

Crisis Leaves Saigon Unruffled

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SAIGON.

The latest shooting incident in the Gulf of Tonkin left few visible marks in South Viet Nam's capital yesterday—unlike the crisis that first broke there just seven weeks ago.

Although some reports said American military forces were supposed to be on a new special alert, the streets of Saigon were even more crowded than usual, and Americans seemed to be moving about just as freely as the Vietnamese, who were preparing for today's celebration of the annual moon festival.

The propaganda mills in Communist China and North Viet Nam cranked up, predictably enough, but neither showed any sign of taking action against the United States, and the invasion panic that swept through South Viet Nam after last month's Gulf of Tonkin incidents did not materialize this time.

IN HANOI

In Hanoi, North Vietnamese Xuan Thuy accused the U. S. of trumping up the incident Friday as part of an "imperialist scheme of aggression." He warned that Washington "must bear full responsibility for all serious consequences."

In Peking, Gen. Lo Ji-Ching observed that his government "has long ago clearly declared that any aggression against the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam means aggression against the People's Republic of China."

Gen. Lo, who is both a Deputy Premier and the Army Chief of Staff, added that "the Chinese people know how to deal with the war maniacs." But he made no promises of concrete support for Hanoi and no direct threats against Washington.

In South Viet Nam the flap surrounding the shooting in the Gulf of Tonkin may actually have strengthened slightly the hand of Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh at home. The Premier seemed more concerned about his country's running border dispute with Cambodia than about the incident at sea.

Gen. Khanh, who put the country under virtual martial law after the U. S. climaxed last month's crisis in the Gulf of Tonkin with air strikes against North Viet Nam, said he thought the

shooting Friday was primarily Washington's concern, not Saigon's.

"We have not received very clear details yet," the Premier said. "But we are not surprised, because the Communists have plans and they go on with the plans they have drawn up."

He added that he would try to find out more later in the day when he flew to Da Nang, 370 miles north of the capital, on a previously scheduled visit to victims of a recent typhoon. A U. S. 7th Fleet spokesman said before the latest shooting incident that a task force was operating about 100 miles from Da Nang on the South China Sea.

Da Nang, only 80 miles south of the North Vietnamese frontier, is a major base for the American F-101 Voodoos and F-102 Delta Daggers flown in during the August crisis when everyone was worried about Communist retaliation for the U. S. air strikes. The other big concentration of the supersonic jets is at Bien Hoa, only 10 miles northeast of Saigon.

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The internal Communist threat was underlined yesterday by a South Vietnamese military spokesman's report that government troops had clashed with Viet Cong guerrillas in nine separate actions during the day—evidence of a big step-up in insurgent activity.

Government casualties—24 dead, 24 wounded and 30 missing—far outnumbered Viet Cong losses—five killed and nine captured—according to the spokesman.

Three Americans were reported wounded in fighting yesterday Friday in the guerrilla-infested area around Ben Cat, less than 25 miles north of Saigon. An American military spokesman said 316 air sorties had been flown in support of government troops—also a sharp increase.

The Viet Cong have resumed their pressure on the Khanh regime during the past week after a lull during the coup-and-counter-coup maneuvering among top army officers. Nine Americans have been wounded in combat since

In the capital yesterday, however, American officials worked their customary Saturday morning and took their usual Saturday afternoon off.

A spokesman pointed out that few of them knew much about the Gulf of Tonkin incident because the 7th Fleet chain of command does not go through Saigon.

A statement by Le Trang, North Viet Nam's press and information chief, explicitly declared that "no battleship of any kind from his country was in the Gulf of Tonkin when the shooting took place Friday. He said the U. S. had manufactured the incident to 'pave the way for launching fresh military attacks' on North Viet Nam.

Hanoi protested the incident in a message to the Soviet Union and Britain, co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva conference that dismembered Indo-China. Foreign Minister Thuy urged "energetic

and timely measures . . . to check the U. S. scheme for renewed war acts against the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam."

A Hanoi message to the International Control Commission established to police the 1954 Geneva agreements requested an extraordinary meeting of Canadian, Polish and British representatives to look into the "despicable schemes and acts of provocation" of the U. S.

An earlier Hanoi broadcast said Washington had concocted the Gulf of Tonkin incident "to bolster up the morale of their henchmen in South Viet Nam" and "to secure more political assets to cope with the Republican party in the present Presidential campaign."