

Presidential Communications Operations Office
News and Information Bureau

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL LEGAL COUNSEL
AND PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON SALVADOR PANELO
BY PINKY WEBB – THE SOURCE/CNN PHILIPPINES**

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WEBB: Sir, US President Donald Trump shrugs off this cancellation of the Visiting Forces Agreement and says that this is going to save them a lot of money. To that you answered?

SEC. PANELO: He's welcome.

WEBB: Are you serious?

SEC. PANELO: Was he serious?

WEBB: I don't know. I have no way to ask him, but I have a way to ask you.

SEC. PANELO: So I was responding in the same tone.

WEBB: Ano, sir, were you serious or you're just joking na he's welcome? Let me just bring this in first sir, I wanted to ask you this: There's an Admiral Philip Davidson, Washington Staff Military Officer for Asia Pacific. He says that this would actually hurt the counter terrorism in the south. Do you agree, sir?

SEC. PANELO: Ganito iyon ha, sabi ni Presidente – simple lang sabi ni Presidente – it is about time we stand on our own two feet. We cannot be relying on other countries to defend our nation from the enemies of the state. I'll quote him, "Kung hindi ngayon, kailan pa?" This is the same slogan that we used to say in UP at that time, "Kung hindi ngayon, kailan pa?" If not now, when? Palagi na lang tayong umaasa.

You know, if you do that, iyong depensa natin ay lalong humihina kasi nakaasa tayo eh. Eh paano kung bigla tayong iniwan? So tama si Presidente: We have to strengthen our own resources. We have to be ourselves.

WEBB: So if that is the case, Secretary, are we averse, hindi ho ba tayo papayag sa kahit na anong agreement with any other country because we need to stand on our own two feet?

SEC. PANELO: Ganoon ang mangyayari doon.

WEBB: So hindi tayo papayag sa kahit anong agreement with any other country?

SEC. PANELO: Iyon ang sabi niya eh.

WEBB: And that is the right path or word?

SEC. PANELO: Umpisahan na nating palakasin ang ating depensa. And that will mean of course – pera, budget. Ganoon ang gagawin talaga natin!

WEBB: Yeah, iyon nga ang gusto kong tanong: Sa susunod na ... papaano ang pera kasi to upgrade skills and the equipment.

SEC. PANELO: Lahat naman iyan puwedeng matutunan eh, puwedeng mabili. Kailangan nag-iisa—sabi nga ni Presidente, “We are friends to all, enemies to none. But if any country threaten our territorial integrity and sovereignty, we will rise to the challenge as a nation and fight like the way the forefathers of ours did during their time.”

WEBB: Using what equipment sir, and what ...?

SEC. PANELO: Eh kung noong panahon naman eh, ano bang ginamit natin? Bola lang tapos nabago. Ganoon din ang gagawin. Kaya nga papalakasin natin ang puwersa natin, eh di mag-uumpisa tayong bumili ng mga high-tech weapons.

WEBB: Is there anything in the pipeline sir, na planong bilhin - in the work?

SEC. PANELO: Iyon na nga eh, nag-uumpisa na tayo eh. Kasi the moment you distance or disattach yourself, eh di siyempre, bago ka ng team.

WEBB: Secretary, is the President dead set on this? Ibig sabihin lang po, sabi nga ni Senator Pong, mayroon pang 178 days—

SEC. PANELO: Wala na iyon. Kalimutan ninyo na iyon. His position will be unchanged until the last day of his term.

WEBB: Let me quote you, “unchanged” sir?

SEC. PANELO: Unchanged.

WEBB: Until the end of his term?

SEC. PANELO: Until the end of time.

WEBB: So hindi na ho niya papalitan iyon?

SEC. PANELO: Kailangan talagang sariling kayod na tayo.

WEBB: What about diplomatic move sir, to possibly make the VFA more palatable sa atin, sa Pilipinas, mas acceptable?

SEC. PANELO: Ang problema nga doon, kapag ganiyan ang attitude natin, palagi tayong relying on another country. Tama na iyan. Baguhin na natin ang attitude natin diyan. Kaya natin iyan!

WEBB: My question sir, is: If they come up with something attractive regarding the VFA, would the President give it a second chance?

SEC. PANELO: Basta sinabi ni President baguhin na natin iyan.

WEBB: So hindi po? Huwag na tayong umasa na posible pang magpalit ang kaniyang mind, sir?

SEC. PANELO: Iyon na nga ang kaniyang sinasabi eh, let's begin the new ... charting of our foreign policy.

WEBB: Secretary, help us understand, iyong tulong po that we talked about with David a while ago. The Americans have helped us in many ways. And—

SEC. PANELO: Anong tinulong nila ngayon dito sa virus? Parang zero eh. May nagpadala sa akin ... ang daming mga iba't ibang bansa ang nagpadala nang kung anu-ano. Pagdating sa US daw zero – ewan ko kung totoo.

WEBB: So wala ho ba tayong ... is there no loss, are you saying, with the scrapping of the Visiting Forces of Agreement?

SEC. PANELO: Alam mo, mayroon – maaari bang wala, siyempre mayroon dahil umasa tayo from the very beginning. Parang ano iyan, hindi ba iyong military bases agreement, ang daming sinasabi, mga gloom scenario. May nangyari ba? Wala naman ah, ganiyan talaga iyan!

WEBB: Pero anong nakikita ninyong loss with the Visiting cancellation?

SEC. PANELO: Parang ano iyan, mag-asawa na naghiwalay. Eh hindi naman namamatay ang—

WEBB: Oo. We will survive eventually—

SEC. PANELO: Palagi nagsu-survive at lalo pang gumaganda nga ang buhay natin eh.

WEBB: But hypothetically lang sir, sabihin natin na mayroon bang chance in the event, let's say the President changes his mind, puwede ho bang bawiin iyong notice of termination before the 180-day deadline?

SEC. PANELO: Let me put it this way: All of us give a certain position ... whether political, social. But when circumstances change, 'di ba, nababago rin iyong ating position eh – so tingnan natin.

WEBB: All right. We'll be taking another short break. This is The Source on CNN Philippines. Please stay tuned.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

WEBB: You're watching The Source on CNN Philippines. Our guests today, former Senators Rodolfo "Pong" Biazon, Orly Mercado, and Presidential Spokesperson and Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo. Sir, question: Iyon po bang pag-cancel ng VFA ay maaapektuhan ba, for example, iyong aids and grants that we receive from them? Would there be some sort of effect?

SEC. PANELO: Siyempre palaging may epekto iyan. Kung dating binibigyan tayo baka hindi na sila magbigay. Pero sabi nga ni Presidente, "Okay lang iyan basta tumayo na tayo nang sarili natin, huwag na tayong umasa kahit kanino."

WEBB: Papaano ho ... anong mangyayari sa EDCA o sa Mutual Defense Treaty?

SEC. PANELO: Eh ganoon na rin siguro – maaapektuhan, tatamaan din iyon.

WEBB: Which means what?

SEC. PANELO: Which means, baka mawala na rin iyon.

WEBB: Baka?

SEC. PANELO: Kung iyon ang posisyon ni Presidente na hindi niya na kailangan ang alliances sa iba at tumayo na tayo nang sarili natin, eh talagang mawawala lahat iyan.

WEBB: One question posed by Senator Orly and Senator Pong was: Are we shifting alliances?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi shifting alliance; tinatanggal natin iyong alliances natin. On our own na nga eh, sarili na nga eh.

WEBB: And no China?

SEC. PANELO: Wala, wala lahat. Tinanong ko si Presidente.

WEBB: The Presidential Spokesperson saying posibleng masunod ang ... posible ang EDCA at Mutual Defense Treaty. Very quickly, Senator Orly, what are your thoughts on that?

ORLY MERCADO: Well, very quickly I say, we have to define first, as I have mentioned earlier, our core interest. And then also identify what the core interests of the United States are in our region, as well as China's. Where our core interests aligned with them, we're fine. Where our core interests are not aligned and they're clashing, then we have to take into consideration the possibility that this unaligned interest can result to conflict. So how do you deal with that conflict is another question to be answered!

WEBB: Kapag mawala ho ba, for example, ang EDCA and MDT, Senator Pong, ano pong epekto noon sa atin, sa Pilipinas?

RODOLFO BIAZON: Without the Visiting Forces Agreement, the MDT – Mutual Defense Treaty – and EDCA are meaningless because the meat of these two agreements is the Visiting Forces Agreement. Now, are we going to do the same with Australia? Remember, we have a Visiting Forces Agreement with Australia. I was part of the ... ano diyan eh. So iyan ang katanungan ko.

WEBB: Okay. Would you be able to say, Senator, answer me if I ask you, did the President make the wrong move by cancelling the Visiting Forces Agreement?

RODOLFO BIAZON: That is a very difficult question because the factors to be studied have a long list. I cannot answer the question. Do we need it now? Well, we have been there. Now, if we do not need it anymore, then the next question is: What is the process in the termination? That is why I listened to Senate President Sotto when he said, kailangan dumaaan ito sa Senado; at kung hindi, ito ay pupunta sa Korte Suprema. And my assumption, my assumption is that you go to the Supreme Court on issues of questions of the constitutionality.

WEBB: Okay. Senator Orly Mercado, last word, sir. Looking forward, what are you looking forward to with the cancellation of the VFA?

ORLY MERCADO: Well, the way I look at it, history will judge us. We cannot make a judgment now because we don't know the consequences yet. But this is still in a flux, and who knows, there might be some benefit out of this. This is not saber rattling ha; there was actual cancellation of the Visiting Forces.

RODOLFO BIAZON: I remember, the termination (signal cut)

WEBB: One seventy eight na lang kasi Tuesday pa iyan. How about you, Secretary Salvador Panelo?

SEC. PANELO: Sabi nga ng ano eh, "So, sir, nagbibilang na tayo?" "Hindi. Sila ang nagbibilang, hindi tayo!"

WEBB: Final words, Secretary, doon sa mga posibleng nangangamba na mawala ang VFA?

SEC. PANELO: The President says, this is a new foreign policy. And the foreign policy is: Friends to all, enemies to none. And he says that foreign policy will be based solely on our national interest and general welfare of the people. Iyon!

WEBB: Okay. Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo, sir, maraming salamat po sa inyo. Good to see you.

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