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**Q&A BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.
AND CZECH PRESIDENT PETR PAVEL AT THE JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE**
[Held at the Octagon Hall, Prague Castle in Prague, Czech Republic | 14 March 2024]

Q: Good afternoon, your Excellencies. My question is for both President Marcos and President Pavel. What kind of defense cooperation are we exploring to support the Philippines in defending international law particularly in the issue of the South China Sea?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: We discussed, first of all, we have based our discussions on the fact that the Czech Republic and the Philippines share the same values when it comes to adherence to international law and that is something that again, we find as a commonality between our two countries.

As we pointed out and continued to discuss, the Armed Forces of the Philippines is undergoing a modernization program.

And under that modernization program there will be a great deal of procurement that needs to be done, to modernize our forces and to modernize our capabilities.

And the Czech Republic has always been an important part of that development, of that evolution.

And we are hoping that that will continue, not only at its present level but at a higher level.

PRESIDENT PAVEL: Let me add that the Czech Republic has had a long lasting tradition when it comes to defense industry.

We have a lot to offer and [unclear] when it comes to aviation part and land equipment and it will be the topic of future discussion.

Specifically, what will be provided but we also see possible cooperation in cybersecurity and in the use and development of high-tech or modern technologies.

I believe that both countries have a lot to offer and there is a lot of space or room for cooperation.

As to South China Sea, we fully support the Philippines when it comes to their entitlement to free movement of goods and also marine transport because that's a principle that not only--- we all respect but which also secures global and regions stability.

To us, South China Sea may seem to be far, far away but if you take into account the percentage of sharer of world or global trade that passes through this area, any disruption of theses routes would have an adverse impact on Europe, not only in the form of shortage of goods but also soaring prices. Which is why we have to pay attention to this topic.

Q: [unclear] television. Mr. President, you have duly answered the question concerning the South China Sea therefore, the question is addressed to Mr. Marcos.

You have mentioned that you want to also approach the United States of America when it comes to the solution of the situation at the beginning of next year you should meet Antony Blinken, the foreign Secretary next week. So, what do you expect from that?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, we--- it is really an ongoing process and that all of these discussions are really as far as the Philippines is concerned, it is concerned with the maintenance of peace in the South China Sea.

It is an issue that is not only important for those surrounded the region, the Indo-Pacific region, for ASEAN, and for the member states of ASEAN that surround the South China Sea.

But also, because this is a safe navigation and passage of the South China Sea is important to international trade, as close to 60% of international trade goes to that channel and we hope to continue these discussions.

And with an eye not to winning any kind of conflict but really just to maintain the peace and to continue to defend the sovereignty and the sovereign rights of the Philippines when it comes to these international differences the we are having to deal with right now.

PRESIDENT PAVEL: ... to thank all of you for coming and I wish you the most enjoyable afternoon. Thank you and see you.

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