

Marcos–Duterte: The Epilogue of a Dynastic Alliance

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July 2024

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Wesley Issey Romain holds a bachelor's degree in Southeast Asian Studies and International Relations from INALCO University in France and a master's degree in International Affairs with a specialisation in Cyber Security from King's College London in the UK. His interests include emerging technology issues, cyber risks, intelligence, and geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region. While completing his academic exchange programme at the University of the Philippines Diliman, Wesley was engaged with Philippine-based NGOs dedicated to fostering peace in the conflict-affected areas of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in the southern Philippines. He is a native French speaker with English as a second language. He is also fluent in Filipino, conversational in Mandarin, and has basic knowledge of Burmese.

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July 10, 2024

Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte's resignation from President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.'s Cabinet on 19 June 2024 has sparked a surge of talks and debates among the country's political elites and civil society organisations from Ilocos Norte to Davao Occidental. While the resignation of the Vice President from the Cabinet is far from being an unprecedented occurrence in the country's political history, and despite Mrs Duterte's breakaway from Mr Marcos Jr. not being met with total surprise, this event remains a significant event for the country as it has political implications on a national level. This note attempts to present the leading causes of the resignation of Vice President Sara Duterte and its potential impact on domestic issues.

VP Sara Duterte's resignation as secretary of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) and vice chairperson of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) has left unanswered questions about her motivation for quitting her roles and the electoral alliance UniTeam. While no explicit reasons have been given, it is clear that over the past two years, there has been latent mistrust between the Duterte and the Marcos political families. A year after his election, Marcos Jr criticised Rodrigo Duterte's aggressive anti-drug campaign, leading to concerns from the Duterte clan that the current president may consent to extradite the former president to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and despite Marcos Jr.'s assurances that he would not help in ICJ's investigation against his predecessor.¹

Opposing views on national security have also contributed to the Duterte-Marcos Jr. tandem rift. In December 2023, VP Sara Duterte, while expressing her opposition to the president's intention to resume peace talks with communist insurgents, characterising it as “an agreement with the devil”, urged him to reexamine the policy that entails providing amnesty to those affiliated with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the New People Army (NPA).² On foreign policy issues, Marcos Jr. has reformed the Philippines' relationship with the United States, enhancing military access to the country, increasing annual exercises “Balikatan”, and leveraging the country's strategic location in the Asia-Pacific, turning around Rodrigo Duterte's shift toward China and Russia. In reaction to this

¹ Ramon Royandoyan. “Philippines' Marcos says won't help ICC probe into Duterte drug war.” *Nikkei Asia*, Jan 23, 2024. Retrieved from: <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Philippines-Marcos-says-won-t-help-ICC-probe-into-Duterte-drug-war>> Accessed 21st June 2024

² Jean Mangaluz. “Peace Talks with NDFP ‘an agreement with the devil’, VP tells Marcos.” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Dec 4, 2023. Retrieved from: <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1870283/vp-sara-tells-marcos-peace-pact-with-ndfp-is-an-agreement-with-the-devil>>

change, Sebastien Duterte, the current mayor of Davao City and brother of VP Duterte, has called on the president to resign due to his pro-US foreign policy, which he believes threatens innocent Filipino lives.³

Sara Duterte's resignation will have significant political implications in the medium term. Her announcement came only a few weeks after the Philippine Commission on Elections (Comelec) released its calendar of activities for the 2025 mid-term elections.⁴ Despite the Office of the Vice President's refutation, many suggest she will act as an opposition leader against Marcos Jr. for the 2028 presidential elections.⁵ According to a 2023 national survey, among 1,200 Filipinos of voting age from Metro Manila, Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, 28% believe Sara Duterte to be the best leader to succeed Marcos Jr. in 2028, ranking her as the first-choice political figure, before senator Raffy Tulfo (11%), Leni Robredo (6%), and her father Rodrigo Duterte (3%).⁶ Surprisingly, current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is only credited with 1% of voting opinion, putting him in 8th position out of a total of ten public servants.

Additionally, on commercial implications, Sara Duterte's anticipated resignation is unlikely to have consequential ramifications, given her limited involvement in the country's economic issues. Nevertheless, her departure will certainly impact national education issues as she leaves the secretary position at DepEd. While this change may spark new ways of approaching education problems in the Philippines and push for a recommitment to enhance education quality, it would lessen political meddling in DepEd affairs.⁷ Credited with positive and extensive experience drafting education reform lawmaking and as a commissioner of the Second Congressional Commission on Education, Senator Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara was appointed to succeed VP Duterte on July 2nd, 2024.⁸

³ Karen Lema. "Rift intensifies between Philippines president and Duterte family", *Reuters*, Jan 29, 2024.

Retrieved from: <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/former-philippine-leaders-son-calls-president-marcos-lazy-urges-him-quit-2024-01-28/>>

⁴ Republic of the Philippines Commission on Election. "Resolution No. 10999: Calendar of Activities and Periods of Certain Prohibited Acts in Connection with the May 12, 2025, National and Local Elections (NLE) BARMN Parliamentary Elections", May 24, 2024. Retrieved from:

<<https://comelec.gov.ph/?r=2025NLE/Resolutions/res10999>>

⁵ Anna Felicia Bajo. "Panelo says Sara resignation meant huge loss to Marcos admin." *GMA Integrated News*, June 20, 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/910739/panelo-says-sara-resignation-meant-huge-loss-to-marcos-admin/story/#goog_rewarded>

⁶ Social Weather Stations. "Best leader to succeed President Marcos, Jr. as President. Philippines, Apr. 2023." Table 1. Retrieved from: <<https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artclisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20230611115407>>

⁷ "Sara's DepEd exit boon or bane?" *The Daily Tribune*, Editorial, June 24, 2024. Retrieved from:

<<https://tribune.net.ph/2024/06/24/saras-deped-exit-boon-or-bane>>

⁸ Bonz Magsambol. "'Much improved choice': Groups, lawmakers hail Angara's appointment as DepEd chief". *Rappler*, July 02, 2024. Retrieved from: <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/politicians-groups-reactions-angara-appointment-deped-secretary/>>

Concerning the communist insurgency issue, uncertainties remain about whether VP Duterte will continue to support Malacañang-led NTF-ELCAC in the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the communist rebels of the NDFP or push for termination of negotiations and renewal of counterinsurgency operations. NTF-ELCAC Executive Director Undersecretary Ernesto Torres Jr., in a statement following the Vice President's resignation, paid tribute to her leadership, which he described as “marked by significant progress” and led to “numerous successful initiatives and operations”.⁹

Beyond the 2025 mid-term elections, the political rivalry and opposition between President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte is expected to continue and culminate in the 2028 presidential elections. On the one hand, the break-up of the alliance between these two major political dynasties due to divergent views on policy can be interpreted as a positive sign of active political life in the Philippines. Indeed, multiple oppositions are often perceived as a reliable indicator of a vibrant democratic life. On the other hand, in the case of the Philippines, which has a centuries-old tradition of dynastic political power, we may show some reasonable degree of caution towards the idea that the growing popularity and supposed strong opposition embodied by Vice President Sara Duterte – and by extension, her family – will be sufficient to solve the endemic domestic problems that many ordinary Filipinos face, such as corruption, poverty, income inequality, crime, and poor infrastructure, to name but a few. Unfortunately, political dynasties, particularly in the Philippines, often perpetuate special interests and nepotism, sustain economic and social inequalities, and concentrate power, which is neither suitable nor desirable in a liberal democracy.

⁹ National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict. “Official Statement on Vice President Sara Duterte’s Resignation”, June 19, 2024. Retrieved from: <<https://www.ntfelcac.org/post/ee564627>>

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