

Sunday, June 25, 2023

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## Exposed: The US'

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# Exposed: The US' vaccines-for-bases demand

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By Rigoberto D. Tiglao

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**A tale of adventure and arrogance**

*First of 2 parts*

PRESIDENT Duterte in June 2021 recalled his order made in 2020 to end the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) as a quid pro quo the US demanded for it to immediately release the already-paid Moderna vaccines urgently needed to fight the Covid-19 pandemic that was raging at that time.

Surprisingly, this was revealed by our ambassador to the US himself, Jose "Babe" Romualdez Jr., a cousin of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in an



interview with the Hong Kong-based news website Asia Times by a pro-US, anti-China writer, Richard Heydarian. Ironically, this atrocious demand by the US was disclosed in the author's obvious attempt to portray Romualdez in glowing terms, with the article titled: "The man behind Marcos' swift shift to the US." It was even Romualdez who convinced Duterte to restore the VFA, the article claimed.

The relevant part of the Asia Times interview reads as follows:

**"Heydarian:** What explains Duterte's turnabout in his final months in office, particularly his decision to restore the Visiting Forces Agreement during US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's visit to Manila in 2021? What happened



there? Was he ever really serious about his threats against the alliance? Was this all about Duterte's gratitude for large-scale US Covid-19 vaccine donations?



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The powerful ambassador to the US for two presidents, or to two presidents?  
PHOTO/SCREEN GRAB FROM ASIATIMES.COM

**Romualdez:** At the height of the pandemic in 2021, I asked for a Zoom meeting with President Duterte to

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discuss Covid-19 vaccines, since we were initially getting [most of] our vaccines from China, which were not as effective as the vaccines coming from the United States.

Except Washington was holding back all their vaccines because President Biden back then wanted all Americans to get it first but we had already paid for our Moderna vaccines and, to put it frankly, I basically begged the White House to give us [the vaccines], to give our people hope — that there is light at the end of the tunnel...

I talked to the president in Tagalog, and I was tearful because I really meant it, because I have so many friends who had already died [from Covid-19 infections] and I said: *'Mr President, we need to*



*give this VFA a chance, because it will help us get our vaccines to our people.'*

Shortly after, Secretary Locsin called me and said the president had decided that [due to our conversation] we will go ahead and restore the VFA [Visiting Forces Agreement]. So that's the story, that's how it happened." (Italics mine.)

## **Pandemic**

Romualdez may indeed have been so concerned with his countrymen's surviving Covid-19 that he told Duterte to restore the VFA so Filipinos could get



American-made vaccines to survive the pandemic.

An equally compelling explanation though was that he was categorically told in his White House begging missions to relay to Duterte that the Moderna vaccine and even the other US product Pfizer would be released to the Philippines only if he doesn't abrogate the VFA. The US was shamelessly taking advantage of the pandemic to get the Philippines to agree to the return of US bases here, crucial to their plan to encircle China.

The US after all has not been beyond such atrocious opportunistic practice. In 1946, the US refused to give the Philippines the \$500 million promised to rehabilitate the country from the





ravages of World War 2 if it did not allow US military bases in the Philippines.

Without the VFA, the Americans' cannot implement their crucial new strategy to counter China's military projection in Asia — the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that allows their armed forces' use of Philippine military camps as well as civilian airports such as the Mactan-Cebu International Airport and the Puerto Princesa International Airport. President Obama got the witless President Aquino 3rd to agree to EDCA, after he scared him that China was preparing to invade and occupy all of the Spratlys, in retaliation for the



## Philippines' filing of an arbitration suit against the superpower.

The VFA provides the necessary legal framework for US military forces' temporary stay in the country and for the arrest and prosecution of their soldiers violating the country's laws. Without the VFA, there are no clear guidelines for the stay of US military personnel in the Philippines, which will block the implementation of the EDCA.

### **VFA**

The Duterte government on Feb. 11, 2020 had informed the US that it would withdraw from the VFA with the US, signed in 1998. While what triggered this was the US refusal to grant a visa to Duterte's longtime lieutenant, Sen.



Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa, it was part of Duterte's moves to liberate the country from the US vassalage.

It was appalling for Romualdez to tell Duterte that the Chinese-made "vaccines were not as effective as the vaccines coming from the United States."

Romualdez's conversation with Duterte was likely made only in the last week of May, as then Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin transmitted his diplomatic note to the US embassy restoring the VFA on June 1 right after, as Romualdez reported in his interview, he convinced Duterte to do so.

Locsin said the policy reversal was undertaken "in the light of political and other developments in the region." The restoration was largely kept secret



though and announced in the mainstream media only a month later on July 30 during the visit to the country of US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

The US defense department in its July 30 press release attributed Duterte's volte-face to the persuasive skills of its defense secretary: "After meeting with Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin 3rd last night, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte retracted the letter terminating the country's Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States."

Romualdez was lying through his teeth or told by the US to do so when he claimed that the Chinese vaccines were ineffective. At the time he made that claim in late May, the only vaccines received by the Philippines were the 2



million Sinovac doses and 525,600 doses from Astra-Zeneca produced by a British-Swedish firm in England.

## **Moderna**

How could Romualdez know that the Chinese vaccines were less effective than the American-made Moderna and Pfizer when these were not available here at that time? Why would Romualdez badmouth the Chinese vaccines except if he had been told by the US that this was the way to get Duterte — known to be so concerned over the masses' welfare — to restore the VFA?

Duterte was clever enough though not to believe Romualdez on that aspect. He didn't wait for the American vaccines



and was first jabbed with the Chinese vaccine in May and had his second dose in July. I myself was first jabbed with the Chinese vaccine in April 2021. Chinese vaccines were the most widely available vaccines at the first outbreak of the pandemic here in March 2021, and in September 2021. As of November 2021, out of the 124 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines received by the Philippines more than 40 percent came from China.

Just when Romualdez was badmouthing the Chinese vaccines, the World Health Organization, based on findings of its Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization issued a press release in June 2021: "The World Health Organization (WHO) has validated the



Sinovac-CoronaVac ovid-19 vaccine for emergency use, giving countries, funders, procuring agencies and communities the assurance that it meets international standards for safety, efficacy and manufacturing.

The WHO updated its approval in June 2022, and noted in its press release on it: Large phase 3 trial in Brazil showed that two doses, administered at an interval of 14 days, had an efficacy of "51 percent against symptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infection, 100 percent against severe Covid-19, and 100 percent against hospitalization starting 14 days after receiving the second dose."

What astonishes me is why Romualdez is proud to announce to the world through media that it was he who



convinced Duterte to believe the lie that Chinese vaccines were not effective, that Filipinos need American-made vaccines so badly the president should give up part of our sovereignty and let the US to transform our land into platforms for their war vs China?

This is our ambassador to the US; is this the ally we can depend on?

*On Wednesday: Heydarian interview reveals Romualdez is so Americanized in ideology to be our ambassador to the US, especially in this era when the US hegemon is being threatened by its rivals.*

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*Facebook: [Rigoberto Tiglao](#)*

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Question 1 of 10

What is the "vaccine demand"?

- A demand for the US to provide vaccines to countries in exchange for military base rights
- A demand for the US to provide military bases to countries in exchange for vaccines
- A demand for the US to provide vaccines to military bases
- A demand for the US to provide vaccines to countries

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