

Viet Shakeup: Fateful Days Near in War

TIMETABLE

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SAIGON.

"The pessimists here said the war was lost eight months ago when the first military junta didn't succeed," a Western diplomat explained. "But we still have a slender hope of winning. Now the question is—how long can we hold that hope?"

The end of the timetable of the Viet Nam war is in November, as if a pact had been signed by all concerned.—America, South Viet Nam and the Communists. For America, November marks the Presidential elections, the results of which will help to decide the fate of Viet Nam.

For South Viet Nam's newly named President, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, November marks the end of a "truce" with some of his own fellow generals who once threatened a coup against him. Despite his elevation yesterday and the Cabinet shakeup still to come, he must prove by No-

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TIGHTENING

VUNG TAU.

South Viet Nam.

Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh took over yesterday as President of South Viet Nam in a government shakeup designed to consolidate power in his hands.

Gen. Khanh, who has ruled as Premier since seizing control of the government in a military coup last Jan. 30, was overwhelmingly elected to his new post by the Military Revolutionary Council, the ruling junta of 58 South Vietnamese generals and colonels, at a meeting in this seaside resort 40 miles east of the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon.

At the same time, the council approved a new, 12-page constitution, switching back from the European-style system of a strong Premier and figurehead President to the American-type setup of a strong President and no Premier at all—the system

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vember that he is strong enough to govern his people and eventually to win their war against the Viet Cong.

For the Communist guerrillas, November marks the end of the rainy season. After the monsoons they can use their known capability of jumping into Phase III, the final decisive phase in which guerrilla tactics are converted into conventional warfare, with a solid but mobile front line.

The effect of the Tonkin Gulf incidents and subsequent American air strikes on North Viet Nam was simply to stop the clock—to neutralize time. No reliable observers here are willing to guess for how long. Few believe, however, that the clock has stopped indefinitely.

QUESTION

The Tonkin incidents pinpoint the question raised by the Johnson administration several months ago. Will air strikes or naval blockades on North Viet Nam win the counter-insurgency war in South Viet Nam? The answer depends on the basic assumptions about the war, which fall into two categories.

The first school views the South Viet Nam war as a civil war, with citizens within the country rising against the government. This school notes that most of the guerrilla fighters are from South Viet Nam and most of their weapons and supplies are captured from the government. These observers believe that even direct war against North Viet Nam would still not win the war in the South.

MORALE

The second school led by the American State Department, is that the South Viet Nam war was caused by direct aggression from Hanoi, since thousands of political and military cadres infiltrated from North Viet Nam during the last four years. Persons accepting this view concede that attacking North Viet Nam would not substantially help to win the war in South Viet Nam. But they believe that counter-insurgency in the South would be inconsequential in the context of "bigger limited war."

U. S. Ambassador Maxwell

Taylor considered the air strikes against North Viet Nam "morale booster" for Americans and South Vietnamese. Actually the air strikes reinforced the long-standing fear of the Vietnamese government that America is in the first stage of planning to negotiate a settlement with Communists. Government officials and Vietnamese intellectuals expressed the view that America was taking strong measures against Hanoi to win a better bargaining position.

One American adviser reported, "My Viet Nam counterpart was so mad about our bombing he would not speak to me. He does not want this war escalated."

However, the Tonkin incidents also caused Hanoi and Peking to reevaluate their "paper tiger" slogans and their assessment that America would not act during these pre-election months. The North Vietnamese incidents forced the Viet Cong guerrillas in South Viet Nam into a temporary lull of activity, presumably until newer instructions are issued. But reliable sources here predict the lull will be only temporary and the guerrillas will once again launch intensive and extensive military operations, as they were doing days before the Tonkin incidents. Military sources here

are exceptionally watchful of the increased numbers of North Vietnamese troops in the provinces south of the 17th parallel, which divides the Communist North from anti-Communist South.

The Tonkin incidents and the bombing of North Viet Nam created the kind of crisis atmosphere in Saigon that gave Gen. Khanh the moment, the means and the justification to launch what he has described as "my own coup."

Phase I of that operation began almost immediately—the increasing militarization of the government. Phase II was accomplished yesterday—the concentration of more power in his own hands.

RESTRICTIONS

Gen. Khanh launched his Phase I two days after the bombing of North Viet Nam by clamping on a state of emergency and authorizing more restrictions on civilian life in Saigon. While Viet Nam has been in a "state of emergency" by declaration of former President Ngo Dinh Diem since 1961, Gen. Khanh's announcement was backed by strong measures of implementation, especially in Saigon. Then last week, in an unprecedented move, he pinned a fourth star on moon-faced Gen. Tran Thien Khiem, Minister of Defense

and Commander-in-Chief of all armed forces. This gave 39-year-old Khiem higher rank than Khanh himself or Chief of State Gen. Duong Van Minh.

"The generals Kh" is a term which Khanh once used to describe himself and Gen. Khiem, a label attached to the two in 1957 when both were field commanders in the battle-ridden Mekong Delta area. In their early twenties, the generals were classmates at a French-operated military academy. It was Gen. Khiem who planned and executed the Jan. 30 coup in Saigon which moved Khanh from a commander in the northern provinces to Premier in Saigon.

In recent weeks, rumors in Saigon indicated that Gen. Khiem, at the instigation of the Dai Viet political party, would launch a coup to unseat Khanh. Khanh's own security advisers repeatedly asked the Premier whether Khiem could be trusted. "Always the reply was 'Gen. Khiem is my very good friend,'" according to one of Khanh security officials.

In Phase II of Gen. Khanh's own coup, Gen. Khiem remains as Defense Minister and may well get more power himself when the revolutionary junta gets around to naming a Vice-President. He actually got

five votes for the Presidency in yesterday's balloting—far fewer than Gen. Khanh, but enough to indicate substantial support behind him.

There is some possibility, too, that the generals overthrown in the Jan. 30 coup—including Duong Van Minh, who was eased out of the government yesterday—may actually be sent out of the country to keep them from sowing dissension in the government.

PARTY

The importance of the powerful, though fragmented Dai Viet (Greater Viet Nam) political party, who supported Khanh-Khiem in the Jan. 30 coup and then thought it could seize the reins of power, will almost certainly be diminished if not crushed in the new government. Much of the difference between civilian and military concepts of how to govern the country and prosecute the war had in the past been fomented by the Dai Viet party, as well as less important political parties.

The "Khanh coup" indicates a reversal for Ambassador Taylor, who came to Viet Nam early in July with the policy of increasing the political prestige and power of

Gen. Minh. Gen. Khanh and Gen. Khiem rebelled as tensions between American officials and the government rose. Two weeks later Ambassador Taylor reversed his policy and told Gen. Khanh on a field trip: "Nous restons ensemble jusqu'à la mort." (We remain together until death.)

If the Tonkin incidents and attacks on North Viet Nam have given the Khanh government "a brief respite," as one diplomat explained, they have hardly eased the pressures of problems within the country.

WARS

The internal problems constitute a war within a war. A favorite pastime in Saigon is to count the number of wars going on in Viet Nam. One visitor, who was in the country only six weeks, drew up a list of twelve separate wars. Gen. Khanh himself casually ticks off five wars... the Buddhist-Catholic conflict, the labor-management problems, differences between various political parties, difficulties with students and regional prejudices between persons from the south, center and northern sections of Viet Nam.

While Gen. Khanh faces a military war against the Viet Cong guerrillas in the countryside, observers here believe that the Communist political subversion is partly responsible for the unrest within the urban centers. Gen. Khanh himself admits that Communist agents are infiltrating not only the national army but his own government.

"The Communists are at our door and the door is open," one Vietnamese officer explained. "But we're too busy fighting inside the House. We must unite to fight the Communists and settle our differences later."

He pondered a minute and added: "But then maybe the Communists are inside our house, too. We must be more clever."

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that prevailed under the late President Ngo Dinh Diem.

President Diem was overthrown and slain last November in the first of South Viet Nam's two military coups, and the strong-Premier system was adopted then.

The new constitution also provides for a reorganized Cabinet; an appointed, 150-member provisional National Assembly with only advisory powers; a separate judicial branch, also appointed, and certain guarantees of individual rights.

CONSULTATION

In Washington, it appeared that the Administration would be agreeable to Gen. Khanh's assumption of his new post, where he will remain under some curbs from the military junta. Gen. Khanh was reported to have consulted at length with U. S. Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor before making the changes.

American officials said Gen. Khanh acted only after trying hard—and failing utterly—to weld dissident political parties and religious groups into a national coalition, all of whose members would be represented in the Cabinet. The various factions could not agree among themselves or with the regime, the officials said.

Asked whether Gen. Khanh might now be more open to charges of being a dictator, the U. S. officials replied that South Viet Nam is giving its citizens a fair degree of freedom compared to other Southeast Asian strong-man regimes like Cambodia, Thailand and Burma—not to mention Asian Communist governments.

NO ELECTION

Gen. Khanh himself was asked the same question at a press conference following his election. He replied that "real democracy" was provided for by the division of the government into executive, legislative and judicial branches and a commitment to eventual free election of the National Assembly—though he made clear that no such election could be held during the current war with the Communist Viet Cong.

Moreover, the general insisted, he is by nature non-authoritarian. "For six months, I have been head of a totalitarian regime without being totalitarian," he said. "I can head a dictatorial regime without being a dictator."

All cabinet members and other key officials resigned

but will stay at their posts until a new government is formed within a month. New ministry appointments, however, are expected to be made as early as this week.

A new Vice-President will also be named by the junta. The President, Vice-President and cabinet members will make up a Cabinet Council, which Gen. Khanh referred to yesterday as a "war cabinet."

Gen. Duong Van Minh, who became Premier following the November coup but was

kicked upstairs to be figure-head President by Gen. Khanh in January, was deprived of a governmental post in the new regime. But Gen. Khanh said he would continue to function as an adviser to the junta. Gen. Minh did not attend yesterday's meeting. Gen. Khanh said he was ill.

The battle-uniformed junta members first met privately for three hours in a yellow hilltop villa, once a residence of Vietnamese emperors, which is reputed to be haunted by the ghost of

a Vietnamese maiden murdered there centuries ago.

Then the doors of the "haunted house" were opened to newsmen and TV cameras for the formal election, by secret ballot, of President Khanh. He got 50 of the 58 votes. Five ballots were cast for Lt. Gen. Tran Thien Khiem, Defense Minister, and one each for Gen. Minh and a field commander, Maj. Gen. Do Cao Tri. One ballot was left blank.

LIMITATION

Some observers saw signs that the junta, to which President Khanh remains responsible under the new system, had denied him power as absolute as he may have wished.

An original draft of the new constitution gave the President authority during a national emergency to "make all decisions and take all appropriate measures." But this section was amended to make such Presidential action subject to the approval of the Military Revolutionary Council.

The new provisional National Assembly, which is scheduled to start meeting Oct. 5, will consist of 100 civilians by the junta and 50 representatives of the armed forces. The body can vote resolutions on national policy but its recommendations are not binding.

Other sections of the constitution prohibit arbitrary arrest, imprisonment or torture and guarantee the "private life, dignity and honor of the citizen as well as his family and his home."