

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**INTERVIEW WITH PCOO SECRETARY MARTIN ANDANAR**  
**BY KAREN DAVILA/HEADSTART/ANC 21**  
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**DAVILA:** Secretary Andanar thank you so much for coming to Headstart this morning.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Good morning.

**DAVILA:** Just how serious is President Duterte in cancelling the Visiting Forces Agreement; what are his conditions?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** He is very serious and based on the statements of President Duterte, he is giving the American government one month to correct its actions on Senator Bato Dela Rosa. So, we are observing and we are waiting for the decision of the United States and after that, we shall cross the bridge when we get there.

**DAVILA:** Does this mean, Secretary, is the government saying that a whole agreement that benefits the country in terms of certain promises that the US government gives us in terms of counter terrorism, a Balikatan exercises. We may all lose this, just because Senator Bato Dela Rosa does not have a US visa?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The basis for this is the continuous disrespect on our sovereignty and our judicial system. The continuous denial on our independence to prosecute - be that private citizens or government official - that is the basis. Now, the Visiting Forces Agreement is a treaty that is based on mutual trust and respect. Now, if there is no longer a respect on the country that you have a deal or a treaty with, then there is a problem there. So, we standby the President's decision.

**DAVILA:** Now, you do have netizens saying that this once happened before to former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales and former Ambassador Albert Del Rosario when they were prevented from coming to Hong Kong. They were deported and the government stand is 'well that's China's right, they are a sovereign nation, they can choose who to not let in the country.' The Duterte administration did not fight for the rights of Conchita Carpio-Morales and Albert Del Rosario, Filipino citizens who were allowed to go to Hong Kong. Why take a different stand now with Senator Bato?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** This is a different case. We are talking about the Magnitsky Act where in the United States based on the clause that they wrote in their budget that they could deny the entry of any government official who has violated human rights records. Now, as the government continuous to press on the matter that we do have our own judicial process in the Philippines; the judiciary, the same bureaucracy that Senator Leila De Lima headed when

she was the Secretary of Justice, it's working. And then you have certain senators in the United States intervening with our own due process. Now, we are a sovereign state, the United States is also sovereign state, we must respect each other.

**DAVILA:** Now, would you say—we're a sovereign state and the stand of the Duterte administration is against... that actually it's what they call a supplement right to the 2020 US budget, there was a clause that was added. Does this mean that it's the stand of the US in full, because the irony is you still have President Duterte—a President Trump inviting President Duterte to the ASEAN Summit. So, which like this is the left hand and this is the right?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** President Trump is a good friend of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte as we witnessed in several engagements of both leaders. But the fact is, you have some members of the US Senate who are intervening with our business here in the Philippines and that should not be the case; as I said we are a sovereign state, they are sovereign state. Our relationship is based on mutual trust and respect. And if you don't respect the laws and the bylaws of our country, then there is a problem there.

**DAVILA:** I'm curious since you have said they are friends, President Trump and Duterte. Does President Duterte plan to discuss this with President Trump?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** I am not certain about that, but as far as we go right now, we base it on the statements of President Duterte. He had an interview with Russia Today and that is what he said that he is not going to attend the ASEAN-US Summit. And again, makulit ako pero the ASEAN and US Summit is a summit that's purpose is to strengthen the relationship of the United States and the ASEAN region. And again, there is a disconnect when one of the ASEAN members states is not being respected by the United States of America.

**DAVILA:** Senator Bato said that he is planning to meet with President Duterte today to actually convince him to attend the ASEAN Summit and to reconsider the Visiting Forces Agreement statement and he'll apply for a visa again if he has to.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Oh, that's his prerogative, but the President already made mention his stand on the issue and has given a condition to the United States government. So, we shall wait for the United States government decision lifting that Magnitsky Act on the case of Senator Bato.

**DAVILA:** I'm curious does the President want the whole act removed or just Senator Bato to have his visa again; because those are two different things. Do you know who's on the list?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Well—no, I don't know who's on the list, but I think it's really a matter of the Philippines sending a message to the United States that we are not succumbing to their neocolonialism way of treating the Philippines, that we are no longer a colony of the United States.

States and they should respect our sovereignty, they should respect our Constitutions, our laws and our bylaws.

**DAVILA:** But has the President thought of the cost of losing the Visiting Forces Agreement?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Oh yes.

**DAVILA:** I mean, Ambassador Cuisia just said that when you lose the Visiting Forces Agreement, what happens is you have no US presence or help when it counts to counter terrorism which we need in the Philippines especially after Marawi. And then you have no military exercises which enhances the Philippine military?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes, of course the President has thought about that. And based on the statement of the President when he was interviewed by the Russian press, he did say that we can go to Russia, we can go to China for assistance in battling these terrorists and other issues that arise from international terrorists.

**DAVILA:** Yeah, okay. But when the President names, we can go to Russia for example. With no disrespect to Russia, we don't have that deep history with Russia. The reason you have allies is you have a deep history with these allies for many, many years.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The same way that we also don't have any belligerent history with Russia and with China. We have an independent foreign policy which the President has advocated since the start of this administration. You know, you see Karen, this is a matter of choice and this is the prerogative of the President. Now, if he wants to open our country to being friends with other super powers like the People's Republic of China and Russia, then so be it.

**DAVILA:** Secretary, who advises the President? I mean, I've spoken to some businessmen, I mean on a bigger spectrum. You know, they are worried in the sense that he makes statements coming from speeches, hits certain businessmen out of the blue for example... or like the Visiting Forces Agreement in a whim—people feel it's just on a whim, where he'll say if you don't I'll cancel the VFA.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** It's not in a whim, for the fact that the past governments, past administration have really been very... I would say supportive in a way that already giving the United States a free hand on whatever they want our government to do. It is a way for the President to say that, 'look, we are an independent country.' Since the 1940's were already independent and we should stop being a lap dog on the United States—

**DAVILA:** No, but then that was the direction of the foreign policy when he came in. So we sort of the pendulum swung and then we are sort of in the middle, now China's in the picture; unlike the last government wherein the relationship with China was very bad. But then to say to cancel The VFA, some say it's quite extreme.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** And to say also that the United States can intervene in our local politics and in our bureaucracy, the decisions of the bureaucracy or the executive powers of the judicial branches is also unimaginable. Now that it's 2020, that should stop already. Our Philippine Senate did not even intervene when the Congress of the United States impeached President Donald Trump.

**DAVILA:** And is the President—is the whole administration believe that you can terminate the VFA without Congress?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes, we do. It states in the VFA agreement, in its provisions, it states that the Philippines or both parties can end the agreement by sending official notice to the other party; and in our case without the intervention of the Senate.

**DAVILA:** So, you are saying that's quite clear.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** That's quite clear. Therefore the President can decide whether to abrogate, whether to be bound by such a treaty or not. That is his prerogative, that's clear.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Speaking of foreign policy, it is one of the legacies of the Duterte administration, which you did not hype on... I mean, during your press conference, it wasn't a focus of the legacy, why not?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The President has several legacies there, several departments in the Duterte Legacy campaign. So, we launched the first the socio-economic, peace and order. We do have three more major Duterte Legacy launches that would be in Davao, Cebu and Cagayan De Oro. So we will give a chance to the other departments to be launched and to be given airtime during those three launches.

**DAVILA:** All right. Let's discuss what you is essentially presented and the Duterte Legacy that you presented, it does not mean the legacy itself. But what you presented has been criticized by... as misleading, out of context and full of lies. So, let's start with them one by one.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Okay, let's do.

**DAVILA:** Okay, the economic statistics. You've quoted that under this administration, you cite a 0.8 inflation rate, which is the slowest pace since 2016, correct. How did you or your team come up with 0.8 as the average inflation rate; what did you mean by that?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Our team did not come up with figure or the figures. We merely got the reports from the other agencies and in this case, the NEDA that gave... and it's all over the news. The inflation rate has dropped—

**DAVILA:** But were you citing this for one month, when you quoted 0.8? Because that was November 2019.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The .8 was November. There was a recent report which came out yesterday or a few days ago, citing that we still enjoyed a low inflation rate compared to last year. Although the inflation rate of December of last year increased a little bit compared to November; but the entire year of 2019 is still lower compared to the inflation rate of 2018.

**DAVILA:** But, isn't it misleading to mention an inflation rate that's coming out of just one month considering that in 2018, the Philippines also experienced the highest inflation rate and almost a decade when we hit 6.7% and yet—of course that's not mentioned in the report, but it was experienced during the Duterte administration. So, is that fair to just pick one month and get that number and say that's the legacy and not pick the other when you peaked to 6.7?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** That's a good question. Actually it's not, it's not misleading in a sense that when we compare it to the higher or the faster inflation rate last year, it's not misleading after all. The report came out a few days ago - again, I'll mention that - that the inflation rate of 2019 is lower than the inflation rate of 2018. And this can be attributed to certain policies made by the Duterte administration like the rice tariffication. It has definitely affected positively the inflation rate of our country.

**DAVILA:** I think what the question is why picked 0.8%? I think that was the question even, I mean of economist or even writers. Why 0.8%? That's why they feel it's misleading, because it doesn't give the whole picture of the inflation rate in the last three years under Duterte. It could have been—I mean, I am just citing to you 2.5% or—why an extreme of 0.8?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** First of all—

**DAVILA:** Why did you pick one month?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The entire inflation rate for the year 2019 has not been released, was not yet released when we launched the Duterte Legacy campaign. Had it been released, then we would have given the entire inflation rate of 2019, which is also slower, which is also a better inflation rate compared to the inflation rate of 2000. What is important here is the effect of the policies made by our economic managers that has led to the improvement of our inflation rate. And again, it's not to choose .8% or the one previous to it or the one previous to it, but the fact of the matter is inflation in our country has improved, has improved compared to the last year and basically we have beaten the odds already by having—

**DAVILA:** So, you don't consider it misleading?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** No, we didn't even say that .8 is the inflation rate for the entire year.

**DAVILA:** So, here's another one: the jobs record. Okay. Build, Build, Build claims to a generated 4.2 million jobs under the Duterte administration in the last three years and yet record show that as of October 2019, in totality, in the Philippines there are 4.2 million employed in construction, all right. So whether or not, it's related to build, build, build, it's just a number that private sector, public sector, there are 4.2 million in construction.

The labor force says that when Duterte took office in 2016, 719,000 more jobs opened by October 2019. So, you now have critics saying was not even accurate to report wherein you could have said 720,000 more jobs opened under the Duterte administration with construction instead of saying Build, Build, Build generated 4.2 when that's an existing number for construction employment. Do you understand what they are criticizing?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes. Well 4.1 million—

**DAVILA:** 4.2 million.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** 4.199 million jobs created is in fact the effect of the Build, Build, Build. Now, it could be construction, it could be service sector, it could be any job that was an effect of the program of the President - this golden age of infrastructure. Now, the number again 4.199.288, these are numbers that were not pulled out of any tree or from thin air. This is reported by—

**DAVILA:** What people were looking for was let's say now if there are - to round it of - 4.2 million working under Build, Build, Build. Under the previous administration, when it came to infra and constructions, how many were employed? So then you can measure the rise from 2016 to 2019. You didn't have that in your presentation.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** We didn't have the report of the previous administration—

**DAVILA:** Would it the rise be more accurate to report?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Well, if we do---

**DAVILA:** The rise for example.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** If we do comparisons, then we will be criticized by, 'why do you always compare yourself from the previous administration?' So what we do is just report the gains of this administration—

**DAVILA:** So, you say existing numbers.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Which is fair to say. Well, I wouldn't say that 4.2 million is an existing number that already existed during the time of President Benigno Aquino. But what I am

reporting, what we are reporting, these are numbers that were given to us by the DPWH. And I don't think Secretary Mark Villar would make up such a huge number of workers – the 4.199 million. The fact of the matter is construction has doubled, tripled or even quadrupled during the time of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. And it's just basic mathematics, you don't need a rocket scientist just to tell you that you need more workers in the construction industry or in the Build, Build, Build projects.

**DAVILA:** Another one is underemployment; you also hyped that up during your presentation. It's the lowest since 2005. It's now at 4.5%. This is what's hard when you're presenting these figures, right? So basic question that people asked is: Where did you get the 4.5% unemployment rate? Although it's agreed upon that underemployment has improved.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** PSA, the Department of Labor and Employment, these are the sources of our information. Now, going back to the effect of employment, underemployment, the effect of the improvement of our poverty incidence from 23% to 16% is widely reported. Five point nine million Filipinos have been lifted out of poverty.

Now, if you ask me, is this an effect of the *Build, Build, Build*? It could be an effect of Build, Build, Build, definitely. Is this an effect of proper implementation of our socio-economic reforms, the Pantawid Pamilya, the unconditional cash transfer program? Then yes, it is.

These numbers represent the proper implementation of the policies of this government and some of the policies of the past administration or administrations that were implemented by this government.

**DAVILA:** Okay. That's good that you mentioned that because you said, it's the implementation of the policies of this administration and even the past administrations.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes.

**DAVILA:** I've read an article written by JC Punongbayan. Did you read that? It's a scathing article on essentially the economic gains that you've spoken about, and he calls this "the post hoc fallacy" which means, he says, that just because numbers improved or dropped, it doesn't mean that it was caused by this administration. So he cites specifically the poverty record where 5.9 million Filipinos were lifted out poverty. So the good number from the PSA is six million Filipinos ... six million fewer poor Filipinos in 2018 than in 2015 when he took office. So the article, JC Punongbayan asks, that does mean it's outright coming because of the policies of President Duterte? Would you credit it to that?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The same way that the critics were questioning President Noynoy Aquino when the economic policies of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo were just fantastic. People would even credit her for the growth of the Philippines under President Noynoy Aquino. It's the same question that they are throwing at this administration, if this—now,

the policies of the past administrations, economic policies of former President GMA, former President Aquino, are policies that we continue to implement in this government. But we improved. We add more policies that could give our masses, our kababayan tangible results.

So for instance, the TRAIN Law, reforming our income tax law wherein more than 90% of our income tax payers are no longer paying income taxes. So that's a policy, an improvement of the policies of the past administration. But this one, initiated by this government that has contributed much on the growth of our economy.

**DAVILA:** Okay. So what you are saying is, you are not claiming it all to becoming from this administration, but the implementation of policies coming from past administrations to this administration that came out with these results? Is that correct?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** That's a possibility. But of course, we highlight the policies of the Duterte administration.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Before we go to a quick break, I just want to add this so we can move forward is, another controversial one is ... DOTr Secretary Art Tugade actually defend this also maybe a few months back. And the claim is: 64 airports—this is a DOTr figure. I've heard this already. Sixty four airports, 243 seaports, 2,709 bridges, 9,845 kilometers of roads. You do have some people saying, "Okay, it's misleading," because the perception is, all of that is built during and because of Duterte's *Build, Build, Build*. When you have some saying, "But not all of it is newly build infrastructure; some of them were upgraded, coming from the GMA and Aquino administrations; and some were also from old projects." How do you respond to that when you cite out these figures and critics say that?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** (UNINTELLIGIBLE) I'll respond to that—

**DAVILA:** Another thing—yeah. They say it's just misleading.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** First of all, we did not say 64 brand new airports. We said 64 airport projects. So it could be retrofitting; it could be rehabilitation, it could be a brand new airport. As a matter of fact, this Panglao International Airport, it was already 48% slippage when our government came in, and we finished the project.

Another project that was started during the past administration or administrations is this Skyway that will connect Makati, all the way to Balintawak. There was a very big problem. It was only seven or eight percent accomplished. And now, we are opening it by the second quarter of this year. So it means to say that this government is not only about continuing good projects that were done in the past. Unlike other administrations that, "Oh, that's the project of the past administration, let's not continue it," no, no. If it's for the good of the people, we will continue it.



But we will continue it and do it faster, do it better and deliver it to the people. And apart from that, we have other projects, so many projects under the *Build, Build, Build* that originated, that was planned, conceptualized under this administration. Iyon lang naman iyon eh. I don't think we can have a successful nation or country if we do not continue good projects because, you know, six years – six (unclear), this term of our President, President's duration – is not enough to finish major infrastructure projects.

**DAVILA:** One major legacy of, I mean, when it comes to *Build, Build, Build*, is the fact that this administration has spent the most in relation to GDP with infrastructure. But you didn't mention that. I mean, how much of the budget now is going to infra in relation to GDP? Is it at eight percent or seven, something like that?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** It's definitely higher than the administration—

**DAVILA:** The highest locally. I think you're hitting eight percent. China, at speak, was hitting 12. But you didn't mention that in your report for example.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes, we will mention that in our second launch of the Duterte Legacy campaign. Again, there's so many legacies to speak of for the last three years. You have the Universal Health Care; you have the free quality tertiary act for our students; you have the reef irrigation for our farmers who have eight hectares and less; we have the expanded maternity leave; so many legacies to speak of. Now, the problem is—

**DAVILA:** But you did not mention the obvious Boracay clean up, Bangsomoro—

**SEC. ANDANAR:** We did.

**DAVILA:** You did the BARMM.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes. The Boracay, the BARMM, the war on hard drugs.

**DAVILA:** Okay. Hold that thought, we're going to take a quick break. When we get back, we're going to talk about exactly what Secretary Martin Andanar said. The drug war, is that really President Duterte's legacy? We'll be right back. Stay with us.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

**DAVILA:** All right, welcome back. Still with us, Communications Secretary Martin Andanar. Secretary, internationally, the President is known, frankly speaking, for the drug war. I mean, whatever number the government forks out, it's all about the drug war, violation of human rights, clamping down on the press, appointing purveyors of fake news into Malacañang. So this is what internationally is perceived and known when it comes to President Duterte. Did you bother to explain this, or is this going to be part of the legacy explanation?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** It was part of the first launch. What the international critics probably failed to announce or to appreciate is that the ten-year old Maguindanao massacre case, wherein 32 journalists and media works were killed, was decided under the Duterte administration last year. That Maguindanao massacre placed us as one of the most dangerous countries for journalist. What they failed to appreciate is that it is only this administration that advocated an administrative order to protect media from harm. It is only this administration that opened up the books of this government to everyone by the Executive Order # 2, the freedom of information. You know, this policy has been fought by numerous congressmen, among is the late Senator Raul Roco back in 1987 – napakatagal na; so many strides that international critics refused to accept. Now—

**DAVILA:** But, I mean, just a quick one. I mean, in that same breath, it's also the administration that in effect—I mean, had Maria Ressa arrested although she is out on bail. I mean, there are threats of closure with ... I mean, ABS-CBN. In other words, I'm not getting into this topic right now because there's going to be a franchise hearing, but you're saying this administration moves towards the protection of journalist and respect of media, and yet it's also this administration that has done that.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** I would argue, Karen, that the decision of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte is based on his promise to implement law and order in this country. Prior to his entering as the president of this country, we were known to be people who do not respect traffic rules, we have sacred cows, this and that. The case of Rappler is a case of violation of SEC rules and regulations, and even violation of BIR rules and regulations. And just because you are a hot shot journalist, you are exempted from all of these rules.

I mean, the rules that the law applies to everyone otherwise none at all. So this advocacy of the President for law and order, for peace and order, is what makes him very popular. And this is just practical. You go to the United States, you go to Europe, you have a better society because you have a government, you have administrators of government that respect the rule of law.

**DAVILA:** Okay. But then, focusing, I mean clamping down on the press versus, let's say, with the drug war actually prosecuting, catching big time drug pushers or traffickers. I remember during the beginning of the term, there was Peter Lim. And yet now, he can't be found. Would you be able to actually say in full confidence that the drug war was successful by actually catching the drug traffickers for example?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Well, you look at the Odicta, the Odicta drug lord of Iloilo. You also have Mayor Espinosa and Parojinog known to be drug lords in their areas. These are big fishes that were caught by government. There are some that got away, but the fact remains if you look at the price of shabu in the market, it has risen from 2,500 per gram, now it's about 6,800. So you have the supply being cut because of the interdiction, because of the war on hard drugs.

You have more than 16,000 barangays, Karen, cleared of drugs. We have more to clear, but you know 16,000 is no joke. We have 14 billion pesos worth of drugs and drug paraphernalia that were confiscated by government. You have also 726 government workers arrested because of drugs. Two thousand seven hundred ninety nine children rescued because they were used to peddle drugs.

**DAVILA:** Okay. The number is debatable until today which is quite shocking is you still have a number coming out that there are 30,000 casualties coming from the drug war, and the PNP has its own set of numbers.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes. You know, 30,000 deaths because of drug war, that's fake news. We have, time and again, we have argued the fact that the PNP, the PDEA has given a number between 5,000 to 6,000 deaths that resulted from authorized drug operations. The rest of the numbers are usual numbers—usual numbers ha—given by the PNP because of other crime cases. You got homicide, you have murder, these are not related to drugs.

And we have to stress the importance of the Philippine National Police report that crime volume has definitely gone down, I think from 520,000 to about 470,000 in 2018. We have not counted the 2019 yet, but based on the third quarter, it has significantly dropped. The number of families that have experienced crime has decreased from 1.7 million families to about 1.4 families, and this is a report by SWS.

**DAVILA:** Yeah, I was going to say. You did cite a number from SWS saying that 5.6 percent families reporting victimization by common crimes. This was a survey done from September 27 to 30, just 1.4 million families reporting that they've been victimized by common crimes which is break ins, carnapping, etc. But I think the report in itself, no one can debate with the numbers, for example, if it's coming from PSA, SWS. But you did not report, let's say, what it's coming from. You know what I mean?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yes, yes.

**DAVILA:** In other words, if it's 5.6 today coming from SWS, in your report, you did not say "unlike in 2015, it was this."

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Yeah, from seven percent for this year. But if you look at the numbers—I was just reviewing the numbers last night, and the families victimized by crime for the first or two years of this government compared to the first two years of the past government, it was five percent for this government and it was eight percent for the last government. So you can really see the drop.

**DAVILA:** So there is a decline.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Definitely.

**DAVILA:** That one, I think that's undebatable, yeah.

**SEC. ANDANAR:** Definitely there's a decline. But again, we are not in the business of comparisons here. We report the strides of this government, that's it. But if the critics want us to compare, then I will have to discuss it with my team. I'll discuss it with the President because siya mismo ang nagsabi that we are not in the business of pointing fingers.

**DAVILA:** Okay. We have three minutes to go. But, Secretary, I want to ask you because other than the drug war that many people say, this is the Duterte legacy is China. The relationship with China is also part of the Duterte legacy, that big pivot in foreign policy. But there's also the minus of the West Philippine Sea. China already actually finishing ... they developed all the reclaimed islands. They say, under the Duterte administration, they become more emboldened, more Chinese workers in the country today in relation to gambling, POGOs, illegal workers, etc., etc. This is also part of the legacy. Will you be able to cite actual benefits that we have gotten as a country from China that he can say, "Yu know, when I leave office, because of our new relationship with China, this is what I'm leaving."

**SEC. ANDANAR:** China is undeniably a super power country, not only in terms of military but also in terms of economy. For the past administrations, especially the last administration, we have failed to take advantage of the reality that China is a mover of an economy. You have the United States of America doing business with China; you have other countries in the Atlantic and other seas dealing with China, and yet you have the Philippines which is just a stone's throw away from China not deal—So it's just absurd.

Now, you have more than one million tourists coming from China; you have all of these businesses, investors coming from China; you have more than 900 million pesos of investments coming from China, we are expecting billions more to come. You now have a good relationship with the People's Republic of China. Again, this is a result of the independent foreign policy of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte.

You mentioned about the West Philippine Sea's skirmish and the islands there. Now, that problem did not start, did not emanate from the Duterte administration, in fact it started during the past administration. The President already said that he will hold that card, the card that was given The Hague, the permanent court of arbitration. And one day, he will have to lay that card and show it to President Xi Jinping. But not now. The relationship is not just based on the conflict that we have on those islands. We have so many aspects in the relationship that we should continue to nourish.

**DAVILA:** On that note—so I think the bigger, I mean, after the legacy, the bigger issue is when the President will really decide and what he will end up deciding when it comes to the VFA. All right, would you say it is still fluid or he is quite determined?

**SEC. ANDANAR:** The President gave one month. There's a condition, a caveat of one month for the United States government to lift, to change, to correct that decision. We will

continue to observe the action of the United States government. But in the meantime, the relationship of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte and President Donald Trump remains healthy.

**DAVILA:** On that note, Secretary Martin Andanar, thank you so much for coming to Headstart.

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