

THE MANILA TIMES

How the US saved Cory's neck in 1989

By [RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO](#) on December 21, 2016 [Opinion on Page One](#)



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As narrated by the strategist, Colin Powell

AS I explained on Monday, President Duterte's break from the United States will ultimately lead to the dismantling of the Yellow Narrative, which would expose President Corazon Aquino—and her son Benigno 3rd as well—as creations of the superpower.

I had quoted the account of Republican Sen. Paul Laxalt, President Reagan's personal envoy, on how US strategists forced President Marcos to call for a "snap elections" in February 1986 which led to the phenomenon of "People Power" coming to the succor of military rebels, the four-day stand-off which gave the US the excuse to shanghai the dictator to Hawaii.

But the US didn't just put Aquino into power in 1986. It also prevented military rebels from forcing her out of office during their coup attempt in November 1989. This coup attempt was launched by the alliance of the anti-Marcos RAM rebels led by then Col. Gregorio Honasan and Marcos' loyal generals, led by Generals Eduardo Abenina and then retired General Jose Ma. Zumel.

Perhaps these officers would have been worse than Cory or Marcos. But how can we be proud of our nation if the US had determined the course of our recent history, and we refuse to see this, and instead believe in the Yellow Myth?

What follows is the account of how the US saved Cory's neck in the November 1989 coup, as told by US Gen. Colin Powell, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff during President George H.W. Bush's administration, in his book, *My American Journey* (I put fascinating or important details in bold type):

Powell's account

“In late November 1989, we had to respond to a coup against President Corazon Aquino of the Philippines.

“Cheney and I had just returned from a conference in Brussels. Cheney, exhausted and ill with the flu, went home and stayed there. I went to work the next day, returned home, and gratefully hit the sack soon after dinner. An hour later, the phone rang, and I was informed by Tom Kelly that a coup was underway in the Philippines headed by a General Edgardo Abenina. I went immediately to the National Military Command Center in the Pentagon, arriving just after 11:00 p.m.



FIGHTER JET THAT DETERMINED OUR RECENT HISTORY. One of four US F-4 Phantom jets streaking over Manila in November 1989. Inset: F-4 details.

“I entered a room designed specifically for dealing with such situations. It was small, low-ceilinged; my steps were muffled by gray carpeting. The room was cold, kept that way to aid the performance of the supersensitive electronic gear. We were using a new teleconferencing system that allowed people from various agencies to confer without leaving their buildings.

“This was the first time the system would be used in an actual crisis. I sat at a table facing five television monitors. On one I could see the White House Situation Room, with Vice President Quayle at the center of the table... The face of (deputy secretary of state) Larry Eagleburger filled a second screen. On a third was Bill Webster, the CIA director, and on a fourth, Harry Rowen, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, who was upstairs in the Pentagon.

“I could see myself on the fifth screen... Also, by pure chance, the Commander in Chief for all our forces in the Pacific, Admiral Huntington “Hunt” Hardisty, was there too, having come from Honolulu to the Pentagon for budget talks.

Aquino cries for help

“President Corazon Aquino, I was informed, had reported that the presidential palace in Manila was being bombed and strafed by rebel planes. She had requested US military intervention to stop the attacks.

“Eagleburger argued hard in favor of answering Aquino’s appeal. ‘We sponsored this democratic government,’ he said, ‘and we have to respond.’ Sporadic reports kept arriving; there was gunfire here and there, and a possible need to rescue Aquino from the palace. But we were hearing more confusion than hard information. Our ambassador in Manila, Nicholas Platt, reconfirmed an official request that we bomb an airfield under rebel control. Mostly old T-28s, World War II prop-driven trainers, based at this field, were the planes attacking the capital. Again, State was eager to respond.

“The Vice President said he needed to contact President Bush soon with a recommendation. I had taken a media beating for holding back on the Giroldi coup in Panama in October. If I wanted to overcome any impression of indecisiveness, I should have plunged ahead now. But I was not about to be stampeded.

“I started asking questions. We could bomb the airfield, but did we know who we would be bombing? Who would we hit, rebels or loyalists? The State Department probably pictured a neat, surgical strike. Instead, I envisioned anxious young pilots flying their first combat missions, not precision-tooled automatons. My concern was that if we started shooting up planes on the airfield, we were inevitably going to kill people, and I warned the other teleconferees, ‘I can guarantee you that the Filipinos are going to blast us at their funerals, no matter which side we hurt.’ We were still, in some quarters, viewed and resented as former colonial masters.

“Before we did anything rash, we needed more on-site information. I wanted to talk to Fidel Ramos, the Philippine defense minister, to get an eyeball account. It just happened that the American military attaché ordinarily posted to our embassy in Manila was also in the Pentagon this night, upstairs with Harry Rowen, (and he was asked to get in touch with Ramos.)

Powell’s Phantom idea

“In the meantime, I described to Quayle and the others a plan that Hardisty and I had

devised: have our F-4 Phantom jets stationed at Clark Air Force Base buzz any T-28S daring to come onto the runway at the rebel-held airbase. In short, scare the hell out of them.

“If any of these planes started to take off, fire in front of them. And if any took off, shoot them down. I concocted a phrase to include in the order to convey the desired sense of menace. Our aircraft were to demonstrate ‘extreme hostile intent.’ I called Cheney, who agreed. He contacted Air Force One and called me back within ten minutes to tell me we had the President’s approval.

“In short, we had a clear line of authority for graduated military action, Commander in Chief to Secretary of Defense through me to the appropriate military units. ‘Go,’ Cheney said.

“I turned to Admiral Hardisty and gave him the go order... The F-4S were launched. They buzzed the airfield repeatedly, and no Filipino pilot took off to see what would happen next. ... Within hours, the coup collapsed without our getting further involved and without the F-4S shooting up anybody or anything...

“A few days later, General Abenina, the coup leader, said, ‘We were about to take over the government. Then the US warplanes appeared. We simply cannot hope to win against the stronger power of the United States Air Force.’ The night the coup ended, I left the Pentagon feeling good.”