

'Duterte aware of Chinese missiles in Spratlys'

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President Duterte is aware of the presence of Chinese missiles on the Spratly islands in the South China Sea but there is no point in waging a war against Beijing, Malacañang insisted yesterday.

Duterte noted that China had built an airstrip and other military installations in the area, which is being questioned by Vietnam.

"There is an airport. There are business there installed. There are military equipment already in place. So what's the point of questioning whether the planes there land or not. There's an airstrip," he said.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said the Philippines would not be joining Vietnam's call on Beijing to remove its missiles in the South China Sea.

Roque said Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano also brought the issue before the Philippine-China bilateral consultation committee in February when the two countries agreed to continue exercising self-restraint in the conduct of activities in the disputed waters. Roque said Philippine and Chinese representatives engaged in a "more open, frank, candid, frontal discussion," which he described as a stronger move than a diplomatic protest.

Last Wednesday, Duterte was asked about his views on the deployment by China of cruise missiles in Kagitingan (Fiery Cross) Reef, Zamora (Subi) Reef and Panganiban (Mischief) Reef over the past 30 days.

"Why will I go to war for a battle that I cannot win? Para akong gago. And of course I said, we have to take into account, but it would – I would take a longer time to do that. Pero kung... Busy ako ngayon eh."

Duterte reiterated that he could not raise hell against China nor ask them to remove the structures in the disputed areas since the Philippines has not enough capability to fight Beijing.

He said he could not sacrifice the lives of Filipino soldiers for a futile exercise where the country will lose.

Duterte again blamed the Aquino administration for not raising a concern when the Chinese started reclamation efforts in the area.