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Submitted: 29 November 2024; Revised: 29 January 2025; Accepted: 30 January 2025

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Policy Coherence and Consistency: An Analysis of the Philippine Foreign Policy towards the West Philippine Sea

Abstract

The territorial dispute in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) has long been a significant threat to the peace and security of not only the Philippines but also of the broader Indo-Pacific region. Despite the emergence of other key global issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, tensions in the disputed islands have continued to escalate, compelling the Philippines to pursue various strategies to protect and promote its national interests. This research aims to analyze and compare the consistency and coherence of the foreign policy strategies pursued by the last three administrations, namely the Aquino, Duterte, and Marcos Jr. administrations, with regard to the WPS. It seeks to understand and evaluate the foreign policy of each administration through the lens of both international relations and public policy theories. To produce substantive qualitative research, the author utilized a variety of data sources, including relevant literature, interviews with Philippine diplomats, and official statements by the Presidents. Considering that the Philippines elects a new president every six years and a confluence of factors affect its foreign policy, this paper advocates for a consistent and coherent foreign policy that transcends presidential terms. Given that war is never an option for the country, the President, as the chief architect of Philippine foreign policy, must exhaust all diplomatic measures available to protect and promote the nation's interests.

Keywords:

policy coherence; Philippine Foreign Policy; West Philippine Sea (WPS)

Introduction

Foreign policy is a public policy. A public policy reflects the intention of the government (Anyabe, 2018). Meanwhile, foreign policy serves as a guide on the conduct of foreign relations of one country. Its

main purpose is to advance a country's interest while upholding its culture, principles, and sovereignty (Ahmed, 2020). In the formulation of state foreign policy, it needs to take into consideration various factors such as geography, culture,

history, and security (Jacobini, 1961). Hence, a foreign policy is developed and pursued by the government to promote its national interest and may change depending on prevailing needs and circumstances of the country.

The Philippine Constitution dictates that the country's foreign policy should be anchored in its national interest and any conflict should be resolved diplomatically. It mandates the renunciation of war as a means of national policy and that its foreign policy should be independent from any foreign influences. The Philippine President serves as the chief diplomat with an authority to govern all branches of the government (the 1987 Philippine Constitution; Resos, 2013). Meanwhile, the prime agency responsible to assist the President in the pursuit of Philippine Foreign Policy is the Department Foreign Affairs (DFA).

The South China Sea Dispute

In the case of the Philippines, an aspiring middle power in Southeast Asia, its foreign policy is crucial in the advancement of its economic growth and preservation of national security. The South China Sea Dispute is among the key issues in the determination of the Philippine Foreign Policy. The long-standing maritime conflict dates back from 1992 where countries involving China, Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines have conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea (Southgate, 2019). The country's claims over selected islands overlaps with the claims of other states, including China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei.

After the standoff between the Philippines and China at the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, the country, led by its experts and officials, filed an arbitration case against China in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) of the United Nations. In 2016, the ruling was awarded in favor of the Philippines. It noted that the "historic rights" claimed by China in the South China Sea has no basis and China transgressed the Philippine

sovereign rights over the disputed islands by prohibiting Filipinos from fishing (Campbell and Salidjanova, 2016).

To strengthen our commitment to our claims in the South China Sea and for ease of reference, the territorial claim of the country is referred and encapsulated in the term the West Philippine Sea (WPS) by the virtue of Administrative Order 29 issued by President Benigno Simeon Aquino in 2012 (Ubac, 2012). The WPS includes the waters and islands within the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) such as the Luzon Sea, Kalayaan Group of Islands, and Bajo De Masinloc or also known as the Scarborough Shoal (Pangalangan, 2022).

Despite the highly commended ruling of the PCA, the Philippines' foreign policy has pursued various strategies due to the frequent change of administration. These frequent changes in the foreign policy of the Philippines lessens the effectiveness of its implementation, hinders cooperation, and demoralizes the country's commitment to its claims in the disputed islands (Southgate, 2019). Hence, the need to conduct further research on the coherence and consistency of the Philippine Foreign Policy with regard to the WPS.

Literature Review

Coherence and Consistency

This paper utilized two kinds of measurements namely: coherence and consistency. Several authors have used coherence and consistency in measuring foreign policies of other countries. In the article of Olsen (2008), it discussed that the effectiveness of a country's foreign policy comprises two dimensions such as coherence and consistency. It was used as a measurement in the empirical analysis of the effectiveness of the policies of the European Union (EU) towards Africa (Portela & Raube, 2009). In this regard, coherency and consistency is deemed an important factor in the effectiveness of the

foreign policy of a country.

According to Merriam Webster (“Coherence,” n.d.), coherence is defined as “systematic or logical connection”. In the article by Portela & Raube (2009), it provided several definitions of coherence and discussed the principle of coherence as a means to analyze the policies of the EU. The article by Hillion (2008, as cited in Portela & Raube, 2009), the author explained coherence as “beyond the assurance that the different policies do not legally contradict each other”. Meanwhile, Gauttier (2004, as cited in Portela & Raube, 2009) refers to coherence to synergy rather than the absence of contradictions. On the other hand, consistency is defined by the Merriam Webster (“Consistency”, n.d) as “agreement or harmony of parts or features to one another or a whole”. Meanwhile, according to Hoffmeister (2008, as cited in Portela & Raube, 2009) consistency refers to “the absence of contradiction”.

The researcher acknowledges the variation in the foreign policies of the three administrations which made the comparison of the three approaches difficult. This research used the Philippine Constitution as a basis in the analysis of the consistency of the Philippine Foreign Policy which mandates the government to pursue “independent” foreign policy. It means that it is free to pursue its interest and conduct relations with other countries without being influenced by external forces.

Lastly, this paper analyzed the coherency of the Philippine foreign policies on the disputed islands by comparing the policy initiatives and objectives of the last three administrations on the West Philippine Sea. It focused on the consistency of all the issuances, policies, and pronouncements issued by the President and other government agencies with regard to the West Philippine Sea. This is deemed important to determine whether the foreign policies remained consistent despite the changes in administrations.

The Philippine Foreign Policies in the South China Sea

The presidents have a significant role in the formulation and direction of the foreign policy of the country. As the chief architect of Philippine Foreign Policy, their policies and strategy vary and greatly depend on their unique personalities, motives, perceptions, and preferences (Medillo, 2020). In this regard, the subsequent part of the literature review focused on the different strategies pursued by the last three Philippine presidents namely: President Benigno Aquino III (2010-2016), President Rodrigo Roa Duterte (2016-2022), and the current president, Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, Jr. (2022-present).

Aquino Administration

The Aquino administration is notable for its commitment to revitalize the Philippine-US alliance (Medillo, 2020). The administration sought to take advantage of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty which guarantees aid from the United States of America (US) in cases of armed conflict in the country. In 2014, the Aquino administration entered into an Enhance Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US. The EDCA allowed US to use five designated Philippine military bases for its personnel and equipment (Arugay & Storey, 2023). The purpose of the EDCA is to serve a “balancing policy” to the threat posed by China in the South China Sea, improve its military capabilities through joint military exercises with US, and modernize several military equipment especially the country’s naval ships (Southgate, 2019).

In view of the decreasing commitment of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) to tackle the issue, China’s permanent membership at the UN Security Council, and the increasing number of incidents in the disputed islands including the standoff between the Philippines and China in 2012, the Aquino administration decided to take the issue to a

different venue. In 2013, it filed a case against China at the PCA based on the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to which both countries are a signatory (Southgate, 2019). On the other hand, China refused to participate in the court proceedings and released a position paper refuting the relevance and citing the improper venue to settle the dispute (Southgate, 2019).

Duterte Administration

Contrary to the approach of President Aquino, the foreign policy strategy of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte has been labeled as the “golden age” of Philippines-China Relations” (Sianipar, 2023). During his term, the country conducted several bilateral dialogues and pursued partnerships with China. It was during the first year of the Duterte administration when the Arbitral Award was released and despite the favorable win for the country, the administration has pursued a “no-taunt, no-flaunt” foreign policy (Bautista, 2018). In order not to offend China, the Philippines downplayed the ruling and did not issue any policies that would exert its claim in the WPS. As a result, the good relations were reciprocated by China through multiple economic, military, and social aids and investment (Bautista, 2018).

Heydarian (2018) also noted how President Duterte avoided mentioning the Arbitral Ruling in his official engagements. The proposed Code of Conduct in the South China Sea also did not prosper and failed to materialize at the ASEAN despite the chairmanship of the Philippines in 2017. Furthermore, according to the article of Bautista (2016), the shift on the Philippine Foreign Policy during the Duterte administration failed to capitalize on the favorable Arbitral ruling. The Philippines missed the opportunity to use it to further promote the claims of the country and gather support from other non-claimant countries. On the other hand, the article of Manantan (2019) argued that the shift in the Philippine Foreign Policy has benefited the country as it was able to

exploit the prevailing Sino-American rivalry. The Philippines was able to demonstrate to US its ability to diversify its policies and depend less on its traditional allies.

Marcos Jr. Administration

As President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, Jr. assumed his office in June 2022, the President took a different foreign policy approach from what was expected during the campaign season. President Marcos reinvigorated the Philippine-US relations which deteriorated during the previous administration. The Marcos Jr. administration started pushing for a “friend to all” foreign policy which is neither “anti-West nor pro-China” (Arugay & Storey, 2023). This strategy followed and continued the initiatives of former President Aquino.

One of the notable foreign policies of the current administration is the expansion of the EDCA granting additional access from five (5) designated bases to a total of nine (9) military bases in the country. Moreover, it also pursued defense agreements with other countries such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea (Camba, 2023). Another foreign policy approach which differs from its predecessor is the emphasis of this administration on the importance of the Arbitral Ruling amidst the increasing tension in the disputed area (Heiduk & Wilms, 2022).

Foreign Policy as Public Policy

Foreign policy is a public policy. To fully understand the differences among foreign policy of each administration, this paper utilized the models for policy analysis of Dye (2016) as shown in Table No. 1. These models guided the researcher in identifying the various influences that affect the foreign policy on the WPS pursued by each administration.

The process model of policy analysis aims to comprehend the various steps involved during the policymaking process. According to Dye

Table 1.
List of Policy Models for Policy Analysis

Models	Definition by Dye (2016)
1. Process Model	Policy as political activity
2. Institution Model	Policy as Institutional Output
3. Rational Model	Policy as Maximum Social Gain
4. Incremental Model	Policy as Variations on the Past
5. Group Model	Policy as Equilibrium in the Group Struggle
6. Elite Model	Policy as Elite Preference
7. Public Choice Model	Policy as Collective Decision Making by Self- Interested Individuals
8. Game Theory Model	Policy as Rational Choice in Competitive Situations

Source: Processed by author

(2016), the most common policymaking process is composed of problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, policy legitimation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. On the other hand, the Institution model also known as Institutionalism focuses on the role of the government institutions in the implementation of a public policy. It studies the mandate of the institutions and treats public policy as their output. Hence, Institutionalism looks at the efficiency and effectiveness of government institutions as the main factor on the success of the policy (Mahmud, 2017).

The third model is the Rational model wherein it assumes that a policy is only rational if its benefits outweigh its costs. Meanwhile, the fourth model is the Incremental Model or Incrementalism wherein it looks at public policy as “continuation of past government activities with only incremental modifications” (Dye, 2016, p. 15). Policymakers accept the legitimacy of new policies if they supplement or agree with previous policies. The fifth model is that Group Theory suggests that individuals with common interests form groups which enables them to voice their demands, opinions and suggestions to the government. The influence of the group is identified through the following: numbers/size, wealth, organizational strength, leadership, access

to decision makers, and internal cohesion. The sixth model is the Elite Theory wherein public policies reflect the preference of the governing elite in a country. In this case, since the ruling elites decide on the policy, the general population is not informed of the process or do not have the ability to influence the formulation of the policy.

The seventh model refers to the Public Choice Theory wherein individual preferences serve as a major determinant of policy decision making. The danger of this theory is that policymakers may only formulate policies to win voters in elections but fail to implement policies once elected. Lastly, the eighth and last theory is the Game theory wherein policies are seen as a result of rational choice. In this theory, there are “players” who are individuals, a group, or a national government with well-defined objectives capable of rational action. These players must be able to weigh in their own interests and expectations from others to be able to arrive with a rational choice.

International Relations Theories

The two main theories of international relations are realism and liberalism which were conceptualized after the first and second World War. Despite their difference, both theories agree that states are all driven by their self-interest. Realism assumes that people are selfish and competitive and such people lead the state and there is an international anarchy wherein the sovereign state is supreme (Heywood, 2011). On the other hand, neorealism, also referred to as systems theory or structural realism, aims to explain the behavior of states based in the structure of international systems. Although both realism and neorealism believe balance of power prevents conflict, realists suggest that foreign policy is a result of statecraft while neorealist argues that it is achieved through a “structural dynamics of international system, and specifically, distribution of power between and among states” (Heywood, 2011).

The second main theory of international relations is liberalism which became popular after the Second World War. It suggests that a balance of power among states can be achieved and there is a possibility of peace and cooperation among states despite different interests (Heywood, 2011, p. 61). Meanwhile, modern liberalism or neoliberalism believes in the existence of international organizations or institutions which serve as mediators and facilitators of states to work on a common interest. Their belief differs from neorealists who deem cooperation among states would be difficult to achieve due to relative gains. Rather, neoliberals claims the benefits of absolute gains of states from cooperation.

Method

This paper utilized a qualitative case study to have an in-depth understanding of the foreign policies of the last three administrations. The research employed a triangular method in collecting data. The researcher made use of three methods such as interview with Diplomats and Foreign Policy experts, related literature, and pronouncements of the presidents to ensure an in-depth analysis of data collected.

The main purpose of the paper is to describe the various foreign policies of the country and compare the different approaches of the three administrations in dealing with the issue at the WPS. It aimed to identify various influences that affect the foreign policy decision making process of the three administrations and explain the implications of these policies to the country's interest. Lastly, this paper aimed to recommend policy strategies or approaches to ensure that foreign policy on the WPS remains consistent and coherent.

The case study on Philippine Foreign Policy only covered issuances from the Aquino administration to present, the Marcos Jr. administration. Moreover, the scope of this research was restricted by the confidentiality and highly sensitive nature of the subject.

Hence, this paper was heavily dependent on the pronouncements of the President, press releases and news articles.

In this paper, the interviewer refers to the sole researcher of this paper while the respondents are the selected diplomats of the DFA. The researcher interviewed three (3) diplomats who are currently employed at the DFA and had relevant experience and expertise on the country's foreign policy on the WPS. The following are the respondents of this paper, namely: Ambassador Henry Bensurto, Jr., Special Assistant (SA) Winston Dean Almeda, and one officer from the Maritime and Ocean Affairs Office (MOAO) of the DFA who wished to remain anonymous in this paper. In consideration of the anonymity request, the officer from MOAO is referred to in this paper as "the Officer from MOAO".

More importantly, the researcher noted that the responses and views of the three respondents do not reflect the views of the researcher, and the Office, the Organization, and the Government they served. In the same way, the views and analysis reflected in this paper do not reflect the views of the Office and Organization where the researcher is currently employed. Hence, any statements and analysis made during the interview and in this research are based on their individual perspective and analysis of the Philippine Foreign Policy.

Results and Discussion

To make the analysis of the data more extensive and organized, the researcher divided the findings into three sub-themes namely: changes and influences in the Philippine Foreign Policy, independent foreign policy, and coherent and consistent foreign policy.

Changes and Influences in the Philippine Foreign Policy

As the chief architect of the Philippine Foreign Policy, Medillo (2020) mentioned that the foreign policy pursued by every administration

heavily depends on the President's personality and perception. This is echoed by Santamaria (2018) who believed that the foreign policy of the Duterte administration is "highly motivated by the president's personality". Given that every President has the freedom to pursue their own foreign policy the probability of variation on the strategy and implementation of the foreign policy may occur. Ambassador Bensurto pointed out how important policy stability is, especially in the policies towards the WPS, as "the danger is made more apparent, and the consequences are serious and significant whenever you have those policy shifts".

The Philippines' relationship with China intensified during the term of President Duterte compared to President Aquino which is a clear indication of a shift in the foreign policy. This became evident when President Duterte attempted to abolish the existing EDCA with US which was a major policy of the Aquino administration. Respondents believed that the shift is due to the economic benefits and support posed by China in the early years of the administration of President Duterte especially on its Build, Build, Build infrastructure program. SA Almeda highlighted that this initiative of the Duterte administration is among its "de-escalation" strategy to prevent the situation in the WPS from exacerbating. However, Ambassador Bensurto argued that this shift has further encouraged China with its grey-zone tactics in the WPS which placed the Philippines in a disadvantageous position in the long run.

With only two years in the administration of Marcos Jr., there have been significant changes in the foreign policy of the country on the WPS. Bilateral meetings and military cooperation with the US have become more prominent. President Marcos Jr. expanded the scope of the existing EDCA by adding five more bases and entered into several infrastructure agreements with US (Arugay & Storey, 2023). According to SA Almeda, this is probably due to "the succeeding administration

learned from that experience and somehow factored that into their policy towards China". As many of the agreements with China from the previous administration failed to materialize, SA Almeda believed that the President Marcos Jr. deemed it best to pursue a different approach in terms of its foreign policy.

According to Ambassador Bensurto, internal and external factors influencing the foreign policy of the country have always been present even during the Aquino administration wherein he served as a Secretary General of the Commission on Maritime and Ocean Affairs Secretariat (CMOAS). The CMOAS served as an institutional mechanism wherein policies related to the WPS are integrated and reported directly to the Executive Secretary. With the abolition of the CMOAS in 2013, Ambassador Bensurto argued that foreign policy on the WPS has increasingly become "personality based". The existence of the CMOA, which was later abolished by virtue of EO no. 57 series 2011, during the term of President Aquino exemplifies an Institutional Theory of public policy.

On the other hand, President Duterte decided to pursue a foreign policy according to the public policy theory of Public Choice theory. In this case, foreign policies are pursued to maximize potential economic benefits whilst preventing a potential war caused by the increasing tension in the WPS. During the 2016 campaign for the presidential election, President Duterte announced he would ride a jet ski to the disputed islands to assert the rights of the country (De Santos, 2021). This was later rebuked by President Duterte as labeled it as a "pure campaign joke" (De Santos, 2021). President Duterte has made pronouncements during the campaign to gain public clamor but failed to implement the policies after assumption as President. Hence, this is among the dangers of Public Choice Theory reminded by Dye (2016) in his book.

Lastly, President Marcos Jr., who only

assumed the office in 2022, is observed to pursue a foreign policy similar to the approach of President Aquino. According to SA Almeda, he believed that this change in the foreign policy of Marcos Jr. administration was due to the experience and lessons from the previous administration. He further explained how the failure of the investment from China to materialize and the continuous aggression of China in the disputed islands have become factors in the shift in the foreign policy. In this regard, the foreign policy pursued by the Marcos Jr. administration is based on the Rational Theory of public policy. However, the research agrees with the respondents that it is premature to conclude the foreign policy of the Marcos Jr. administration. Hence, this analysis is limited with only the data collected within the first two years of the Marcos Jr. administration.

Independent Foreign Policy

The term “independent” in the country’s foreign policy has been subject to multiple definitions and various interpretations of different administrations. The respondents of the research have also answered dissimilarly when asked on what they think when the constitution stated, “independent foreign policy”. Both Ambassador Bensurto and SA Almeda believed that the term “independent” in the constitution reflects the colonial history of the Philippines. According to Ambassador Bensurto, the use of “independent” foreign policy means “there is a subconscious inferiority complex”. This was echoed by SA Almeda who argued that the use of the term “independent” shows redundancy as the Philippines is a sovereign country.

Subsequently, both SA Almeda and the officer from MOAO have directly agreed that the country’s foreign policy has always been independent. According to the officer from MOAO, the country’s foreign policy has always been independent despite the influence of various factors such as geopolitics. On the other hand, SA Almeda argued that every

administration pursued an independent foreign policy and, in specific cases where it aligned with US Foreign Policy, it only is a consequence of the nature of the policy. He further noted that only history can judge whether the presidents truly pursued an independent foreign policy and protected our national interest.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Bensurto noted how the Duterte Foreign Policy failed to utilize the momentum garnered during the Aquino administration. Despite the different approach and increased bilateral talks with China during the Duterte administration, China continued to militarize and reclaim the islands in the WPS (Camba, 2023; De Castro, 2023). This is what De Castro (2023) reminded in his article that international relations should be strategic and not at the expense of our national interest and security. Hence, pursuing an independent foreign policy does not guarantee protection and promotion of national interest.

In analyzing the International Relations Theory pursued by the three administrations, this paper analyzed the pronouncements, including the State of the Nation Address (SONA), made by the presidents during their term. Given the authority and powers the President encompasses, each pronouncement they make is considered policy or a law (Ranada, 2019). The next sections of the findings and analysis triangulated the pronouncements made by the presidents with official issuances which are important documents for accountability and transparency (Ranada, 2019). In the absence of an official issuance, news articles were used as reference to cross check Presidential pronouncements.

During the first SONA of President Aquino (2010), there was no mention of the foreign policy strategy he aimed to pursue. However, he mentioned his plan to modernize military equipment and bases (Aquino, 2010). Meanwhile, on his sixth and last SONA, President Aquino highlighted the importance of multilateral

approach and the country's commitment to international law in dealing with the issue at the WPS. The statements President Aquino made before and after the filing of the case against China indicated the peaceful means pursued by the Aquino administration in handling the dispute. Despite the threat posed by China and the suspension of bilateral talks with China, the country was not deterred and used diplomatic means in asserting its claims in the disputed islands. War or any aggressive or militarized means was never an option to the administration.

In this regard, the Aquino administration pursued a liberal foreign policy. It sought the aid of international organizations to garner potential alliances with other countries. However, it is also important to note that the modernization policies pursued by President Aquino, including the EDCA agreement with US, signified a realist argument. The administration acknowledged the potential threats to our national security. Therefore, there was a perceived urgency to strengthen the country's national security by boosting and modernizing its military capacity. Overall, it followed a liberal approach in international relations in dealing with dispute in the WPS.

During the Duterte administration, the president has been extremely vocal of his stand on the issue in the WPS. On his first SONA, the President declared his intention to pursue a peace means to settle the dispute (Duterte, 2016). It was in 2016 when the ruling of the PCA on the case filed by the Philippines back in 2016 against China was released. President Duterte reassured the public with his commitment to the ruling and plans to cooperate with other countries. This affirmation made by the President illustrates a liberalist approach on its foreign policy.

President Duterte has also consistently expressed his plans to further modernize the military capacity of the country. However, his priority during his term was the so-called "war on drugs" which garnered several criticisms in

the international community has found support from China (Garcia, 2020). Moreso, China has also committed its financial support to the infrastructure projects of the administration. All these ignited what most critics would refer to as the "golden age of the Philippines-China Relations" (Sianipar, 2023). As a result, the long-standing relations with US have stagnated during this period whose actions were viewed by President Duterte as meddling in the country's affairs (Santamaria, 2018). Meanwhile, Manantan (2019) viewed this approach as beneficial to the Philippines as it was able to use the ongoing US-China rivalry to its own benefit.

As the country bounced back from the Pandemic in the latter years of the administration of President Duterte, the issue on the WPS was not sidelined. It has been addressed by President Duterte on many occasions. In one of his press statements, President Duterte (2021, as cited in Aljazeera, 2021) expresses his gratitude to China due to the aid it has given to the Philippines during the Pandemic. Moreover, President Duterte had also been vocal of his intention to avoid war against China and the resolve for peaceful means due to the high risks of war. Hence, the Duterte administration pursued a liberal approach in its international relations with other countries.

Prior to his assumption to the Office, President Marcos Jr. was expected to uphold a "full continuity" of foreign policies of his predecessor, President Duterte (Heydarian, 2022). However, the shift was gradually seen as the President assumed the Office. In his first SONA, President Marcos Jr. (2022, as cited in De Leon, 2022) reaffirmed his commitment to international law and to the peaceful settlement of disputes. Further, among his proposed legislation also includes modernization of military capacity of the country, amendment of the National Defense Act, and reinstatement of the Mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps (De Leon, 2022). All of which are realist policies of international relations with the

aim to strengthen the country's national capacity and security. The Marcos Jr. administration has still a long way into his administration to fully account for his foreign policy approach. However, it is evident that President Marcos Jr. is pursuing a liberal approach in international relations.

Despite different strategies, the three administrations have pursued an "independent" foreign policy based on the liberal theory of international relations. War was never an option to any of the administration as it involved great risks especially to the Philippines. Article II, Section 7 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution has mandated that the State shall pursue a foreign policy with highest regards to "national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest, and the right to self-determination". In this regard, all three administrations have also ensured that they enact policies that would strengthen military capacity to protect our national interest and sovereignty. Hence, the Philippine Constitution has always had a liberal and realist view in which the President should uphold as the chief architect of the Philippine Foreign Policy.

Coherent and Consistent Foreign Policy

To thoroughly analyze the coherence and consistency of the three administrations, the researcher used two points of reference. First is the arbitral ruling which was filed in 2013 and finalized in 2016. Second is the EDCA which is one of the major and highly criticized foreign policies of every administration.

President Aquino has persistently asserted the rights of the Philippines in most of his official functions, travel, abroad and statements. There has been no record of any pronouncements contradicting his previous pronouncements or policies. Moreso, there has been no record of any agency contradicting the pronouncements of policies of the Presidents.

In contrast, the Duterte administration took a different approach in promoting the 2016 arbitral ruling. President Duterte is known for his candid

statements wherein in many instances he cussed vulgar words on national television and called out several people. In his 2020 prerecorded speech to the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, President Duterte (2020, as cited in Musico, 2020) reaffirms commitment to the ruling. A few years later, President Duterte in a public press conference belittled the importance of the ruling by comparing it to a piece of paper which can be thrown (Viray & Deiparine, 2021). And just months after, in his 76th prerecorded speech to the 76th UN General Assembly, President Duterte again reaffirmed the importance of the arbitral ruling. This is just among the many instances wherein the pronouncements of President Duterte varied from time to time.

According to Ambassador Bensurto, President Duterte only upholds the arbitral ruling as a routinary obligation. In this case, the role of the DFA is given high regard. As the President had made varying pronouncements, the DFA, as an institution, is burdened with the responsibility to clarify his statements and ensure that none of his statements is taken out of context by other countries. And despite such instances, the DFA, as an institution, remained vertically coherent by maintaining our commitment to international law and peaceful settlement of dispute.

Subsequently, President Marcos Jr. has consistently promoted the arbitral ruling in his official travel, speeches, and interviews (Tomacruz, 2022). The arbitral ruling has also been a topic for discussion on the state visit of the various heads of the government in the Philippines. Government agencies have also echoed the same position in all its issuances and pronouncements. The researcher found no record of any national government agencies contradicting the President's foreign policy. In this regard, despite the brief period since President Marcos Jr. assumed the office, his foreign policy on the WPS has been consistent and coherent in terms of the arbitral Ruling.

The second point of reference is the implementation of the EDCA. It is important to analyze how the three administrations viewed and implemented the EDCA as this agreement served as “balancing policy” to deter threats and aggressiveness of China in the WPS (Southgate, 2019). Despite the high level of criticism, President Aquino pursued the EDCA with the Supreme Court confirming its legality in 2016 (Sabillo, 2016). The researcher found no pronouncements and official documents saying otherwise. Hence, President Aquino has been consistent and coherent in its foreign policy regarding the implementation of EDCA.

On the other hand, President Duterte has expressed varying opinions about EDCA. President Duterte (2016, as cited in Ranada, 2016), has expressed his discontent on the EDCA in which he believed do not benefit the country. After this statement, many bills were filed in both chambers of the Congress requesting for the abrogation of the EDCA. However, a year after this statement, President Duterte reaffirmed its commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 and EDCA during the bilateral meeting with US President Donald Trump (Fonbuena, 2017). In this regard, it can be concluded that his administration had been inconsistent and incoherent in its pronouncements or official statements. The danger of an incoherent and inconsistent pronouncement could mislead policymakers and administrators. More importantly, it could send mixed signals and be open to various interpretations of other countries which could affect the country’s foreign relations with other countries.

In the first few months in the Office, President Marcos Jr. has already signed an agreement with US which further expanded the scope of the EDCA (Arugay & Storey, 2023). The researcher agrees with the respondents’ view that it is too early to judge consistency and coherency of the foreign policies of Marcos Jr. administration as he has only been in the position for two years. However, it is also equally important to highlight the consistency

and coherence of his foreign policies during his first years in the position. The researcher believed that the appointment of a career diplomat as the head of the DFA has contributed to this. A career and senior diplomat with vast experience in the foreign service would greatly supplement the President in pursuing a foreign policy that is coherent and consistent foreign policy.

In summary, the Aquino administration was consistent in its pronouncements and foreign policy throughout his six-year term. Meanwhile, President Duterte gradually moved away from being an active supporter of China and staunch critique of US by the end of his term. With the abolition of CMOA, Ambassador Bensurto pointed out the lack of proper mechanisms such as specific institutions to integrate the policies related to the WPS which prevents the succeeding administration after President Aquino to come up with a “solidified” and “coherent” policy. Olsen (2008) highlighted the importance of the role of every institution in having a coherent and consistent policy. The lack of thereof in the case of the Duterte administration contributed to the inconsistencies of foreign policy during his six-year term.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to analyze the country’s foreign policy in the lens of both public policy and international relations. With the increasing tension in the WPS, it is high time that the foreign policy of each administration be subject to an in-depth analysis to review which strategy is the most effective and efficient. It attempted to compare the foreign policies of the three administrations to ensure a full understanding of the issue in the WPS prior and in the aftermath of the landmark 2016 arbitral ruling. In this regard, the researcher hopes that this paper provided valuable information and critique to its readers especially to policymakers and administrators.

Given that the Philippines changes its president every six years, it increases the possibility of a shift in the foreign policy. This is also due to the fact that the country's foreign policy reflects the unique personalities and preference of the president as the chief architect of the Philippine Foreign Policy. All of this is a part of the State's inherent freedom as a democratic country. The researcher agrees with the respondents that change in administration affects the stability and continuity of our advocacies in the WPS. Over the years, it has been observed that China's aggression and grey-zone tactics in the disputed islands has been persistent and increasingly alarming regardless of the foreign policy or president of the Philippines. Hence, it is highly important that the Philippine's foreign policy be consistent and coherent so that it transcends beyond the change of administration.

In summary, the Philippine Foreign Policy is an interplay of various factors such as geopolitics and economics. Based on the pronouncements and issuances of each administration, each administration has distinctly crafted their foreign policy. For the Aquino administration, the available institutions specific for maritime issues on the WPS have proven to have accomplished more in promoting our national interest. Their decision to file a case against China at the PCA legitimize the maritime entitlements of the Philippines and invalidated the claims of China. Meanwhile, the Duterte administration has been heavily driven by Public Choice Theory. In many cases, he made hurried, emotionally charged statements that were not accompanied by any formal policy issuances. Lastly, the Marcos Jr. administration is observed to be compelled by the Rational Theory wherein it considers the lesson from previous administrations in order to pursue a strategic foreign policy. However, the researcher agrees with the respondents that two years in the Office is not enough to fully analyze its foreign policy.

Nevertheless, all three administrations have

pursued liberal foreign policies mandated by the Philippine Constitution. The three administrations have explicitly stated their commitment to international law and peaceful settlements of the dispute in the WPS. War was and will never be an option as it involved significant risk not just to countries directly involved in the dispute but to the entire world. Nevertheless, the administrations were not limited by the liberal perspective of the constitution in pursuing military cooperation with other countries and strengthening the country's military capacity.

Lastly, this paper concludes that all three administrations pursued an "independent" Philippine Foreign Policy. As a sovereign country, no foreign country can impose its will or influence the affairs and policies of the Philippines. What matters more than having an independent foreign policy is the commitment of each administration to protecting and promoting the country's national interest. Due to the changing and increasing needs of the country, the President, as the chief architect of the Philippine Foreign Policy, must be able to maximize use of the foreign policy to protect our sovereign rights diplomatically whilst promoting trade and cooperation among countries.

Both the researcher and the respondents concur that there is a need to educate the Filipinos on the Philippine Foreign Policy. Foreign policy is as important as the domestic policies of the country. Its successes and consequences affect not just a few but the whole country. Further, this paper suggests strengthening the institutions engaged on the issue on the WPS. Institutions served as the backbone of the State. Having strong institutions would ease foreign policy integration and implementation. It will also ensure maximum benefit and protection of national interest. As a result, a consistent and coherent Philippine Foreign Policy that can withstand any change of administration.

For future researchers, the paper could be further improved by focusing on the comparison

of two administrations only. As this paper involved two full-term administrations and one who has been in the position for only two years, the analyses were constricted by the limited available resources of the last administration. Moreover, future researchers may also opt to increase the number of respondents to increase the accuracy of the paper. Finally, this paper used both public policy theory and international relations theory as a tool for analysis. Future researchers may opt to use only one to increase the depth of the analysis and discussion of foreign policy.

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