



Thammasat Institute of Area Studies

WORKING PAPER SERIES 2017

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Case of Duterte's Independent Foreign Policy*

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December, 2017

THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY

PAPER NO. 02 / 2017

Thammasat Institute of Area Studies, Thammasat University
Working Paper Series 2017

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This publication of Working Paper Series is part of Master of Arts in Asia-Pacific Studies Program, Thammasat Institute of Area Studies (TIARA), Thammasat University. The view expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Institute.

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Abstract

Since the start of his administration, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte has pursued a foreign policy which has been in contrast with the containment policy of the Aquino administration towards China. The new leader immediately pushed forward for a true practice of independent foreign policy which denotes that the country will seek closer relations with China and Russia as it distances itself from its traditional ally, the US. The policy shift of this administration is also understood as a “Pivot to China,” which explicitly demonstrate a change in the normal pattern of the country’s strategic diplomacy with aims of diversifying options and improving relations with other countries. However, Duterte’s desire to move closer with China while downplaying the South China Sea dispute attracted disapprovals and was immediately dubbed as a “national tragedy” by former Philippine foreign secretary Albert del Rosario.

This research seeks to identify and analyze the reasons behind the shift in foreign policy by looking at China as the main factor. The study employs Gideon Rose’s neoclassical realism as a lens of foreign policy analysis. With that, this study offers a systematic explanation of the action taken by the new administration by examining the series of events in the revitalizing Philippine- Sino relationship. Moreover, this research also provides insights on the positive and negative implications of it. It delves into the perceptions of the Philippine foreign policy decision-makers, particularly of President Duterte towards China’s intentions and its chosen foreign-policy response as engaged by his administration. This thesis argues that China’s support and compatibility to Duterte’s national priorities feeds in Duterte’s perception of perceiving it as the best partner for its government among the different state actors in the international system, thus ushering the shift in Philippine foreign policy.

Keywords: *foreign policy, Duterte, China, realism, South China Sea*

1. Introduction

Foreign Policy is defined as the totality of a country's policies toward and interactions with the environment beyond its borders (Breuning, 2007). Specifically, in the context of realism, it is what a particular country tries to achieve in international relations in order to forward its self-interests both domestically for its own government and internationally for the state itself. It could be argued that one's foreign policy could make or break one's presidential term depending on its outcomes and trade-offs. Hence, foreign policy directions and decisions, especially those of a new government has to be studied.

The Philippines is a unitary state governed by a Presidential system. With that, the President, being the head of state, has a huge influence on the country's foreign policy choices and decisions (Jacobini, 1961). In the context of Philippine foreign policy decision-making process, the Philippine President plays a huge role as he is considered as the chief architect of foreign relations. This means that any Filipino President can certainly redefine the country's priorities, set policy directions, postures, and, personally, dictate his or her country's diplomatic course towards other countries. This makes the foreign policy path of every new elected President controversial especially when there's a shift in how diplomatic relations are conducted. This paper evaluates the shift in Philippine foreign policy from Aquino's "contain-China" policy to Duterte's more independent foreign policy which privileges the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the central factor.

Based on a neoclassical realist perspective, This thesis argues that the shift in Philippine foreign policy is influenced by the Philippine foreign policy-decision makers', specifically the President's perception of the international system and its relative power towards China. The Duterte administration views China as a viable partner for its economic and political aspirations, intentionally overlooking it as a threat which was perceived by the previous administration resulting to an "underbalancing" effect. It is argued that because the South China Sea dispute has been downplayed by the Duterte administration, this in turn has allowed China to militarize the area, posing a future long-term threat to the security of the Philippines and the region.

2. The Philippine Foreign Policy of the Aquino Administration

During Duterte's predecessor's term, the Philippines' foreign policy was focused on protecting the nation's territory from an aggressive China which entailed the necessity to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and further strengthen the Philippine-US security relations (Sonsri, 2015). This is what scholars call containment or balancing China approach which aims to contain China's maritime expansion (De Castro, 2016). In 2011, just a year in office, former President Aquino asserted in his State of the Nation Address (SONA) that the country will no longer keep silent in regards to the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea). It was at this moment where he pursued the possibility of bringing this disputed case with China to the United Nations tribunal for the Law of the Sea (*GMA News Online* 25 July 2011). Aquino proudly uttered in his speech, "*Ang sa Pilipinas, ay sa Pilipinas,*" (What belongs to the Philippines, belongs to the Philippines) pertaining to the country's stance under his administration (AP Archive, 2015). The Philippines at that time wanted to resolve this issue through a Rule-of-Law approach (Sonsri, 2015). The Aquino administration kept its promise made during his 2011 SONA wherein he uttered, "*Ang sa Pilipinas, ay sa Pilipinas,*" (What belongs to the Philippines, belongs to the Philippines) pertaining to the country's stance with regards to the Spratlys under his administration (AP Archive, 2015). The Aquino administration was successful in its desire to protect the country's national territory against China resulting to a major and notable outcome of his foreign policy: standing up against Chinese hegemonic behavior by bringing the disputed case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, Netherlands in 2013. This subsequently resulted in a favorable outcome discrediting China's Nine-Dash line claim. This victory sent a message to the region that a relatively less powerful country in terms of economy and power can resort to a rules-based approach and existing international law in solving disputes.

3. The Philippine Foreign Policy of the Duterte Administration

Despite the bold move which the Aquino administration has conducted, the Philippines continues to receive much attention worldwide through its dramatic shift of foreign policy from that of containing (Aquino's foreign policy) to being open and closer to China (Duterte's foreign policy). Upon assuming the Presidency, he immediately pushed forward relatively for more independent foreign policy which featured Manila seeking closer relations with China and Russia and distancing itself from its traditional ally, the United States (Merez, 2017). This shift by the new administration explicitly demonstrates a change in the normal pattern of the

country's strategic diplomacy with aims of diversifying options and improving relations with other countries (Kraft, 2017). The Duterte government apparently chose to repair the dented Philippine-China relationship endured by the preceding administration which immediately earned the name "Pivot to China," a part of his so-called independent foreign policy. The policy was instantly dubbed as "national tragedy" by former Philippine foreign secretary Albert del Rosario who served in the Aquino administration (Esmaguél II, 2016). National tragedy pertains to the notion that despite capitalizing on the efforts of his predecessor in protecting national territory on the South China Sea, by strengthening US security relations and further asserting the Philippine rights in its territory (West Philippine Sea), the new leader, instead, took an opposite approach, embracing China as it dropped the US as an ally (Heydarián, 2016).

4. Statement of the Problem

The new Philippine policy direction raised concerns not only at the executive level of the Philippines' government, business and academia but also in the general public. In fact, most observers and analysts initially viewed Duterte's move with much skepticism given the potential risks of playing two major powers against each other (Huang, 2016). Nonetheless, such moves were expected from the new leader since during his presidential campaign, Duterte had been very vocal about being pro-China. The new leader openly expressed his desire to change the direction of the country's diplomatic strategy and even stated that if China was willing to help his administration in its transportation and commercial infrastructure development plan, then he would "shut up" in regard to the territorial dispute (Robles, 2017). A Western Historian, Alfred McCoy (2017), observed that Duterte was playing a very dangerous game with this move, asserting that it will only benefit China as it uses the Philippines to undermine US hegemony (McCoy, 2017 in Robles, 2017). This policy direction maneuver could be viewed as confirming the classic potential risk of falling into a Thucydides trap. This theory speculates that war will most likely to emerge in a situation where a great or rising power threatens to displace a current world hegemon (Allison, 2017). Hence, undermining American power posits future problems for the region's security and stability which requires a comprehensive understanding and attention.

If a foreign policy shift caused by an individual like Duterte has the potential of creating a massive problem and concern for his own country and the region, then it is necessary to

understand and identify the reasons behind it. This research presents a different take on power transition theory which was discussed by Organski wherein he argued,

“even distribution of political, economic, and military capabilities between contending groups of states is likely to increase the probability of war; peace is preserved best when there is an imbalance of national capabilities between disadvantaged and advantaged nations; the aggressor will come from a small group of dissatisfied strong countries; and it is the weaker, rather than the stronger power that is most likely to be the aggressor.”

(Organski, 1980, pg. 19)

In this study, it can be observed that the Philippines as a middle power is the aggressor in which it position itself to play off two superpower states, China and the US. Thus, peace in the international system is disturbed in this case due to the asymmetry of relations between the Philippines and the US wherein its foreign policy redirects to bandwagon with another superpower country like China.

With that, this study aspires to provide an explanation which is aimed at explaining the shift of foreign policy from Aquino’s contain-China policy to Duterte’s independent foreign policy which involves the so-called Pivot to China by looking at China as the central factor that precipitated this shift. This study offers an opportunity to apply neoclassical realism theory to a specific case: the shift in Philippine foreign policy under Duterte.

5. Theory of the Study

Neoclassical realism emerged as a theory introduced by scholar Gideon Rose in 1998. It specifically caters to studies incorporating foreign policy analysis. Neorealist patriots and their critics who both dominated recent debates about international politics, were perceived by Rose as insufficient and their views needed further development. Rose argued that, foreign policy outcomes vary per state. Hence, he suggested was that it would be better to treat the study of foreign policy by applying specific cases rather than comparing a foreign policy outcome with other states or looking at systematically repeating patterns which what neorealists usually do.

The neoclassical realism developed as the fourth school of thought which incorporated three former theories: Innenpolitik, Offensive realism, and Defensive realism. The Innenpolitik theory gives importance on the influence of domestic factors on foreign policy. Offensive realism, on the other hand, focuses more on systemic factors having the utmost influence on foreign policy and state behavior. Defensive realism shares the notion of Offensive realism, its assertion is in a lighter scale as it only argues that only some of the systemic factors drive the behavior of state and not all. With that, Rose determined the strengths and weaknesses of these theories and found out that they were too one-sided. Thus, he began developing a systemized framework for foreign policy analysis.

Rose argued that foreign policy is fundamentally an outcome of leaders' perceptions. However, these perceptions are also shaped by the international system. Hence, neoclassical realism theory delves into two factors, the cognitive variable which is the leader's perception and systemic factors which are influenced by the state's external environment. The former making up the internal and the latter the external factor. Rose's theory argues that foreign policy is an outcome of leaders' perceptions. However, these perceptions are also shaped by the international system. Hence, neoclassical realism theory delves into two factors, the cognitive or internal variable is represented by leader's perception and systemic factors which are influenced by the state's external environment. The former comprises the internal dimension and the latter the external factor.

6. Hypothesis

It can be realized in this study that the perceived national interest priorities of the Duterte administration are "internally" driven: economic development and the imperative for conducting an effective war against illegal drugs. These two domestic agendas feed Duterte's of China as a potentially viable partner for achieving his administrations national priorities.

7. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology in which triangulation is applied to explain the policy shifts Duterte has pursued. It gathers data from various sources such as written records, news reports or articles, autobiographies, and personal interviews, in order to build compelling explanation for this policy shift (Pierce, 2008). Specifically, this study used the triangulation of

data which includes document analysis, online content analysis, and interview. The specific triangulation technique that was employed in this study is the triangulation of sources. Triangulation of sources allowed the study to verify the consistency of findings generated through the different data sources used (Patton, 2002). This method is deemed the most efficient in order to establish an empirical evidence that would explain the shift. The data of the thesis included the televised speeches and interview of President Duterte in order to gauge his perception which is an important aspect of the study. Moreover, supporting his rhetoric would include the analysis of the events that had actually transpired throughout his first year in office as pure rhetoric without actual actions would not be able to provide empirical findings. Finally, the third set of data sources came from a an interview fieldwork involving the Philippine foreign affairs officer, Foreign Service Institute researchers, Philippine political and international relations professors and a an appointee of President Duterte concerning the proliferation of the illegal drugs in the country. In fact, the author had the privileged to conduct a personal interview in the Philippines with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) officer and researchers, as well as the Chair of the Dangerous Drugs Board who also served as the Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) last July of 2017. Having various sources involved in the study is helpful in analyzing the factors present and strengthening the assumption of the research.

8. Discussion and Analysis

8.1 Establishing the Perception of President Duterte

Duterte has expressed in a televised interview that the Philippines would overall be in a better position if we mend our relation and continue to work with China. In his own words, he uttered, *“We’re better off making friends with China. Anyway, America is also the best friend of China. We will adopt a neutral policy there,”* (R. Duterte, television interview, October 28, 2015). Furthermore, the tough-talking leader acknowledges the fact that the Philippines is no match with China in terms of waging war, hence dealing with the Chinese diplomatically is the best way forward. Moreover, this sentiment is also shared and supported by the wider spectrum of the Duterte government, especially by some of some his appointees such as the newly appointed chairman of the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) and former Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Dionisio Santiago who was personally interviewed by the author of this study. General Santiago had echoed the nature of Duterte’s foreign policy direction by stating,

“...the best balance is to be friends to everybody. What is wrong with being friends with everybody? They are our neighbors. China is very close and everybody is going to China for business, why disallow the Philippines to be friend with the Chinese and take advantage?”

(D. Santiago, personal interview, July 16, 2017).

This notion is very interesting given that the President and some of his appointees such as General Santiago assumes China as a practicable ally for the country. This paper argues that this perception formed at the executive level concerns the administration's desire for economic benefits in order to pursue one of its national policy; Duterteonomics. China is observed to conduct somewhat that imitates America's linkage policy in the region with the aspiration to win the hearts of the leaders in various countries particularly that of America's ally like the Philippines through the giving of aids, business dealings and infrastructure projects. However, it is known in the prism of realism that states are always after their own interests and benefits, therefore the trade-off in this economic transaction with China should be taken into consideration by the administration.

At first, the responses of Duterte were perceived as pure words with no corresponding actions, especially during the pre-Presidential elections. It was thought that this was only a campaign tactic conducted in order to portray him as a totally different type of Presidential candidate from that of his opponents who most prefer to retain and continue Aquino's foreign policy. As another Senior Foreign Affairs Research Specialist from the FSI, Louie Merced puts it,

“Well I think, initially people thought it was all campaign bluster and will not follow to what he said. But to what we have been seeing, he is really trying to redirect our foreign policy and especially even in the West Philippine Sea issue,

(L. Merced, personal interview, July 18, 2017).

8.2 The Duterte administration's Economic Agenda

On the night of October 18, 2016, President Duterte arrived at Beijing's Capital International Airport for his four-day state visit. His delegation was composed mostly of his cabinet members including Senator Alan Peter Cayetano who was the chair of Senate committee on foreign affairs at that time and now the Secretary the Department of Foreign Affairs since May

of 2017 (Ranada, 2016). A day before his flight to Beijing, Duterte has expressed in an interview with Xinhua news agency that he believed China was the only country that could help the Philippines (*Xinhua News*, 17 October 2016). In this visit, Duterte sought to revitalize relations with China which had soured during the Aquino administration. He mainly aspired to enhance economic trade and economic cooperation with the PRC. General Santiago has also mentioned that *“There is this big neighbor who is willing to do business with us and support us economically,”* pertaining to the Chinese (D. Santiago, personal interview, July 16, 2017). This shift in economic dependency seemed reasonable given China’s continuous economic rise, placing itself as the second largest economy in the world (The World Bank, 2017). However, as the economic partnership reemerged in this new administration, China would also take this opportunity to also forward its self-interest, particularly in the issue of the South China Sea.

The Chinese were very clear. You know, the joke in the Philippines is that the Chinese ambassador in the Philippines is called the whisperer because he is always whispering something to the President. He meets the President more than other foreign envoy and diplomat. And the Chinese ambassador did a very good job at saying, “if you try to use this arbitration award to embarrass us and if you welcome more American military presence in the Philippines, in the South China Sea we are going to make life hell for you.” With that, they deployed various nuclear bombers close to the Scarborough Shoal and they conducted joint military exercises with Russia. They did all the kind of signaling. But at the same time, they said, “If you play nice and not raise the award and kind of downgrade some aspects of relationship with the US then we will make life quite heaven for you and offer you all the economic incentives that your ASEAN buddies like Malaysia and Vietnam are getting.”

(R. Heydarian, CSIS Forum, November 13, 2017)

As the first Mindanaoan President of his country, Duterte vowed to develop the southern region economically in which he seek for an inclusive development. A decentralized economic strategy was one of the approaches that was extensively discussed for the Duterte government’s socioeconomic agenda during the two-day business sector assembly in Davao City, Mindanao June of last year. According to the CEO of the Magsaysay Maritime Corp., one of the attendees of the meeting,

“Decentralization is key to inclusive growth. Manila has always been the central business hub of the Philippines, leaving a lot of people in the regions excluded from the enjoyment of economic opportunities and a better quality of life,”

(Joven & Rodriguez, 2016).

In order to pursue his economic agenda, a viable economic partner is necessary in which for this administration is the PRC. Also known as “*Dutertenomics*,” accompanying the socioeconomic agenda is the willingness of the government to enormously invest on big infrastructure projects which was also named as the “*build build build*” project. This has been dubbed as the “*golden age of infrastructure*” in the Philippines which includes mostly the expansion of airports and construction of major roads, bridges, railway transportation system. Through this economic agenda, public spending on infrastructure projects is estimated to reach 8- 9 trillion pesos in the next five-year (Morallo, 2017).

In just a year in office, the President was able to successfully accumulate approximately 1 trillion pesos in ODA which was an unprecedented feat in the history of modern Philippine governance. Aside from Japan which pledged 1 trillion yen (424 billion pesos) for the infrastructure projects of the country, China is undisputedly seen as the biggest ODA source of the Duterte administration with \$9 billion in total value apart from the \$15 billion worth of private commercial deals (ABS-CBN News, 15 January 2017).

8.3 The Duterte administration’s War on Drugs

Another national agenda put forward by the administration is the war against illegal drugs. During the Philippine Presidential elections, Duterte has instituted his campaign to solve and alleviate drug problem in the country noting that the country has become a “*narcotic state*”¹. He even gained massive support from the public when he kept on promising to fulfill this in just the span of 6-months. This domestic policy campaign would not be an easy task and would surely require aggressive efforts from both the government and other concerned domestic bureaucracies such as the Philippine National Police (PNP). Immediately upon winning the elections, the strongman has kept his words true to his campaign promise and in

¹ Duterte said in a speech addressing law enforces in Ozamis City on August 17, 2017 from GMA News Online.

just a month in office, around a thousand alleged drug dealers had been killed and while over 600,000 drug-related individuals turned themselves into authorities. Moreover, some drug syndicates, both big and small, were brought to jail (Robins-Early, 2015). President Duterte's war on drugs has received both support and criticism. Nonetheless, despite the opposing views, what is certain is the fact that this controversial campaign was truly felt not only in the country but throughout the entire world.

In fact, former US President Barack Obama criticized Duterte for his war on drugs. On September 2016, the US government took the opportunity during the ASEAN Summit in Laos to urge the Duterte government to conduct the war on drugs the right way, which basically means to be in accordance with the rule of law (Placido, 2016). When asked by the press in Vientiane about his comment on the Philippines' war on drugs, Obama has expressed that,

"We're not going to back off on our position that if we're working with a country, whether it's on anti-terrorism, whether it's ongoing after drug traffickers, as despicable as these networks may be, as much as damage as they do, it is important from our perspective to make sure that we do it the right way. Because the consequences when you do it the wrong way, innocent people get hurt. And you have a whole bunch of unintended consequences that don't solve the problem,"

(B. Obama, news conference, September 8, 2016).

After a year of conducting the war on drugs, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) claimed that the Duterte government was successful justifying that it had a positive impact, especially in alleviating the use of narcotics in the country. PDEA Director General Isidro Lapeña stated that during Duterte's term, 86,984 drug suspects have been arrested, including 302 government workers while nine drug laboratories were and 152 suspected drug dens were closed down dwarfing the anti-drugs operations of the past administrations (Placido, 2017). The Duterte government has mentioned that the war on drugs will continue until the end of his term which will be until the year 2022. Interestingly, this perceived success of the government's drug war was also attributed to the strong support of its newfound ally, China. In fact, the Chinese government provided the country a grant of \$15 million which will be used for drug rehabilitation and law enforcement (Santos, 2017).

Unlike the United States under the Obama administration and other countries in the West, particularly the European Union, who criticized Duterte's war on drugs, China has been seen to be very supportive. In fact, aside from the Chinese government, private Chinese citizens had partnered with the Duterte government. A Chinese businessman Huang Rulun funded the Mega Drug Abuse Treatment and Rehabilitation Center in Nueva Ecija in which the phase 1 of the project was completed in November 2016. The center is expected to accommodate and handle 10,000 patients which is of big help for the government's anti-drug policy. The President had labeled the Chinese tycoon as a "Good Samaritan," (Ranada, 2016). Moreover, the Chinese government had also been consistent in showing support to the Duterte government since his election. On September 29, 2016, the country has finally released an official statement through its Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang, who said that *"Under the leadership of President Duterte, the new Philippine government enacted policies that prioritize combating drug-related crimes. China understands and supports that,"* (Viray, 2016).

Moreover, during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) undertaken by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2017, China was the only country which stood by the Philippine side. In reality, out of 47 members of the council, 45 had urged the Philippines to end extrajudicial killings and withdraw its plan to revive the death penalty except for China. During the press conference, Chinese spokesperson Shuang once again delivered a stance in favor to the Duterte government,

"Drugs are the common enemy for all human beings, bringing pain to many developing countries, including China. China supports President Duterte and the Philippine government in combating drug-related crimes in accordance with the law. We hope the international community can respect the judicial sovereignty of the Philippines and support its efforts in fighting drug-related crimes through cooperation,"

(Flores, 2017).

Mr. Merced of the FSI has also reaffirmed this notion during the interview stating,

"While everybody is criticizing him on the way he approach the drugs campaign, China was very open arms and was willing to help Duterte and I think that also played a

big factor on why he is so open to dealing with China right now. They don't even care about the human rights issue because it is the same with them. In that regard, they have a commonality, and Duterte finds peace with that,"

(L. Merced, personal interview, July 18, 2017).

8. Conclusion

The shift in Philippine foreign policy under the Duterte administration is primarily caused by the change in the national interest priorities of the new government which are economic development and the war on drugs, different from the Aquino administration which is on protecting the national sovereignty in the South China Sea. Hence, it can be seen that China's support and compatibility to Duterte's national priorities feeds into Duterte's perception of perceiving that country as the best partner for its government among the different state actors in the international system, thus ushering the shift in Philippine foreign policy. Given that President Duterte acknowledges that the Philippines is unparalleled with China in terms of economic and military power, the foreign policy redirected to having a favorable stance towards it. Moreover, China's support and compatibility towards the Duterte administration's national interest priorities feeds in his perception of having a favorable inclination towards it. With that, this thesis would like to assert that Duterte's perception is an important factor in understanding why the country shifted its foreign policy. Moreover, the author would like to argue that the perception reflects the liking and preference of the foreign policy decision-maker in relation to their prioritized national agenda despite of the consequences it may entail.

Aside from its national interest priorities set by the administration that makes China as the compatible partner to carry out its domestic agendas, the factor of an ambiguous US contributes to Duterte's perception of establishing an unreliable US. Hence, it can be concluded that Duterte's shift towards China is pragmatic in a sense that America is uncertain in terms of responding for the protection of the country. Furthermore, China will not abide by international law anyway which only feeds in Duterte's perception that the country is better off in redirecting its foreign policy towards Beijing in order to achieve its domestic goals which are the need of funding for big infrastructure projects and to sustain the administration's war against drugs.

This study also concludes that the Philippine foreign policy is vulnerable to changes depending on who the leader is. Moreover, their perception is necessary to understand as different leaders may have perceived the country's threats and opportunities similarly, however their foreign policy response may be different. Therefore, the Filipino public should take into serious account the foreign policies that aspiring Filipino leaders wish to push forward during elections. Its implications on Philippine politics is that power in the domestic sphere is important to analyze given that if one wants to analyze and go deeper into understanding the country's chosen foreign policy, it is necessary to determine whether the national agendas set by the leaders are for their self-interest or pragmatic benefit of the country.

For this study, it can be that the trade-off in this shift in foreign policy is the South China Sea. However, the author argues that more than the support and compatibility of the national interest priorities of the administration with China, the Duterte administration was left with no choice but to be subservient to China due to immediate benefits it could achieved despite long-term threats to the country's national security. Moreover, Duterte was able to consolidate power among the majority of the Filipinos in which supports his domestic agendas. In conclusion, the President is provoked to maintain his domestic stability in which can only be done through continuing on with his policies and making it materialize in which China is of big influence in carrying out those domestic goals.

In the context of international relations, the shift in Philippine foreign policy will affect both its relationship with China and the United States. Hence, this development has a substantial effect on regional politics and security that the author would like to reflect on. President Duterte, through his foreign policy choice, was able to disrupt the Philippine-US relations. Thus, it can be expected that the country's relations with America will have complications in which threatens the existing Philippine-US security alliance. Nonetheless, this disturbance in the relationship is not entirely dependent on Duterte alone. Therefore, it is also interesting to take into account for future researches about the actions of the Trump administration in this situation. When such alliance gets disrupted, the power and influence of US economically and militarily in the region may weaken, allowing China to have the opportunity of dominating the region in these aspects. However, it is interesting to ponder that this notion is not certain as this view is complex given that as the Duterte government seeks to diversify military relations with China and Russia, the Philippine military still remains US-centric. Nonetheless, the idea of

a continuous infiltration of China and Russia in the Philippine military institute may have significant influence in the long-run which may polarize the institute in the future. Likewise, the emergence of Donald Trump also adds up to the complexity of the issue given that the new US government through his government finally supports the administration's war against illegal drugs which pleased President Duterte. With that, it may be possible in the future that President Duterte's perception towards the US may change and so as its foreign policy. For now, this thesis argues that the Philippines shift towards China weakens American hegemony in the region. With that, this may impede US' balancing strategy in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Moreover, this thesis also concludes that understanding the case study presented above denotes the importance of the neoclassical realism theory as it reinforces the importance of the perception of President Duterte in redirecting Philippine foreign policy. It can be seen, that regardless of the state power of the Philippine, be it a medium or a small power, the country's behavior is hugely influence by the current President. Therefore, this thesis presents the notion of the Philippines as a country being vulnerable to foreign policy changes. Hence, this study argues that the country may be deemed as unreliable, especially for its allies and partners in the international system. This is due to the country having to pursue different policies that best suits not particularly the nation but the current government at a certain period of time.

For the Philippine-China relations, the country under a Duterte presidency will further cause a continuous strengthening of their relations. With that, the Duterte government may be able to fulfill both of its national interest priorities. Hence, the country will see the actual development of big infrastructure projects under this administration. Given this notion, it is possible that President Duterte may maintain a high popularity among the majority in the country courtesy of this particular domestic policy as big projects denotes tangible materials that the Filipino society can actually see. Moreover, there is a high possibility of a huge influx of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment to the country which also denotes a huge number of Chinese workers and companies entering the country.

However, there will also be a continuation of the country's infamous war on illegal drugs. Currently, the country has seen various killings of innocent people which have enraged a substantial amount of population in the Philippine society. Particularly, this situation may

provide an opportunity for the opposition party to criticize the government in which the idea of ousting President Duterte may be ushered in. However, this thesis argues that this possibility is less likely to happen as there is currently no clear leader of the opposition to go against the Duterte administration. Most importantly, the strengthening of Philippine-China relations has resulted to the downplaying of the arbitral tribunal ruling. With that, it can be concluded that as the Duterte administration views China as a viable partner for its economic and political aspirations, it intentionally overlooks it as a threat which was perceived by the previous administration resulting to an “underbalancing” effect. Thus, this may permit China to militarize the area through the construction of artificial islands which will be transformed into military bases, thus eventually resulting in a future long-term threat to the security of the Philippines and the region. Hence, this thesis argues that the Duterte administration’s independent foreign policy is only beneficial for temporary peace which means achieving only short-term goals such as economic benefit to secure one of his administration’s national agenda priority. In fact, the foreign relation redirection by the Duterte administration constitute a more problematic situation given the less utilization of the tribunal ruling which indirectly allows China to illegally take control of some parts of the South China Sea. Hence, this is problematic as it would rather be more difficult to protect the country’s sovereignty once China has already finished establishing its artificial islands within the Philippine territory. With that, this thesis finally concludes that the problem offered in this study provides an interesting situation to look forward to in the future of international relations. The succeeding Philippine president after Duterte should be ready to resolve the dilemma in the South China Sea that would definitely concern the country in the future. Hence, there is a high chance for the Philippine foreign policy direction to change course again in which definitely time can only tell.

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