

Deepe

Khanh-1

Sent April 15 NY H-T

Shortly after General Nguyen Khanh seized power in this country's second coup on January 30, he sent a colonel with written orders to take over command of the Dalat Military Academy, the Westpoint of Viet Nam situated in the plush mountain resort city.

The colonel presented his orders to the commandant, jolly General Tran Tu Oai, who once as head of Viet Nam's malaria eradication department, said, "I'm the only general to fight the Viet Cong (Communist guerrillas) with a ~~3~~ spray gun."

The chubby-checked general asked the colonel, "Who issued your orders?"

The colonel replied General Khanh had signed them.

"Until Khanh personally comes here and orders me to leave," General Oai snapped curtly, "You can go to hell." The colonel ~~was~~ quickly returned to Saigon and was assigned elsewhere.

In another instance, several weeks ago, an American-piloted L-19 light reconnaissance plane crashed in the mountainous jungles of I Corps, the northernmost of the four Vietnamese army corps bordering Communist North Viet Nam. American military aircraft immediately launched an extensive search for the plane in the tangled jungles of Quang Tin province.

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Kha nh--2

The Vietnamese command in Saigon ~~command~~ ordered a crack Vietnamese airborne Ranger unit to launch a nine-day ground search. However, fearing large concentrations of troops might be used against one of them, local Vietnamese commanders in I Corps decided that to release the troops would require signatures of at least seven LOCAL Vietnamese officers on the ~~same day~~ day. These seven signatures included: not only the corps commander (a general), and both division commanders (colonels), but also the district chief (a captain) where the search would be conducted plus two province chiefs (majors)—including one whose air space would be violated by the aircraft transporting the troops. By the time this minor miracle was accomplished, eight days had elapsed—and the ground unit had only one day to search the area.

Simultaneously, the Saigon command sent an important commander to I Corps to get the search organized. ~~He was given 24 hours~~ Local commanders gave him 24-hours to conduct his business and "get out." He did.

If this check-and-balance empirebuilding—which Americans call "military musical chairs"—is eroding General Khanh's command of the anti-Communist war in the countryside, he has a much more serious problem—the war of Saigon—where he is regularly snipped ^{FT} in the heels by rival political parties, by parties within parties, by religious partisanship, by Vietnamese newspaper columnists—and especially cartoonists—and by anyone else who things a potshop a day keeps the general away.

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Khanh—3

Vietnamese political observers—who accurately predicted the two previous coups—pronounce without qualification the inevitability of an anti-Khanh coup, either through the use of military might or treacherous assassination. In fact, these observers predict not only a third coup, but a fourth one, noting that "the next coup will solve nothing. Anyone can seize power but no one has enough support to ~~it~~ stay in." They say it is only a question of time before a coup

Khanh himself is ~~concerned~~ concerned enough to sleep in a different house each night, (informatively source is Lodge), to admit to foreign correspondents that his wife is worried and to deliberately house his wife and four children 350 miles from Saigon.

On the other hand, the American community almost unanimously expresses the believe that ~~if~~ the spunky general will outlive this initial period of tottering. They say "he is very energetic, very cunning, in fact--he's very everything."

"He's dirtytricked enough people enough not to let others do it to him," ~~ask~~ one American explained. (Lodge informatively).

Yet this American viewpoint is partly based on what the Americans want to believe believe. Since the visit of ~~a~~ Defense Secretary Robert McNamara a month ago, America has clearly pinned all hopes of ~~prosecutit~~ ~~proce~~ prosecuting the war vigorously on the 36-year-old ~~rote~~ goateed general. American officials realistically ~~admitt~~ ~~admit~~ admit that if Khanh is toppled, the anti-Communist war effort will hopelessly deteriorate. They even halfheartedly ~~admit~~ threaten and American ~~with~~ withdrawal if Khanh goes.

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Without question, the American intelligence apparatus here is clearly helping Khanh build an anti-coup machine.

Saigon politics en toto are such an incredible never-neverland that one Western diplomat lamented, "We (Free World) may be able to save the Vietnamese from the Viet Cong, but can we save them from themselves?" The political scene is a snarled fuzgball of habitual intrigues; of temporary alliances, but inevitable infidelity; of plots and subplots; betrayal and ~~counterbetr~~ counterbetrayal; of a tornado of factions within factions ~~and~~ within factions. Obvious visible manifestations—such as unity ~~is~~ shown in a press conference—are a mirage. ~~To~~ ~~Summation~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~political~~ ~~scene~~ ~~in~~ ~~Saigon~~ ~~is~~ ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~politics~~ ~~are~~ ~~always~~ ~~subsurface~~, consistently indirect, and not infrequently manipulated by the ~~fantasy~~ ~~fairytale~~ ~~predictions~~ of horoscopes and fortunetellers.

The fact that Khanh has remained in power for 80 days (as of April 19) can not be attributed to any unity in this nation ~~which~~ once described as "only a series of families." Nor is it Khanh's personal power, popularity or skill of ~~a~~ his supporters, who include on the military side those officers loyal to former president Ngo Dinh Diem, or on the civilian side ~~to~~ those government leaders who have returned from years of exile abroad.

It is ironically, Vietnam's greatest enemy, the Viet Cong, who have provided for ~~him~~ him the glue to fight against something more ruthless than Khanh himself, but yet which is still sub-national since North Viet Nam is already under Communist control. The second favor benefitting Khanh is that at this time his opponents are as busy fighting among themselves as they are ~~fighting~~ fighting him.

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~~SECRET~~
Besides Khanh Inc., there are three other significant power groups now operating in Saigon, where the unity of government must be reinforced. They are:

1. The Dai Viet (Greater Viet Nam) ~~Revolutionary~~ Party, ^{Hard Communist, largely Viet} the group deemed most likely to toss a coup if there is one. Among its ranks are key troop-~~control~~ controlling generals, including the chief of staff of the Joint General Staff, who not only commands all troops in the country, but also has personal responsibility for the crack 7th Division directly south of Saigon, where the Viet Cong are running wild. The division commander, also a hardcore Dai Viet, controls enough troops, if properly mobilized and moved, to ~~be~~ topple easily ~~the~~ units loyal to ~~the~~ Khanh in Saigon.

Yet, the party itself reflects the main ~~dis~~ ^{divisive} divisive force in the country: regionalism. The French splintered Viet Nam into three regions—the northern, the central which was residence for old Imperial court, and the ~~east~~ southern region including the Mekong Delta, ~~which is the primary target of the Viet Cong guerrillas.~~ primary target of the Viet Cong guerrillas. The southern section, because of hotter climate, richer lands and easier life, are regarded by ~~them~~ people of the ~~other~~ other two regions as the poor white trash of Viet Nam.

The northern branch of the party, mostly refugees who are the most educated and energetic in the country, is significantly represented in the government by the Foreign Minister, Dr. Phan Huy K Quat, who ~~is~~

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represented Vietnam at the SEATO conference, and ~~currently~~ vice premier in charge of economics who is a 43-year-old ex-Harvard University ~~who would be an important candidate~~ professor. Should Khanh ever relinquish his position of prime minister as ~~one~~ head of the civilian government, The Central Vietnam wing has the most rice-roots support, but the least power in Saigon. The Southern wing is divided within itself. One faction is headed by Dr. Nguyen Ton Hoan, is Khanh's vice ~~premier~~ premier in charge of pacification, ~~is~~ the most ~~sk~~ significant civilian heading the war effort. Dr. Hoan, a Catholic-Catholic who returned from nine years ~~of~~ of exile in Paris has been one of Khanh's supporters, but is also rumored to want to become prime minister. The second section of the ~~southern wing~~ southern wing headed by a businessman is anti-Khanh.

Vietnamese political parties are distinctly differently from those in America. There are no known membership lists; ingenious use of rumors and slander replace party leaflets and banners; party corruption substitutes for party fundraising drives. Saigonese call the party, not the Dai Viet, but the Dai Vet, (Big Dredge) meaning to pull in rake-offs and grafts. The U. S. government has cut off aid to several projects which the Dai Viet has engineered only to raise funds or prestige of the party.

While most parties in Viet Nam are nationalist-anti-communist, none have ~~any~~ ~~ideology~~ ~~(More)~~ ideology to counter that of the Communists. Most groups revolve around personalities, "and there are always more leaders than members in any party," one Vietnamese commented.

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2. A group of generals from the Central region, headed by General Do Mau, a lean stoop-shouldered ~~man~~ man in late 40s who has been the principal engineer in the two previous coups. Wearing Carmine de Sapio-type sunglasses, he is proud of his peasant birth. Yet he's one of the most ingenious ingriduers in Viet Nam. A kingmaker rather than a king, and unofficial overseer of the Vietnamese intelligence network, he in one way or another will in large part decide whether Khanh stays in power or not. Some of the general generals are considered to be working for the central intelligence agency, but their ~~loyal~~ loyalties may shift.

3. Young officers around General ~~Duc~~ Duong Van Minh, the goldtoothed nominal chief of state who commands more genuine popularity and prestige from the population and lower-ranking offbe officers than any other individual. Vietnamese observers predict that if the Dai Viet succeeds in the next coup, and then surely flounders, the ~~fourth~~ fourth coup would boost Ming Ming Minh into power.

But in the final analysis in Viet Nam, the most illogical of all rationale--superstition--may win out. Khanh's opponents in ~~the~~ the war of Saigon call him "Thang Rau De"--the one with the beard, indicating he's attempting to hid his recessed chin which means a short life, or "Thang Mat Loi", the one with the bulging eyes, a symbol symbol of ~~trustworthy~~ trustworthiness.

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However, ~~in~~ a bearded village elder in An Binh (Village of Peace) ~~is~~ who daily witnesses Gen. Khanh's anti-Communist war (the hamlet chief was killed by Viet Cong, two subordinates beheaded, schoolhouse poked with ~~bullet~~ bullet holes,) ~~predicted~~ said General Khanh has "Buddha ears--big ears like Buddha so he can do something outstanding and ~~his~~ his eyes are round which is a good omen."

Whether the advocates of the "Buddha ear" omen or the "Rau De" (goats beard, hence goatee) omen proves right may well determine the future, not ~~only~~ of General Khanh and Viet Nam but also ~~the~~ America's prestige in throughout ~~the~~ the world.