

A Failure of Leadership
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As respectfully as possible, I would like to dwell today on a self-proclaimed failure of leadership.

Five years ago, the Philippines legally won the South China Sea arbitration case which invalidated China's claim to historic rights over resources within the West Philippine Sea.

Since then, our country's fight for the West Philippine Sea has lost momentum as President Duterte decided to set aside the Award in favor of Beijing's promise of economic benefits.

On Constitutional Mandates

When a President-elect in our country assumes office, he takes a solemn oath to faithfully fulfill his duties as President of the Philippines, preserve and defend the Constitution, execute the laws, do justice to every man, and consecrate himself to the service of the Philippine nation.

One of the paramount constitutional mandates of the President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, "is to secure the sovereignty of the State and the integrity of the national territory."

Thus, it is the paramount constitutional duty of the President to protect and assert our nation's rights in the West Philippine Sea.

On The Jet Ski Promise

During the election campaign of 2016, President Duterte made his famous vow to ride a jetski towards the Spartlys, plant the Philippine flag, and challenge China—in his own words—"suntukan o barilan." [Translation: "Fist fight or a gun duel"]

Given such an unrealistic scenario, we think that our countrymen who voted for President Duterte did not *literally* believe in this promise of riding a jet ski to the Spratlys and issuing this challenge to China.

However, our countrymen believed in the message apparently conveyed by President Duterte through the jet ski metaphor: that he would stand up to China and protect the West Philippine Sea, consistent with the Constitution.

Last May 10, 2021, the President claimed that his pledge to ride a jet ski to the Spratlys and plant a Philippine flag there was a "pure campaign joke," calling those who believed him "as being stupid."

This episode contributes to a widening belief among our countrymen that President Duterte betrayed the Constitution he swore to uphold and has consequently betrayed his countrymen who rely on him to protect the West Philippine Sea.

With less than a year left until the end of President Duterte's term in June 2022, his record of asserting the rights of Filipinos in the West Philippine Sea has been abysmal.

As President Duterte himself admitted in his State of the Nation Address in 2020 regarding the Chinese presence in the West Philippine Sea: "*Talagang inutil ako dyan, walang magawa.*"

[Translation: "I'm really useless there and there's nothing I can do."]

My fellow countrymen, this admission speaks volumes.

On Xi Jinping Making Duterte Win

When we reflect on past events, we believe that President Duterte's actions fit into a disturbing pattern of loyalty to a foreign power.

On February 22, 2019, we received information from a most reliable international entity that high officials from China are bragging that they had been able to influence the 2016 Philippine elections so that Duterte would be president.

We believe that our Beijing post can easily validate this. Moreover, subsequent actions of the President lend more credence to this information.

On Xi Jinping Protecting Duterte

As early as May 15, 2018, our President proudly declared in Casiguran Bay in Aurora that Chinese President Xi Jinping has sworn to protect him from moves that will result in his removal from office.

"The assurances of Xi Jinping were very encouraging," President Duterte said. The President paraphrased Xi Jinping: "We will not allow you to be taken out from your office, and we will not allow the Philippines to go to the dogs."

In a press conference in Davao before going to China to attend the 2018 Boao Forum for Asia, President Duterte professed his undying love for the Chinese President.

President Duterte said: "I just simply love Xi Jinping. He understood, he understands my problem and he is willing to help."

It is certainly disturbing to see our President—who should be looking after his own people—relying on a foreign leader for his security of tenure as President. Moreover, such foreign leader

represents an aggressor that is openly and illegally occupying land and waters that belong to the Filipino people.

Is it already a truism? While President Duterte holds office, are we effectively owned by China? Or is this one of President Duterte's so-called jokes meant to escape accountability?

On President Duterte's Policies in the West Philippine Sea

If we accept as true President Duterte's compromised loyalty to his country, then the actions that defined his administration's policies in the West Philippine Sea make sense.

As enumerated by Justice Tony Carpio:

First, in 2016, shortly after the issuance of the Arbitral Award, President Duterte declared: "I will set aside the arbitral ruling. I will not impose anything on China." President Duterte set aside the Award in favor of Chinese loans and investments that have barely materialized until this day.

Second, in the same year, President Duterte announced that the Philippine Navy will patrol only the 12-nautical mile territorial sea of the Philippines, in violation of the constitutional mandate that the Philippine State shall protect the country's 200-nautical mile EEZ.

Third, in 2019, President Duterte announced that he entered into a verbal agreement with President Xi Jinping allowing Chinese fishermen to fish in our waters—violating the Constitution which provides that the fish in our EEZ belongs only to Filipinos.

Fourth, President Duterte's repeated false assertion that China is already "in possession" of the West Philippine Sea. This recklessly concedes Philippine lands and waters to China more than what China actually possesses.

As well, may we add that in a televised address last May 5, 2021, President Duterte characterized the Arbitral Ruling as a scrap of paper that he will throw in the waste basket.

[Translation of what he said on the subject: "That paper, in real life, between nations, that paper is nothing...Son of a bitch, that's just a piece of paper. I'll throw it in the waste basket."]

Through these acts, many Filipinos have reason to believe that our President has been discrediting our nation. For the last five years, what we see is a betrayal of the Filipino people.

When President Duterte admitted that he was "inutil" with respect to the West Philippine Sea, the honorable thing left for him to do was to step down given his admission that he could not fulfill his sworn mandate as President to protect the West Philippine Sea.

In 2017, President Duterte moreover declared that only two out of five of his statements are true. In his words: "Eh sa limang salita, dalawa lang 'yung tama niyan, 'yung tatlo puro kalokohan 'yan," [Translation: "In every five statements I make, only two are true while three are just jokes]," the President said during the 115th anniversary of the Bureau of Customs in Manila.

This admission may be seen as another way to escape accountability and it also sums up President Duterte's failed leadership in the West Philippine Sea.

We can say that there are two out of several of President Duterte's statements that have turned out to be true: first, that he is "inutil" in protecting the West Philippine Sea; and second, that he "simply loves Xi Jinping."

Is it not about time for Filipinos to reject this man and what he represents?

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