

Coup in Two Acts—A Viet Special

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SAIGON.

The reassertion of power in South Viet Nam by a military junta as a governing super-body appeared yesterday to be a coup d'etat in slow motion, with more to come.

The junta overthrew one of the three pillars of the Vietnamese government—the High National Council, whose nine active members were the legal foundation of the political structure.

The other two pillars of government, Chief of State Phan Khac Suu and Premier Tran Van Huong, have so far remained untouched. But their continuation in office appears doubtful.

There is speculation that a "slow coup" is being conducted in two installments—with Mr. Huong and Mr. Suu the next victims—to avoid the question of the legitimacy of an army takeover and hence the problem of recognition by other governments.

The re-emergence of a military junta is considered likely to be followed by the re-emergence of a military strongman leading the government—Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, armed forces commander-in-chief and former Premier.

In this first phase of a drive to centralize power in the anti-Communist armed forces, the junta also:

¶ Forcibly retired 41 generals and colonels.

¶ Arrested 10 troublesome leaders of political parties and student organizations who had planned recent violent demonstrations against the government.

¶ Served a warning to religious leaders whether Ro-

man Catholics or Buddhists that further acts leading to political instability would not be tolerated.

"We arrested only trouble-makers," one Vietnamese general involved in the seizure of power explained. "We did not arrest any Buddhist leaders, but their turn will be next if

they cause any more trouble."

At least six Vietnamese generals were reported under house arrest, but this could not be confirmed. Five of these had been overthrown by Gen. Khanh during his Jan. 30 coup but had been reinstated in high-ranking military posts.

American and Vietnamese officials were unable to decide whether the power shift should be described as a coup or a purge. "This is without comparison to any other power maneuver in the world," one Vietnamese officer said. "It's a Viet Nam special."

One Vietnamese political observer called it a "coup a la Alfred Hitchcock. This is just the first act. Everyone is in suspense to see how the coup finally ends."