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MARCH 3, 1965

SAIGON--A high-ranking American official on a fact-finding mission from W from Washington was recently eating dinner with a Vietnamese couple, both staunchly anti-Communist, who were decrying the marked deterioration of the internal political situation.

The American official asked if they were not encouraged "after recent ~~events~~ events," meaning the bombing of North Vietnamese military installations. The Vietnamese wife chipped at her ~~STK~~ fingernail polish and asked "What happened recently?"

The Vietnamese husband responded, "Oh, you mean ~~the~~ the aggression against North Viet Nam?"

The American official was flabbergasted at their reaction, which indicated how ~~little~~ much more worried about Saigon politics than they were re-assured by the bombing of North Viet Nam.

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For, the bombing raids against North Vietnam--including the largest one this week--came paradoxically when the internal political situation is ~~at~~ potentially ripe for a negotiated settlement.

In short, ~~as~~ as the American military ~~posit~~ posture grows tougher--or more hawkish--the internal political line is in parallel growing softer leaning towards dovish neutralist settlement.

These are the factors which are worrying the anti-Communist Vietnamese since the first retaliatory bombing of North Viet Nam on February 7:

1. The unimpeded rise of the militant Buddhist Institute, which has become a most ~~impirt~~ important political force in the country--second only to the Viet Cong ~~guerr~~ Communist political machine--and their public and official appeal for peace--~~which~~ which

Vietnamese stop killing fellow Vietnamese. The fear is this issue could in time cause the collapse of the Vietnamese armed forces and government.

2. At least one quarter of the ministers in the new government formed February 16 are considered "Buddhist ministers;" another one-quarter are considered ~~1~~ pro-French, if not french agents; the remaining half are considered "the best-intentioned bunch of nitwits ever to fill a ~~Cain~~ Cabinet."--they are considered weak personalities who would easily bend under prevailing political pressure from pro-neutralist factions. No element is prepared to resist the Buddhist

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The government is, in short, a de facto coalition government, which could pave the way for negotiations with the Communist Liberation Front.

3. This potentially pro-neutralist trend in the civilian government was relatively unimportant as long as the Vietnamese Armed Forces Council, considered to represent anti-Communist power, acted as a super-government. But, during the February 19th coup attempt and subsequent dismissal of Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh as Commander-in-Chief, the Vietnamese military council diminished in political importance. Khanh has used the armed forces as a counter-balance to the anti-Communist political counter-balance to the the pro-neutralist Buddhist mass power. Now that he is gone, the generals are fighting amongst themselves; at least one general has slipped over to the political side of the Buddhist Institute, and is indirectly calling for peace.

4. A peace movement has surfaced in Saigon, which the government officially labelled as Communist-inspired. The movement has circulated a petition calling for a ceasefire without condition--without demanding the Communist elements stop their aggression. This movement has obtained the signatures of 471 persons--many of them the most respected "high Society" upper-crust layer of Vietnamese society. While some of them have been arrested, the movement is now considered to be wiping up students and workers to spearhead their cause by street demonstrations against the arrival of 12 South Korean troops--and by implication they calling for the withdrawal of American troops.

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4. The anti-Communist ~~base~~ <sup>P. HARS</sup> fabric of the Vietnamese society and government are in disarray. The Catholics, ~~the~~ usually anti-Communist in viewpoint, are ~~if~~ divided among themselves and are discredited since the February 19th coup attempt. The American ~~tax~~ officials in Saigon are generally ~~a~~ discredited by both the left-wing ~~a~~ faction who hold <sup>them</sup> the United States responsible for the February 19th coup attempt, and by the right-wing faction who feel United States policymakers have made a general mess of ~~the~~ the political situation, hence ~~a~~ jeopardizing the anti-Communist war effort. The most important operative element--the armed forces--are suffering from high desertion rates; the fear is that a "push for peace" might cause its collapse. For the first time, officers of as low a rank as captain are attempting to send their families to France.

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Hence, there are two distinct trends--militarily military American policymakers are both escalating the war--both in by bombing North Vietnam and southern Laos, and internally by the use of American jets to pound Viet Cong guerrilla strongholds--and are internationalizing the war by the introduction of South Korean troops.

But a second trend is for ~~maximum~~ fewer and fewer anti-Communists to do less and less about the Communist political subversion--which is now considered to be a major ~~cause~~ <sup>their</sup> cause of reaction to the military offensive.

These two trends are considered contradictory--if Washington policymakers intend to prosecute the total war for victory. But the two trends are considered to be in parallel if Washington intends to negotiate--the tough military stance would be considered enough to give American an apparent military victory, but the Communists would be admitted into a coalition government--which would be the prelude to neutralization and years later to a communist takeover.

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"It is a principle ~~institutions~~ that the hotter the military war, the more the Communists will push the political subversives," said one counter-guerrilla expert.

Most foreign diplomats here consider the bombing of North Viet Nam at best a half-solution to the total problems of Viet Nam. A few consider the bombing raids have only created a second problem.

However, the pessimists among foreign diplomats and observers here consider the anti-Communist war lost. The optimists believe the trends can still be reversed--with a great deal of luck.

The ~~primary~~ question among the pessimists is whether American troops will be graciously invited to withdraw--or will be "chugged out". Their fear is the Communists in the provinces--and the Buddhists in Saigon and the major cities--will begin street demonstrations demanding peace--at any price. They argue bombing of North Vietnam is now incidental; American policymakers, if they intend to hold in South Viet Nam, must decide to send in American combat troops.

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The fear amongst the anti-Communist Vietnamese is the emotional appeal of the Buddhist leaders, who are considered working on behalf of the Communists. The Buddhist political-priests have ignited the issue that being argued in the home of each Vietnamese--including the generals and colonels.

The peace movement--launched by both the Communist subversives and the Buddhist political-priests--is considered "dynamite" as one Vietnamese businessman explained and is the most discussed development in Saigon. Vietnamese families refuse to hold piastre currency; the price of gold has risen up to 30-40 per cent ~~over~~ the past three weeks "and it is being buried in the ground outside Saigon", according to one businessman. "The Vietnamese hope to get it out in the confusion before the Communists take over." Other housewives have begun stockpiling rice; the price has risen sharply, although it normally drops following the Chinese New year.

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Vietnamese friendships of long years standing are being broken up because of the tense political climate. "Who are our friends-- and who are our enemies?" one young Vietnamese housewife asked. pondered. "I have to ask myself that each time before I send out dinner invitations."

An increasing number of the "jet set of Saigon" have begun to play both the ~~in~~ pro-American--and the pro-neutralist line. These middle and upper-class elements have for years, in a limited scope, sided with the Viet Cong by paying taxes. But this took the form of protectionism against Viet Cong gangsterism--without any political connections. However, however, an increasing number are politically aiding these pro-Communist or pro-neutralist elements by signing pro-Communist peace petitions, by spreading an anti-American line-- and perhaps in the future by joining street demonstrations.

"It is a time when each Vietnamese has two feet and two faces," explained one depressed Vietnamese housewife.