

RESISTING A NATIONAL TRAGEDY
Closing Remarks by Ambassador Albert del Rosario
Chair, Stratbase ADR Institute
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Thank you for joining us today to discuss the abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). For my closing, please allow me to be brief.

The termination of the VFA by President Duterte removes one of the focal points that underpin the longstanding alliance between the Philippines and the United States. Worse, as Malacañang has mentioned, this may only be the first step to ultimately putting an end to all Philippine-US defense agreements such as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) and the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).¹ This will effectively upend the Philippine-US Alliance as we know it.

The Philippine-US Alliance is one of the oldest and enduring defense partnerships in Asia.

¹ <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/02/14/1993016/mdt-edca-may-also-be-scraped>

Along with the valiant efforts of our Filipino heroes, this alliance has helped our country maintain its integrity against foreign aggression during World War II and now against Chinese incursions in the South China Sea. Our recent experience shows that the Philippine-US alliance appears to be the only deterrent against China's reclamation of Scarborough Shoal, a territory which belongs to the Philippines throughout centuries.

As we had previously expressed, this shift in foreign policy of casting aside a reliable ally in favor of an aggressive northern neighbor that wants to deprive us of our land and seas is incomprehensible and harmful to our country and our people. There is no rationality for such a move except to put into reality the President's personal sentiments when he publicly declared that "I simply love Xi Jinping."

Terminating the VFA would serve to actualize our pivot towards China against the strong and vehement objections of our people.

While the VFA is admittedly an imperfect agreement, its termination would interrupt the benefits of the MDT with regards to the joint training and exercises, the pursuit of modernization, achieving interoperability, providing assistance during natural calamities and being effective partners in addressing our challenges in respect of counter-terrorism.

If we may also recall, the quick US relief response during the Yolanda disaster was made possible by the VFA. Other countries wanted to immediately respond but were constrained by the lack of legal arrangements for their troops to enter the Philippines. At its peak, the US military efforts included more than 13,000 military personnel, 66 aircraft and 12 naval vessels. The US delivered more than 2,500 tons of relief supplies and evacuated over 21,000 people.

What is unfolding before us is a national tragedy which should be resisted. As a democratic and republican country, we do not believe that one man alone can make this damaging choice for our people. We therefore appeal to our esteemed institutions such as Congress and the Supreme Court to help us resist this tragedy. We appeal to the conscience of our military whose duty under the Constitution is to defend the integrity of our national territory.

We must reject the notion that maintaining the Philippine-US alliance is subservience to the US. In the international community, countries must forge alliances to protect their own interests. We must maintain the alliance between the Philippines and the US, not for sake of the US, but for the sake of our countrymen who want to protect their country's territory.

We must be with responsible nations with whom we share our core values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. To stand otherwise is not what Filipinos are; it is not what we do; it is not what is right.

Our people must take a stand. We must speak up. In the famous words of a pastor during the period of Nazi tyranny in Germany:

“First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.”

**It is our earnest hope that we will not see the day
when no one will be left to speak for us. END**