

MANILA STANDARD

The bang, bang, bang bad-ass president

posted October 19, 2016 at 12:01 am by [Tony Lopez](#)



For the first time in our history, we have a “bang, bang, bang president”—Rodrigo Roa Duterte, 71.

Like eight presidents before him, Du30 is a lawyer. Like Ferdinand Marcos before him, the incumbent chief executive is a warrior president.

Marcos, however, was a warrior in the classical sense of the word. That is—he trained himself as a soldier, was a lieutenant during the Second World War, and became a guerilla leader. He also battled the most vicious rebels the Philippines has ever known—the communist guerillas and the Muslim separatists.

Duterte is also a warrior but in a different sense. He has refused to conduct an open war with the communist guerillas (three of their leaders are in his cabinet) and the Muslim separatists. (He thinks the criminal syndicate Abu Sayyaf are patriots).

Plainly, Duterte is warrior, gangland style. He battles drug addicts, drug dealers, drug lords and other criminal elements, using courage, cunning, skill, gutter language, and legal shortcuts of the moment. So far, the man with the rugged looks and quiet charisma seems to be winning. More than 4,407 drug addicts, drug lords and criminal elements in the same business have fallen. The police admit to killing four of every 10 victims or 1,661; they point to vigilantes for taking care of the remainder, 62 percent or the 2,730. Every day, 40 people die in the vicious unrelenting illegal drugs war.

Success has made Duterte such a notorious bad-ass—intimidating, uncompromising, tough, an inveterate killing machine. The free dictionary defines a bad-ass a “mean-tempered or belligerent person.”

Duterte is a natural bad-ass. As mayor for nearly 23 years of his native Davao City in the south, he was wont to wear leather jackets and leather boots, ride a motorcycle, a pistol tucked in his waist, maraud the streets in search of suspects and criminals. Mincing no words, he told the criminals in his city of 1.5 million people: “Go out of my city. Because if I find you here, I will kill you!” Indeed, those who didn’t leave, “they died,” he gloated.

That image won him the presidency. Duterte garnered the most number of votes ever won by a presidential winner—16.6 million, 39 percent of the 42.55 million votes cast in the May 9, 2016 elections. The 16.6 million is 6.6 million more votes than the poor second placer, Mar Roxas who had 9.978 million or 23.45 percent of the total.

Having won with his bang, bang, bang style of public service, Duterte has expanded his killing fields—the nation, and barged into the global arena. US President Barack Obama, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and the European Union raised alarms about human rights violations. Angered, Duterte called Obama the son of a whore and suggested “he can go to hell.” He dismissed Ban Ki-moon as a fool (“tarantado”). He advised the EU “to better choose purgatory.”

Duterte seems bent on fulfilling his campaign promise of drowning 100,000 drugs in polluted Manila Bay to fatten the fish there. He has extended his deadline to kill them, from six months (up Dec. 31, 2016) to one year (until June 30, 2017). The President keeps saying he will not stop “until the last pusher is taken out of the streets,” adding: “I have no intention of failing.”

For Duterte, the problem is not drugs per se. “It is the survival of the next generation,” he points out. Once a family has a drug addict, that family starts to become dysfunctional, to disintegrate. A year or two of drugs use could shrink a user’s brain, Digong says. The user then becomes a criminal.

Early on, Finance Secretary Sonny Dominguez announced Duterte’s 10-point socio-economic agenda. They include: one, maintaining macro-economic policies; two, tax reform; three, easing doing business; four, ramped-up infra; five, rural and agricultural development; six, land management; seven, human capital development; eight, science and technology; nine, social protection; and 10, family planning.

I think Sonny over-counted, using his 10 fingers. Truth to tell, Digong has only three programs—drugs and crime, corruption, and an independent foreign policy.

Reducing illegal drugs and criminality looks to me like a huge success, at least for the short term. I am not keen though on the success of Digong’s anti-corruption campaign. His fear-factor could indeed work wonders, at times. Like when he declared the end of laglag-bala extortion racket at airports by threatening to feed the bullet to the airport personnel who plants the lead into passengers’ luggage.

Also, Transportation Secretary Art Tugade has declared it is okay to put a bullet into your luggage as long as you surrender it before boarding your flight.

It still takes two months to secure a passport. There are still no driver's licenses and plates readily available. At local governments, securing business permits still is an ordeal (the locals still insist on selling you fire insurance, for P1,000).

To his credit, Duterte insists on having government bureaucrats to issue permits or licenses in three days and on his cabinet to act on project approvals within a month. He also has "8888" for the public to dial to denounce corrupt government personnel.

Meanwhile, Duterte seems to think that an independent foreign policy means being anti-American and veering closer to China and Russia, America's traditional geopolitical rivals.

Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay says America has failed the Philippines. The US cannot help the country protect "our territorial boundaries and the exclusive use of our maritime entitlements in the South China Sea. "Our defensive forces remain grossly incapable in meeting security threats," says Yasay. Worse, "our only ally could not give us the assurance that in taking a hard line towards the enforcement of our sovereignty rights under international law, it will promptly come to our defense under our existing military treaty and agreements."

In Duterte's eyes, America has no credibility as an ally. Why? America has not given Manila enough firepower to cope with its enemies, real and imagined. It's the "bang, bang" mentality all over again.

Only in this case, the stakes are much bigger and the balance of terror and power in Asia could tilt in Beijing's favor, away from America.

biznewsasia@gmail.com