

scope

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SAIGON--The Communist-led Buddhist movement has declared an irreversible state of total war on the American-backed government of Prime Minister Tran Van Huong, reliable as observers indicate.

Perhaps less noticed but more significant, the powerful Buddhist politico-priests have declared war on the legal mechanisms which would select the future gov any future government.

Two other powerful forces--the Vietnamese armed forces and Americans--are trying to arbitrate the differences between the two warring camps.

But, hopes for compromise appear slim. The odds are heavily against the 63-year-old cherub-faced Prime Minister winning the battle--the question is whether he will have the opportunity and ~~desire~~ ^{power} to crackdown positively on the "playing the Communist game," Buddhist leadership, which he considers pro-Communist, before he falls.

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The predictions of bloodshed and violence are now more than idle ~~sk~~ speculation and coffeehouse chatter. Prime Minister Huong has personally been warned of "blood consequences" by members of the official high High National Council--and the predictions of a coup d'etat and turmoil has been discussed by members of the Council during official meetings, according to reliable sources.

Observers here believe the one other powerful force in the country--the Communist Viet Cong--are waiting for the showdown with glee, knowing that any turn of events will may help them profit them.

The powerful Buddhist oppositionist movement lead by skilled political-priests Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau sparked the overthrow of the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic, last year and were implicated in the "demi-coup" ~~xx~~ which toppled Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh from the Prime Minister's Office during late/ August student demonstrations.

The question of who and what government would follow Huong should he fall is still considered speculative. However, observers here view as especially significant the re-emergence of an Armed Forces Council--which they interpret as being a de facto military junta--

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Should the Huong government--and the legal apparatus for selecting future governments--be toppled, Vietnam's third military junta in thirteen months is considered likely to ~~reappoint~~ jettison General Khanh into civilian authority again.

In attempts to quicken the pace and intensity of their fight against the Huong government, the ~~politico-~~ Buddhist politico-priests have launched a series of hunger strikes to be coupled with their constant "war of communiques." The short-term expectations are that the ~~Buddhist~~ next move of the Buddhist leadership would include a brilliant demonstration of saffron-robed monks to the Presidential Palace to protest against the government; perhaps the hunger strikes would be shifted to the provinces and to include the Buddhist laity; perhaps a ~~disinformed~~ Buddhist organize association of disabled war veterans would launch a protest march.

Since the government has declared demonstrations illegal and subject to being stopped by force, and would be in an embarrassing position to arrest a peaceful demonstration of Buddhist houses or disabled war veterans.

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He Current

Buddhist sources indicate that this phase of non-violence and non-cooperation with the ²goe government might well include another round of flaming protest suicides as occurred last year against President Diem. While considered a propaganda ~~x~~ weapon and a political threat at this point, Buddhist sources ~~xxxx~~ ² are now ² skilfill skilfully circulating names of monks who have volunteered to turn themselves alive—~~includi~~ ² which ² enhances their public prestige—including one named Thich Ho Giac, a youthful judo expert who is deputy of the Buddhist chaplain's corps in the Armed Forces and widely considered by government security forces as a Communist cadre.

These current Buddhist tactics are roughly ~~remain~~ equivalent to the ²semi-ill semi-legal struggle often used by the Communists—to provoke the government to make a stand on issues that they have not clearly authorized, but yet not clearly banned—as in the case of war veterans riding in trishaws in a protest demonstration.

Warning

"These are all the things they can do in phase two," one high-ranking Vietnamese government official exclaimed. "When they get to the final phase—God help us." Anything can ² happen then."

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IN RECENT days
The Buddhists ~~in~~ have intensified their propaganda effort ~~it~~ and ~~the~~ changed the course of their skilfully maneuvered campaign since Prime Minister Huong entered ~~the~~ office on November 1. At that time the central point of their attacks ~~were~~ ^{WAS} against several ~~unnamed~~ unnamed ministers in the government. This line continued until the violent, bloody student demonstrations of late ~~an~~ November when the ~~Political Bureau~~ began to unroll a scathing campaign ~~ago~~ against the Prime Minister himself, ~~Formerly~~ blaming him for naming an "anti-revolutionary" government, for "oppressing" student demonstrators in order to preserve order ~~and~~ security in Saigon, and then ~~ve~~ for imposing martial law. They also accused him of ~~separatism~~ separatism by favoring those, like himself, who were born in the Mekong Delta region of the country, once known as Cochinchina.

Last ~~week~~ weekend, however, in a series of masterfully written, precisely worded communiques, the Buddhists shifted tactics by completely ~~ignoring~~ ignoring the existence of Huong ~~but~~ instead concentrated ^{ing} their fire on the supporters --and the creators of Huong. his supporters and--and his creators.

The three pillars of the Huong regime are, the Prime Minister the Chief of State Phan Khac Suu and and his Cabinet, ~~the 15-man High National Council which roughly operates like the United States Senate but also he has extensive powers in~~ ~~But both the High National Council and the Chief of State have extensive powers in~~ ² approving the Prime Minister, ratifying his Cabinet and in drawing up procedures for the future National Congress which would draft the permanent Constitution.

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The Buddhists then attacked by name a leading ~~politician~~ ^{Councilman} within the High National Council who ~~controls~~ ^{WIELDS} enough votes to prevent a non-confidence vote against the government. A delegation of High National Council men reportedly met a ranking Buddhist leader and asked ~~them~~ ^{him} that if a non-confidence vote were ~~given~~ ^{taken} ~~and~~ ^{Against} Huong were ~~not~~ ^{legally} ~~out-casted~~ who would the Buddhist want as their the succeeding Prime Minister. The Buddhist leader reportedly replied the movement did not ~~want~~ ^{wanted} care to name the next Prime Minister-- but simply wanted Ho Huong out of office. The High National Council reportedly gave up in disgust and decided to stick with Huong.

Simultaneously, the Buddhists have launched a whispering campaign against ~~Phu~~ the Chief of State and then decided to content confront Huong's strongest outside support--the United States. In a letter to Ambassador Taylor--which was censored in the Vietnamese local press but ~~was~~ ^{is} widely circulated by the Buddhists in mimeographed leaflet form--the ~~Buddhists~~ ^{Political} asserted they held the ~~the~~ United States responsible for deciding whether the Huong government survived or fell. ~~Thamimphicantform~~ While the letter was promptly dismissed as Buddhist propaganda line, ~~it served~~ this line of reasoning was promptly ~~dismissed~~ ^{By official Americans} as Buddhist propaganda, even the most anti-Communist, anti-Buddhist Vietnamese agreed that the support of the American government ^{WAS} is the first prerequisite for any ~~future~~ ^{new} government.

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The Buddhist letter to Taylor last week--~~and~~ ended a common hope--and myth--that had circulated in Saigon for months--that the two wily monks, the so-called moderate Tam Chau and the so-called extremist Tri Quang, could be split from each other with the leadership and rank-and-file falling into the moderate ranks.

Huong, backed up by an intensive ~~mass~~ propaganda campaign launched by American and other foreign officials, attempted at all cost to split the two ascetic monks by creating personal rivalries and divisions. At the ~~1~~ end of last week, however, both were patiently enduring a 48-hour hunger strike in protest against Huong--and indirectly against the Americans.

This final act by Tri Thich Tri Quang--considered to be pro-Communist then gave rise to a second and current myth--that if ~~Stix~~ he had not lost Tam Chau Chau--both of them had lost the mass their mass support.

Tomorrow: Buddhist Mass Support.