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SAIGON--The disruptive Vietnamese political crisis represents the beginning of a sizeable, swerving step away from winning the anti-Communist war here.

Political observers here foresee at least three key factors emerging from the simmering, potentially explosive, crisis. They are:

1. A long process of political deterioration, which will severely damage the already weak anti-Communist political forces attempting to administer the social-economic-political programs ^{THAT} which are an important part of winning the war, plus a whirlwind change of Vietnamese military commanders who are responsible for conduction^{Ng} the purely military campaigns.

2. The growing probability that the ten-man ruling military junta will be diluted in its authority and anti-Communist composition--if it survives at all.

3. The longer-term prospect that Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky is heading only a transitional government rather than a permanent anti-Communist bulwark of internal strength.

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Political ~~an~~ observers here are carefully watching to determine if, when and whether the military junta and Prime Minister Ky—at a later stage--fall in a bloody, chaotic showdown with pro-neutralist Buddhist leaders, or whether and if they will fall in a smooth transition of power in behind-the-scenes Palace intrigues and interludes of invisible maneuvering.

Of immediate concern~~y~~ to ~~American~~ short-range American national ~~inner~~ interest is whether or not Prime Minister Ky will survive. He is known to have often threatened to resign from his post; ~~circumstances~~ VIETNAMESE ~~circumstances~~ he has told national leaders that he carries a copy of his resignation in his flight suit. Even more dangerous, however, is that "clandestine" government-oppositionist leaflets have begun to attack the Prime Minister by name. Previously, ~~then~~ they had attacked only ~~select~~ many selected members of the ten-man ruling junta, most of them Catholic generals.

Because the loss of Ky from the Prime Minister-ship would be a direct political slap in the face of President Lyndon Johnson, who lightly and publicly embraced ~~the~~ the mustacheed general at the Honolulu Conference last month, Ky is considered to have a better chance to survive than the other ruling generals.

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Of far more immediate importance internally, however,--and of longer-range American national interest--is the ~~future~~ ^{future of} fate of the ten-man military junta, rather than the Prime Minister Ky. *Himself*

The military ~~junta~~ ² junta, officially named the National Leadership Committee or the ~~The~~ ² ~~Directorate~~ Directorate, is the legal basis of the government and Prime Minister Ky, as the head of the executive branch of government, is subordinate to the ruling council. The military junta of ~~hardlin~~ ² hard-line, anti-Communist generals is now considered ^{TO BE} in a significant position in that it would decide ~~the composition of~~ the future civilian councils to draft a national ² consitut constitution--whether these bodies would be predominantly pro-neutralist or anti-Communist--and would finally approve the election regulations which could give the right to vote to Communist elements, or could decide whether ~~covert~~ ^{TO BE} Communist agents or pro-neutralist sympathizers would be eligible for candidates in the election.

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If the ruling military junta is ~~washingtonian~~ toppled--either peacefully, violently or gradually--however, anti-Communists here fear that the key decision-making councils would be pro-neutralist in orientation and that gradually through the years an internal political ~~stage~~ arrangement would be made with the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (~~the~~) (NFLSVN)-- the political backbone of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese armed forces.

"The great freedom fighter, Prime Minister Ky, could easily find himself in the ~~unhappy~~ curious, but unhappy plight of having American and Buddhist support--but ~~preside~~ presiding over a neutralist government," one Western observer explained.

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The gist of the conflict between the pro-neutralist Buddhist leaders and Ky's military junta is notrptnot a difference in NATIONAL programs for Vietnam--~~is is~~ but is the time period in which these programs are to be implemented. Prime Minister Ky, at the Honolulu Conference, presented his famous two-year program, which had been unveiled publically to the Vietnamese in mid-January.

His plan called for the pacification, security of currently rural areas, ~~now~~ controlled or influenced by the Viet Cong, along with active social-economic programs in these ~~areas plus the urban~~ rural areas as well as the cities. According to government estimates, at the end of 1967, the Saigon government would have controlled seventy six per cent of the Vietnamese population politically as well as securing them militarily from the increasing pressure of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units. At this time, the population could have voted freely for a national legislative assembly, which, if a Prime Ministerial system of government was outlined in the Constitution, would also have selected a new government.

Most ~~observers~~ political observers ² here believe that this ambitious program would have given Ky and the military junta a political victory of sorts while gradually "phasing" themselves out of the political responsibilities and handing over power to relatively anti-Communist civilians. (More)

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The Buddhist leadership, which has spearheaded the toppling of several past regimes, however, wants to telescope the time period in which the gradual evolution towards civilian government takes place. Few political observers here believe that the Vietnam possesses "such a luxury of time", fearing that growing Communist military pressure and increasing political confusion on the non-Communist side preclude any ^{substantial} shifts of power at the central government echelon ^{during} at the current period.

Ironically, the Buddhist demands for democratic and independent structure of the government "as soon as possible," appear to ^{be} observers here to be in step with the ^{principal} key decision made at the Honolulu Conference--including the ^{decision} decision of President Lyndon Johnson--^{at} that elections for a national legislative assembly ^{also} be held ^{as} soon.

Hence, while American officials have reiterated their support ^{for} of Prime Minister Ky, the growing question in Saigon is whether or not the American government also supports Ky's two-year program and his military junta of nine other generals.