

**RESPONSE OF  
BENIGNO S. AQUINO III  
TO THE OPEN LETTER OF DFA SECRETARY ALAN PETER CAYETANO**

Dear Secretary Cayetano,

Your open letter was brought to my attention. I would have to say that the overwhelming bulk of the questions that you put forward could be easily answered through a quick Google search, which would reveal, among others, my statements, our actions, and the positions of the parties who were involved in the matter. Further, as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, you have at your disposal the files and relevant personnel concerning the issue.

What could not be gleaned from a mere review of the record and the various media reports are the details concerning the very thinking behind our actions: Why we did, how we did it, and all the political and cultural realities that led to our decision to bring our case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)—the results of which truly changed the equation. We, a small nation, were able to clarify and assert the rights of all before a superpower, China.

To respond point per point to your questions, which I suspect Beijing has likewise asked in the wake of its defeat before the PCA and world opinion, is akin to presenting them with a gold mine of information and intelligence—a playbook, so to speak—on our country and our very strategy. That would make us predictable. I believe that would indeed make your life, and our country's position, more difficult should a similar situation arise down the line.

On being constructive, might I state that, in the only NSC meeting that I was invited to under the watch of President Duterte, I cautioned everyone about becoming too close with Beijing. Perhaps, I may suggest an article which appeared in the July 28-August 3, 2018 edition of *The Economist* that speaks of China's Belt and Road Initiative. It is entitled: "Gateway to the globe." Some points of which are worthwhile:

- That: "Western economists struggle to see what Myanmar gains from Kyaukphyu, which is far from the country's commercial capital, Yangon. They have no trouble seeing what China gets: an opening to the sea for its landlocked south-western province of Yunnan."
- That: "Sceptics in Myanmar shudder at the loans covering the government's 30% stake. They point to the precedent of Hambantota, a port built by China in Sri Lanka that passed into Chinese hands in 2017, along with 69 square kilometres of land, after the Sri Lankan government could not service debts incurred in its construction."
- That: "A China-Laos railway, begun in 2016, could cost the equivalent of almost half Laos's GDP. ... These loans are not charity."

Alan, I remember you as being very fond of basketball. I ask: Would it be wise to give your team's playbook to your opponent?