

THE MANILA TIMES

Ninoy Aquino: Hero or miscalculating 'throne' gamer?

By [RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO](#) on December 5, 2016 [Editors' Picks](#), [Opinion on Page One](#)



RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO

IT was renowned scholar Edward Carr who pointed out in his book that is a bible of sorts for historians, *What is History?*: “The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.”

This is so true in the case of two sets of “facts” involving the last days of opposition leader Ninoy Aquino. One is Ninoy’s last interview with foreign correspondents inside the plane in the wee hours of August 21, 1983, a few hours before the aircraft landed, and the opposition leader was killed by a single bullet to the head.

The second set is his taped telephone conversation two days before he left the United States on the way to the Philippines, with his close friend, the late Steve Psinakis (the husband of Presentacion Lopez, the only daughter of the “Don” Eugenio Lopez, Sr.) who taped it.

I got to know about the tape only last Friday when somebody posted it in his Facebook page with the notation: “Shocking, Ninoy Aquino’s Last Recorded Phone Call Before Returning to Manila.” I initially thought it was either another Yellow Cult propaganda extolling Aquino’s martyrdom, or one of those fake news reports.

I confirmed though that it was authentic as Philippine Daily Inquirer columnist Amando Doronila—a close friend of the Lopez clan—reported in August 2008 that Psinakis had released a transcript of the tape to his newspaper, and even played the actual audiotape to him.



DIFFERENT: Ninoy, left, being interviewed by the foreign press August 21, 1983; right, close friend the late Steve Psinakis, who had a telephone conversation with him a week earlier, which Psinakis taped, and released 25 years later.

Why the conversation—which was a scoop for the *Inquirer*— wasn't put on the PDI's front page (as it always does) and was seemingly ignored by the Yellow Cult would be obvious from the rather different, even shocking, portrait of Ninoy it presents, a transcript of which I publish below.

In Ninoy's interview with foreign correspondents, he is the humble opposition leader who decided to return to the Philippines, as he put it, "to help the opposition rebuild its grassroots organization" for the 1984 Batasang Pambansa elections. In his talk with the press, Ninoy is the picture of a reluctant martyr: "I no longer crave for political office. I would like to reiterate: I am not out to overthrow Marcos."

Says what heroes say

He does slip, though, and responds thus to a reporter's question on why he was returning to the Philippines: "I don't think a general should be ten thousand miles from his troops, even if he's leading them from prison." He says what heroes usually say: "I have to suffer with my people, I have to lead them because of the responsibility given to me by my people."

It is a different Ninoy in the Psinakis tape, in which he reveals why he is rushing to return to the Philippines: Marcos is dying, he's said his farewells to his generals, and he's got

just three weeks to settle his affairs on earth. “Marcos is a man now: Terminal,” he says. Ninoy says that Imelda is moving to grab power.

While Ninoy of course doesn’t specifically say he is in the best position to be the next president, one senses from his conversation with Psinakis that he is ” convinced 100 percent” that Marcos would allow him to be his successor. “Now that he (Marcos) is about to meet his Maker, I am almost confident that I can talk to him and sell him something,” Ninoy tells Psinakis.

Ninoy revealed to Psinakis that he has “trump cards,” which gave him confidence that Marcos would let him assume power. He said ASEAN leaders would support him to succeed Marcos and so would Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, who he said was “willing to send a private envoy” who would use Japanese economic assistance to the country as leverage.

Listening to the Psinakis tape, one would see Ninoy as a political player with nerves of steel, very much aware of the risks of his move to take over from Marcos, even as he cannot let a big opportunity pass him by. Even his tone in the telephone conversation is so different, supremely confident in the way I remember him giving a privilege speech in the Senate.

He explained to Psinakis the three scenarios he was expecting. First, a “100 percent (chance) I will be brought directly to prison; so that I may not get a chance to talk to anybody on the ground.” Second, they will “turn back the plane” (to return to wherever it came from). And third, “and this is really iffy, they have two guys stationed to knock me out at the airport.”

I find it remarkable that in the Psinakis tape he said nothing that is in the genre of the heroic statements he made in his interview with the press, like he is willing to risk his life, and even die for the country. He is rushing back expecting that Marcos would die in weeks, and he has the support of ASEAN and Japan to assume power.

I certainly don’t mean to be facetious, but after listening to the tape, that quote from the TV series “Game of Thrones” sprang to mind: “When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die.”

The tape reveals that Ninoy was rushing home believing Marcos would be dying very soon—he mentioned the time frame of three weeks—and that he could talk to the dictator who, with his trump card, would make him his successor. But he knew there was a risk he could be assassinated, and he took it.

Information so wrong

Aquino’s—or Sin’s—information, however, proved to be so wrong. Marcos was indeed hospitalized at the Kidney Center in July 1983. But according to his son Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., that was when he donated his kidney to his father for a transplant. Bongbong in an interview claimed his father had recovered from the

transplant, and was having lunch with them when he received the news that Ninoy was assassinated. Marcos would die not in 1983, but six years later.

What Aquino did not mention was that by early 1983, the country was already moving towards the worst economic crisis ever, to a great extent the result of the global debt crisis triggered by the Mexican default on its loans in March 1982.

Should we classify Ninoy as a hero, with his reasons for returning revealed, and at a period when the economy was already teetering, that only the slightest political trouble would push to the chasm? That's an honest question in my mind, really, and I am willing to be enlightened on it.

Transcript of Aquino's telephone conversation with Psinakis August 13, 1983

Ninoy Aquino: Hi Steve, I'm at the airport and I cannot leave America without saying goodbye to you and expressing to you my deepest gratitude.

Steve Psinakis: Our prayers are always with you and all I can [say] is, remember that a word from you and anything you want is in your fingertips from me, okay? There's no limit to what I will do for you if you need some help. We are praying for you, for your safety and success and freedom of people, okay?

Aquino: Now this is the latest, Steve, that I can give you. My source is Cardinal Sin. Number one: Marcos checked in at the Kidney Center. The experts went, saw him, they did a test. He flunked all tests and the conclusion was if they operate on him, it would be fatal.

So he went back to the Palace. He is no longer responding to medication and he will have to be hooked up to the dialysis machine now more often. How he will last with that machine on, I don't know. Apparently they are now moving to put Imelda in effective control. And they are going to revamp the Cabinet, with (Roberto) Ongpin most probably emerging as prime minister and finance minister. Danding Cojuangco or [General Fabian] Ver, defense minister. O. D. Corpus possibly foreign minister, and maybe Ayala, I mean Enrique, maybe agriculture minister, I don't know.

But there's a major shake-up. Marcos met with his generals and apparently said goodbye to them last Friday. He was on television in Manila 24 hours ago, commenting on the boxing fight of Navarette and Talbot to show the people he is okay. But it's a matter of time, so he wanted three weeks to collect his thoughts, write his memoirs, complete his book and most probably craft the final stages of his administration.

He's a man now: Terminal. He knows he's going and that's the background I'm coming in.

Psinakis: I [also] heard some of this yesterday. I got some reports, not of course as authoritative as yours, but pretty much the same that something was wrong and they

couldn't operate and so forth. At any rate, the thought that comes to mind is that is good and bad. Good in that he's going and he knows it. He might show some compassion for the country and treat your return with more pragmatic thinking. The bad part may be that hardliners like Ver who are bulldogs without any political savvy, who may think that they're next in line [of succession]. Obviously, such people would look at your return with uh... That's what I'm worried about.

Aquino: Well, there are two reports I received along that line. Well, if they pinpoint the plane I'm coming in. The rumor in Manila is that I'm taking the private jet of Enrique (Zobel) from Hong Kong. But all planes are being guarded and they may close the airport on Sunday or turn back the plane if they would be able to pinpoint which one I'm coming in.

The third, and this is the real iffy. They have two guys stationed to know me out at the airport. And they will try them for murder, they'll convict them, but they have assurances.

Psinakis: Ah...let's not think about that.

Aquino: Yeah, that's the... Those are the things that I've been alerted. So, I don't know what options they will do now. But I am meeting with ASEAN leaders beginning Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Indonesia—Suharto might receive me. Malaysia is already firm and Thailand is just about firm. Now Japan has sent word that if Imelda is in place [Prime Minister] Nakasone is willing to use his economic clout.

Psinakis: Ah really, huh?

Aquino: Yes...to tell Imelda that if you treat Aquino nicely, we can dialogue.

Psinakis: Oh, that's good news all right. That's damn good news.

Aquino: Nakasone is willing to send a private envoy, a secret private envoy with a personal letter making a plea for me. If am still alive and in prison, that if they will treat me gently, and come up with some kind of an understanding, Japanese economic assistance will continue. Because they are very uptight that if the woman [Imelda] takes over and there will be chaos, you know, it would be bad. Now the ASEAN leaders, on the other hand, feel this way: ASEAN today is already one region. And any instability in one part of ASEAN will scare investors in the entire region.

That's why they are very, very uptight about the possibility of chaos and instability in the Philippines with Imelda. And that is the background of my conversation with them: That I am not going to upset the apple cart but that we can harmonize our movement.

To what extent they will be able to mitigate the hardliners, I don't know. That's the chance we'll have to take. If I survive Sunday, and I get to prison, I'm there in a week's time, I can get the works going.

I'm picking up a letter from [MNLF chairman] Nur Misuari, telling them that if the government will trust me as a negotiator, then they can start talks again. But they will not talk to anybody else.

Psinakis: It sounds to me like you have an awful lot of pluses on your side.

Aquino: Those are the trump cards I'm bringing home, which of course can be negated if one character gets to throw me out.

If I get into prison, there is no doubt, like 100 percent, I will be brought directly to prison. I may not even get a chance to talk to anybody there on the ground. But it's okay. As long as I'm alive and in prison, I can start using my trump cards.

I will try to hold out for a meeting with Marcos. Now that's he's about to meet his Maker, I am almost confident that I can talk to him and sell him something. Although the Cardinal told me that "if you think you can sell Marcos a bill of goods like return to democracy and electoral processes, forget it. You're dreaming."

"He's no longer in that state." This is the Cardinal's idea. I don't buy it. Because I don't think that a man who is about to die will be, you know, too hard-headed.

SP: I hope you are right, but I think the Cardinal is right. I think Marcos...not only because he doesn't want to, that's academic at this point in time. But I think he has just...he's so deep and he has no choice but to stay where he is and leave things as they are. And I certainly hope that that's wrong because we don't want that.

Aquino: Okay. So, goodbye Steve.

Psinakis: One last question...

Aquino: Yes?

Psinakis: Any whatsoever...any indication from the US side that there might be some help on the cooperative or absolutely nothing?

Aquino: No. No indication. Except that they are watching me. They are following all my steps. But I am still hopeful that sanity will prevail and they will know that eventually, they'll have to come to talk. Because I don't think they're very happy with the woman [Imelda] running the show.

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32 Comments



Duh-knee on [December 18, 2016 7:11 am](#)

How about the often-repeated tale that it was a Cojuangco who masterminded the killing? That clan has always been fractious among themselves, and ruthless and powerful, too. Little wonder that two presidents couldn't (or preferred not to) solve the mystery on who killed their husband and father. It was one of their own. As a commie, Ninoy wanted to give back Hacienda Luisita to the rightful owners, the farmers. A cousin-in-law didn't, and additionally, hated commies.

Your comment is awaiting moderation.

[Reply](#)



Ramon on [December 11, 2016 5:47 am](#)

The late Senator Benigno S. Aquino Jr paid Rolando Galman to shoot him so that his chosen successors, his son, President Aquino III and his wife, President Cory Aquino, have a counter-claim to Marcos charisma. How could Rolando Galman penetrate the tight cordon that the military set up when they arrested Aquino — if Aquino did not use all his money and connections to make sure Galman meets him at the airport to shoot him. He had millions to bribe the military to allow Galman in to shoot him. The NPA's do not have enough money to bribe the military to allow Galman to penetrate the military cordon and shoot Aquino. Only Aquino had the money and connections to make sure that Galman waits for him in the tarmac to shoot him. Before he left to the Philippines, he announced his forthcoming assassination and even gave the manner he choose to die. The Aquinos think that they can falsify history. Even the Plaza Miranda bombing was his doing — in spite of the cowardice of Liberal Party Senators not to investigate the Plaza Miranda bombing and not to find who attempted to murder them for fear of their lives.

[Reply](#)



Fanny Whalla Ann on [December 16, 2016 2:43 pm](#)

Hello Ramon! Do you have any taped telephone conversations between Ninoy and Rolly Galman? And also between Ninoy and the NPAs? Your accounts should be written and re-written in fantasy books for the lunatics. Nice try in political blogging.



Lito on [December 10, 2016 4:58 pm](#)

How about a live debate from the two groups. The Yellow group vs the Marcos group. Gather all the information they know and reveal them in the telecast debate. Let the Filipino viewers decide who is hero or not. Finish this once and for so that the Filipino people can move forward. Enlighten those fanatics and reveal those who just manipulated the minds of the people for personal gain and ambition. Correct the history if it is full of lies. Nowadays, it seems hard to know who is telling the truth.

[Reply](#)



Doc Je on [December 9, 2016 4:47 pm](#)

I'm glad the internet, google, youtube and social media got invented. I used to think that Ninoy was purely a hero, and that those accusations that he was aligned with the communists were completely false. As it turns out, he really did meet with them in order to destabilize the government and eventually grab power. Fast forward to today, it seems that's the M.O. of LP. Destabilize and grab power. Enlightening article.

[Reply](#)



Ramon on [December 11, 2016 6:04 am](#)

There is a plethora of evidence to prove conclusively that Aquino was the mastermind behind the Plaza Miranda bombing and his assassination was only a suicide. You don't need the facts to convince the yellows the truth. The brownouts and the traffic jams will finally convince the yellows that Aquino was a plain hoax.

5.



noel salaysay on [December 7, 2016 4:40 am](#)

I am surprised to learn that Bongbong Marcos donated his kidney during this time; there were rumours that Marcos could not have masterminded Ninoy's death because of his condition.

[Reply](#)

6.



Amnata Pundit on [December 6, 2016 9:20 am](#)

"...they are watching me. They are following all my steps." Isn't this a clue as to who sacrificed him that fateful day?

[Reply](#)

7.



Laiera on [December 6, 2016 1:03 am](#)

Oh wow, I forgot that he's human too. He is not a traitor as the Marcos apologist claimed to believe nor a "hero" as the yellow cult proclaimed him to be. He is a politician for goodness sake!! The plans that he have were all very reasonable unless people really want Imelda to grab the highest seat and continue managing the country? Remember that at that time, you people placed your bet for democracy on him. So it's very obvious that if Marcos died, it's either Ninoy or Imelda. Can you think of anyone else?

[Reply](#)

8.



Eggoykibs on [December 5, 2016 11:02 pm](#)

A martyr, throne-gamer, haciendero, democracy icon, bemedalled soldier, sharpshooter, sharp mind, cronyism, swiss accounts, yamashita treasures, conjugal dictatorship, imeldific, martial law-all these come to mind each to his own hero. It also happened many christmases ago in old judea long oppressed latest by the roman empire the people expected a hero to be born in a palace. I

really hoped our next everybody's hero president should come from the oligarchs, the Aquinos or the Marcoses considering their education and awesome resources the latter some say could last 30 lifetimes.

[Reply](#)



Daniel Ali on [December 5, 2016 7:37 pm](#)

Ninoy's answer in an interview with Mother Jones.

Ninoy: if you will make me a president tomorrow my friend in six months I will smell like horse shit, because I cannot bring the prices down and I cannot give jobs to the Filipinos.

[Reply](#)



Maribel Calanda on [December 5, 2016 6:22 pm](#)

The Yellow Cult are the only ones saying that Ninoy is a hero. He never was since the beginning. Excuse me, he came from a family of traitors and he is also a traitor if I will believe all the negative sayers that he sold out the soldiers to Malaysia in an effort to occupy Sabah. He is a Communist coddler, so how can he be a hero?

[Reply](#)



Francis Mensahero on [December 7, 2016 12:57 pm](#)

that's why Japans' Nakasone promised to help him because of the ties that binds. His grandfather was a japanese collaborator.



Ramon on [December 11, 2016 5:56 am](#)

If we keep believing this crap that Aquino was a hero, we are headed for more traffic jams and brownouts. What happened to Cory Aquino's bland

promises that he will do better than Marcos, one week straight brownouts. The brownouts and the traffic jams will finally convince all yellows that the Aquinos are fooling them.



Mikvital on [December 5, 2016 2:20 pm](#)

Aquino had a personal political agenda for coming, to be a dictator also.

[Reply](#)



mama zita on [December 5, 2016 1:36 pm](#)

The return was short of heroic standards. The pro-media concocted to elevate the pretender as true to life hero. 98% of Ilocandian populations would be shaken to learn that a new hero is returning so to reign over from their dying hero. Miscalculated return cost the life of hero-in-disguised. Political party hero is justifiable.

[Reply](#)



canuto on [December 5, 2016 12:32 pm](#)

Ninoy Aquino conveniently saved himself and left his partymates to die in the Plaza Miranda bombing, and this phone conversation reveals he is really just another opportunist who lusts for political power. I'm mighty glad this SOB was assassinated.

[Reply](#)



Ramon on [December 11, 2016 5:50 am](#)

Excuse me, he was not assassinated. He paid Rolando Galman to shoot him. The assassination was suicide — plain and simple.

14.



mario santos on [December 5, 2016 12:28 pm](#)

For me I consider Ninoy as a hero, he fought, he stand, self exiled and came back to die.

Other Politicians run away to save themselves and only only came back after People Power and rode-on Ninoy's death.

After People Power what I notice is these politicians started to amass great wealth and the country went downwards.

Can anyone advise me that I am wrong.

[Reply](#)



mama zita on [December 5, 2016 1:57 pm](#)

Check on records whether self-exiled or medical necessity that the proclaimed hero was out of the country. The return objective was not to die. Salmon fish return upstream to die. It's your choice, it's your own hero and you're entitled to it.



[cris](#) on [December 5, 2016 2:25 pm](#)

YOUR WRONG IN CONSIDERING NINOY AS A HERO



rempaj on [December 5, 2016 10:57 pm](#)

He never fought a battle for the betterment of our country, he fight for a government position to stop anything on agrarian reform that will dismantle their grip on hacienda luisita... and true to that with the two aquino presidency...



Roselo on [December 6, 2016 1:53 am](#)

Would you mind to elaborate more your facts about Ninoy on how he fought and what is he fighting for to consider as hero? Heroism can be done by anyone, an extra ordinary ways of helping its fellow is a heroic act or, something like devoting own life for a cause but not inflicting others for personal interest. Who is Ninoy in real life actually? A smart mouthed person who likes to impress his audiences every time he delivered his privilege speech that he is the strong opponent of Marcos but specifically what he did in this country? What particular contributions he contributes to the development of this country, please elaborate more and support your claims.

Personally, i'm not saying that your claim is wrong, same with your political opinion. What I'm trying to say here as long as you can attest that your claims are all factual then maybe Ninoy might be a Hero!



Marcus on [December 11, 2016 7:07 pm](#)

Yes he fought and die for his own self interest or the interest of his party mates or the US to have him gunned down and start the revolution. Self exiled -nope, he requested it for medical reason and even received monetary help from Marcos.



The Great Defiant on [December 5, 2016 11:27 am](#)

Marcos or Aquino is no heroes....
Let's get our ass movin...
our country is facing so many problems....

[Reply](#)



Edwn on [December 5, 2016 10:41 am](#)

Ninoy looks to me here more like an ambitious opportunist than a hero.

[Reply](#)

17.



Trolololol on [December 5, 2016 9:49 am](#)

I see no problem with this taped conversation. You may interpret Ninoy's decision to return home as a hasty attempt for a power grab, but i see it as a desperate gamble to make sure Imelda will not sit on the throne.

The problem here is that we delve too much with the "What ifs" of history. Marcos and Ninoy are all dead, and yet we strive too hard to create a hero out of these two figures as if demonizing/sanctifying Marcos will usher an economic miracle that will eventually save us from the turmoil that we all know both these two figures are partially responsible for.

We are in too much shit that we create an illusion that we can save this country by simply burying an old despot in a symbolic ground, while the other half of the people believe that exhuming his corpse will deliver the same economic miracle.

Just like in "Game of Thrones," we try to paint a glossy picture of squabbling houses of kings and queens that we forget that the peasants and soldiers are the ones who die in the thousands for fighting a cause not their own and their only sin was living in a piece of land ruled by a certain someone who will go to the depths of hell to get what they want.

The Kings are dead. Long live the Kings!

[Reply](#)

18.



Dogge on [December 5, 2016 8:51 am](#)

Blame Imelda M. and not Ferdinand M.

[Reply](#)

19.



Concerned Person on [December 5, 2016 7:38 am](#)

Ninoy Aquino obviously had political ambitions to take over — aligning key players as "trump cards" .. seeing his wife and his son run the country .. I don't think he would have made this country any better than it is today .. no matter how

much a tyrant they call Marcos, and how they gloat about their (yellowtards) people power / edsa victory .. fact of the matter is .. The Philippines has gone from bad to worse .. just take a look outside .. you won't have to walk far to see the signs of poor governance / corruption and poverty!

[Reply](#)



Mark Laperal on [December 5, 2016 5:54 am](#)

I don't see anything wrong with this Ninoy interview as he is very truthful and candid on all his plans on what he will do upon his return to his country. He also mentioned different scenarios of what will happen to him and yet decided to, to pursue his dreams and simply do something for the country. It is the media who painted him as hero and not him personally in any ways. So what is the big fuss.

[Reply](#)



Dan on [December 5, 2016 12:58 pm](#)

that it is Cardinal Sin's idea to bring him back giving him false information about the health status of FM. So there is a possibility that Sin was among the planner of killing Ninoy to use it to oust FM and Imelda.



rempaj on [December 5, 2016 11:01 pm](#)

It might also be right to include cardinal sin as the mastermind in the plot to assassinate him because I think he is the only one knows of his return aside from his family. The motive? -shall be up to the investigators not from me..



nicky lee on [December 5, 2016 1:49 am](#)

wow! the latter – miscalculating ‘throne’ gamer – obviously. then there's the catholic church rearing its ugly head again!