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Barack Obama

*Joint Press Conference with Philippine President Benigno Aquino III*

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**President Aquino:** The honorable President of the United States Barack Obama and his official delegation, members of the Cabinet present, members of the press, ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon.

Today, the Philippines welcomes President Obama and his delegation on his first state visit to the Philippines. The United States is a key ally, a strategic partner, and a reliable friend of the Philippines.

With this visit, we reaffirm the deep partnership between our countries, one founded on democratic values, mutual interest in our shared history and aspirations, and one that will definitely give us the momentum to propel our peoples to even greater heights.

We witnessed the most recent and tangible manifestations of this in the immediate outpouring of assistance from the government of the United States and the American people in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (or Yolanda), and your nation's clear expression of solidarity with the typhoon survivors.

Mr. President, in your State of the Union address earlier this year, you spoke of how American volunteers and troops were greeted with gratitude in the affected areas. Today, I reiterate formally the Filipino people will never forget such kindness and compassion.



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On behalf of my countrymen, I thank the United States of America once more for being a true friend to our people.

The friendship and partnership between our countries, however, are evident not only in times of crisis and immediate need, but also in other aspects of our relations. Our defense alliance has been a cornerstone of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region for more than 60 years. And our strategic partnership spans a broad range of areas of cooperation, contributing to the growth and prosperity of both our nations, and fostering closer bonds between our peoples.

As such, President Obama and I met today with the shared resolve to ensure that our deepening relations are attune to the realities and needs that have emerged in the 21st century, which affect not only our two countries, but also the entire community of nations.

I thank President Obama for the U.S.'s support for our government's efforts in modernizing and enhancing its defense capabilities. The Philippines-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement takes our security cooperation to a higher level of engagement, reaffirms our country's commitment to mutual defense and security, and promotes regional peace and stability.

Both President Obama and I shared the conviction that territorial and maritime disputes in the Asia Pacific region should be settled peacefully based on international law. We affirm that arbitration is an open, friendly and peaceful approach to seeking a just and durable solution. We also underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Declaration of Conduct and the expeditious conclusion of a substantive and legally binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea -- all towards fostering peace and stability in our part of the world.

We, likewise, welcome the active participation of the United States in regional mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit.

Typhoon Haiyan showed the entire world how vulnerable the Philippines as well as other developing countries are to natural disasters. As such, humanitarian assistance and disaster response is an essential component of our cooperation. As the United States and the American people have always been ready to support us in the aftermath of disasters, so too do we look forward to the continued cooperation of the United States and the rest of our partners in the international community as we undertake the task of building back the communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

This morning we made a promising start as we discussed how our partnership can be enhanced through building climate resilient communities. These kind of strong communities are important not only in withstanding disasters, but also in fostering inclusive growth across the entire country.



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President Obama and I recognize the importance of strong economic engagement for the continued growth of both the Philippines and the United States.

On this note, we expressed our appreciation for the U.S.'s support for our government's programs under the Partnership for Growth framework, which enhances the policy environment for economic growth through US \$145 million total plan contribution from the USAID. U.S. support is also coursed through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which supports the implementation of projects and road infrastructure, poverty reduction, and good governance, with \$434 million grant from 2011 to 2016.

Recently, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration reinstated the Philippines to a Category 1 status. This will redound to mutual benefit for our countries from opening more routes for travel between the United States and the Philippines to creating more business opportunities to facilitate the increased tourism and business travel.

We welcome the substantive agreement between our countries on the terms and concessions for the U.S. to support the Philippines' request for the extension of special treatment for rice imports until 2017.

We also discussed the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which is a high-standard trade agreement that will shape the global and regional economic architecture in the 21st century. The Philippines is working to assert in how participation in TPP can be realized.

The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro last March 27 brings a just and lasting peace within our reach -- a peace that will serve as a strong foundation for stability, inclusivity, and progress in Mindanao. This was born of the steadfast commitment and the hard work of our administration, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and other partners and stakeholders, the U.S. included.

We thank President Obama for the United States' significant assistance and support for the Philippine peace process. Our meeting today was comprehensive, historic and significant, embodying our shared values and aspirations. It afforded President Obama and myself the opportunity to build on the relations between our countries, and discuss our strategic mission for the future of the Philippines-United States relationship -- a relationship that is modern, mature and forward-looking, and one that allows us to surpass challenges towards the benefit of our peoples, the entire region and the world.

Thank you.



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**President Obama:** Mabuhay. Thank you, President Aquino, for your warm welcome and your very kind words.

With the President's indulgence, I want to begin by saying a few words about some terrible storms and tornadoes back home in the United States. Over the weekend, a series of storms claimed at least a dozen lives and damaged or destroyed homes and businesses and communities across multiple states, with the worst toll in Arkansas. So I want to offer my deepest condolences to all those who lost loved ones. I commend the heroic efforts of first responders and neighbors who rushed to help.

I want everyone affected by this tragedy to know that FEMA and the federal government is on the ground and will help our fellow Americans in need, working with state and local officials. And I want everybody to know that your country will be there to help you recover and rebuild as long as it takes.

Now, this is my first visit to the Philippines as President, and I'm proud to be here as we mark the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, when Americans and Filipinos fought together to liberate this nation during World War II. All these years later, we continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder to uphold peace and security in this region and around the world.

So, Benigno, I want to thank you and the Filipino people not only for your generous hospitality today, but for a friendship that has spanned generations. And I'd add that our friendship is deeper and the United States is stronger because of the contributions and patriotism of millions of proud Filipino-Americans.

As I've made clear throughout this trip, the United States is renewing our leadership in the Asia Pacific, and our engagement is rooted in our alliances. And that includes the Philippines, which is the oldest security treaty alliance that we have in Asia. As a vibrant democracy, the Philippines reflects the desire of citizens in this region to live in freedom and to have their universal rights upheld. As one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, the Philippines represents new opportunities for the trade and investment that creates jobs in both countries.

And given its strategic location, the Philippines is a vital partner on issues such as maritime security and freedom of navigation. And let me add that the recent agreement to end the insurgency in the south gives the Philippines an historic opportunity to forge a lasting peace here at home, with greater security and prosperity for the people of that region.

I was proud to welcome President Aquino to the White House two years ago, and since then we've worked to deepen our cooperation and to modernize our alliances. Our partnership reflects an important Filipino concept -- bayanihan -- the idea that we have to work together to accomplish things that we couldn't achieve on our own.



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That's what we saw last year when Typhoon Yolanda devastated so many communities. Our armed forces and civilians from both our countries worked as one to rescue victims and to deliver lifesaving aid. That's what friends do for each other. And, Mr. President, I want to say to you and the people of the Philippines: The United States will continue to stand with you as you recover and rebuild. Our commitment to the Philippines will not waver.

Today, I'm pleased that we're beginning an important new chapter in the relationship between our countries, and it starts with our security -- with the new defense cooperation agreement that was signed today. I want to be very clear: The United States is not trying to reclaim old bases or build new bases. At the invitation of the Philippines, American servicemembers will rotate through Filipino facilities. We'll train and exercise more together so that we're prepared for a range of challenges, including humanitarian crises and natural disasters like Yolanda.

We'll work together to build the Philippines' defense capabilities and to work with other nations to promote regional stability, such as in the South China Sea. And I'm looking forward to my visit with forces from both our nations tomorrow to honor their service and to look ahead to the future we can shape together.

As we strengthen our bilateral security cooperation, we're also working together with regional institutions like ASEAN and the East Asia Summit. When we met in the Oval Office two years ago, Benigno and I agreed to promote a common set of rules, founded in respect for international law, that will help the Asia Pacific remain open and inclusive as the region grows and develops.

Today, we have reaffirmed the importance of resolving territorial disputes in the region peacefully, without intimidation or coercion. And in that spirit, I told him that the United States supports his decision to pursue international arbitration concerning territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Finally, we agreed to keep deepening our economic cooperation. I congratulated President Aquino on the reforms that he's pursued to make the Philippines more competitive. Through our Partnership for Growth and our Millennium Challenge Corporation compact, we're going to keep working together to support these efforts so that more Filipinos can share in this nation's economic progress -- because growth has to be broad-based and it has to be inclusive.

We discussed the steps that the Philippines could take to position itself for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And I encouraged the President to seize the opportunity he's created by opening the next phase of economic reform and growth.

Today, I'm announcing that my Commerce Secretary, Penny Pritzker, will lead a delegation of American business leaders to the Philippines this June to explore new opportunities. And I'd add that we've also committed to work together to address the devastating effects of climate change and to make Philippine communities less vulnerable to extreme storms like Yolanda.



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So, Mr. President, let me once again thank you for everything you've done to strengthen our alliance and our friendship. I'm looking forward to paying tribute to the bonds between our people at the dinner tonight and to working with you as we write the next chapter in the relationship between our two countries.

**Question:** Good afternoon, Your Excellencies. President Aquino, President Obama -- welcome to the Philippines. My questions are: How did the United States reassure the Philippines that the U.S. is genuinely committed to countering an increasingly assertive China in the region? Will the U.S. defend the Philippines in case the territorial dispute with China in the West Philippine Sea or the South China Sea becomes an armed conflict? And how do you think will China react to the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement? And what are you going to do with this that is consistent with your position to have the territorial disputes resolved in arbitration? Thank you.

**President Obama:** Well, I've been consistent throughout my travels in Asia. We welcome China's peaceful rise. We have a constructive relationship with China. There is enormous trade, enormous business that's done between the United States and China. There are a whole range of issues on the international stage in which cooperation between the U.S. and China are vital. So our goal is not to counter China. Our goal is not to contain China.

Our goal is to make sure that international rules and norms are respected, and that includes in the area of maritime disputes. We do not have claims in this area territorially. We're an Asia Pacific nation and our primary interest is the peaceful resolution of conflict, the freedom of navigation that allows for continued progress and prosperity. And we don't even take a specific position on the disputes between nations.

But as a matter of international law and international norms, we don't think that coercion and intimidation is the way to manage these disputes. And for that reason we're very supportive of President Benigno's approach to go before the tribunal for the law of the sea and to seek international arbitration that can resolve this in a diplomatic fashion.

With respect to the new Defense Cooperation Agreement that's been signed, the goal here is wide-ranging. We've had decades of alliance with the Philippines, but obviously in the 21st century we have to continue to update that. And the goal for this agreement is to build Philippine capacity, to engage in training, to engage in coordination -- not simply to deal with issues of maritime security, but also to enhance our capabilities so that if there's a natural disaster that takes place, we're able to potentially respond more quickly; if there are additional threats that may arise, that we are able to work in a cooperative fashion.

This is consistent with, for example, the agreement that we have with Australia, in Darwin. Obviously, we've had a longstanding alliance with Australia, but we also recognize that as circumstances change, as capacities change, we have to update that alliance to meet new needs and new challenges.



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And so, I think this is going to be a terrific opportunity for us to work with the Philippines to make sure that our navies, our air force are coordinated, to make sure that there's information-sharing to allow us to respond to new threats, and to work with other countries, ASEAN countries -- Australia, Japan. My hope is, is that at some point we're going to be able to work cooperatively with China as well, because our goal here is simply to make sure that everybody is operating in a peaceful, responsible fashion. When that happens, that allows countries to focus on what's most important to people day to day, and that is prosperity, growth, jobs. Those are the things that we as leaders should be focused on, need to be focused on. And if we have security arrangements that avoid conflict and dispute, then we're able to place our attention on where we should be focused.

**Mr. Carney:** The next question comes from Margaret Talev of Bloomberg.

**Question:** Mr. President, later today we are expecting to hear about new sanctions on people close to President Putin. And I wanted to ask you, do you see this as a way to get to Mr. Putin's personal wealth? Do you believe that he has amassed personal wealth that's unreported? Or is it just a means of ratcheting up pressure before a move to sectoral sanctions? You mentioned yesterday specifically the defense industry as an area where it doesn't make sense to move without Europe moving. I wanted to ask you, are we likely to see defense sanctions soon, banking and energy sanctions soon? What kind of timeframe?

And then, President Aquino, if I may, I also wanted to ask you about China and the new agreement. What I wanted to ask you is what message should China take away from the U.S. and the G7's approach to Russia and Ukraine when it comes to territorial disputes? And do you believe that the military agreement that we've just been talking about will in and of itself deter China from being aggressive territorially, or should the U.S. begin developing military options that could be possible contingencies if you needed to go that course? Thanks.

**President Obama:** You're right, Margaret, that later today there will be an announcement made, and I can tell you that it builds on the sanctions that were already in place. As I indicated, we saw an opportunity through the Geneva talks to move in the direction of a diplomatic resolution to the situation in Ukraine.

The G7 statement accurately points out that the government in Kyiv, the Ukrainian government, has, in fact, abided by that agreement and operated in good faith. And we have not seen comparable efforts by the Russians. And as a consequence, we are going to be moving forward with an expanded list of individuals and companies that will be affected by sanctions. They remain targeted. We will also focus on some areas of high-tech defense exports to Russia that we don't think are appropriate to be exporting in this kind of climate.

The goal here is not to go after Mr. Putin, personally. The goal is to change his calculus with respect to how the current actions that he's engaging in in Ukraine could have an adverse impact on the Russian economy over the long haul, and to encourage him to actually walk the walk and not just talk the talk when it comes to diplomatically resolving the crisis in Ukraine.



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There are specific steps that Russia can take. And if it takes those steps, then you can see an election taking place in Ukraine; you can see the rights of all people inside of Ukraine respected.

The Ukrainian government has put forward credible constitutional reforms of the sort that originally Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the south and east said were part of their grievances, the failure to have their voices heard and represented. Kyiv has responded to those.

And so there's a path here to resolve this. But Russia has not yet chosen to move forward, and these sanctions represent the next stage in a calibrated effort to change Russia's behavior. We don't yet know whether it's going to work. And that's why the next phase if, in fact, we saw further Russian aggression towards Ukraine could be sectoral sanctions, less narrowly targeted, addressing sectors like banking or the defense industry.

So those would be more broad-based. Those aren't what we'll be announcing today. Today's will be building on what we've already done and continue to be narrowly focused but will exact some additional costs on the Russians. But we are keeping in reserve additional steps that we could take should the situation escalate further.

**President Aquino:** First of all, I think China shouldn't be concerned about this agreement, especially if you look at what is being contemplated -- for instance, training for emergency disaster relief operations.

I'll give you a perfect example. The Americans have the V-22 Osprey aircraft, which is quite a significant upgrade in capabilities in terms of reaching out to very remote areas. We don't have a comparable aircraft. We have smaller helicopters. And we had 44 of our provinces devastated by Typhoon Haiyan. Now, the training will not just train our people on how to operate this particular aircraft, but more importantly, even help the Office of Civil Defense, for instance, manage this resource in case a storm or another natural disaster of the scale that transpired does happen.

Secondly, I think the statements that America has been making with regards to Ukraine is the same message that has been said to China, and I guess not only by America but so many other countries. China itself has said repeatedly that they will and have been conforming to international law. And the rest of the world is I think saying we are expecting you to confirm and, by actions, that which you have already been addressing by words, and not distort international law.

The Philippines has not just won through arbitration, but we did remind obviously the President and our dialogue partners that in 2002 they tried to come up with a code of conduct with regards to the South China Sea and the portion which the Philippines claims, which we call the West Philippine Sea.



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And in 2012, the 10th anniversary, there had still been no progress even -- in the meeting. So the Philippines felt it was timely to raise the matter up and to remind everybody that there is no code of conduct that binds us that sets the operational parameters for all to manage any potential conflict. And as a result of that, there has been preparatory meetings towards the formal meeting to try and constitute a code of conduct.

So at the end of the day, we are not a threat militarily to any country. We don't even have -- and I have said this often enough -- we don't even have presently a single fighter aircraft in our inventory. Now, we have I think legitimate needs. We have a 36,000 kilometer coastline. We do have an exclusive economic zone. We do have concerns about poaching on our waters and preserving the environment and even protecting endangered species. So I think no country should begrudge us our rights to be able to attend to our concerns and our needs.

**Question:** Good afternoon, Your Excellencies. This question goes to President Obama, but I would also like to hear the thoughts of President Aquino. I understand the tough balancing act that you need to do between China and your allies in Asia. But do you believe that China's expansionism is a threat to regional peace and stability? And will the Mutual Defense Treaty apply in the event that the territorial conflict with China escalates into an armed conflict?

**President Obama:** Well, let me repeat what I said earlier. I think that it is good for the region and good for the world if China is successfully developing, if China is lifting more of its people out of poverty. There are a lot of people in China, and the more they're able to develop and provide basic needs for their people and work cooperatively with other countries in the region, that's only going to strengthen the region -- that's not going to weaken it.

I do think that, as President Aquino said very persuasively, that China as a large country has already asserted that it is interested in abiding by international law. And really, our message to China consistently on a whole range of issues is we want to be a partner with you in upholding international law. In fact, larger countries have a greater responsibility in abiding by international norms and rules because when we move, it can worry smaller countries if we don't do it in a way that's consistent with international law.

And I think that there are going to be territorial disputes around the world. We have territorial disputes with some of our closest allies. I suspect that there are some islands and rocks in and around Canada and the United States where there are probably still some arguments dating back to the 1800s. But we don't go around sending ships and threatening folks. What we do is we sit down and we have some people in a room -- it's boring, it's not exciting, but it's usually a good way to work out these problems and work out these issues.

And I think that all the countries that I've spoken to in the region during the course of my trip -- Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and now the Philippines -- their message has been the same everywhere I go, which is they would like to resolve these issues peacefully and



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diplomatically. That's why I think that the approach that President Aquino has been taking, putting this before international arbitration, is a sound one.

And if China I think listens to its neighbors and recognizes that there's another approach to resolve these disputes, what China will find is they've got ready and willing partners throughout the Asia Pacific region that want to work with them on trade and commerce and selling goods and buying goods. And it's inevitable that China is going to be a dominant power in this region just by sheer size. Nobody, I think, denies that. The question is just whether other countries in the region are also able to succeed and prosper on their own terms and tend to the various interests and needs that they and their people have as well. And that's what we support.

**President Aquino:** I think from the onset, our message to China has been I think we're all focused on achieving greater prosperity for all our respective peoples, and prosperity and continued prosperity does not happen in a vacuum. There has to be stability. And in turn, they have responded that the disputes in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea are not the end all, be all of our relationships. And we have had good cooperation with them on so many different fronts, and perhaps one could even argue that this is the only sore point in our relationship.

Now, having said that, perhaps -- we have tried to work on that particular premise of building up our ties on different aspects where there is no conflict or very little conflict. And in this particular instance, I have to find the way and means by which we can both achieve our respective goals, which I believe are not -- or should not be mutually exclusive, but rather should be inclusive if at the end of the day, we do want to strive for the prosperity of our respective peoples.

That I think has to be the primordial concern, rather than disputes on a few rocks that are not possible to be inhabited. And I think in due time, given the fact that there's so much commerce that traverses this particular -- both in the maritime and the air domain -- China, which has achieved its goals of improving the life of its people, will see the soundness of this proposal and perhaps will act more, shall we say, consistently and actively towards achieving that stability for all. That is our hope.

**Question:** Thank you to both Presidents. President Aquino, as a journalist, I'd like to ask you why 26 journalists have been killed since you took office. And I understand that there have only been suspects arrested in six of those cases. What are you doing to fix that?

President Obama, as you grappled here with all these national security challenges, I have two questions. One, back home we've learned that 40 military veterans died while they were waiting for health care, a very tragic situation. I know you don't run the Phoenix Office of Veterans Affairs, but as Commander-in-Chief, what specifically will you pledge to fix that?



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And, secondly, more broadly -- big picture -- as you end this trip, I don't think I have to remind you there have been a lot of unflattering portraits of your foreign policy right now. And rather than get into all the details or red lines, et cetera, I'd like to give you a chance to lay out what your vision is more than five years into office, what you think the Obama doctrine is in terms of what your guiding principle is on all of these crises and how you answer those critics who say they think the doctrine is weakness.

**President Obama:** Well, Ed, I doubt that I'm going to have time to lay out my entire foreign policy doctrine. And there are actually some complimentary pieces as well about my foreign policy, but I'm not sure you ran them.

Here's I think the general takeaway from this trip. Our alliances in the Asia Pacific have never been stronger; I can say that unequivocally. Our relationship with ASEAN countries in Southeast Asia have never been stronger. I don't think that's subject to dispute. As recently as a decade ago, there were great tensions between us and Malaysia, for example. And I think you just witnessed the incredible warmth and strength of the relationship between those two countries.

We're here in the Philippines signing a defense agreement. Ten years ago, fifteen years ago there was enormous tensions around our defense relationship with the Philippines. And so it's hard to square whatever it is that the critics are saying with facts on the ground, events on the ground here in the Asia Pacific region. Typically, criticism of our foreign policy has been directed at the failure to use military force. And the question I think I would have is, why is it that everybody is so eager to use military force after we've just gone through a decade of war at enormous costs to our troops and to our budget? And what is it exactly that these critics think would have been accomplished?

My job as Commander-in-Chief is to deploy military force as a last resort, and to deploy it wisely. And, frankly, most of the foreign policy commentators that have questioned our policies would go headlong into a bunch of military adventures that the American people had no interest in participating in and would not advance our core security interests.

So if you look at Syria, for example, our interest is in helping the Syrian people, but nobody suggests that us being involved in a land war in Syria would necessarily accomplish this goal. And I would note that those who criticize our foreign policy with respect to Syria, they themselves say, no, no, no, we don't mean sending in troops. Well, what do you mean? Well, you should be assisting the opposition -- well, we're assisting the opposition. What else do you mean? Well, perhaps you should have taken a strike in Syria to get chemical weapons out of Syria. Well, it turns out we're getting chemical weapons out of Syria without having initiated a strike. So what else are you talking about? And at that point it kind of trails off.



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In Ukraine, what we've done is mobilize the international community. Russia has never been more isolated. A country that used to be clearly in its orbit now is looking much more towards Europe and the West, because they've seen that the arrangements that have existed for the last 20 years weren't working for them. And Russia is having to engage in activities that have been rejected uniformly around the world. And we've been able to mobilize the international community to not only put diplomatic pressure on Russia, but also we've been able to organize European countries who many were skeptical would do anything to work with us in applying sanctions to Russia. Well, what else should we be doing? Well, we shouldn't be putting troops in, the critics will say. That's not what we mean. Well, okay, what are you saying? Well, we should be arming the Ukrainians more. Do people actually think that somehow us sending some additional arms into Ukraine could potentially deter the Russian army? Or are we more likely to deter them by applying the sort of international pressure, diplomatic pressure and economic pressure that we're applying?

The point is that for some reason many who were proponents of what I consider to be a disastrous decision to go into Iraq haven't really learned the lesson of the last decade, and they keep on just playing the same note over and over again. Why? I don't know. But my job as Commander-in-Chief is to look at what is it that is going to advance our security interests over the long term, to keep our military in reserve for where we absolutely need it. There are going to be times where there are disasters and difficulties and challenges all around the world, and not all of those are going to be immediately solvable by us.

But we can continue to speak out clearly about what we believe. Where we can make a difference using all the tools we've got in the toolkit, well, we should do so. And if there are occasions where targeted, clear actions can be taken that would make a difference, then we should take them. We don't do them because somebody sitting in an office in Washington or New York think it would look strong. That's not how we make foreign policy. And if you look at the results of what we've done over the last five years, it is fair to say that our alliances are stronger, our partnerships are stronger, and in the Asia Pacific region, just to take one example, we are much better positioned to work with the peoples here on a whole range of issues of mutual interest.

And that may not always be sexy. That may not always attract a lot of attention, and it doesn't make for good argument on Sunday morning shows. But it avoids errors. You hit singles, you hit doubles; every once in a while we may be able to hit a home run. But we steadily advance the interests of the American people and our partnership with folks around the world.

**Question:** The Veterans Affairs --

**President Obama:** You got me all worked up on the other one. The moment we heard about the allegations around these 40 individuals who had died in Phoenix, I immediately ordered the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, General Shinseki, to investigate. We also have an IG investigation taking place. And so we take the allegations very seriously.



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That is consistent with what has been my rock-solid commitment to make sure that our veterans are cared for. I believe that if somebody has served our nation then they have to get the benefits and services that they have earned. And my budgets have consistently reflected that. That's why we've resourced the Veterans Affairs office more in terms of increases than any other department or agency in my government.

That doesn't mean, though, that some folks may still not be getting the help that they need. And we're going to find out if, in fact, that's the case, and I'm interested in working with everybody, whether it's our outstanding veteran service organizations or Congress, to make sure that there is not a single veteran in the United States who needs help -- whether because they're homeless, because they're sick, because they're looking for a job. I want to make sure that they are getting the help that they need.

**President Aquino:** With regards to the killing of journalists, perhaps we should say from the outset that I don't have the figures right here before me. But we did set up an interagency committee to look on extralegal killings and forced disappearances, torture, and other grave violations of right to life, liberty and security of persons.

And in this particular body, there has been -- I have the figures for labor-related issues -- there were 62 suspected cases of extrajudicial killings referred to it, and of the 62 investigations before this committee, there have been 10 that have been determined to fulfill the criteria and the definitions of what constitutes an extrajudicial killing. Of the 10 cases that have been determined to be possible EJK cases, only one happened during our watch -- the case of Mr. Estrellado.

Now, as far as journalists are concerned, perhaps the track record speaks for itself. The Maguindanao massacre involved something like 52 journalists, and there are presently something like over 100 people who have been indicted for this crime and are undergoing trial. That doesn't mean that we have stopped trying to look for others potentially involved in this particular killing. And may we just state for the record that even when it comes to journalists, it is not a policy of this state to silence critics. All you have to do would be to turn on the TV, the radio, or look at any newspaper to find an abundance of criticisms.

Now, having said that, investigations have been done. Anybody who has been killed obviously is a victim, and investigations have been ongoing. If at times we do not reveal the discoveries by our intelligence agencies and security services, perhaps we are very sensitive to personal relationships by the people who are deceased who were killed not because of professional activities, but, shall we say, other issues. But having said that, they were killed. That is against the law. And the people will have to be found, prosecuted and sent to jail.

The fourth plank of my promise when I ran for election was judicial reform, and this is still a work in progress. We want to protect all the rights of every individual but also ensure that the speedy portion of the promise also happens.



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Unfortunately, speed is not a hallmark of our current judicial system and there are various steps -- laws, amendments, particular laws -- even a rethink of the whole process to try and ensure the speedy disposition of justice.

Thank you.

**President Obama:** Thank you very much, everybody.