

# Magnetic Thi Roils Viet Politics

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SAIGON.

Flamboyant Maj. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi is a one-man symbol of the paradoxical pitfalls and pathos of Vietnamese political intrigue.

The constant bubbling of Franco-Oriental maneuvering is considered a major obstacle to effective American-South Vietnamese opposition to the Communists, who have the best organized political machine in the countryside.

Gen. Thi was dismissed Thursday from his command of the five northern provinces, where for the last two years he ruled in warlord fashion. He was dismissed by the nine other generals of the military junta who were barely ruling at all.

Gen. Thi was a sporadic author of political instability in Saigon, with an abortive coup in 1960 and several "palace coups" to his name.

Yet his dismissal is considered to be only a prelude to more instability (other military leaders are expected to be ousted) if not outright chaos through student-civilian military committees now organizing demonstrations in Gen. Thi's ex-bailwick.

The 43-year-old Gen. Thi was the strongest individual, in terms of political popularity and appeal in the junta. But he was not so strong as the other nine collectively opposing him. Since Gen. Thi was the first general to fall from the junta in its nine-month existence, his expulsion in-

dictated that committee leadership was no longer sacred—nor even workable.

The ouster of Gen. Thi—easily could spark political instability within Viet Nam on at least three counts:

¶It means the junta is not unified—which delights the pro-neutralist civilian politicians, and obviously the Communists.

¶In the five northern provinces formerly commanded by Gen. Thi, where nearly 4,000 American Marines are fighting, a whirlwind shift of Gen. Thi's administrative personnel, province chiefs, and at least one of the two division commanders is expected. This probably will set back the Marines' pacification efforts.

¶Followers of Gen. Thi in Saigon and some of the commanders of the other three corps areas may also be shifted. Gen. Thi was considered to have previously had the support of the National Police director Col. Pham Van Lieu, as well as some division and regimental commanders near Saigon.

A slender bright spot in the otherwise gloomy political picture is that the executive branch of the government headed by Premier Nguyen Cao Cao Ky has become stronger.

By breaking the power of Gen. Thi, the strongest, most magnetic personality in the 10-man junta, the Saigon regime is expected to find it easier to handle weaker corps commanders. Their alternatives:

Carry out orders from Saigon efficiently—or face be-

ing expelled from the junta and their position of power. The four corps commanders and their subordinate division commanders hold the actual

basis of power in the country—the raw power of guns.

They were once described as being so independent from Saigon that "Viet Nam has

four Vietnamese war lords ruling the provinces—and three American warriors where three American warlords where United States troops are