

## Interview with US-based Filipino intellectual Kenneth Bauzon on the Duterte presidency

### **FIRE-STORM FROM THE BOONDOCKS:**

Understanding “Little Brown Brother’s” *Realpolitik*

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Posted by CenPEG.org

Nov. 15, 2016

“A howling wilderness” was what General Jacob Smith ordered his troops to make of Samar, Philippines. He was taking revenge for the ambush of fifty-four soldiers by Filipino revolutionaries in September 1901. After killing most of the island’s inhabitants, three bells from the Balangiga Church were looted as war trophies; two are still displayed at Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Very few Americans know this. Nor would they have any clue about the 1913 massacre of thousands of Muslim women, men and children resisting General Pershing’s systematic destruction of their homes in Mindanao where President Rodrigo Duterte today resides.

Addressing this dire amnesia afflicting the public, both in the Philippines and abroad, newly-elected president Duterte began the task of evoking/invoking the accursed past. He assumed the role of oral tribune, with prophetic expletives. Like the Filipino guerillas of Generals Lukban and Malvar who retreated to the mountains (called “boondocks” by American pursuers), Duterte seems to be coming down with the task of reclaiming the collective dignity of the heathens—eulogized by Rudyard Kipling, at the start of the war in February 1899, as “the white men’s burden.”

*Mark Twain: “Thirty Thousand Killed a Million”*

The Filipino-American War of 1899-1913 occupies only a paragraph, at most, in most US textbooks, a blip in the rise of the United States as an Asian Pacific Leviathan. Hobbes’ figure is more applicable to international rivalries than to predatory neoliberal capitalism today, or to the urban jungle of Metro Manila. At least 1.4 million Filipinos (verified by historian Luzviminda Francisco) died as a result of the scorched-earth policy of President McKinley. His armed missionaries were notorious for Vietnam-style “hamletting.” They also practised the “water-cure,” also known as “water-boarding,” a form of torture now legitimized in a genocidal war of terror (Iraq, Afghanistan) that recalls the ruthless suppression of Native American tribes and dehumanization of African slaves in the westward march of the “civilizing Krag” to the Pacific, to the Chinese market. Today the

struggle at Standing Rock and Black-Lives-Matter are timely reminders. Stuart Creighton Miller's 1982 book, "*Benevolent Assimilation*," together with asides by Gabriel Kolko and Howard Zinn, recounted the vicissitudes of that bloody passage through Philippine boondocks and countryside.

Not everyone acquiesced to Washington's brutal annexation of the island-colony. Mark Twain exposed the hypocrisy of Washington's "Benevolent Assimilation" with searing diatribes, as though inventing the "conscience" of his generation. William James, William Dean Howells, W.E.B. DuBois and other public intellectuals denounced what turned out to be the "first Vietnam" (Bernard Fall's rubric).

It was a learning experience for the conquerors. In *Policing America's Empire*, Alfred McCoy discovered that America's "tutelage" of the Filipino elite (involving oligarchic politicians of the Commonwealth period up to Marcos and Aquino) functioned as a laboratory for crafting methods of surveillance, ideological manipulation, propaganda, and other modes of covert and overt pacification. Censorship, mass arrests of suspected dissidents, torture and assassination of "bandits" protesting landlord abuses and bureaucratic corruption in the first three decades of colonial rule led to large-scale killing of peasants and workers in numerous Colorum and Sakdalista uprisings.

#### *Re-Visiting the Cold War/War of Terror*

This pattern of racialized class oppression via electoral politics and disciplinary pedagogy culminated in the Cold War apparatus devised by CIA agent Edward Lansdale and the technocrats of Magsaysay to suppress the Huk rebellion in the two decades after formal granting of independence in 1946. The machinery continued to operate in the savage extrajudicial killings during the Marcos dictatorship up to Corazon Aquino's "total war" against nationalists, progressive priests and nuns, Igorots, Lumads—all touted by Washington/Pentagon as the price for enjoying democracy, free market, the right to gamble in the capitalist casino. This constitutes the rationale for U.S.-supported counterinsurgency schemes to shore up the decadent, if not moribund, status quo—a society plagued by profound and seemingly durable disparity of wealth and power—now impolitely challenged by Duterte.

Not a single mass-media article on Duterte's intent to forge an independent foreign policy and solve corruption linked to narcopolitics, provides even an iota of historical background on the US record of colonial subjugation of Filipino bodies and souls. This is not strange, given the long history of Filipino "miseducation" documented by Renato Constantino. Perhaps the neglect if not dismissal of the Filipino collective experience is due to the indiscriminate celebration of America's success in making the natives speak English, imitate the American Way of Life shown in Hollywood movies, and indulge in mimicked consumerism.

What is scandalous is the complicity of the U.S. intelligentsia (with few exceptions) in regurgitating the “civilizing effect” of colonial exploitation. Every time the Filipino essence is described as violent, foolish, shrewd or cunning, the evidence displays the actions of a landlord-politician, bureaucrat, savvy merchant, U.S.-educated professional, or rich entrepreneur. Unequal groups dissolve into these representative types: Quezon, Roxas, Magsaysay, Fidel Ramos, etc. What seems ironic if not parodic is that after a century of massive research and formulaic analysis of the colony’s underdevelopment, we arrive at Stanley Karnow’s verdict (amplified in *In Our Image*) that, really, the Filipinos and their character-syndromes are to blame for their poverty and backwardness, for not being smart beneficiaries of American “good works.” “F—ck you,” Duterte might uncouthly respond.

### *Hobbes or Che Guevarra?*

An avalanche of media commentaries, disingenuously purporting to be objective news reports, followed Duterte’s campaign to eradicate the endemic drug addiction rampant in the country. No need to cite statistics about the criminality of narcopolitics infecting the whole country, from poor slum-dwellers to Senators and moguls; let’s get down to the basics. But the media, without any judicious assaying of hearsay, concluded that Duterte’s policy—his public pronouncement that bodies will float in Manila Bay, etc.—caused the killing of innocent civilians. The imperative to sensationalize and distort by selective framing (following, of course, corporate norms and biases) governs the style and content of quotidian media operations.

Is Duterte guilty of the alleged EJK (extrajudicial killings)? No doubt, druglords and their police accomplices took advantage of the policy to silence their minions. This is the fabled “collateral damage” bewailed by the bishops and moralists. But Obama, UN and local pundits associated with the defeated parties seized on the cases of innocent victims (two or three are more than enough, demonstrated by the photo of a woman allegedly cradling the body of her husband, blown up in *Time* (October 10) and in *The Atlantic* (September issue), and social media to teach Duterte a lesson on human rights, due process, and genteel diplomatic protocols. This irked the thin-skinned town mayor whose lack of etiquette, civility, and petty-bourgeois decorum became the target of unctuous sermons.

### *Stigma for All Seasons: “Anti-Americanism”*

What finally gave the casuistic game away, in my view, is the piece in the November issue of *The Atlantic* by Jon Emont entitled “Duterte’s Anti-Americanism.” What does “anti-Americanism” mean—to be against McDonald burgers, Beyonce, I-phones, Saturday Night Live, Lady Gaga, Bloomingdale fashions, Wall Street, or Washington-Pentagon imperial browbeating of inferior nations/peoples-of-color? The article points to tell-tale symptoms: Duterte is suspending joint military exercises, separating from U.S. gov’t foreign policy (renewing friendly cooperation with China, “veering” toward Russia).

Above all, Duterte is guilty of diverging from public opinion, meaning the Filipino love for Americans. He rejects US “security guarantees,” ignores the \$3 billion remittances of Filipinos (presumably, relatives of middle and upper classes), the \$13 million given by the U.S. for relief of Yolanda typhoon victims in 2013. Three negative testimonies against Duterte’s “anti-American bluster” are used: 1) Asia Foundation official Steven Rood’s comment that since most Filipinos don’t care about foreign policy, “elites have considerable latitude,” that is, they can do whatever pleases them. 2) Richard Javad Heydarian, affiliated with De La Salle University, is quoted—this professor is now a celebrity of the anti-Duterte cult—that Duterte “can get away with it”; and, finally, Gen Fidel Ramos who contends that the military top brass “like US troops”—West-Point-trained Ramos has expanded on his tirade against Duterte with the usual cliches of unruly client-state leaders who turn against their masters.

Like other anti-Duterte squibs, the article finally comes up with the psychological diagnosis of Duterte’s fixation on the case of the Davao 2002 bombing when a “supposed involvement of US officials” who spirited a CIA-affiliated American bomber confirmed the Davao mayor’s fondness for “stereotypes of superior meddling America.” The judgment seems anticlimatic. What calls attention will not be strange anymore: there is not a whisper of the tortuous history of US imperial exercise of power on the subalterns.

This polemic-cum-factoids culminates in a faux-folksy, rebarbative quip: “Washington can tolerate a thin-skinned ally who bites the hand that feeds him through crass invective.” The *Washington Post* (Nov 2) quickly intoned its approval by harping on Ramos’ defection as a sign of the local elite’s displeasure. With Washington halting the sale of rifles to the Philippine police because of Duterte’s human-rights abuses, the *Post* warns that \$ 9 million military aid and \$32 million funds for law-enforcement will be dropped by Congress if Duterte doesn’t stop his “anti-US rhetoric.” Trick or treat? Duterte should learn that actions have consequences, pontificated this sacred office of journalistic rectitude after the Halloween mayhem.

On this recycled issue of “anti-Americanism,” the best riposte is by Michael Parenti, from his incisive book *Inventing Reality*: “The media dismiss conflicts that arise between the United States and popular forces in other countries as manifestations of the latter’s “anti-Americanism”....When thousands marched in the Philippines against the abominated US-supported Marcos regime, the *New York Times* reported, “Anti-Marcos and anti-American slogans and banners were in abundance, with the most common being “Down with the US-Marcos Dictatorship!” A week later, the *Times* again described Filipino protests against US support of the Marcos dictatorship as “anti-Americanism.” The *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* share an ideological-political genealogy with the Cold War paranoia currently gripping the U.S. ruling-class Establishment.

Predictably, the *New York Times* (Nov. 3 issue) confirmed the consensus that the US is not worried so much about the “authoritarian” or “murderous ways of imposing law and order” (Walden Bello’s labels; *InterAksyon*, Oct 29) as they are discombobulated by Duterte’s rapprochement with China. The calculus of U.S. regional hegemony was changed when Filipino fishermen returned to fish around the Scarborough Shoal. Duterte’s “bombastic one-man” show, his foul mouth, his “authoritarian” pragmatism, did not lead to total dependency on China nor diplomatic isolation. This pivot to China panicked Washington, belying the *Time* expert Carl Thayer who pontificated that Duterte “can’t really stand up to China unless the US is backing him” (Sept 15, 2016). A blowback occurred in the boondocks; the thin-skinned “Punisher” and scourge of druglords triggered a “howling wilderness” that exploded the century-long stranglehold of global finance capitalism on the islands. No need to waste time on more psychoanalysis of Duterte’s motivation. What the next US president would surely do to restore its ascendancy in that region is undermine Duterte’s popular base, fund a strategy of destabilization via divide-and-rule (as in Chile, Yugoslavia, Ukraine), and incite its volatile pro-American constituency to beat pots and kettles in the streets of MetroManila.

*If We Forget, Never Again*

This complex geopolitical situation entangling the United States and its former colony/neocolony, cries for deeper historical contextualization and empathy for the victims lacking in the Western media demonization of Duterte and his supporters, over 70% of a hundred million Filipinos in the Philippines and in the diaspora. Limitations of space forbid this, but we can supply cues and guidelines for this ongoing historical framing of the answers in the following quasi-dialogue.

We have posed key questions to political scientist Dr. Kenneth Bauzon of St. Joseph’s College, Brooklyn, NY, to fill the vacuum. A Filipino public intellectual, Dr. Bauzon is an acknowledged expert on international relations. His groundbreaking book, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity in the Philippines*, has led him to be invited to speak at conferences worldwide, the last being a lecture on “The New Scramble for Africa” at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute for African Studies, in Moscow. He has been interviewed by CNN and Radio Australia. The interviewer, an emeritus professor of Ethnic Studies and Comparative Literature, was a fellow of W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, Harvard University, Fulbright lecturer of American Studies at Leuven University, Belgium, and currently professorial lecturer, Polytechnic University of the Philippines. Among his recent works are *US Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines* (Palgrave) and *Between Empire and Insurgency* (University of the Philippines Press).

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ESJ: As a scholar of international affairs, what is your view of this declaration of President Duterte on his "separation" from the US (chiefly, from foreign policy) in terms of the Asian pivot and Asian geopolitics in general?

*KB: First of all, Duterte himself has clarified the statement as not representing any semblance of severance of diplomatic, economic, and military ties between the two countries. When he spoke of this during his recent visit to China, my guess is that he may have picked the wrong word to express what he may have been thinking and planning to do in Filipino: "Ihiwalay" which, literally, means "to separate", which is the word that he actually uttered although what he may have really wanted to convey was more nuanced, e.g., to distinguish, to differentiate, to make note of the difference, or to re-direct. I would simply describe it as a re-orientation.*

*As the constitutionally-elected President of the Republic, Duterte has the prerogative to re-define and re-orient the country's foreign policy along the lines of his vision. What is emerging from his series of public statements is his desire to forge a foreign policy more independent from an over-bearing foreign power, more-self-determining, and distinguishable from that of preceding administration, viewed as more fawning to foreign interests.*

*Given a historical vantage point, this is remarkable in itself regardless of whether Duterte succeeds or not. We have a sitting president wanting to do the above where none of his predecessors – actually, since the birth of the republic -- have ever contemplated, much less, put into action, what he has declared to do, at least in the foreign policy arena. This came as a surprise, of course, to many including myself, who have begun to offer him cautious benefit of the doubt.*

ESJ: A formidable ambition. What would be needed to accomplish that?

*KB: For him to succeed, he has to define his parameters and to contend with, rather than ignore, some constraints. In the short-term, he needs to shore up his congressional base of support and to ensure that he gets the kind of legislative backing for his foreign policy objectives.*

*Further, he needs to consolidate his leadership in two organizations that fall directly under his authority both as President and as Commander-in-Chief: the civilian bureaucracy (which includes the civilian police force at various levels), and the military. I do not mean for him to become authoritarian or, for that matter, invoke an emergency or a crisis to justify some form of constitutional dictatorship.*

*I believe the country is not in a situation wherein this is necessary despite some rumors of a coup. But if he feels that the epidemic of prohibited drugs is of such an extent that it is an imminent threat to the life of the nation similar to if not more so than when former President Ferdinand Marcos felt that the Marxist and the Bangsamoro insurgencies during the early 1970s were a threat to the Republic, then he (Duterte) may take some kind of emergency measures and assume extraordinary powers as the Chief Executive under the Constitution, which permits him to do so.*

ESJ: Opponents (mainly from the pro-American Roxas-Aquino-Trillanes camp) are already calling him a "communist" dictator. What is your reading of his populist tendency?

*KB: Right now, Duterte continues to ride high in popularity among ordinary citizens a hundred days or so into his presidency. This despite the fact that hundreds of innocents have died as collateral victims since he commenced his war on drugs.*

*It is hard to predict how long he can sustain this level of public support, but he can do this if, over the next year or two: 1) he continues to show significant rate of decline in the distribution and use of prohibited drugs; 2) he shows that he has a serious program to go after the big-name dealers, high-profile politicians, and certain elements within the police, military, and civilian bureaucracy; 3) he significantly reduces the number of collateral victims and provides avenues of redress for the victims' families; and, d. he institutes a program of rehabilitation with the support and cooperation of various non-governmental organizations and the private business sector.*

ESJ: Let us return to the vow to "separate" from US vampiric embrace. What are some of the diplomatic or juridical steps needed?

*KB: Duterte may commence a critical review of the existing treaties and agreements involving the country's military and economic relations with the US. On military matters, this review would have to include agreements and treaties that are relics of the Cold War including the Military Assistance Agreement of 1947 and the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 which provides, among others, for the so-called Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG), a Trojan Horse of sorts allowing the US a unidirectional prerogative to predetermine, influence, if not control, internal Philippine military decisions and virtually apart from executive knowledge and control, with regards to, among other issues, procurement, training, and strategies and from whose trainees could come potential coup leaders in collaboration with their quisling allies among the traditional elite politicians.*

*We might add here the so-called Manila Declaration of 2011 signed between former Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Del Rosario--a tried and true servant to US interests, and to Hillary Clinton, a neocon darling-- affirming this treaty but reinforcing the Philippines' military dependence on and subordination to US military priorities; and, the more recent Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) of 2014, allowing for "rotation" rather than permanent basing of US forces, including use of Philippine military facilities and equipment, viewed by many as a circumvention of the constitutional prohibition of presence of foreign military forces on Philippine soil and a travesty of Philippine sovereignty.*

ESJ: Would you say this move would also address the political, cultural and ideological subordination of the Philippines to US imperial geopolitics?

*KB: These "treaties" serve, first, as means of neocolonial control over the Philippines and for the purpose of disciplining its population, and, second, as integral foundation to its series of military outposts in projecting military might in East Asia and Western Pacific, which includes Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in Northeast Asia; Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia; and Australia and New Zealand in the Southwestern Pacific as members of the tight three-party Cold War vintage military alliance called the ANZUS, all of which are intended, aside from affirming Anglo-Saxon supremacy in that part of the globe, to coral the vast natural resources, e.g., tin, manganese, ore, gold, copper, oil and rubber, contained within the East Asian and Western Pacific region; control and regulate the vital navigational arteries connecting two great oceans essential to maintaining trade under the neoliberal rules heavily tilted in its favor; and discipline the behavior of China and North Korea with a lot of help from the roving US Seventh Fleet, not to mention thousands of foot soldiers stationed in bases hosted in many of these allied countries that already maintain a host of surveillance and communications posts within their respective territories.*

*What Duterte is doing is not to radically alter the architecture of US imperial control in the region, for that would be unrealistic to expect; what he is doing is forging towards his vision of weaning the country from this dependent status.*

ESJ: Can you elaborate what moves he should initiate on the economic front?

*KB: Duterte should organize a task force – again, consisting of nationalist-oriented citizens who share his economic vision – to help him comprehensively assess the nature, impact, and direction of economic relations with not only the US but also, more broadly, with the whole network of global neoliberal institutions that have served to entrap the Philippines into a perpetual cycle of poverty, calamity, mendicancy, and dependency. If Duterte wishes to accomplish his goal of “separation,” he should also realize that, if he wavers, there will not be another opportunity that would come along in a very long while as the one currently within his grasp.*

*The ability of the US to subvert and thwart self-determining efforts on the part of many countries in the Global South must not be underestimated. The US has a long and continuing track record of doing this. Commencing with a recognition of the bogus nature of the so-called special relationship between the US and the Philippines featuring the onerous parity rights agreement propagated during much of the 1950s and the 1960s, and of the debilitating effects of over a century's assimilation and internalization of the capitalist ethos, and belief in the presumed boundless benevolence of the US, he should consider redefining terms of investment and trade agreements. He must repudiate the blind and relentless application and enforcement of neoliberal principles, e.g., privatization, trade liberalization, and deregulation, all of which have accelerated the erosion of national sovereignty and patrimony in favor of foreign-based supranational decision-making bodies that almost without fail favor foreign-based corporate*

*entities with a grant of, among others, unprecedented investors rights and intellectual property rights,*

*Duterte also needs to critically examine the terms of membership with trading regimes, both global and regional, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Trans-Pacific Economic Partnership (TPP) as well as with global financial institutions, e.g., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He could judge where the country has benefited, and where it is being debilitated, such as the odious debts incurred during the Marcos dictatorship. He should not only repudiate these debts but also the conditionalities that encumber the nation's economic self-determination.*

*Duterte should assert the prerogative to re-impose protectionist laws and regulations, long-abandoned especially since the country joined the WTO, in order to safeguard public health, conserve the environment, protect and develop the competitiveness of small and local producers and farmers, including adoption of safeguards and measures to clamp down on the dumping into the local market of cheap, subsidized products from the industrialized countries, e.g., genetically modified grains and food commodities, and provide assistance to infant industries and protect these from foreign competition. He should reconsider reviving the import substitution growth strategy adopted by nationalist-oriented regimes during the 1950s and early 1960s.*

ESJ: Well, after the CIA-Lansdale-directed Magsaysay and the repression of the Recto-Tañada-led nationalist movement, we got Marcos and authoritarian rule. Do you see the State functioning otherwise?

*KB: That Filipino-first strategy was quashed by the US-endorsed free market fundamentalism, accompanied by a spate of coups, assassinations, and relentless doze of propaganda praising the virtues of the US as beacon of democracy. Duterte must understand that market fundamentalism promises only illusory development to the client states like the Philippines that have only gone deeper and deeper into an endless cycle of poverty, inequality, and violence.*

*of the state, properly oriented along national democratic lines, must be affirmed so as to properly direct it into providing public services, ensuring fair and just working conditions, implementing agrarian reform, and restoring the damaged environment.*

*All the above-suggestions would be in line with and in support of a remarkable and bold statement, declared to a group of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) upon Duterte's arrival in Japan last October, that he would like to see the current generation of OFWs now dispersed in all four corners of the globe to be the last. He would like to see the country develop in such a way as to provide employment to the citizens with decent living wages or income and break the cycle of the*

*Philippines as a labor-exporting country at the service of transnational companies based largely in affluent regions of the globe, e.g., North American, Western Europe, the Middle East, and Northeast Asia.*

ESJ: What is your comment on the US and Europe's focus on the so-called "extra-judicial killings" by the PNP which, inflated grossly, obfuscates the lethal impact of narcopolitics that have ruined Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Afghanistan and other "failed" states?

*KB: The issue of extra-judicial killings (EJK) has been on my mind for a long time. I myself reflected on this issue in an OpEd in the **Manila Chronicle** on military-enabled vigilante killings in Mindanao in the 1980s.*

*No one brought up on the concept of respect for the lives and dignity of others, adherence to common rules of human decency and principles of fairness, acceptance of the rule of law and due process, and the sovereignty of nations to determine and shape their own future, would ever condone or accept EJK as a means of dispensing justice or restoring order or national security. This problem was – and remains – a feature of elite-led electoral politics.*

*Then as now, extra-judicial killing was and is accepted as a “normal” tool by rival local and provincial warlords wanting to maintain their lordship over a particular town, province or region, reflecting the semi-feudal/semi-capitalist conditions that the country was and is in. It also reflects the utter failure of the US-imposed experiment in formal-legalism in which US colonial authorities wanted to convert the colony as a showcase of liberal democracy in Asia but one anchored on the system of accumulation and super-imposed on the country's semi-feudal condition.*

*At the time, US colonial authorities relied on the cooperation of local elites as transmission belt of colonial power and authority. They even allowed these local elites to form their own private armed groups, and even cultivated the practice of arming, training, and managing vigilante groups or death squads in counter-insurgency campaigns. Now, reliance on vigilante groups or death squads not only by the military and the police but also by civilian politicians, has not diminished. It remains endemic. The ideological uses of these groups become more manifest when they are employed for disciplining society, for extracting compliance, and for counter-insurgency purposes. More broadly, they are an essential tool for maintaining the country's semi-feudal/semi-capitalist status quo wherein the country itself maintains its client status, a semi-colony, under the guardianship of the US.*

ESJ: Practically all media propaganda about EJK ascribed to Duterte lacks a historical context or perspective. Crude empiricism (litany of victims' personalities, sensational framing, the numbers game) has been deployed to demonize Duterte.

US "imperial humanitarianism" is frothing to neutralize the Filipino devil. What is your diagnosis?

*KB: The drug problem in the Philippines is largely domestic in nature but with international dimensions. Much of the suppliers are foreign-based, along with much of the raw materials and equipment used in processing and refining. The Philippines, thus, has been and remains largely a drug-consuming country.*

*While the production is largely in the hands of invisible but powerful drug lords, with foreign nationalities, distribution and consumption are essentially by and among Filipinos. Thus, the overwhelming victims are Filipinos with their lives destroyed, families broken, and the social fabric torn apart. The rate of addiction among the civilian population has been spiking, with periods of acceleration and decline reflecting both the flow of supply and the intensity – or lack thereof – of official efforts to fight this menace.*

*Although there are obvious differences, the nature of the local drug problem resembles that which China faced on the eve of the Opium Wars in the late 1830s, eliciting an edict from the Chinese imperial authorities banning opium imports from foreign traders angering, in turn, British traders and their colonial protectors who claimed simply that the ban was in violation of free trade. With the British Empire as the greatest drug pusher at that time, its invocation of free trade, as a strategic step, was over and above the health and welfare of the Chinese people. British merchants profited at the expense of the well-being of the Chinese people while the British Empire was able to gain a foothold in the Chinese mainland and project its power (from Hong Kong) throughout East Asia and the Pacific. Drugs, human rights violations and predatory colonialism (as in Afghanistan and Colombia) have always been intertwined.*

ESJ: So this hysteria about Duterte as "serial killer" (as one French newspaper stigmatized him) merits the vulgar expletives. Fine, but these elites have always dictated the norms of "civilized" governance since the rise of the Spanish, then British and French empires, up to American predominance. Would you expect a logical improbable behavior, given the nature of the beast?

*KB: These criticisms are hollow and lacking in credibility. At best, they could be strategic in nature, intended, consciously or unconsciously, to impress upon him the superiority of Western-oriented legal principles and standards of human rights, and contrast these with the presumed barbarism and absence of due process in the former colonial ward, compounded by what they see as Duterte's unrefined manners and foul language.*

*The US, for example, has not much to show for after four decades or so of its so-called war on drugs. Aside from filling private prisons with low-level, non-violent offenders redefined in the court system as felons, this so-called war is nowhere close to being won. Worse, during the illegal war against the sovereign state of*

*Nicaragua in the 1980s, the Reagan Administration, through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), facilitated the sale and distribution of heroin in major US cities, particularly in poor black neighborhoods, to facilitate fund-raising for the terrorist group called the Contras.*

*The US government had no compunction about destroying the lives of minority youths so long as funds were found to underwrite the Contra war and satisfy Reagan's obsession to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua even if this meant destroying Nicaragua's social and economic infrastructure. A World Court decision in 1986 condemned that US policy as terrorism and the US as a terrorist sponsoring state, and proceeded to award Nicaragua the amount of \$17 billion, a decision ignored by the US to this day.*

ESJ: What about the European critics who seem to mimick the US self-righteous chiding of their neocolonial wards?

*KB: I believe Duterte is right in making reference to the EU elites' brutality as colonial masters towards their respective colonial subjects and that the Europeans' criticisms against Duterte are just a way of "atoning" for their past sins, to make themselves feel better. But even that might be too much of an assumption. During the Cold War, these countries have participated in Operation Gladio, a program of political repression and assassination enlisting the work of ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi groups against whom they considered as left-leaning politicians and activists. At Cold War's end, they ganged up on Serbia, subjecting it to more than ninety days of sustained and punishing aerial bombardment, destroying infrastructures, and killing countless innocents in the process, as punishment for President Slobodan Milosevic's apparent failure to sign the US/NATO imposed draft Rambouillet Accord prior to March 1999. Then, through the International Criminal Court (ICC), US/NATO authorities hounded Milosevic with trumped up war crimes charges, detaining him in The Hague, driving him to take his own life, only to be posthumously exonerated of all charges in 2016.*

*A similar level of repression operates today within Europe, this time with the use of militarized police force pitted against those protesting neoliberal policies, including ruthless austerity policies, at venues of WTO, G-8, NATO, and World Bank/IMF meetings in major cities of member states. And, outside of Europe, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), these countries have supported, and continue to support with arms and funds the regime-change in Libya. They have connived in promoting the atrocities of the Zionist State of Israel against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, including the stranglehold of Gaza. They are busy aiding the slaughter of Yemenis and the virtual destruction of the nation of Yemen by Wahhabi Arab despots led by Saudi Arabia; and furthering the relentless pursuit of another regime-change project in Syria. All of the above-cases of US/NATO/EU represent the best about themselves: as ruthless and deceptive modern-day conquerors masquerading under a humanitarian garb.*

ESJ: In case Hillary Clinton is elected, what is your prognostication of Clinton's response to Duterte in contrast to Obama?

*Although it is hard to predict any specific response president Hillary Clinton might show toward Duterte, I believe any response from her would be consistent with broad US geostrategic policies and interests in the East Asian and Western Pacific region. These have involved consolidating and firming up US alliances, bilateral or otherwise, with countries such as South Korea and Japan in Northeast Asia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia, and Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific. . During her term as Secretary of State, Clinton played a direct role in ensuring that these policies and interests remained stable and intact. They are essential to Obama's so-called Pivot to Asia strategy designed essentially to contain China and to project US military might in the Western Pacific with the US Seventh Fleet playing a lead role.*

*Between Clinton and candidate Donald Trump, I would assess Clinton's experience, predisposition, and ideological orientation as by far closer to, and more in accord with, these geostrategic policies and interests than Trump could ever muster though he is known to be pragmatic. It does not mean that in the unlikely possibility that Trump is elected, these geostrategic policies and interests would change. No, but pursuit of them would be impacted by the personality, predisposition, and ideological orientation of whoever is ultimately elected, not to mention the type of advice that they will receive from their respective set of advisers.*

ESJ: Duterte visits to China and Japan, in hindsight, seem part of a shrewd strategy to firm up the trenches before a frontal assault against the Euro-American Leviathan. Certainly it is an unprecedented, pathbreaking move. But would that stabilize the volatile field of local realignments?

*KB: Admittedly, Duterte's opening to China and Russia throws a monkey wrench into all of US plans. In particular, he disrupts Obama's Pivot-to-Asia military program to prepare the region as a possible flashpoint for confrontation with China.*

*Subduing China is the ultimate goal. In so doing, Obama is clearly acting in behalf of the neocons that have maintained dominance in foreign policy-making within the US foreign-policy establishment since the end of the Cold War but, more particularly, since 9/11. Through unilateralism, they have wanted for the US to proclaim a global hegemony, and to dismantle states that dare stand in their way. And for client states, being loyal friends with the US does not assure the preservation of their respective sovereignties.*

*In fact, quite the opposite. In the case of the Philippines, through guile and promises of assistance, the US has managed to persuade Philippine negotiators to violate the Philippine Constitution in two ways. Firstly, by allowing US troops within Philippine soil through the concept of "rotation" wherein no US troops would*

*be permanently stationed in the Philippines; only on a rotation basis. This means that there will always be US troops, except that they are recycled periodically. Secondly, on the principle that the country is nuclear-free, Philippine officials have simply refused to verify further when US officials declare their standing policy of neither confirming nor denying whether a US military craft (either naval or air force) wishing to dock or land at a Philippine port or airbase carries nuclear weapons. They simply assume that the US could be trusted and, hence, regard verbal assurances by US officials as the final word.*

ESJ: So, way before the elections, the US has subverted Philippine sovereignty, and Duterte cursing was a wake-up call to Filipinos to face the truth of their continuing oppression and domination, mystified initially as "Benevolent Assimilation" by Yankee invaders when they killed 1.4 million "insurrection" in the Filipino-American War (1899-1913). Can you spell out the ramifications of this new initiative?

*KB: If Duterte is able to sustain his policy of rapprochement with China and Russia through the mid-point of his six-year term, he shall have disrupted the US provocations against China particularly in challenging China's claims of sovereignty over the Spratlys and over vital sea lanes.*

*This may be a good thing in at least three ways that I can think of, all ignored by his detractors: First, it removes the immediate possibility of direct confrontation between China and the US over the contested waters as well as over principles of navigation. Second, it affords an opportunity for Duterte to wean the Philippines away from political and economic dependence on the US, at the same time it also affords opportunity for the Philippines for a self-determined path toward economic development and political independence. And, third, it gives a fine example to countries in the Global South seeking more self-determination to emulate.*

*The US, under a Clinton presidency, might not easily reconcile itself with this situation, however, and might find ways to subvert, undermine, or change it. This is based on the simple premise that empires, like the US today, take a dim view towards neutrals in a military sense, or those non-aligned, in a political sense. They are intolerant to alternative philosophies or ways of life that could potentially challenge their own system, expose their weaknesses, or derail their objectives. This is illustrated by a number of cases including the US embargo on Cuba, and regime change policies pursued or attempted on a good number of examples by the US in Central and South America, and in post-Soviet Eastern Europe through the so-called Color Revolutions.*

*Thus, Duterte would be well-advised to watch out. While he may have the loyalty of the civilian bureaucracy, the loyalty of the police and the military could not be automatically assumed. After all, he has to reckon with decades of direct military-to-military relationship between the Philippine and US militaries through JUSMAG*

*wherein decisions that are military in nature are often made without close scrutiny and supervision by, or consent of, civilian authorities, let alone the President.*

*The police institution, on the other, has also been primed through decades of intervention in the areas of training, procurement, and management by the USAID with its police assistance program in willing host countries falling under the broader guise of developmental assistance. If Duterte wishes his re-orientation to be comprehensive, and to assert Philippine independence and self-reliance in military and police matters, these are definite areas he needs urgently to look at and, perhaps, terminate.*

ESJ: What is your evaluation of Filipino-American response to Duterte? In general, there is wide support, but there is a vocal antagonism expressed by professionals and upper-class Fil-Ams--the new "asimilados"--claiming to be 200% Americans.

*KB: The continuing overwhelming popular support that Duterte enjoys attests to his enigma as a political actor. The enigma flows out of the seeming series of contradictions that he embodies within himself but based on the viewer's preconceived notions, preferences, and standards about how a person – a politician in this case – should behave. Thus, he has been described among media commentators as a psychopath, as “the punisher”, “serial killer” (as per a French newspaper) and, grudgingly, as a “political genius”, whatever that means.*

*Among US and European leaders, criticisms against Duterte have obsessed largely on the human rights implications of his anti-drug campaign and, thus, their assessment on his performance in this campaign has been based mainly on formal standards of human rights and due process.*

*They have also commented on Duterte's apparent coarse speech and unrefined manners, suggesting that these are manifestations of Duterte's lack of training in etiquette or table manners. This has prompted Hillary Clinton, upon hearing of Duterte's choice of words in describing US President Barack Obama as a son-of-a-type-of-mother, to call on and lecture Duterte “to have some respect.” This is an early indication of how Clinton, if elected president, would assume an imperious posture and treat Duterte as a juvenile, never mind that Clinton herself has been implicated by a mountain of evidence in much greater and more serious instances of criminalities including breach of US national security laws, regime-change in Libya, murder in Honduras, misappropriation of Haitian relief funds, and, along with her husband Bill Clinton, pay-for-play scheme through the money-laundering operations of the Clinton Foundation involving huge amounts of funds from foreign donors.*

ESJ: That was the naif mask, the playful ingenue, astutely wired to provoke and incite, successful so far in thrusting the Philippines into the main headlines. What is its dialectical counterpart?

*KB: Among Duterte's supporters, on the other hand, they see his tough-talking style but along with his down-to-earth, personable approach as admirable and endearing assets in the context of Filipino culture. They see him as one who understands their situation, one who can be relied on as a neighbor, and one who will not take advantage of one's weakness or even of one's naivete.*

*In contrast to traditional politicians, or even to mainstream politicians in the developed societies of North America and Western Europe, he is seen as frank and sincere, straight-talking, and tough if needed. In other words, he is what one sees and not what he wishes one to believe, and this makes him enough of an unconventional and an unorthodox political personality because this is regarded as honesty but above all, integrity.*

*While he has been adored by much of the public, he has basically been disowned by the mainstream Philippine political class, that is, until his electoral victory in May 2016. Keep in mind that his presidential campaign was launched largely as a result of a popular clamor. He did not seek the position; it was essentially handed to him as the most viable candidate for his political party, the PDP-Laban (PDP or Partidong Demokratiko sa Pilipinas [Democratic Party of the Philippines], in alliance with Lakas ng Bayan [LABAN, or People Power]) by the public that rejected the almost endless cycle of old-time corruption, incompetence, and mendicancy associated with previous administrations especially the administration of the outgoing President Benigno Aquino, Jr. and his ruling Liberal Party.*

*Duterte garnered 16.6 million votes, 6.5 million votes more than the next highest vote-getter. Although this was a plurality (39 %), rather than a majority, Duterte quickly earned the support and admiration of much of the 61 % of the voting public that did not vote for him by showing early successes in fulfilling several of his campaign promises including exposing and fighting corruption in high places, and his much talked-about anti-drug campaign. In this electoral cycle, 81% was reported to have turned out heavily to vote out of a total of 54 million registered voters.*

*Following the May 9 elections, the Second Quarter 2016 Survey of the Manila pollster Social Weather Station gives Duterte the excellent rating of +79. In the same survey, 63% of respondents believe that Duterte can fulfill "all or nearly all" of his campaign promises in all categories, in both urban and rural areas, in all classes, among men and women, all age groups, and across education. With these results reflecting his comprehensive victory, Duterte broke all barriers, proving the mainstream pundits wrong.*

*ESJ: Of course, a deviant will attract other folks marginal or oppositional to the status quo. Please discriminate the sectors in this cluster.*

*KB: OK. Among Duterte's broad base of support, especially following his election, has been the Left community of various shades including those who consider themselves liberal, progressive, nationalist, environmentalist, human rights activist, revolutionary (above-ground), and revolutionary (underground), among others. While no systematic survey is available to gauge the level and consistency of and motives for support for Duterte, there is enough traffic of opinion in the media that one may randomly use to understand this facet of the Duterte phenomenon.*

*It appears that there are many issues of substance represented by Duterte that have served as a glue bringing these groups together, setting aside differences that could be set aside, serving as a protective shield for Duterte if for no other reason than the realization or, at least, perception, that this is a rare moment in the nation's history, a moment long time in coming and which may not come again in a long while, wherein their respective aspirations are represented and articulated, and real actions being taken to actualize them.*

*On such substantive issues as poverty and inequality, and the pestering insurgency both by the Marxist-oriented and the Bangsamoro rebels in the southern Philippines, Duterte's approach, characterized by his pragmatism, already promises early signs of progress.*

*With Duterte's invitation to several prominent and respected members of the Left community into his administration, coupled by the success of the preliminary talks between the Philippine Government, on one hand, and representatives of the Marxist insurgency, held in Oslo, Norway hosted by the Royal Norwegian Government, during several weeks of negotiations culminating with the signing of the preliminary agreement in late August 2016.*

*This is the moment denied to the Left at the time of the People Power Revolution that catapulted Cory Aquino to the presidency in 1986, or 30 years ago. At that time, the Left above-ground political party, BAYAN, was beset with internal indecision as to whether or not to join a coalition in which it was not the principal decision-maker. It turned out that events had decided for BAYAN when the bourgeois elite leadership, with whom (Cory) Aquino was more identified, excluded BAYAN from the coalition that they themselves built and controlled, effectively shutting out BAYAN from any post-dictatorship role.*

**ESJ:** What is your evaluation of current negotiations? Duterte established good relations with Moro National Liberation Front leader Misuari that led to the release of some hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf. Duterte's pivot to Mindanao seems to be working. Will this be the strong point of his administration even if he is neutralized or overthrown by a coup?

*KB: God forbid that anything untoward would happen to Duterte. In dealing with the twin insurgencies of the Marxist-oriented New People's Army (NPA) and its*

*political arm, the National Democratic Front (NDF), and the Bangsamoro insurgency represented both by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Duterte has accomplished more in his first one hundred days in office than any of the three presidents that preceded him during each of their respective entire terms in office. I am referring to Joseph Estrada, who declared a “total war” on the Bangsamoro; Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who scuttled peace negotiations; and Noynoy Aquino, the do-nothing president but presided over the botched Mamasapano massacre, among other malfeasance.*

*In dealing with the Marxist insurgency, Duterte has some background, as Mayor of Davao City, in understanding the many reasons why a fellow citizen would abandon a life of relative comfort and pick up a gun and fight the government in the hills and fields of his province as a rebel. Although not a Marxist, he understands enough that the grueling poverty and oppression that a vast number of ordinary citizens both in his province of Davao and throughout the country offer little hope for a better life. His pragmatism was put to use in dealing with the rebels in his province and city by opening a line of communication with them, often to the chagrin of the military posted in his province, the Tenth Infantry Battalion.*

*An example of this was when a prominent NPA leader, Leonardo Pitao, or Kumander Parago, was killed in an encounter with the military on June 28, 2015. The military believed that Pitao's death would cause the rebel movement to fizzle, but Duterte disagreed arguing that Pitao would be replaced, possibly by Pitao's adult son. For Pitao's funeral, he allowed the use of the city's recreation center for the slain rebel leader's wake and to accommodate thousands of rebels and sympathizers from across Mindanao, and possibly from other parts of the country as well, to attend the funeral. Duterte promised to help the slain rebel leader's family cope with the loss because he knew Pitao as a “family man” at the same time that he assured the citizens of his city that they would be safe from any future retaliation that the rebels might take against the military.*

ESJ: That was indeed exemplary, a prophesy of what's to come. But let us return to the more intractable problem of the Moro insurgency. Given your extensive, perspicacious scholarship on the Islamic movement in the Philippines, what is the prospect of this conflict winding down, or at least tempered with some negotiated compromise, analogous to the one being made between the government and the NDF.NPA?

*KB: In dealing with the Bangsamoro insurgency, Duterte declared during his State of the Nation address that he would pursue peace with both the MNLF and the MILF despite simmering differences between the two rebel groups. He has been critical of the way his predecessors have handled the negotiations with these groups, characterized by bad faith and lack of resolve. Duterte has expressed determination in bringing the Muslim insurgency to an end, and the rebel groups have reciprocated by expressing their goodwill. Declared Ghazali Jaafar, MILF's Vice Chairman for Political Affairs: “No one will understand better the Moro issue*

*but a Mindanaon”, plus given the fact that Duterte himself has Maranaw and Lumad ancestry in his blood and privy to the struggles and experiences of both the Lumad community and the Bangsamoro.*

*Duterte ordered the military and the police not to arrest erstwhile MNLF Chair Nur Misuari, former Governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), accused of leading a failed rebellion in early November 2001 intended to disrupt elections scheduled on November 26 of that year to elect Misuari's successor as governor of ARMM. This as a gesture of goodwill to the MNLF.*

ESJ: My intuition is that the way Duterte handles the Moro insurgency might lay down the groundwork for preparing to accept the NDF's national-democratic program for national reconstruction, even though the chronology might be different. What is your assessment beyond the configuration of the conventional tea-leaves?

*KB: The challenge faced by Duterte in seeking peace in Mindanao may be more complicated than the set of negotiations he has with the Marxist rebels. In the former, he is dealing with fractious groups, including now the Lumads. Additionally, he faces the task untangling the myriad of agreements reached by previous administrations separately with various groups, principally the MNLF and the MILF. Then, there is the matter with the Abu Sayyaf putative to the US policy of recruiting ruthless Muslim fighters around the globe during the 1980s and unleashed them on the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Duterte has inherited this headache from all previous administrations, but with the inter-mediation of Misuari and other Moro leaders, some kind of solution may be found. As to how soon, however, it is not known, but at least Duterte has already succeeded in getting some hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf fighters released, and this is not a bad accomplishment for a president just a few months old in office.*

*Much of the political solution to the Bangsamoro rebellion appears to rest on the shoulders of government institutions, first, on the part of the legislature to craft, in consultation with Bangsamoro leaders, a new political architecture not just in Mindanao but for the rest of the country but in a manner that would provide as wide and meaningful an autonomy as possible for the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines. Right now the concept of federalism is being examined and assessed in terms of its viability for a country that has had a centralized, unitary government for much of its life either as a colony or as an independent nation. Second, on the part of the Supreme Court (SC), which has had the tendency to be formalistic and literal in interpreting the role of the executive branch particularly in crafting a new political arrangement. This was illustrated in 2008 when the SC invalidated the Memorandum on Agreement – Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) agreed upon by government and MILF rebel negotiating panels. While this agreement would have provided a modicum of peace in the Southern Philippines, the SC decision was a catalyst for the continuation of more shedding of blood that continues to this day.*

*If Duterte succeeds in bringing a negotiated settlement to the twin insurgencies mentioned here, it would be the single most important accomplishment not only by him but by any president who has ever assumed his position of power and responsibility. In reality, these insurgencies are what festers in the back of every citizen's mind as they confront the other problems faced by the nation: poverty and inequality and, of course, corruption and the drug menace. There is a sense that these insurgencies need to be taken care of first before attention could really and fully be turned on the greater problems. But it is well for Duterte to realize that a negotiated settlement with the leaders of these insurgencies only gives a brief breathing room to lay the foundation towards a lasting solution to the poverty, inequality, and lack of political representation that fueled these insurgencies in the first place. Failure to do so would guarantee resumption of these fighting and much bloodletting among brothers and sisters. Only a thoroughgoing popular, democratic revolutionary transformation of the whole country can ultimately bring justice, dignity, prosperity, and genuine sovereignty to our people.*

October 31, 2016