

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks to United States and Filipino Troops at Fort Bonifacio in Taguig, Philippines

April 29, 2014

The President. Hello, everybody! Please, have a seat. *Kumusta kayo.*

Audience members. *Kumusta kayo.*

The President. It is great to be here at Fort Bonifacio. Vice President Binay, distinguished guests: It's an honor to be here with our outstanding allies, the leaders and members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. And we're joined by men and women who stand tall and proud to wear the uniform of the United States of America. And let me also welcome all our Filipino friends.

Now, I'm not going to give a long speech, because it's hot and people are in uniform. I hope you don't mind me not wearing my jacket. And I also want to make sure that I have some time to shake some hands.

But I'm here in the Philippines to reaffirm the enduring alliance between our two countries. I thank President Aquino for his partnership and the deeper ties that we forged yesterday. I'm especially proud to be here as we remember one of the defining moments of our shared history, the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte during World War II and the beginning of the liberation of the Philippines.

Right after this, I'll pay my respects at the American cemetery here in Manila, the final resting place of so many Americans and Filipinos who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of this country in that war. These Americans and Filipinos rest in peace—they rest in peace as they stood in war: side by side, shoulder to shoulder—*balikatan*.

Together, Filipinos and Americans put up a heroic defense, at Bataan and Corregidor. Together, they endured the agony of death marches and the horror of the prisoner-of-war camps. Many never made it out. In those years of occupation, Filipino resistance fighters kept up the struggle. And hundreds of thousands of Filipinos fought under the American flag.

And sadly, the proud service of many of these Filipino veterans was never fully recognized by the United States. Many were denied the compensation they had been promised. It was an injustice. So in recent years, my administration, working with Congress and others, have worked to right this wrong. We passed a law, reviewed the records, processed claims, and nearly 20,000 Filipino veterans from World War II and their families finally received the compensation they had earned. And it was the right thing to do.

What's been written about Bataan could be said of their entire generation: "The loss of life was grievous, and hardly a Filipino family was untouched by the tragedy. But the heroic struggle brought out the best in the Filipino character in the face of adversity and served as a beacon to freedom loving peoples everywhere."

We are truly honored to have some of these extraordinary veterans here with us today. Among them are men who fought at Bataan and Corregidor and a survivor of those hellish prisoner-of-war camps. Some fought in the resistance, including nurse Carolina Garcia Delfin. These veterans are now in their nineties. They are an inspiration to us all, and I'd ask those who can stand to stand or give a wave so that we can all salute their service.

The spirit of these veterans—their strength, their solidarity—I see it in you as well: when you train and exercise together to stay ready for the future; when our Special Forces—some of you here today—advise and assist our Filipino partners in their fight against terrorism; and when you respond to crises together, as you did after Yolanda. Along with your civilian partners, you rushed into the disaster zone, pulled people from the rubble, delivered food and medicine. You showed what friends can do when we take care of each other.

These are the kinds of missions we face today. Yesterday President Aquino and I agreed to begin a new chapter in our alliance. And under our new agreement, American forces can begin rotating through Filipino airfields and ports. We'll train and exercise together more to bring our militaries even closer and to support your efforts to strengthen your armed forces. We'll improve our ability to respond even faster to disasters like Yolanda. And today I thank the people of the Philippines for welcoming our servicemembers as your friends and partners.

Deepening our alliance is part of our broader vision for the Asia-Pacific. We believe that nations and peoples have the right to live in security and peace and to have their sovereignty and territorial integrity respected. We believe that international law must be upheld, that freedom of navigation must be preserved, and commerce must not be impeded. We believe that disputes must be resolved peacefully and not by intimidation or force. That's what our nations stand for. That's the future we're working for. And that's why your service is so important.

Let me be absolutely clear: For more than 60 years, the United States and the Philippines have been bound by a mutual defense treaty. And this treaty means our two nations pledge—and I'm quoting—our "common determination to defend themselves against external armed attacks so that no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that either of them stands alone." In other words, our commitment to defend the Philippines is ironclad, and the United States will keep that commitment, because allies never stand alone.

In closing, I want to leave you with an incredible story that captures the strength of our alliance. We all know about the massive international response after Yolanda. What few people realize is that it started all with a single aircraft carrying a handful of Filipino and American troops and civilians. The storm hit land that Friday. The very next morning, the first aircraft took off, a Philippine C-130 carrying Captain Roy Trinidad, a Philippine Navy SEAL, Colonel Mike Wylie, United States Marines, and Major George Apalisok, U.S. Air Force.

Just hours after the storm passed, with Tacloban devastated, they landed at the airport. And the next day, they were joined by others, including Army Major Leo Liebreich. In the days that followed, they worked together—Filipinos and Americans—setting up a medical station, clearing debris from the runway, reopening that airport. Filipino soldiers unloading aid from American cargo aircraft; American troops loading supplies onto Filipino helicopters. And when all the cargo was off those aircraft, our troops worked together to help local residents aboard so that they could be evacuated to safety. And over and over, those grateful Filipinos responded with a simple word: *salamat*.

There, in the ruin, men like these worked around the clock, day after day. And at night they'd sleep on boards for cots, in a damaged building with only half a roof. "It rained on some nights, and we got a little wet," said George, "but nobody complained." "We've been training together for many years," he said. "We worked as a team." And because of individuals like these, thousands were evacuated to safety, and what started with a few men on that first day became a global relief effort that saved countless lives. Roy, the Philippine Navy SEAL, George, Mike, Leo—they are here today. George also happens to be a proud Filipino

American. I want them to stand again and accept our thanks. We are proud of their outstanding service. Thank you.

There's a connection between our proud veterans from World War II, our men and women serving today, bound across the generations by the spirit of our alliance, Filipinos and Americans standing together, shoulder to shoulder, *balikatan*. On behalf of the American people, thank you all for your service. Thank you for making us so proud. To the Americans here, I am never prouder than being able to stand before you as your Commander in Chief. To our Filipino Armed Forces, thank you for being such an outstanding ally. Together, you are helping to secure the prosperity and peace of both our nations.

God bless you. God bless the Republic of the Philippines. God bless the United States of America. God bless the alliance between our great nations. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:56 a.m.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Fort Bonifacio in Taguig, Philippines, U.S. and Filipino troops.

Locations: Taguig, Philippines.

Names: Apalisok, George; Aquino, Benigno S., III; Binay, Jejomar Cabaiatam; Delfin, Carolina Garcia; Liebreich, Leo; Trinidad, Roy; Wylie, Mike.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Military compensation and retirement systems, modernization efforts; Asia : South China Sea, maritime territorial disputes; Philippines : Defense relationship with U.S.; Philippines : Fort Bonifacio in Taguig; Philippines : President; Philippines : President Obama's visit; Philippines : Relations with U.S.; Philippines : U.S. assistance; Philippines : Vice President; Veterans : Service and dedication.

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