

CHAPTER 5

The Philippines Security Outlook 2016: Dramatic Changes, Persistent Challenges, and Uncertain Prospects

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Introduction

2016 was an eventful and tumultuous year for the Philippines. Change predominantly defined its internal politics as well as security and foreign relations. The 2016 national elections proved to be a critical watershed that automatically reconfigured the country's political landscape. While members of the country's elite once again dominated the polls of Asia's oldest democracy, the decisive victory of the maverick city mayor and political outsider, Rodrigo Duterte, in a hotly contested presidential race was a political game-changer. Serious in enacting swift and radical change, President Duterte seeks to change old ways of thinking about and doing politics in the Philippines. Specifically, this involves a re-examination of conventional defense policies, long-standing military alliances, and orthodox ways of addressing security threats with the goal of implementing a more relatively independent defense policy. Though well-received by most of the domestic public thus far, the popularity and controversies surrounding Duterte are also unsettling multiple foreign audiences used to the nation's predictable policies and unassertive postures abroad. The firebrand leader has consequentially put the country under a microscope and brought to bear the often downplayed and under-appreciated role of small powers in Asia-Pacific's current turbulent and uncertain strategic environment.

Under Duterte, Philippine defense and security are policy areas where expectations of substantial change are high. Though his electoral campaign that focused more on domestic security issues such as criminality, illegal drugs, and terrorism, the new chief executive surprisingly paid attention to foreign policy often through spontaneous outbursts and controversial, acerbic, and drastic rhetoric. Despite his gutter language, many Filipinos do not doubt his sincerity to uplift the conditions of the country. However, some from the more established and privileged sectors of society and their foreign allies criticized his distasteful and amateurish approach to foreign relations and are worried about the negative impact of his remarks.

The new administration under Duterte's leadership is inheriting the old security challenges left by his predecessor in the form of territorial disputes, terrorism, insurgency, and threats to human security such as natural disasters. Compounding them are new security threats such as criminality and illegal drugs. Duterte's war on illegal drugs is the major security development for this year given its ability to dictate his defense policy as well as define his engagement with the country's security sector, other political institutions, and even other countries. While previous administrations identified terrorists, external powers, insurgent militants, and religious extremists as main security threats, the new president is paying a lot of attention to drug cartels and their members, the public officials who harbor them, and the criminal or terrorist organizations who benefit from the drug trade. This has implications on the external reorientation of the Philippine military implemented by the previous administration.

This hardline approach toward illegal drugs and criminality needs to be juxtaposed with the very assertive policy of pursuing peace toward all insurgent movements in the country. Duterte is adopting a page from the Ramos presidency (1992-1998) that saw the necessity of having an inclusive peace process with all disgruntled secessionist groups. For the first time, peace processes with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Nur Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and other groups involved in the Mindanao conflict have been activated simultaneously. Duterte is as aggressive toward winning the war on illegal drugs as he is insistent in waging lasting peace in the Philippines.

This paper argues that the changes brought about by the new Duterte Administration and its promise of further change are contributing to the complexity of security and defense provision in the Philippines. The government needs to strike a careful balance in addressing more domestic-oriented challenges with how it places and defines the Philippines in the larger international arena. This requires a strategic appreciation of the domestic and foreign dimensions of security threats, the adoption of policies that combine national responses with international cooperation and improving institutional capacities capable of implementing the promised changes. In other words, the focus on homeland security must go hand-in-hand with the appreciation of the pivotal role small powers like the Philippines can play in Asia-Pacific's unstable security environment. This entails a reliance less on personalized politics and strongman leadership that has defined Philippine politics for decades. Instead,

the new administration should be guided by its defense and security bureaucracy but also adopt a strategic playbook that has contributions from a wide array of relevant political actors motivated not by parochial self-interests but by security imperatives brought about by the national context and a shifting regional order.

This paper has three parts. First, it identifies the major security challenges of the Philippines in the past year, namely: maritime security, illegal drugs, terrorism, and non-traditional security threats such as natural disasters. It then proceeds by providing the major security policy shifts and directions adopted by the new Duterte Administration. Particularly, it discusses the impact of these changes to military modernization, civil-military relations, the peace negotiations, and security relations with major powers. The last section examines the prospects for the next few years and opportunities for security cooperation.

Security Challenges: Drugs, Criminality, and Terrorism

Typical Filipino politicians normally do not have a sense of urgency once they assumed office. Many were caught by surprise with the swiftness of Duterte's actions, particularly in launching his war on drugs. With less than 100 days into his term, it has resulted in more than 3,000 casualties and this number increases by the day.¹ Tens of thousands of drug pushers and users have voluntarily surrendered to the police, exacting a toll on the country's already decrepit jail system. There were also not enough drug rehabilitation facilities to absorb many of them.²

Serious apprehensions and criticisms were launched against this crackdown by foreign media, human rights groups, and even the United Nations and the United States. Duterte quickly retaliated against their outright condemnation by exposing their hypocrisy. Fulfilling a campaign promise, the firebrand leader is showing no sign of retreating from what he described is a “bloody war” to prevent the

¹ One way to disaggregate drug-related deaths is to separate the casualties from legitimate police operations from summary executions from unknown assailants and killings under police investigations. The term “extra-judicial killings” that conflates these two types but is widely used by mainstream media and other critics of the governments.

² Janjira Sombatpoonsiri and Aries Arugay, “Duterte’s War on Drugs: Bitter Lessons from Thailand’s Failed Campaign,” *The Conversation*, 29 September 2016, <https://theconversation.com/dutertes-war-on-drugs-bitter-lessons-from-thailands-failed-campaign-66096>.

Philippines from becoming a narco-state.³ Critics raised alarm to the rise of extra-judicial killings as it mainly hit the poor members of Filipino society.⁴ International nongovernmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch encouraged Western nations to suspend foreign aid to the Philippines while political opponents used the issue to discredit the highly popular president very early into his term.⁵

Duterte's scorched earth policy on illegal drugs put the human rights versus security debate front and center in the Philippines. Liberal-minded Filipinos see the president as a serious threat to the rule of law and civil liberties. A public opinion poll, however, revealed that almost 84 percent of respondents approved Duterte's drug war.⁶ Many supporters had direct personal experience with how drugs have destroyed their families and communities. By striking fear into the hearts of members of drug cartels, the government has generally improved the peace and order situation in many parts of the country. The socio-political context that undergirds human rights in the Philippines point to the fact that remained lofty concepts that most ordinary Filipinos do not appreciate as much as their longing for solutions to their own struggles against poverty and insecurity. The lack of rule of law and unequal access to justice made civil rights a privilege enjoyed by the economically affluent and politically powerful in society.

So far, there is no serious nor credible attempt to investigate the thousands of drug-related deaths though the president has extended an invitation to a special rapporteur of the United Nations to conduct a probe.⁷ While the government vowed to respect human rights, criticisms that range from complacency to complicity have yet to be fully addressed by the government. The president's negative reaction against criticisms and treatment of its innocent victims as "collateral damage" only bolstered the still unfounded insinuations of state-sponsored executions. There is also a need

³ Jason Silverstein, "Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte extends bloody war on drugs by six months, after overseeing 3,500 deaths," *New York Daily News*, 18 September 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/philippine-president-rodrigo-duterte-extends-bloody-war-drugs-article-1.2796876>.

⁴ Megha Mohan, "The Philippines: No Country for Poor Men," *BBC News*, 3 December 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38144237>.

⁵ One of the staunchest critics is a sitting senator who previously served as Justice Secretary under Aquino Administration and did little to address the proliferation of illegal drugs in the country. She is the highest official being implicated by the Duterte administration to the drug trade.

⁶ Nestor Corrales, "SWS: Duterte's War on Drugs Earns 'Excellent' Rating," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 October 2016, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/822906/sws-dutertes-war-on-drugs-earns-excellent-rating>.

⁷ Nestor Corrales, "UN Rapporteur Welcomes PH Invitation to Probe Killings," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 12 October 2016, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/824685/un-rapporteur-welcomes-ph-invitation-to-probe-killings>.

to redefine the police forces' terms of engagement in order to prevent further deaths. As seen in the experiences of Colombia, Mexico, and Thailand, drug wars without other kinds of policy interventions espouse further violence and insecurity in society.

There is hope that the Duterte Administration will focus its anti-drugs efforts into the rehabilitation and reintegration of drug dependents into society. The success of this campaign cannot be meaningfully measured in terms of the number of dead bodies it has generated. It is a multi-dimensional and transnational problem requiring comprehensive solutions from the lens of public health, economics, and transnational security. Networks of illegal drug supply go beyond any one country's sovereign borders. The Philippines is a producer, a transit point, and a consumer of narcotics. Each role requires specific policies that involve the entire state apparatus, as well as involvement from civil society and communities. The drug trade is also a transnational threat; this means neighboring states have to work together to fight. In this sense, Duterte's plea for regional cooperation on illegal drugs is a step in the right direction and could be supported by other Asia-Pacific countries.⁸ While the government has vowed to chase the top drug lords and government officials who coddled them, the victims of this bloodshed are mostly ordinary Filipinos that Duterte promised to serve and protect.

Duterte's campaign against illegal drugs can learn from the experiences of other countries. While a strict law enforcement approach, often with assistance from the armed forces, amounted to the elimination of some drug syndicates, it has not fully solved the underlying roots of the problem. Colombia, Mexico, and Thailand eliminated some drug cartels but these organizations and their transnational links allowed them to evolve by transferring their operations to other countries with weak states and/or engage in other illicit activities. Keeping drugs out of the Philippines as a policy goal also displays the lack of appreciation over its complexity as a transnational security threat. Though the president's campaign promise was to eliminate drugs within six months, the revelation over its embeddedness in the country will likely prolong the war for a few more years. Without an evolved approach, not only will public support decrease but it will entail more resources, involvement from the Philippine armed forces, and even harsh draconian policies.

⁸ "Duterte in Laos, seeks ASEAN unity vs terror, drugs," *Philippine Star*, 6 September 2016, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/09/06/1620914/duterte-laos-seeks-asean-unity-vs-terror-drugs>.

Apart from illegal drugs, the Duterte Administration also intensified its campaign against terrorism, particularly the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) as well as smaller local terrorist groups seeking to align themselves with the Islamic State (IS). Unlike the previous government which downplayed IS and the possibility of their influence in the country, Duterte is treating the matter with a seriousness of purpose and conviction. His hardline stance resulted in the biggest mobilization of armed troops in ASG areas of control in recent years. The September 2016 bombing of the Roxas Night Market in Davao City was Duterte's insecurity "baptism of fire." It was symbolic and personal attack toward the new president in several ways. Davao was Duterte's showcase to the country and the world as a place where change and transformation resulted in a peaceful, secure, and economically prosperous community. The perpetrators of the bombing were individuals linked with ASG, the Maute group, and other small terrorist bands who are trying to catch the attention of IS by engaging in terrorist attacks.

Duterte quickly mobilized several battalions to southern Mindanao to neutralize the ASG and the Maute group. The new president even dared to visit a town previously controlled by the Maute group where an IS flag is hoisted. He is considered to be the only president in recent memory to have visited a known war zone in Mindanao.⁹ Duterte did not mince his words about crushing terrorists but he also expressed his fear that terrorism has the potential to be the gravest security threat of the Philippines in the coming years. This is why he was even open to talking to the ASG, though he quickly changed his mind after the ASG continues to engage in kidnapping and sowing terror in villages.

Previous governments have also been aggressive in counter-terrorism but Duterte is pursuing a different approach. As a native of Mindanao, he has a more direct and personal appreciation of the complexity of the Mindanao conflict. This is the reason he is pursuing a more inclusive and comprehensive peace process with all disgruntled groups in southern Philippines with a motivation to give them more powers to decide on their affairs. His more inclusive peace approach is also motivated by his firm belief that the conflict in Mindanao that breeds poverty and terrorism can be solved by turning the Philippines into a federal republic.¹⁰

⁹ Carmela Fonbuena, "On day of Duterte visit, AFP retakes Butig town hall from Maute," *Rappler*, 1 December 2016, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/154094-duterte-visit-afp-retakes-butig-town-hall-maute>.

¹⁰ Aries A. Arugay, "Duterte's Plan to Revive Philippine Democracy," *New Mandala*, 28 October 2016, <http://www.newmandala.org/dutertes-plan-revive-philippine-democracy/>.

Military Re-Reorientation: Policy Shifts and Continuities

The previous Aquino Administration implemented substantial changes to the military in the form of a modernization program that aims to develop a “credible defense posture” for the Philippines. This emphasis on territorial defense was understandable given the tense regional environment as well as its maritime and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. This “external turn” was implemented side-by-side the AFP’s continued operations against communist insurgency, terrorist groups, and other internal security threats. Big ticket purchases in the form of hardware defined this military modernization program. For example, the Philippine Navy received refurbished naval vessels and several new aircraft this year. Though this multi-year plan for military upgrading will take several more years, it is expected that the Duterte Administration will continue to support it but for different reasons. The new president expressed that the continued modernization of the AFP will be dictated by the demands less of external defense but more in terms of addressing internal security threats such as terrorism, transnational crime, and illegal drugs. The AFP has named its security campaign as Development Support and Security Plan *Kapayapaan* [Peace] that contains an enlarged role for the military in internal security and non-traditional civilian functions.¹¹

By reverting the emphasis of the AFP toward internal security, Duterte is trying to redefine the mission of the military by refocusing it toward law enforcement and internal peace and order. The extent to which a commander-in-chief can shape the contours of security and defense policy is normal in Philippine politics given the weakness of its bureaucracy and other political institutions. Given this “re-shift,” the Duterte government is even contemplating in reviving the defunct Philippine Constabulary, a notoriously controversial security force responsible for implementing martial law during the Marcos dictatorship.¹² If this becomes a reality, not only will it undermine democratic civil-military relations, it will also “militarize” law and order by placing the armed forces, instead of the police, as the primary actor for internal security. The blurring of responsibilities between the military and the police could be a step back for democratic civilian control and the military disengagement in politics in the Philippines.

¹¹ Amita Legaspi, “AFP adopts new security plan under Duterte,” *GMA News Online*, 6 January 2017, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/594904/news/nation/afp-adopts-new-security-plan-under-duterte>.

¹² Edith Regalado, “Duterte wants return of PNP to Constabulary,” *Philippine Star*, 21 September 2017, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/09/21/1625914/duterte-wants-return-pnp-constabulary>.

The military has been supportive of the new president. For his part, Duterte has expressed a level of support toward the military including the welfare of soldiers and enlisted personnel unseen from previous presidents. He has visited every major armed forces camp in the country, boosted their morale by expressing his unwavering support to ward military operations against the nation's enemies, and even visited and honored the injured and fallen members of the AFP. These symbolic acts were interpreted by his critics as the leader's attempt to secure military support for political reasons but others have argued that this is a way for Duterte to be familiar with his responsibilities as commander-in-chief given his lack of national political experience.¹³

The reorientation toward internal security threats might be confusing to the AFP which has been preparing to shift toward external defense but it might benefit the civilian forces of the country's security sector such as the police, coast guard, etc. This is only if Duterte is willing to pay more attention to their current plight and devote resources for their training and upgrading. There is an imperative to improve the capabilities of the coast guard, especially its critical role in humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR). The new administration must not only rely on the military for HADR but also equip and develop its civilian institutions to meet security threats from environmental disasters and accidents at sea.¹⁴

The relationship between the military and Duterte seems to be cordial and strong. Its proposed budget to the Philippine Congress featured a 15.2% increase from its 2016 appropriations. This is a consistent increase since 2012. However, Duterte's majority hold in the legislature even made it possible for an additional increase which made its budget to increase by 17.38% for 2017 in order to support the AFP's mission to quell internal and external security threats.¹⁵

Another complicating factor in Duterte's relationship with the military is the new president's desire to implement a lasting peace with all insurgent movements in the Philippines. The CPP and its military arm, the New People's Army, has been

¹³ Pia Ranada, "Why has Duterte visited 14 military camps in less than a month?" *Rappler*, 20 August 2016, <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/143584-duterte-military-camp-visits-analysis>.

¹⁴ Jay Tristan Tarriela and Jeffrey Ordaniel, "Why the Philippines Needs More Than Just Military Upgrades," *The Diplomat*, 21 July 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/why-the-philippines-needs-more-than-just-military-upgrades/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2017/VolumeI/DND/DND.pdf>.

the AFP's staunchest enemy, a remnant of its original mission inculcated during the American colonial period. A self-confessed leftist and mentee of the CPP's founder Jose Maria Sison, Duterte resumed peace talks with the CPP's political arm, the National Democratic Front and appointed credible personalities as the government's negotiators. This move was lauded by the international community. Also, Duterte reached out to the CPP and in an unprecedented move offered cabinet positions to its members. Finally, he declared a truce with the communists. While this was temporarily lifted following a skirmish, both parties agreed to cease hostilities.

The peace talks with the communists are being conducted at the same time with new rounds of negotiations with the MILF and the MNLF. This nonselective and inclusive approach to peace is what sets Duterte apart from his predecessors. While skeptics doubt that this can be done during his presidency, the new president's strong political will and sincerity to end the conflict are the new factors at play. Hailing from conflict torn and economically poor Mindanao, Duterte knew too well that there can be no development without a peace that is formed through an inclusive process.¹⁶

While not included in the peace talks, the military has expressed enthusiasm for the peace process. However, their continued support depends on the exact details and terms of a settlement which might include thorny issues like human rights abuses, transitional justice, and accountability of all parties to the conflict. For now, it seems like Duterte can balance the leftist and military elements of his government but it remains to be seen to what extent he can maintain this level of influence.

Duterte's Foreign and Security Policy Chessboard(s): The Philippines as a Small Power

Many did not expect that the new president will cause a political shockwave in the country's once predictable foreign policy, especially since Duterte refused to see himself as a statesman. But prior to his controversial foreign policy stances, the Permanent Court of Arbitration handed its unanimous award in the arbitration case filed by the Philippines against China concerning the SCS on July 12, 2016. Though

¹⁶ Aries A. Arugay, "Duterte's Crusade for Peace in the Philippines," *Australian Outlook*, 24 September 2016, http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/dutertes-crusade-to-win-peace-in-the-philippines/.

the Tribunal's decision did not include aspects related to sovereignty and boundary delimitation between the parties, it rendered final and binding judgments in favor of the Philippines on a host of critical issues. It ruled that there is "no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources within the sea areas falling within the 'nine-dash line'." Second, it also stated that certain sea areas in the SCS fall within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Philippines and none of the features in the Spratly Islands could generate its own EEZ. Third, it observed that China has caused serious damage to the marine environment through its "large-scale land reclamation and construction of artificial islands" and "violated its obligation to preserve and protect fragile ecosystems."¹⁷

The arbitral case was Aquino's major foreign policy thrust with significant US prodding but without regional consultation with other SCS claimants and members of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Instead of immediately doing the groundwork for its enforcement, the Duterte Administration chose to put the ruling aside. The president described the ruling as one that "fell on his lap" but he swore that he will deal with the ruling in due time.¹⁸ For the time being, his government has expressed a desire to smoothen bilateral relations with China.

As the country's chief diplomat, Duterte wanted to implement a truly independent foreign policy divorced from the clutches of any major power. He articulated this, often in the form of spontaneous outbursts, during his first participation in the ASEAN Summit with regional and global leaders in Vientiane, Laos. Apart from Pope Francis, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the president cursed US President Barack Obama over US criticism on his war on drugs.¹⁹ This led Obama to skip a planned bilateral meeting with the Philippine president. Duterte shrugged the snub and went on a tirade about US colonial atrocities in Mindanao and its consistent hypocrisy in dealing with small states like the Philippines. Many observers were caught by surprise while other governments became worried given the fact that the Philippines will be ASEAN's Chair on the occasion of its 50th anniversary next year.

¹⁷ "PCA Press Release: The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)," <https://pca-cpa.org/en/news/pca-press-release-the-south-china-sea-arbitration-the-republic-of-the-philippines-v-the-peoples-republic-of-china>.

¹⁸ Patricia Lourdes Viray, "Duterte Wants to Set Aside Arbitral Ruling – for Now," *Philippine Star*, 29 August 2016, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/08/29/1618421/duterte-wants-set-aside-arbitral-ruling-now>.

¹⁹ Duterte later apologized for the remarks and if they were construed as a personal attack. In Elise Hu, "Philippine President Expresses 'Regret' For Cursing Obama," *NPR*, 6 September 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/09/06/492778889/philippines-president-expresses-regret-for-cursing-obama>.

The anti-US remarks shook the Philippine foreign policy and security community to the core given the intimate relations between the two countries. Duterte's stance is a combination of his knowledge about America's colonial sins, a bad experience dealing with the US government, and the US criticism on his war on drugs. Duterte feels the US rebuke is both a personal attack and a disrespect of Philippine sovereignty, something he thinks he has the burden to uphold. In his off-the-cuff and inflammatory statements, he threatened to abrogate a long-standing military alliance, invalidate the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), and sever diplomatic ties. As his cabinet attempted to creatively interpret them without success, these provocative tirades of the nation's chief architect of foreign policy grabbed worldwide attention.

Duterte officially visited Indonesia, Brunei, and Vietnam before proceeding to a critical visit to China. Chinese President Xi Jinping described Duterte's visit as springtime after years of mutual discontent. Both leaders pledged to continue stalled cooperative ventures and embark on new ones ranging from intelligence sharing to combat illegal drugs to public infrastructure, agriculture, and people-to-people exchange.²⁰ The Philippine president left China with reportedly US\$24 billion worth of deals, loans, and aid.²¹

As expected, Duterte's fiery rhetoric trumped the economic outcome of the trip. He praised China's generosity, identified with its ideological slant and promised to pursue a joint alliance with other countries. In that same vein, however, he announced his economic and military "separation" from the US. Some fear that the president will abandon Scarborough Shoal in exchange for economic deals or reinstated fishing rights for Filipinos.²² After the trip, it was reported that China's coast guard granted Filipino fishermen access to the disputed shoal. During the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Lima, Peru, the Philippines government announced that the internal lagoon within the shoal is a no-fishing zone in order to preserve marine life in the area. China did not seriously reject the idea of a marine

²⁰ Ben Blanchard, "Duterte Aligns Philippines with China, Says U.S. Has Lost," *Reuters*, 20 October 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-philippines-idUSKCN12K0A8>.

²¹ Andreo Calonzo and Cecilia Yap, "China Visit Helps Duterte Reap Funding Deals Worth \$24 Billion," *Bloomberg*, 21 October 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-21/china-visit-helps-duterte-reap-funding-deals-worth-24-billion>.

²² Emily Rauhala, "Duterte Renounces U.S., Declares Philippines Will Embrace China," *Washington Post*, 20 October 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/philippines-duterte-saysgoodbye-washington-and-hello-to-beijing/2016/10/20/865f3cd0-9571-11e6-9cae-2a3574e296a6_story.html.

sanctuary and has even hinted the possibility of a fishing deal with the Philippines.²³

The president's pivot to China did not mean an abandonment of US relations. Duterte was among the first leaders to congratulate president-elect Donald Trump after the US elections and has even appointed Trump's Filipino business partner as a US trade envoy.²⁴ Military exercises between the Philippines and the US will continue next year but are now reduced and focused what the nation needed more – capacity-building in humanitarian action and disaster response.

Duterte's single-handed approach to re-crafting foreign policy is risky and could take a toll on the ability of the Philippines to make credible commitments abroad. Foreign policy requires a level of consistency that reduces significant risks and a shared strategic playbook influenced by expertise and long-term planning. Duterte's policy approach implies a careful distinction between impulsive pronouncements and actual implementation with a keen eye on the latter. However, his future antics on foreign policy might not be given the same amount of patience by elites and masses alike especially if it threatens the country's national interest. Politics in the Philippines rarely stop at the water's edge.²⁵

More Change is Coming? Prospects for Security Cooperation

Dramatic changes in the midst of persistent challenges defined the security situation of the Philippines. In this regard, change could also mean opportunities for the convergence of its security interests with other countries. Duterte's strategic moves opened opportunities for bilateral cooperation as well as the possibilities of multilateral security initiatives. However, the future of security cooperation for the Philippines might now be more defined by the country more than the weight of its possible partners. Duterte's emphasis on national interests, the protection of the Republic, and the welfare of the many ordinary Filipinos that elected him into office likely defines his foreign and security policy. His disruption of the US-led liberal order in the Asia-Pacific might be dismissed by some as the rants of a populist

²³ Mike Ives, "Philippines to Declare Marine Sanctuary in South China Sea," *New York Times*, 21 November 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/world/asia/philippines-rodrigo-duterte-scarborough-shoal-china.html>.

²⁴ Aries A. Arugay, "Engagements and Disengagements," *ASEAN Focus*, issue 7 (October-November 2016): 6.

²⁵ Aries A. Arugay, "Duterte's Pivot to China," *Australian Outlook*, 27 October 2016, http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/dutertes-pivot-to-china/.

demagogue from a small power. However, it can also be interpreted as an uncanny move of a leader who sees the potential of small states in a strategic game dominated by major powers. The country's geographic position in the region has been strategic given but its recalibration of its foreign and security policy to the shock and awe of the world has definitely put more attention to an otherwise unnoticeable country.

Perhaps Duterte's desire to develop closer relations with Japan revealed the wisdom behind his drastic policy shifts. His visit to Tokyo was timed after his state visit to China which many dubbed as a symbol to cut its umbilical cord with the US. However, the symbolic impact of his visit to Japan downplayed such predictions. The visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in January 2017 and the expansion of Philippine-Japan relations to include maritime security, coast guard, and border patrol management, and new avenues of cooperation displayed the multitude of opportunities that come with a government that puts the country's national interest first before the interests of its political elites. This was also seen in his desire to develop closer relations with ASEAN member-states as well the regional organization's dialogue partners such as Russia, Japan, among others.

Duterte's approach to defense and security is uncompromising, uncouth, abrasive, and even offensive. The Philippines is indeed entering uncharted terrain both in its domestic politics and foreign policy. Whether or not such changes can be sustained depends a lot on Duterte's endgame and strategic vision as well as his capability to deliver his promises. While many analysts and observers believe that his approach is based on a well-thought strategy,²⁶ it seems that he is the only one who has access to this strategic playbook. This uncertainty is clearly risky and unhelpful in building and strengthening institutions which the country badly needs to have a clear, coherent, and sustainable security and defense policy.

²⁶ Kavi Chongkittavorn, "ASEAN: Duterte's China Move," *ABS-CBN News Online*, 15 November 2016, <http://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/11/15/16/analysis-asean-dutertes-china-move>.

