally supported the BBL, it is not clear whether he can get the support of the Congress on a revised BBL. Meanwhile, local affiliates of the so-called Islamic State (IS), particularly the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), have rapidly expanded their footprint across the highly porous maritime borders of the Philippines,

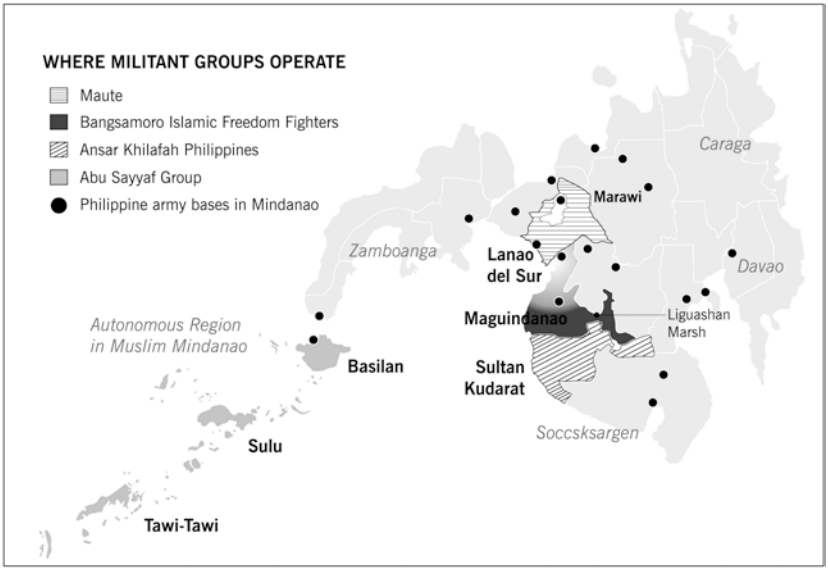

Fig. 4.1 Islamic state affiliates in Mindanao. *Source* Reuters, Philippine Army Recruitment Office

Indonesia and Malaysia, while successfully stepping up their lucrative kidnap and ransom operations against foreign citizens and tourists in Mindanao (see Fig. 4.1). There are also growing concerns about infiltration of IS members, as the global terrorist franchise expands beyond its shrinking foothold in Iraq and Syria in search of a "distant caliphate." The battle of Marawi, which took place after IS-affiliated militants sought to take over the country's largest Muslim-majority city, tested the limits of the AFP's urban warfare capability and forced the Duterte administration to solicit American military support. Weeks into the crisis, Manila sought technical assistance from American Special Forces, with Washington providing high-grade intelligence and advanced equipment and rifles to Filipino troops (Reyes and Butlangan 2017). So far, it seems that the Philippines' first Mindanawon president has equally struggled to cope with the insurgency and terrorism problems that have beset his predecessors (see succeeding sections for more analysis). The Battle of Marawi is likely just the beginning of a new and dangerous chapter in Mindanao's tortuous history of conflict and terrorism.

Peering Into the Abyss

"Behind every fascism, there is a failed revolution," Walter Benjamin observed in the early twentieth century (Zizek 2010). A similar thing could be said about the rise of right-wing populism (distinct from fascism) in emerging market democracies like the Philippines. The upsurge of right-wing populism in the Philippines is the natural byproduct of the failure of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution to fulfill its greatest emancipatory potentials (Mendoza 2009). And this is why despite its setbacks and shortcomings, the Duterte administration continues to enjoy high trust and approval ratings. Consumer confidence is high (Flores 2017a), while the majority of Filipinos are hopeful that positive change and transformative reform is still on the horizon (Flores 2017a, b). Despite its shaky start, the Duterte administration is more resilient than it seems and continues to enjoy a supermajority in the Congress. By and large, (civilian) institutional checks and balances are largely in

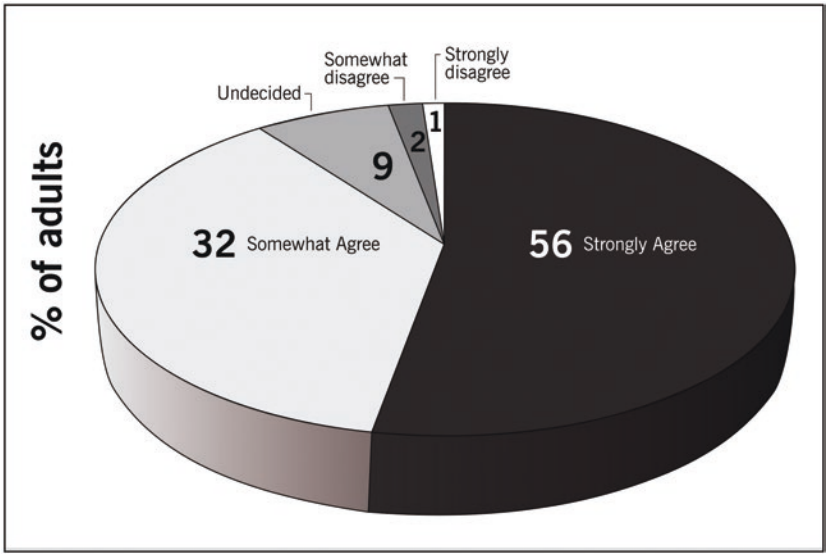

Fig. 4.2 Satisfaction rate with Duterte's war on drugs (December 2016). *Sources* Social weather stations. *Note* Agreement with the test statement: "From the time when Rody Duterte became president, there has been a decrease in the drug problem in my area,"

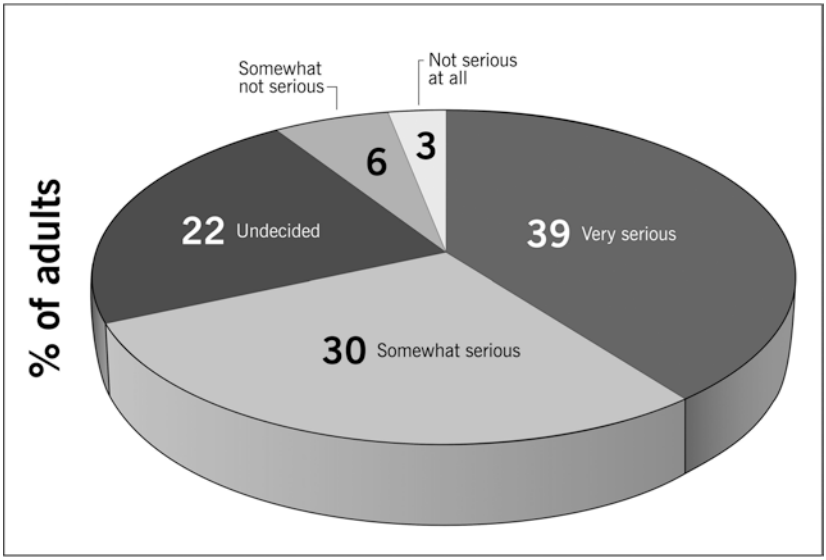

Fig. 4.3 Public concern of prevalence of extrajudicial killings. *Source* Social weather stations. *Note* Seriousness of the extra-judicial killings or EJK problem in the present administration

hibernation mode. Nonetheless, the political landscape has begun to shift, as the public turns more critical and domestic and international pressure increases.

In a survey by the Social Weather Station (SWS), covering the third quarter of 2016, more than 80% of respondents expressed satisfaction with Duterte's war on drugs in principle (see Fig. 4.2), but 71% made it clear that it's "very important" that drug suspects are "kept alive." In the SWS' fourth quarter of 2016 survey, almost eight out of ten Filipinos expressed concern about their personal safety and the possibility that they could end up as victims of EJK (see Fig. 4.3). This seemingly paradoxical data could mean that majority of Filipinos agree with the president's anti-drug campaign in principle, but have reservations in terms of method.

Duterte's war on drugs, however, raised broader concerns about rule of law and general safety, including among the business sector. Things came to head in January 2017 when a South Korean businessman, Jee

Ick-joo, was reportedly abducted by policemen on (questionable) drug-related charges and later murdered in the PNP headquarters, despite receiving ransom money from his family. Amid the massive public outcry, including by the business community, Duterte was forced to fully suspend anti-drugs operations, particularly the controversial *Oplan Tokhang*, which has been blamed for the spate of killings in recent months. Instead, the president called on the PNP to get its house in order, while asking other agencies, specifically the PDEA and the AFP to step in, with the military making it clear that its involvement will not involve an aggressive door-to-door crackdown on suspected drug pushers (Evangelista 2017). When Duterte called upon the men in uniform to take charge of his anti-drugs campaign, chiding the police as incompetent and corrupt, they reluctantly offered to only form a task force, composed of only few hundred men, while explicitly ruling out any house-to-house, Tokhang-style raids. The military was clearly averse to being involved in Duterte's controversial policy lest it risks not only mission creep, but also massive military aid from the USA, which is conditioned on human rights record of recipient institutions (Mangosing 2017; Gloria 2016). The drug war suspension, however, proved temporary, with an Oplan Tokhang 2.0 introduced months later. But the frequency of drug-related killings ebbed in the latter 6 months of Duterte's first year in office. The phase two of drug war no longer saw Duterte accusing high-profile individuals of involvement in drug trade based on his notorious drug list, while police forces were now accompanied by priests and civil society members during raid operations on suspected drug dens to prevent any possible breach of due process and human rights by law enforces (Marsigan 2017). Many in the business community and civil society welcomed the pause—and subsequent dialing down of the drug war—as a possible prelude to a broader tactical shift in the anti-drugs campaign, with more focus on rehabilitation, educational campaign and targeted operations against high-value targets as the next logical step. Yet, there is still widespread international concern over human rights and rule of law in the country. In the 2017 Global Peace Index, which measures general safety in specific nations, the Philippines was found as the second least peaceful nation in East Asia, beaten only by North Korea. According to the report, the Philippines' poor ranking was partly because of "a bloody war against drugs and crime (that) has been extended nationwide" under the Duterte administration (Flores 2017a, b). Duterte's incendiary rhetoric hasn't ebbed either. A month after

suspending the *Oplan Tokhang* operation, Duterte resumed his macabre warnings against drug suspects as if nothing changed on the ground (Placido 2017).

Dutertenomics Meanwhile, there are indications of economic vulnerability, despite high growth rates. Amid growing political uncertainty, there are concerns that the Philippine economy is gradually losing momentum or could lose the opportunity to bring in high-quality investors, who strongly value rule of law and policy predictability. According to the Philippine Central Bank, the country's score in the overall *confidence index,* which measures investors' and business' confidence in the macroeconomic fundamentals and state policy, retreated to a 2-year-low in the last quarter of 2016 (BSP.Gov 2017). The Philippine currency has experienced its biggest depreciation in more than a decade, while Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow has slowed down. The country's Balance of Payment (BOP) sheet has also hit a 3-year low, further limiting the ability of the government to tackle rising costs of dollar-denominated debt and imports (Agcaoili 2016). While recent economic setbacks can be attributed to exogenous factors, namely changes in interest rates of developed markets and a sluggish global economy, there is an emerging consensus that regulatory and political uncertainty is a key culprit.[22] After all, in emerging markets where institutions are weak and growth is fragile, political cycles are as important as underlying macroeconomic fundamentals in determining investment and growth patterns (Sharma 2013). Leading economists such as Cielito Habito, former secretary of economic planning under the Ramos administration, have warned about a slowdown in government spending, total investment, and household consumption, just as inflation picks up. Remittances from Overseas Filipino Workers, a key driver of domestic growth, have also slowed down, while imports have steadily outstripped stagnating exports. In short, the country is facing more headwinds than expected (Habito 2017a, b). In June 2017, the Philippine Central Bank posted its first current account deficit in 15 years, raising concerns over the long-term macroeconomic health of the country (Reuters). Regardless of the degree to which the current government is responsible for recent economic jitters, the fact of the matter is that Duterte is under pressure to

[22] Based on conversations between the author and major global credit rating agencies in the first two quarters of 2017.

adopt a more comprehensive nation policy agenda. For some, it took more than a decade for the Philippines to put itself on the emerging markets map. Now, all of that is in jeopardy, thanks to a combination of exogenous and endogenous shocks, structural impediments, and cyclical headwinds. Eager to address questions over the country's economic trajectory, the Philippine government launched the "Dutertenomics" agenda in April 2017,[23] signaling its commitment to bringing about a "golden age" of infrastructure spending in the country. Over the next few years, the Duterte administration seeks to allocate up to $167 billion for an ambitious nationwide infrastructure boom. Investments from China, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as Japan, the leading investor in the country, are expected to play a crucial role. Yet, there are deep uncertainties over whether the government can get its house in order by implementing necessary reforms to (i) raise sufficient funds for massive infrastructure spending and (ii) efficiently handle the bidding and implementation of multiple big-ticket projects within few years. Reliance on Chinese capital and companies also carries its own risk, given Beijing's relatively high-interest rates, poor track record in environmental sustainability and good governance indicators, and almost exclusive reliance on Chinese labor for foreign infrastructure projects. Not to mention, the lingering risk of "debt-trap diplomacy," whereby China may use its growing economic influence to seek geopolitical concessions from its increasingly indebted partners, as we have seen in the case of Sri Lanka and Venezuela in recent years (Mangahas 2017; Chellaney 2017). To be fair, Duterte's economic managers have sought to re-assure everyone that the bulk of infrastructure spending would be sourced from tax revenues and domestic capital. They have also pushed for a comprehensive tax reform package aimed at streamlining the country's revenue base and funding big-ticket projects on the horizon. The success of Dutertenomics remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is growing public pressure on the Duterte administration to deliver on basic services, including a modern and efficient public transportation system in heavily congested megacities like Manila and Cebu,

[23] Disclosure: The author was invited as a resource speaker, strictly in his capacity as an independent scholar and prominent international affairs commentator, during the first Dutertenomics Forum in Conrad Hotel, Pasay City, April 18, 2017.

where grievance politics (against traditional politicians) has been most pronounced in recent years—and that the government recognizes this political reality.

Spectre of Authoritarianism Beyond economics, there are also concerns over freedom of expression in the country and the deterioration in the quality of public discourse. As Howie Severino,[24] an award-winning Filipino journalist, put it, "I cannot recall any other time when people in our profession have been threatened with death so cavalierly, [and] women have been threatened with rape. We have been called many names. Nowadays, one cannot even quote Duterte himself without being accused of bias. It's like people are trying to scare or frustrate us into shifting careers." For him, this shouldn't come as a surprise, since "Duterte cast himself early on as an enemy of liberal values and civil language." Marites Vitug,[25] a leading veteran journalist, echoes Severino's observations: "The Philippine media has never been in such a fighting mode since the martial law years in the 70s. This time, we are fighting against forces that want to delegitimize us, to do away with truth and facts…They hate criticism, they hate opposing views–which are elements of the oxygen of a democracy." In its annual human rights report, the US State Department, now under the Trump administration, criticized how "public attacks on individuals and international bodies who have criticized [Duterte's] policies had a chilling effect on free speech and expression" (Adel 2017).

Duterte's controversial decision to have the former dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, buried at the cemetery of the national heroes (*Libingan ng mga Bayani*) has also contributed to the gradual crystallization of, at least, a nebulous opposition, many of whom are deeply concerned about the potential return of the Marcoses to *Malacanang*. The Catholic Church, key members of the Aquino administration's Liberal Party, human rights, and civil society groups, among others, have formed a de facto coalition, which aims to resist historical revisionism—and any potential lurch into full-fledged autocracy (Quezon 2017a). On multiple occasions, Duterte has threatened to declare martial law, supposedly in relation to his war on drugs and criminal networks, though the president and his henchman have repeatedly equivocated on the exact

[24] Interview with author January 18, 2017.

[25] Interview with author February 27, 2017.

circumstance that would require him to do so (Fenton 2017). Duterte finally got his chance to test the waters, when he promptly declared Martial Law all across the island of Mindanao after the Maute Group, a self-styled Islamic State affiliate in the Philippines, launched a daring invasion (May 23, 2017) of Marawi, the largest Muslim-majority city in the country.

Previous Filipino presidents, who also grappled with similar crises such as the 2013 siege of Zamboanga by a Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) splinter faction, either shunned Martial Law or, as in the case of President Gloria Arroyo, confined it to only few days and strictly the geographical epicenter of the clashes, namely Maguindanao Province (Quezon 2017b). The Duterte administration, however, contends that the situation in Marawi resembles not only a rebellion by separatist Jihadi groups, but also an all-out "invasion" due to the reported presence of foreign fighters among the ranks of IS-affiliate groups in the Philippines. As Press Secretary Martin Andanar[26] said, the government is battling the "scourge and ideology of IS," which is threatening the whole region. To be fair, there was something unique about the Marawi attack, since it was the first major effort by an IS-affiliate to carve out a *Wilayat* (province) in Southeast Asia, prompting international concerns over the prospect of a "distant caliphate" in East Asia (Jones 2017). The attack on Marawi was likely an opportunistic revenge operation, which came shortly after the AFP launched (another) failed raid on the safe house of Isnilon Hapilon, the leader of Abu Sayyaf and IS command's designated emir of Jihadi-extremist groups in Mindanao. Duterte even threatened to extend the Martial Law across the whole country, if necessary to "protect the people" against further terrorist attacks. Within weeks, both the houses of the Congress passed a resolution to affirm the legality of the proclamation in Mindanao, but leading legislators openly opposed its extension beyond the restive southern island. Opposition legislators and civil society groups also challenged Duterte's declaration in the Supreme Court, which has the final authority to decide on the validity of any Martial Law declaration. Supreme Court Chief Justice Sereno also instructed all courts in Mindanao to remain functioning to ensure the judiciary's duty in protecting the rights of the citizens there remains intact. Notwithstanding broader concerns with potential abuse

[26] Interview with the author on May 30, 2017.

of the declaration by security forces, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights reassured everyone that, almost a month into the implementation of the Martial Law implementation, there were no abuses reported, so far. Crucially, the military's top brass, including Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Eduardo Año as well as Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, initially advised against any Martial Law declaration in Mindanao, arguing that existing legal arrangements were sufficient to address the terrorist threat. Eager to assuage public anxieties, the Department of National Defense swiftly released a set of guidelines to reassure the public that the military will continue to uphold their basic constitutional rights. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, said the military "will not [repeat] the Marcos martial law abuses" and will continue to "safeguard the basic constitutional rights of the people of Mindanao."[27] Over the past three decades, the military has helped topple two divisive and unpopular presidents, Ferdinand Marcos (1986) and Joseph Estrada (2001), who were deemed to have lost their democratic mandate amid massive nationwide protests. Complicit during the dark days of Martial Law under former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, the military has been more than eager to reiterate its commitment to democratic principles and values. Tasked with defending the constitution, rather than just blindly following political leaders, the AFP has undergone decades of democratic indoctrination and professionalization since the fall of the Marcos regime. This is largely the product of efforts by various reformist presidents, from Ramos to Aquino III, in conjunction with civil society groups, who have sought to turn the military into a reliable guardian of the democratic status quo. As of this writing, the Philippine defense establishment has reluctantly supported the Martial Law declaration in Mindanao, which can still be nullified by the Supreme Court, and is largely lukewarm, if not opposed to, its extension across the country (Heydarian 2017c).

Under the 1987 Constitution, which was specifically designed to avoid a Marcos-style dictatorship, the president faces numerous obstacles on the road to a nationwide Martial Law: First of all, it takes a clear case of nationwide "invasion or rebellion" before Martila Law can be declared throughout the country; the president has to submit a report to the Congress within 48-eight hours of declaration to justify it; the Congres,

[27] Interview with the author on May 30, 2017.

"voting jointly, by a vote of at least a majority of all its members in regular or special session" has the power to revoke martial law and restore the writ of habeas corpus for those charged with rebellion or invasion; only the Congress has the power to extend the declaration beyond 60 days if it deems "the invasion or rebellion shall persist and public safety requires it;" the suspension of writ of habeas corpus only extends to those who have been charged with rebellion, invasion, and similar offenses; ordinary citizens can take the case to the Supreme Court, which, within 30 days, can challenge the "the sufficiency of the factual basis" and nullify any martial law declaration. In short, there are multiple layers of constitutional safeguards against the resuscitation of a Marcosian dictatorship. Most crucially, Duterte doesn't have the degree of influence and support Marcos used to enjoy—thanks to systematic bribing and politicization of the armed forces—among the men in uniform before he decided to declare Martial Law in 1972 (1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philipines; Claudio 2017).

Civil-Military Relations Yet, this is no cause for complacency. As Mark Twain once reportedly remarked, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." Overseeing a supermajority in the Congress, Duterte is indeed in a position to amend the Philippine constitution, ostensibly in the name of a shift to a federal-parliamentary system, and relax existing safeguards against the concentration of power in the executive. In Turkey, for instance, Erdoğan has successfully moved in this direction after the failed coup attempt against his government in 2016 (Aljazeera 2017). It is precisely the specter of Marcosian politics and democratic backsliding that has mobilized a still small, but determined minority, which enjoys significant international sympathy. The military top brass' commitment to a democratic status quo can't be taken for granted also, considering Duterte's conscious effort to win them over, not only with promises (so far unfulfilled) of better benefits, but also an appointment to prized positions at the highest levels. Duterte's government is increasingly the most "militarized" democratically elected civilian government in the world. There are as many as seven (former and current) AFP chief of staff appointed or set to be appointed to his presidential cabinet: National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr.; National Irrigation Administration chief Ricardo Visaya, Office of the President Undersecretary Emmanuel Bautista, Defense Undersecretary Ricardo David; newly appointed Environment Secretary, who replaced environmental activist Gina Lopez, who was rejected by

the (allegedly mining industry-influenced) Congressional Commission on Appointments; Dionisio Santiago as Chairman of Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB); and the current military chief of staff and soon-to-be Secretary for Interior and Local Government Eduardo Ano (Ranada 2017). Duterte's two leading advisers on defense and foreign policy, Lorenzana and Ramos, were also generals before entering service in the government. Theoretically, at some point, Duterte's charm offensive could win the personal loyalty of a critical mass of military officials, who could be crucial to AFP's consent to and support of any nationwide Martial Law proclamation. The other possibility is a split within the top brass on the issue if Duterte chooses to up the ante and embark on a road to establishing a neo-authoritarian regime. At this point, however, Duterte enjoys sufficient popularity and legislative support to push with major reforms and isolate opponents short of overturning the democratic status quo.

The arrest of Senator Leila De Lima, Duterte's chief critic, on what the mainstream media and human rights group portray as politically motivated charges has sharpened domestic political fault-lines and raised international concerns over the direction of Philippine democracy. Vice President Leni Robredo, who remains to be among the most popular public figures, has been eased out of the Duterte administration and faces the possibility of even losing her office: Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has challenged his electoral loss at the Supreme Court, the independence of which has also come under question. Ultimately, deepening political polarization will create a lose-lose outcome with long-term negative impact on the country's economic prospects and democratic institutions. It also undermines the ability of the Duterte administration to build consensus around key policy reforms, as it expands increasing proportion of its (diminishing) political capital against an increasingly determined and vocal opposition.

Then there is the cloud of uncertainty over Duterte's health conditions. Some have suggested (Tatad 2017) that he may be terminally ill and is quietly seeking cancer treatment overseas (China) away from public's eye, a claim that has been flatly rejected by the president. Though Duterte has admitted that he has used Fentanyl, a highly potent painkiller, due to a spinal injury he suffered during a motorcycle accident years earlier. Duterte also said that he is suffering from Buerger's disease, a rare condition that causes painful inflammation of arteries and vessels. The president was conspicuously out of public's eye not only during the

New Year's Eve, but also during the National Independence Day (June 12) and several days after. But Malacanang claimed that the president was simply coping with an exacting schedule, which, given his advanced age, required rejuvenation and rest (Agence France-Presse 2017a, b). Later, Duterte made an unverified claim that his absence was partly due to an incognito trip to an undisclosed location in Mindanao after few days of resting in bed (Romero 2017). Under the Philippine constitution, similar to that of America's, the vice president is next in the line of succession if the chief executive suffers from a debilitating health condition or passes away. At this point, however, everything is still in the stage of speculation, but a growing number of legislators have called on the administration to be more transparent about the commander-in-chief's health conditions to avoid unnecessary uncertainty over the Philippines' political future (Sabillo 2017).

The Southeast Asian country, like Gramsci's Italy, is caught in an interregnum, struggling to anchor itself somewhere between strong man populism, autocratic nostalgia, and democratic resistance—with no clear resolution on the horizon. The Philippines has entered a twilight zone.

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