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khenh--1

January 28, 1965

FOR RELEASE: SUNDAY, JANUARY 31

SAIGON--A year ago yesterday, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh in his first swift, silent coup d'etat entered the Prime Minister's Office with three stars, a modest black goatee and a reputation for being a ~~man~~ an expert poker player.

Today, he sports four stars, a Genghis Khan goatee plus moustache and the winner of an important round of political gambling. A year ago, he was the frontman Prime Minister for ~~an~~ other generals and political rivals; today today he is the behind-the-scenes strongman officially named only commander-in-chief of the Vietnamese Armed Forces and Chairman of the ~~a~~ powerful Armed Forces Council, which has now ~~officially~~ become a super-government making ~~all~~ key decisions in the anti-Communist sphere of influence in Viet Nam.

~~His main aim is to establish a strong government in Vietnam~~

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One of the surest bets in Viet Nam is now is that this spring the 37-year-old gambler-general will be elected as a ~~de Gaulle-like~~ President—barring his own assassination.

He is, in short, the man of the moment—but the moment in a lost year. Khanh is now the strongman of the super-government—but in the shrinking anti-Communist sphere.

"We have now come full circle back to January last year," one Vietnamese politician explained. "But more accurately the circle is actually in three-dimension an ascending spiral for Khanh. The full circle is American logic; the ascending spiral is Vietnamese dialectics.

"This year has been a repetition of history—but also the evolution of history. There are many changes in the year. When Khanh first came to power, he was eager to be a government official. Now he still longs for these things, but he vigorously protests he does not want them.

"He's using as a political axiom to acquire the Presidency that old French proverb: If you follow the woman, she will flee; if you retreat, she will follow you."

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"Khanh has learned his political ABC's well; he's much more mature," the politician continued. "He came to power clinging clinging to the Americans; now he's built the image of being mildly anti-American and a more independent Vietnamese leader."

During the past year Khanh failed to lead his nation in the anti-Communist war--a task the free world assigned to him--but he succeeded to survive, which is all Vietn Nam expected of him. His policy of survival--considering the initial odds--was in itself a political achievement, if not a political phenomenon, according to Vietnamese observers.

When Khanh entered the Prime Minister's Office, the American policy, which supported him with varying degrees of effectiveness during his rise and fall from power, was to build a strongman regime, aided by visits of American Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

This policy in 1964 was effected with visible semi-success, but not total failure. During the coming months, This American policy will be continued in an almost last-ditch attempt to maintain a politically stable government with a high degree of centralized power resting in the hands of Khanh. The prospect is that this plan will be implemented at all costs--and will succeed if at all possible.

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When Khanh entered the Prime Minister's Office last January, he was in fact only the frontman for a coalition of right-wing generals and political parties; he himself considered his immediate enemies were in his rear--and not the Viet Cong Communist guerrillas in the frontline. ~~At the end of 1960~~ But now, a year later, despite being toppled from office by rioting students, he had in one way or another ^{exiled} eliminated all personal political and military rivals ~~introduced~~ ^{anti-Communist} and eliminated all political organizations which could compete for his position-- ~~in the anti-Communist sphere.~~

But, if Khanh as Khanh's power continued to increase so has that of his enemies and potential oppositionists. Khanh has established for himself and the armed forces more and more control--but in a shrinking ^{political-military} world as the Viet Cong Communists tighten their grip on the peasant masses and as the Buddhists increase their political influence on the urban masses.

"The Armed Forces--and Khanh--have more and more control over less and less territory and fewer and fewer people," one Vietnamese observer noted.

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Khanh's current state of decision is in marked contrast to his low point five months ago when in a moment of immobility he was unable to counter the rioting student demonstrations, organized by the Buddhists and political parties, which were to topple him from the Presidency but which enabled him to retain a fiber of power. Since then, he has meticulously and skillfully inched his way way back into a position of power--but simultaneously the Buddhist political movement has also grown more decisive and powerful.

The coup d'etat

Khanh's second coup this week overthrowing Prime Minister Tran Van Huong from office bestowed upon Khanh the "task of solving the President's present crisis," a situation in which he will again be confronted with the Buddhist leaders who engineered his downfall. But to solve the crisis does not mean to end it--it will mean only to soften it. Khanh, already adopting the role of the great compromiser, will through concession and counter-concession, pressure and counter-pressure, seek to contain the power and scope of the political Buddhist monks. Hence, the unity of the nation will rest, not on religious unity among various religious or regional groupings, but upon a confusion of checks and balances in which each faction will be pitched against each other rather than against Khanh or the government.

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while containing, though not solving, the immediate problem of political instability within the anti-Communist sphere, Khanh is simultaneously faced with the even greater threat from his true enemy--the Viet Cong Communists, who throughout the past year have mushroomed in military ^{in the countryside} might and increased their political influence ^{NATION - wide} in the countryside.

Hence, with a two-front war--political stability in the rearlines and the Communist menace in the frontline.

Saigonese concede that ~~the~~ ² if these problems are to be ~~solved~~ ² Khanh is the most capable leader on the anti-Communist side to wage this two-front war. He ~~is~~ ^{is} considered the best politician among the generals and the strongest general by the politicians.

The biggest gamble of all for Khanh is that after one lost year in time ~~the~~ ² whether or not the problems are too enormous and immediate to solve/ or to smother.

The ~~odds~~ ² odds are that if Khanh loses this ~~h~~ ^h gamble, the Viet Cong Communists will cash in most of the chips.