
Who — including President Reagan — can really believe that the Government of Ferdinand Marcos will conduct a thoroughgoing investigation of the foul murder of his strongest political rival, Benigno S. Aquino Jr.? But at least Salvador H. Laurel, another opponent, boldly put the right questions to the Marcos-controlled Philippine National Assembly:

- “How was it that [the alleged lone killer] was allowed to approach the plane” that had brought Mr. Aquino home to Manila?

- “How was it that the assassin knew exactly where to wait,” although it was not generally known on which of several possible planes Mr. Aquino would arrive?

- How could a lone assassin have penetrated the military screen supposedly protecting Mr. Aquino? Why was the assassin killed on the spot? What were the names and units of the three military security guards who escorted Mr. Aquino off the plane, one in front and two closely behind him?

- Why did the security guards take Mr. Aquino down the steps to the runway, rather than through an enclosed landing platform to the terminal? And how did the assassin know they would do that?

- If, as a coroner’s report indicated, the supposed assassin was six inches shorter than Mr. Aquino, how could the bullet have entered behind Mr. Aquino’s left ear and traveled downward to exit beside his lower lip?

These are not the only questions that cry out to be answered. For example, after President Marcos declared that Mr. Aquino had been killed with a .357 Magnum, another Marcos critic, Senator Jose Diokno, asked with justified incredulity:

“How in heaven’s name could a man with an eight-inch gun and a holster get into the Manila International Airport and onto the tarmac?” Especially when the field was supposedly under heavy security guard to protect Benigno Aquino?

And what about the story of Kiyoshi

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IN THE NATION

Questions for Manila

By Tom Wicker

Wakamiya, a freelance journalist, who was on the same plane that brought Mr. Aquino to Manila? The Japanese news agency Kyodo said Mr. Wakamiya saw one of the security guards who took Mr. Aquino off the plane shoot him from less than three feet away (Mr. Marcos said the shot had been fired from a distance of 16 to 18 inches). This seems consistent with the downward trajectory of the bullet.

Mr. Wakamiya also claims to have seen, immediately after Mr. Aquino’s murder, another man pushed from a gray military van and shot to death. This would explain the “assassin’s”

body; and indeed the entire Wakamiya story seems to fit the known facts better than the official account.

At the least, it’s not good enough for Philippine officials to “discount” or “dismiss” it, as they are variously described as doing; and surely Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, has no business describing such reports as “confused impressions.” He wasn’t there and has no call to defend Ferdinand Marcos.

Mr. Reagan probably is right to withhold judgment on whether to make his planned trip to the Philippines, since he could hardly leap to

the conclusion that the Marcos Government was responsible for the Aquino murder. If nothing but white-wash is forthcoming from Manila, however, Mr. Reagan will enhance respect for himself and for the U.S. by having no further truck with a dictator who calls himself an anti-Communist to justify every form of human rights violation.

Military necessity may force the U.S. to pay Mr. Marcos a blackmailer's fee — \$900 million over five years — for bases in the Philippines. But that doesn't mean Vice President Bush has to proclaim, ludicrously, that "we love your adherence to democratic principle and to the democratic processes," as he did on a visit to Manila, or that the President ought to break bread with a man believed to have murdered his strongest rival.

In view of the Aquino murder, moreover, Congress needs to take a hard look at a new U.S.-Philippine extradition treaty that would curtail the tradi-

tional right of the American judiciary to inquire into human rights conditions in foreign countries before returning fugitives to them. This authority would be substantially shifted to the executive branch, where foreign policy considerations might often take precedence over human rights.

The Reagan Administration has negotiated the treaty but it can't be ratified by the Senate until Congress completes legislation translating its provisions into U.S. law. Such legislation is pending before the Senate, the House Judiciary Committee and a House subcommittee on human rights. Delaying it might be one way to squeeze Mr. Marcos into carrying out some of his frequent promises to move toward democracy.

But it would probably be too much to expect that even holding up the treaty could force the Marcos Government to produce an objective report on what really happened at the Manila airport; for that, Mr. Reagan ought to rely on his own investigative resources.