Dr. John J. Hamre: Everybody please have a seat. Thank you. So glad to see you all here. It’s just wonderful to have this room full. It should be, because this is a rare opportunity for all of us. Thank you all for coming.

My name is John Hamre. I’m the president of CSIS. But it’s a real privilege to have you here, but really to welcome President Marcos. It’s just a – he’s had a remarkable visit. I’ve been watching the news, and it’s just been really a standout visit. And I think we’re all very glad for that.

You know, there’s such a unique relationship between our two countries. And it’s personal. It’s bottom-up. About three years ago I spent a fair amount of time in a series of hospitals, and at every step of the way it was a Filipino that was helping me – at the emergency room, the ICU, the hematologist, the nurses, the doctors. And it wasn’t just that they were health care professionals. It’s that they brought a buoyancy of spirit that’s so typical of the Philippines, you know? It just – it made me want to get well, because I wanted to live up to the generosity that they were expressing for me. It was just – it was marvelous, and a great, great thing.

You know, we’ve had choppy relations between our two countries through the years. My friend Henry Howard is here. Henry was instrumental in returning the Balangiga Bell. You say to most Americans, they don’t know what you’re talking about, right? (Laughter.) No American knows what that means. Every Filipino knows what that is. We took a bell from a Catholic church as a war trophy, you know? And it took 100 years, I think, to get it back. You know, Henry, thank you for doing that. But it’s emblematic of the unevenness we’ve had between our two countries.

We’re right now entering a remarkably positive period of time, because of President Marcos. He is bringing new dynamism to this relationship. And we see each other now in ways where we need each other in a modern time. And it’s a wonderful thing. So it’s a privilege for all of us. This is his last big event before he leaves tonight, so he’s giving us the privilege of talking with him, and then also getting his insights from his really very successful visit in Washington.

So with your very warm applause, would you please welcome to the stage President Ferdinand Marcos. (Applause.)

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.: I get a special Filipino footstool. (Laughter.) So thank you for such thoughtfulness. Thank you very much for the kind introduction from Mr. John Hamre, the president and CEO of CSIS, and the other CSIS officials.

We have with us our – the speaker of our House of Representatives, Speaker Martin Romualdez. (Applause.) Also with us is our foreign
secretary, Secretary Manalo. (Applause.) And our ambassador, who cannot wait to see our plane leave. (Laughter.) He has been working on this trip for a year, and I think that we owe him a pat on the back for the very good work, the groundwork that he put – (applause) – that he has put in for us to have – for us to be able to say that, at the very least, this visit has been a most constructive and meaningful one.

I was just speaking inside before we came out and we were talking about the trip. And I said, generally, there is a tendency sometimes when we have these official visits or state visits you make these declarations and pronouncements which are very general and what we refer to as motherhood statements.

On this trip, that has not been the case at all. We have gone into a remarkable amount of detail in terms of the establishment and the strengthening and deepening of relations between the U.S. and the Philippines. I am lucky, however, that these arrangements and these agreements have come about because we have such a very strong foundation of our relationship.

And now here we are at the CSIS, one of the world’s foremost policy institutions on national-security and foreign-policy issues, and have been a great partner in highlighting the Philippines to its American and, of course, international audience.

Just two weeks ago our foreign affairs secretary stood before you to provide his perspectives, our perspectives and the Philippines’s deep bilateral ties with the United States, as well as our country’s place in the Indo-Pacific and in the world.

Today I would like to delve into what I think our two countries and peoples have been and will continue to be naturally drawn to each other. I dare say that in a similar vein the future of the United States will hold more promise if the U.S. works closely, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, in lock step with the Philippines.

The answer is simple and more fundamental even than our almost 72 years of treaty alliance. What truly binds our two countries and peoples is our shared value and our commitment to mutual prosperity.

In May last year, a record 56 million Filipinos exercised their right to vote. True to our roots as the first Asian republic, we showed the world once again that the Philippines remains a bastion of freedom in the Asia-Pacific.
When I came into office in July last year, I promised to uphold these same values to ensure that democracy delivers for every Filipino, especially while we still reel from the lingering effects of the pandemic and the ripple effects of even the crisis in Ukraine and to the Philippines and to the global economy.

My father once said of what good is democracy if it is not for the poor. He was absolutely right.

I'm quite certain that you will all agree that this is the very same principle behind the Biden-Harris administration’s national and foreign policies. Our two countries are drawn to each other because we recognize that in order to achieve our common goal of peace and prosperity for our peoples, we need to work with likeminded partners.

It is therefore not surprising that, over the past 20 months in particular, our two countries have seen a steady exchange of official engagements at all levels of government. This includes my first meeting with President Biden on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York and this visit, the first by a sitting Philippine president to the United States in over 10 years. I do not know quite how that developed that way, as that has not been the case in the past. But we are back on our normal road of partnership, working together hand in hand.

Together with our most senior Cabinet officials, President Biden and I had frank and open discussions on where we are in our bilateral relationship and where we want our alliance and our partnership to bring us, particularly in terms of addressing the most pressing challenges confronting our two countries today.

We noted that the food, water and energy crises, climate change, terrorism, transnational organized crime, they have all become enormous and complex challenges, not only for the smaller countries such as the Philippines, but even for the large countries and great powers like the United States.

We are grappling with both new and traditional threats to our people’s security, nowhere more acutely felt than in the Indo-Pacific region. And the Philippines sits squarely at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region. It is for this reason that I called for evolving our alliance to make it more responsive to present and emerging challenges. It is because national security is no longer simply about territorial defense. Economic security is national security.
After some fits and starts in the nearly 125 years since its independence the Philippines is poised to achieve upper middle income status in one or two years’ time. We are projected to become the sixteenth largest economy in the world by 2040. For more than a hundred million Filipinos ensuring their economic well-being and uplifting their quality of life has always been the priority of this administration.

We continue to work on finding synergies and aligning our efforts to sustain our economic momentum and secure inclusive development by expanding cooperation in key areas such as agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, to navigate and manage regional and global security challenges.

The Philippines was amongst the first to welcome and embrace the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework because at the outset we found that our values aligned with the principles underpinning the United States’ vision for the IPEF, that of transparency, of fairness, competitiveness, of inclusiveness, sustainability, and resilience.

One could argue that the Philippines and the United States are natural strategic, trade, and investment partners. The challenge now is to make sure that the IPEF brings about concrete deliverables including in closing the infrastructure gap amongst partners, encouraging the connectivity between partners, and when I say – when I use the word connectivity, which goes beyond digital connectivity which has become the most common use of that word, but to include transportation, include trade, include travel by land, by sea, by air, and in that way we strengthen supply chains, we build resilience, and we open up access and opportunities not only to the digital economy but to the other emerging sectors that as yet we have not necessarily totally identified but will come down and will be something that we will have to face in the very near future.

We see a couple of issues that are of vital importance to our economic partnerships. First, the reauthorizing of the General System of Preferences, or the GSP program, is a key first step. Both our countries have greatly benefited from the GSP. The program covers over 2,000 products and, certainly, can be expanded to cover other products of interest.

I do not say this lightly but the Philippines has much to offer when it comes to economic opportunities that both countries can take advantage of. We grew at 7.6 percent and last year – which made the Philippines one of the fastest growing economies in the Indo-Pacific in 2022 – while facing global economic headwinds we are still projected to grow by around 6 percent this year and that is the forecast that we are hoping, actually, to improve on, and another 6.2 percent next year.
We have a young, dynamic, and skilled labor force. We have instituted several major economic reforms intended to make it easier to do business in the Philippines and I am proud to say that our macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong.

As the United States actively looks for alternative locations for businesses in the region we urge both the U.S. and the private sector to consider doing business with us in the areas, of course, of clean energy, decarbonization, agriculture, food security, critical green minerals, digital infrastructure in telecommunications, and, as has been spoken about, and in health care.

We believe that not only do these areas have a high potential for growth but will also provide the most benefit to our peoples. To advance our common climate agenda, energy and green metals cooperation will be an important piece of our engagement and must be prioritized. The Philippines is interested in becoming a strategic partner of the U.S. in terms of metal processing for American battery application and development. The increased deployment of clean technologies comes with an increase in demand for inputs of crucial energy resource minerals, including cobalt, nickel, which just happen to be very abundant in the Philippines. We are eager to work with the U.S. government to carve out a clear pathway for maximizing incentives under the Inflation Reduction Act, to help our resources – to help our sources of raw and processed materials for battery production to complement your National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries.

We have recently advanced discussions on a possible one-two-three agreement. We see nuclear energy as an important part of the country’s future energy mix, both for ensuring supply and bringing electrical costs down. This will allow us to progress discussions with the U.S. companies offering nuclear technologies for government and for commercial use while we continue cooperation on other capacity-building initiatives under other strategies – under strategic civilian nuclear cooperation MOU, or memorandum of understanding.

As I brought up with President Biden, I see as critical the undertaking of technical cooperation and possible U.S. investment in the adoption of geographic information systems, remote sensing, artificial intelligence, and the baselining and change detection of terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems. This will aid us as we establish our own geospatial database and equip us to move towards strengthening science-based policymaking in our country. We certainly would welcome discussions and joint action research with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The NOAA
has been providing critical support to the prevention and mitigation of the harmful impacts from the recent oil spill that we suffered in Oriental Mindoro. Furthermore, with NASA, we hope to formalize our participation in their Asia air quality program, recognizing that the weather sector has the opportunity to lead the change and to deliver transformative solutions in our quest for climate-resilient and sustainable development. We likewise encourage the exchange of knowledge on integrated water resource management and opportunities for joint trans-disciplinary action research, with particular focus on the nexus between climate change, biodiversity conservation, and food, energy, and water security.

Building on our science, technology, and innovation engagements, we hope to work with the United States in establishing the virology and vaccine institute of The Philippines. We can jointly work on the training of technicians and specialists, including postgraduate education scholarships, providing necessary equipment, and implements for the center, and establishing what is envisioned to be the first biosafety Level 4 laboratory in the country.

We look forward to welcoming pharmaceutical companies, open to taking advantage of incentives in using The Philippines as a base for their vaccine manufacturing and distribution operations.

We also look forward to our continued partnership in fighting noncommunicable diseases such as tuberculosis, diabetes, obesity. We will require massive investments in the human, physical and technological resources of the Philippine Genome Center, including access to artificial intelligence tools, training of technicians and of scientists, equipment, and relevant research.

There are existing cooperative projects that can be built upon or expanded. We also hope to partner with the U.S. geological service in training, research, and projects to support our efforts in making a holistic intervention for protecting our coastal areas by targeting environmental degradation in the uplands that impact upon our coastal ecosystems, such as through sedimentation, by restoring the shoreline and protecting marine ecosystems. The United States consistently ranks amongst our top-three trading partners and top 10 sources of foreign direct investment. We are proud that many U.S. companies, including those in the Fortune 500, have found a home in the Philippines. And hope that more companies would look to us as they diversify and reconfigure their supply chains.

My friends, ladies and gentlemen, I make this case for forging closer economic ties because creating prosperity and realizing human potential will not only make the Philippines a more reliable alliance partner for the
United States, it will also strengthen our democracies. A bilateral partnership that works for our peoples will, in turn, attract the support that it needs to thrive, creating a mutually reinforcing circle of trust, one that will truly being our alliance, our partnership, and our friendship into the 21st century.

Thank you all very much for your attention, and good afternoon. (Applause.)

Gregory B. Poling:

Well, let me be the first to thank you, President Marcos, for some phenomenal remarks, and congratulate you on a phenomenal week of visits. I want to reiterate what Dr. Hamre said earlier about just how impressive the last few days of engagements has been. I'm Gregory Poling. I direct the Southeast Asia Program here at CSIS. I also run what we call the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, focused on the South China Sea. So my interest in the Philippines has been longstanding on both fronts, and this is a real honor for us, especially having so recently hosted Secretary of Foreign Affairs Manalo.

Let me start with the alliance. So just yesterday, you visited the Pentagon. You were the first foreign leader to get full honors under the Biden administration at the Pentagon. Which I’m sure was no mistake. And then we saw the release of the new defense guidelines, the first ever bilateral defense guidelines, despite the fact that the Philippines is the oldest U.S. treaty ally in the region. It seems a pretty ambitious plan. When you look out five or 10 years, what does this more equal, more modern alliance look like to you?

President Marcos:

Well, it is one that is responsive to the challenges that we face. And that approaches and finds ways to solve those problems, those challenges on a multidimensional basis. The relationship between the Philippines and the United States – although security and defense right now are top of mind, and security and defense are what we feel are the urgent issues that we must attend to, when asked about what is the most important part of the relationship between U.S. and Philippines, is it the mutual defense treaty? Is it the – is it the people-to-people relationship? And I cannot answer such a question because there are so many facets to our relationship.

And what I see in the future is just developing all of those. Seeing, as I mentioned, that we talk about security and defense. Security and defense can no longer be isolated as one issue. There are attendant and ancillary issues that help to – that help solve the problem, and that are part of the solution. And so, again, we must really be looking towards the – for example, on the economic side, we must be looking to adjust our relationship, as we all are trying to adjust and to transform our economies.
We must look to the new economy that is emerging from the post-pandemic world, and with the impacting forces of the war in the Ukraine.

And those are some things – these are elements, these are issues that we never really had to deal before. So now that is why the relationship must recognize that such is the situation. And that this is what we had hoped to achieve. And I think we have taken the very good first steps and in the right direction for our relationship to be able to respond in a relevant fashion and with an agility that is – that can accommodate the very fast-moving geopolitical forces, the very fast-moving geopolitical issues that arise now. Whereas it used to come every year or so, now they're every week or so, and sometimes even quicker than that.

So that is the direction that I see the R.P.-U.S. relationships heading. And this is what we are going to try to develop. And I think that we are in very good agreement with your president and your government as to the directions that we need to take. And this visit has been very constructive in bringing us to that point where we can say we are ready, that we are capable of looking to the world and seeing what the world has become or the world has evolved, and evolving as well together so as to be able to play the part that we choose to play in the community of nations.

Mr. Poling: Most of the announcements that came out of your trip here this week, including the joint statement with President Biden, focused not on security but, as you indicated, on food security –

President Marcos: Sure.

Mr. Poling: – and climate change and energy and trade. Are you happy with what the U.S. has put on the table to date on the economic front to make this really a comprehensive, not just a security-focused, relationship?

President Marcos: Well, I think that, yes, I am. Now, it's simply because I think it is well recognized by both our governments, not only in the directions that we're taking but the policies that we undertake, and for the part of the Philippines, even the new legislation that we have enacted, that, yes, we are attending to what can be considered to be the most critical areas.

They may have – because of the situation in the geopolitical world right now, they may have begun or started with a focus on security and defense. But that was only a starting point. And from that starting point, the wide-ranging discussions that we have had and the wide-ranging discussions that we have had have become – have come up with some concrete proposals that now our governments will go away and study and try to find a consensus between our two governments on how to move forward.
So I think this visit of myself, of the members of the cabinet and some of the rest of the official delegation – we also have brought with us many members of the private sector – that this visit has become a very – has certainly set the direction very clearly. And it is important in this volatile situation, this volatile setting, that clarity must be there. So we are very clear in what we intend to do, what roles we play, and what positions we take on certain issues. And that, I think, we have largely achieved on this trip.

Mr. Poling: Thank you. You mentioned labor rights and human rights. And a week and a half ago, in response to the tragic murder of Alex Dolorosa, your department of justice issued a very strong statement condemning the culture of impunity in the Philippines, that it will not be allowed to stand. Could you elaborate a bit on what your administration’s plans are to tackle that culture and the human-rights abuses that it’s allowed?

President Marcos: Well, I think those – most of the discussion that are critical of the human-rights situation of the Philippines derive from the policy that we undertook to fight the drug war. And perhaps we – and in my view, what had happened in the previous administration is that we focused very much on enforcement. And because of that, it could be said that there were abuses by certain elements in the government, and that has caused some concern with many – in many quarters about the human rights situation in the Philippines. Well, I cannot speak to what my predecessor had in mind and what his idea was, but what I can speak to is the policy that we have undertaken and that, I have – I said, the drug war continues to be at the source of many – much criminality in the Philippines.

The syndicates have grown stronger and wealthier and more influential, worryingly so. But instead of going after everyone, we have – I’ve tried to identify the key areas where we have – that we have to tackle, the key areas that we have to attend to, so that we can see a diminution of the activity of the drug syndicates.

To this end, we have just finished – we instituted a process by which we asked – we always – we have – really, it is very clear. I think anyone who looks at the drug problem in the Philippines even very quickly will immediately see that the problem lies in enforcement. And some of our law enforcement officers have been sucked into these terrible – these terrible – these terrible systems that have enriched themselves at the cost of the lives of many, especially our young people. And the policemen, that is why we instituted – I organized a commission and I asked for the resignation of all the policemen – police officers from colonel level up. And we have received about, what is it, 917 resignations, and we are now in the process
of looking through the records of these officers to see those that have had derogatory comments, those that have evidence against them. As of today, two of those very high-ranking – I think general rank – have already been removed from – have been separated from the service, and there are still over 30 cases that are being administratively investigated. And that will – that will continue. And if anything is found that is – that implicates any of them to have been – to be involved in any of these activities, then we will start to – we will start to develop the cases against them and in that way dismantle this terrible system that has grown up and has become such a cancer in our society that we – that has – that has gone all the way to the highest levels of government.

So the change in policy, I believe, is much more focused. I always say that the previous administration focused on enforcement. We have taken enforcement as far as we can. Now it is time to look at actually going after dismantling these syndicates. And before that, we should also look at not the rehabilitation of those who have already fallen into this drug culture which has destroyed their lives; further back to that process is also the – is a process of reeducation, of explaining especially to our young people what the damage that – what the potential damage is to their lives should they be involved in this way – not only as users, not only as addicts, but also as dealers and operators of these syndicates.

And so it is a – we are looking at the problem as a whole. We start with the – with the errant policemen. We go back to the rehabilitation process for those who have unfortunately fallen into this addiction cycle. And for the young people in the country who have yet to – (laughs) – who I hope and we hope will never enter into that kind of lifestyle, to continue to educate and to give options to our young people so that they are not – they do not – they are not tempted to indulge in these activities.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

Now, before we turn to the online and in-person audience I have one more question. We have to address the elephant in the room. China continues to harass Filipino mariners on a dangerous basis. Just last week, we had a near collision with a Philippine coast guard vessel at Ayungin Shoal and China has been highly critical of your moves to deepen the alliance with the U.S. How can you maintain a stable relationship with Beijing while still defending Philippine sovereignty?

President Marcos: Well, in the same way that we maintain our relationship with the U.S. We constantly consult with our allies and our partners. We constantly keep our lines of communications open.
When I went to see President Xi in Beijing last January I proposed so as to avoid these incidents, these unfortunate incidents that we see every so often such as the blocking of our fishermen from their fishing grounds, such as the, well, intimidation, really, of many of our maritime forces, I suggested that we – to avoid these instances I suggested that we institute a system wherein we have a direct contact, one president to the other, and in that way no matter if I cannot speak, for example, to President Xi himself I have someone that I can pick up the phone and call who will make – who I know and I have confidence in making my message arrive to the president.

And this works, of course, both ways, that if the president of the People’s Republic would like a message to arrive to me then we have a system in place. We are – we have a system in place to achieve that and we are still working on it. Our secretary of foreign affairs is working on the details of that – well, I refer to it as a hotline, really, and, hopefully, that soon we will have that in place. We will have that functioning, and in that way disengagement is really not an option.

We try to balance. In my first state of the nation address I said that the Philippines’ foreign policy will keep the Philippines the friends of all and enemy to none. Our foreign policies is almost simplistic when I describe it because our foreign policy is based on the pursuit of peace. Our foreign policy is based on the promotion of our national interest.

Now, the promotion of our national interest include the defense of our territorial integrity and of our sovereignty, and that is what that we are working on now and I think that as long as we continue that process, as long as we continue to engage, as long as we continue to assure all our partners, not only China but all our partners – the ASEAN member states, all the countries in Asia, all those who have – we now include in the Indo-Pacific region – that we have an open and clear and available system to be able to communicate with one another, to be – have a very open and candid exchange of views and to explain what it is that we are concerned with and to listen to the concerns of other countries.

That seems to be the only way because we certainly do not want to provoke a more serious situation than it is already now. We certainly do not want to cause an incident by misjudgment, by mistake, that will elevate the conflict from what it is now to a higher level.

That is if – that is not a one – it is not the work of a day or a week or a month. It is something that is ongoing and that really should never end and that, in my view, is the only way to keep the levels of confrontation, the levels of misunderstanding, to a manageable level.
Mr. Poling: Thank you. All right. Let’s open it up to the audience. We have a microphone for those in the room who would like to ask, over on my left here, if you just stand up. And while you make your way there, let’s go to one of those that came in from our online audience.

So, first, we have Leslie Wilhelm. She’s a U.S. Navy civilian. She asked: What is the biggest immediate need for the Philippines to address the impending loss of the Malampaya field in 2027? This is an energy security question, I think.

President Marcos: Again, this is – that’s actually a terribly good question, because the only way to resolve the issues that are outstanding is to, once again, keep talking. And to come to consensus, to come to an agreement, and to continue to negotiate. It is not an easy process, but the Malampaya fields are the natural gas fields that lie in our – within our baselines and within our exclusive economic zone. And that, again, is being questioned in certain case, in certain areas, by China. And we continue to negotiate with them. We continue to find a way.

The essential – the essential problem – the essential roadblock to that whole process has been very simple. China claims certain areas of the sea. The nine dashed line, it covers just about the entire West Philippine Sea. We, on the other hand, have established our baselines, which have been recognized and accredited by UNCLOS. And therefore, there is a conflict. And so what happens now, especially when it comes to exploration for energy – for our energy needs, which law will apply? Because we say this is part of Philippine territory. And therefore, Philippine law should apply. Chinese say, no, it is part of our territory. Therefore, Chinese local law should apply.

We are slowly inching towards a resolution of that. And it may have to come down to a compromise that will just limit that application – the application of laws. Maybe to the vessels that are – that are involved in this exploration or exploitation of whatever natural gas fields we can – we can access. So that’s one of the suggestions. But, as I say, it’s not a – like, there is no silver bullet where you say: We will do this, and it’s done. As I said, we are inching slowly towards a resolution. And that’s why we must be constant. We must be transparent. And we must be accountable for all that we do. And I cannot see any other way to handle the problem other than that.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

Murray.
Q: My name is Murray Hiebert. I’m affiliated with CSIS and with BowerGroupAsia.

I won’t ask a China – a South China Sea question, although I had a lot of those, because you’ve done such a good job of answering them. But I’ll ask an economic question. Your predecessor had roughly cut off a lot of the mining opportunities in the Philippines. But you talked in your opening remarks about the minerals that you have and that could be developed probably for electric vehicles and other purposes, clean energy purposes. Can you talk a little bit about what you’re planning to do in that sector, and how you’re attracting foreign investment in the clean energy space?

President Marcos: With regard to what, as you describe it, the cutting off of mining opportunities in the Philippines, that was a very – that was very much in the initial part of the previous administration. Since then, the position of the Philippines has changed. What we are working for now is not – right now we are exporting nickel, but we are exporting – just as an example, nickel – we are exporting nickel as raw ore. And that is the – probably the worst way to do business in terms of value-added in our country. And so what we are working towards now is the processing, and leaving the value added in the Philippines.

And like, again, to go back to my previous example for Nickel, we can process that into a finished product that we can now use. That’s why battery technology and battery manufacture has become so attractive for us. And that’s why I mentioned it more than once in my remarks, simply because we have available to us all the minerals that are necessary for the production of batteries. So that for me may be the ultimate end of what we are trying to do, but to do that, we have to be able to extract our copper, to extract our cobalt, to extract our nickel, and process it into a form that is useful as the raw material for further processing into batteries. So we are not yet at that point.

If we were to initiate the businesses that we have been looking at in terms of battery production and all the other technologies that will help our renewable mix, renewable and fossil fuel mix, if we are going to be able to participate in that market, we have to be able to process our raw material into a form that is applicable as a raw material for the succeeding processes that will bring us to the point where we are actually manufacturing batteries. I think it’s well recognized around the world that this is where we are headed, this is where the needs of our countries, the needs of our energy suppliers are headed, and that’s what we are trying to do in the Philippines.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.
Let’s go back to the online audience. John Bechtel with BenarNews and Radio Free Asia asks a question that we get a lot of different versions of the same question: Has the U.S. asked your government to contribute Philippine military troops to combat operations should a war break out between the U.S. and China over Taiwan? (Laughter.)

President Marcos: No.

Mr. Poling: I suspect it’s a very short or a very long answer. (Laughter.)

President Marcos: Well, the short answer is no. And the reason is that we have made it very clear that the bases that we have opened up to be used by American forces in the Philippines, we had just identified four additional bases which we announced last month and these – the original concept behind this cooperation agreement that we have with the U.S., from which this – these new bases were derived from, was really because of the effects of climate change and the increasing instances of disasters in the Philippines. I think, for example, everyone can remember the super typhoon – you call it Haiyan; we called it Yolanda – and that was nine years ago, 10 years ago now, and that was, for example – everyone said that is a hundred-year typhoon, meaning this strong a typhoon only occurs every hundred years or so. Well, eight years later we had Typhoon Odette that was not quite as strong but laid waste to as much of our resources as Yolanda did – we call it Yolanda – that Haiyan did. And so you can see that this – the climate change – (laughs) – for number one. I’m now – at the very least, after all of these things that have happened, the naysayers that say that climate change is not real, et cetera, global warming doesn’t – is not a big deal, et cetera, et cetera. At least we have heard less and less of that, but that recognition that this is the situation that we are facing.

The Philippines in terms of climate change has been determined and assessed to be one of the most, if not the most, vulnerable countries when it comes to the effects of climate change. And that’s what EDCA was for, because we always run to our partners, to the United States, to our Asian partners for help when these things happen, as indeed we do help when our Asian partners, our partners everywhere around the world have a problem such as this, and that is the exchange. And the EDCA sites were meant to be – were conceptualized, really, to be the places that we could use so as to be able to provide quicker relief, quicker rescue, do a better job, in other words, of rehabilitating and reconstructing the damage that has – that will be caused by these disasters. And that is – that’s the basic – that’s really the basic premise of the EDCA sites.

Now, with the increasing tensions especially in the Taiwan Straits, then the military aspect and the – and the security and defense aspect, to go back to
the terminology we have been using – and the security and the defense aspect became part of that mission. And that’s why it became sensitive, and that is why China has been terribly critical. But I do everything I can – the foreign minister of China just visited with me a couple of weeks ago, three weeks ago, and I told him and I assured him that, no, these are not – these are not intended to be military bases to attack – to move against anyone, any country; not China, not any country.

Again, let me return back to the simple concept of our foreign policy, and it is we’re continuing work that we would like to be involved in in the pursuit of peace, and that continues to be the case. So I am – you know, should there be such an attempt to use such – the EDCA sites for offensive action, then that would be outside the parameters of what we had discussed and what the EDCA sites are, in fact, for. So to – and to – but to be fair, the United States has never brought up the possibility – (laughs) – that we will use – that the United States will use the EDCA states as staging areas for any offensive action against any country, and I think we are in lockstep with the U.S. with that, and that they understand the concerns that the Philippines has and are sensitive to the reasons why we have those concerns.

So, again, to go back to the quick answer, no, the United States has never said that this is a possibility. And we have also made it clear from our end that we will – this is not what – this is not the purpose of those sites and this is not the way they will be used.

Mr. Poling: Thank you, sir.

I know it’s been a very long week and this is your last public event, so we are going to end it on time. That’s going to be the last question. Please, everybody, join me in thanking the president of the Republic of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (Applause.)

President Marcos: Why don’t we take one more? The poor – the poor lady has been waiting to –

Mr. Poling: One more? One more, OK. This is like in the concert when they come out for the encore. We have one more –

Q: This is like an encore question.

Welcome Washington, President Marcos. My name is Nagi Chin from Voice of America. Good afternoon.
You mentioned war, Ukraine. If you don’t mind me asking, what is your takeaway in your meetings with U.S. officials and Congress? And how do you assess the possibility of U.S. and China work together to mediate an end to the Ukraine war? And if you don’t mind me being very direct, would countries in – Southeast Asian countries like the Philippine(s) welcome it or being skeptical about it? Thank you.

Well, the Philippines has been very clear in our support for the resolutions in the United Nations that were passed upon the onset of the war in Ukraine, and that we respect the sovereignty and territoriality of every single nation in the world. And that applies most certainly, because they are in the – in this incredibly critical situation where there is an outright war going on.

So this is – these are some of the shared values that I spoke about when it comes to the U.S., for one, but also of many countries around – member states of ASEAN, the countries around Asia. I think we are in full agreement that we must continue to protect the sovereign – the sovereignty – not just sovereign rights, but the sovereignty of each nation, no matter where they are, and that the situation in Ukraine cannot continue and it is something that is really anachronistic in the modern world. But nonetheless, we all think that way.

And when the first reports started coming in about the massing of forces by Russia on the Crimean border, the border with the Ukraine, we all sort of shrugged and said that this is not going to happen. It’s 2022. You know, this is not – this is not the sort of thing that goes on anymore. Boy, were we wrong. We know now exactly what has occurred.

And so we must continue to present a united front, because this doesn’t – the war in Ukraine has affected everyone, strangely enough, because it’s not something that we expected. We never expected that the war in Ukraine would make any difference to the lives of ordinary Filipinos. Well, it has, in a very serious and profound way. And that’s why it is essential that we are all – and I speak in terms of ASEAN, I speak in terms of Asia – that we are all shoulder to shoulder and continuing to promote the rights of every sovereign nation to protect its borders. And I think that that is the – that is the principle that we must hold close and fight very hard to defend. So that is the position that the Philippines has. I believe it is the position that ASEAN has. And I believe it is a position that most Asian countries have – in fact, all Asian countries.

Thank you. And with that, please join me in a round of applause.
(Applause.)