



A DAMAGED PRESIDENCY, A BESIEGED ADMINISTRATION

Abstract

Twilight of a Damaged Presidency: The Limits and Abuse of Presidential Power

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In our presidential system of government, the presidency enjoys far greater political power vis-à-vis either Congress or the Judiciary. This reality can make of the presidency either an engine for activist reformism or an engine for grand-scale abuse of power.

In its first four years, the P-Noy presidency enjoyed favourable ratings as shown by public opinion surveys, a political capital that it could have systematically used to jumpstart and sustain much needed reform. However, much indecisiveness and ineptness by the president has left a track record that falls short of earlier expectations.

Economic growth, touted to be the second best in Asia, has not made any significant dent on poverty rates and unemployment (the worst record in the ASEAN 10 for unemployment trends during the last 8 years). With anti-corruption (*daang matuwid*) as its professed policy centrepiece, the P-Noy administration, ironically, now confronts the country's worst corruption scandal involving some of the president's closest allies. Its potentially lasting legacy of a definitive peace process in Mindanao also faces an uncertain endgame.

More recently, Pres. Aquino III has also shown a disturbing trend of self-righteousness in responding to critics as dramatized by his combative stance vis-à-vis the adverse Supreme Court ruling on the DAP. He has also deployed this attitude in protecting and coddling close allies (such as Abad and Alcala) who have been linked to various illegal practices.

In the DAP scandal, it appears that Pres. Aquino and DBM secretary Abad deliberately sought to test and expand the limits of the law confident in their line of defense that the billions of pesos were supposedly spent for the public good. We now know that much of the DAP was also used for patronage and for huge lump sum allocations for projects, personalities, and places, solely at the discretion of one or two men.

The PDAF and DAP crisis and earlier critical events in the country (the Zamboanga armed crisis, the Sabah conflict with Malaysia, the devastation inflicted by Yolanda and related natural calamities, the automation election system fiasco, continuing impunity on human rights cases, the maritime crisis with China) all dramatize the limits, ineptness, and unpreparedness of a political leadership unable to effectively address fundamental structural and institutional problems about our dysfunctional political system.

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