# Dutertes’ desperate moves

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Growing evidence of their criminal behavior must have driven the father and daughter to mount desperate acts—with former president Rodrigo Duterte egging the military to oust President Marcos while his daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte, is openly plotting to kill the Chief Executive. What is it with the Dutertes from Davao, one might ask, that their default reaction to any perceived adversity is to call for killing people?

For six years under his presidency, Duterte’s “kill, kill, kill” mantra resulted in the extrajudicial killings (EJKs) of more than 6,000 as law enforcers implemented his brutal war on illegal drugs. His violence-laced rhetoric became policy that encouraged impunity among state agents and lawless elements, desensitized people to news of drug suspects being summarily killed, and normalized EJK as state response to criminality.

The same propensity for killing must have prompted his daughter last month to disclose that her relationship with Mr. Marcos had become so toxic that she wanted to “cut off” his head. On Saturday night, Sara Duterte threw a fit at the House of Representatives where her Office of the Vice President chief of staff, Zuleika Lopez, was being held in contempt for refusing to cooperate in the ongoing joint inquiry on how P125 million of the Vice President’s confidential funds were used up in just 11 days during the last quarter of 2022.

In an online news conference in the dead of the night, Sara Duterte spewed invectives against the President, his First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, and Speaker Martin Romualdez for allegedly instigating moves to persecute her and her family.

## Constitutional successor

Responding to a question from a female supporter, she said: “Don’t worry, ma’am, about my security because I have spoken to a person. I told him that if I were killed, he has to kill BBM (President Marcos), Liza Araneta, and Martin Romualdez as well. No Joke. No joke.” She added: “I left word, ma’am, that if I get killed, he shouldn’t stop until he has killed them, And he said, ‘yes.’“

Confronted with the possibility of criminal prosecution, the Vice President however backpedaled, like her father is wont to do when faced with accountability. It was a “conditional act of revenge,” she said, and was to be carried out only after her death. Not withstanding her ignorance of the law, and with the Davao template of killing adversaries perfected under her father’s term, there’s no telling which demented agent or underworld character would crawl out of the woodwork to carry out the Vice President’s imaginary deathbed command.

As the second highest official of the land and constitutional successor to the presidency, Sara Duterte’s incendiary words constitute a serious threat to the President’s life, while her father’s call on the military to withdraw support from a “durugistang presidente” (a drug addict of a President) borders on sedition. The government is thus well within its right to take appropriate action to forestall such evil designs that could plunge the country into civil strife and economic and political chaos.

## Ticking time bombs

In contrast to the Dutertes’ apoplectic statements, the President’s firm and dignified response was reassuring. Without stooping to his erstwhile political allies’ gutter level, Mr. Marcos said in a video message on Monday that he will not tolerate such criminal threats and will continue to uphold the Constitution and the rule of law.

Sharing the general sentiment that her rants were meant to divert attention from investigations on the questionable use of P612.5 million confidential funds, the President said the search for truth “should not be subjected to ‘tokhang,’” referencing the killings under the Duterte drug war.

In dealing with the ticking time bombs that the Dutertes have become, the government must pursue to its logical conclusion its probe on the possible plunder of confidential funds given to Sara Duterte, and the extrajudicial killings of thousands under Duterte’s bloody war on drugs.

## Power grab

Now that it has all the ammunition it needs to build its case against the former president, the government must allow his thorough and unrelenting prosecution, be it in Philippine courts or before the International Criminal Court. Already, the Department of Justice and the National Bureau of Investigation have taken the appropriate initial steps to investigate Sara Duterte for possible libel, defamation and grave threats, and violations of the anti-terrorism law. Shouldn’t the older Duterte be held liable as well for the controversial law enacted during his administration?

And while the Dutertes are busy digging their own graves, Malacañang has taken the offensive to expose the depravity of their power grab. In a statement, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin noted: “No motive is more selfish than calling for a sitting president to be overthrown so that your daughter can take over.” That is a much-deserved stinging rebuke, and one that should finally wake their supporters to their idols’ self-serving motives.