

Discontent Increasing, but Coup Is Doubtful

Troops, Secret Police Prop Diem Regime

By Beverley Deepe

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SAIGON, July 8—Despite increasing discontent with South Viet-Nam's ruling family, a coup d'etat seems difficult to accomplish at this time.

The maintenance of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his family in power—or toppling them—depends on military officers stationed around this capital city.

It appears almost impossible for civilian demonstrations and riotous mobs to topple the 62-year-old President, his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and powerful Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu.

"This government is utterly ruthless," explained one reliable observer. "If a mob moved toward the palace, the government would line up the troops and mow them down. If 10,000 school kids marched to the palace, they would not make it over the fence.

"It would be just like Hungary. They had spirit and

dedication. But what good is a rock against a tank?"

A two-month-old Buddhist crisis of riots, demonstrations and one monk who burned himself to death polarized general long-standing grievances against the President and his family.

However, to overthrow Diem and family and then establish another regime requires gnawing dissatisfaction not only throughout the army, but also among key units in the vicinity of Saigon, the most important being elements of the one armored cavalry squadron composed of tanks, armored cars, M-114 armored reconnaissance vehicles and M-113 armored personnel carriers.

Significantly, last week President Diem and his brother Nhu brought to trial 19 soldiers and two civilians who led the unsuccessful 1960 coup d'etat to serve as a warning to Vietnamese military and American policymakers.

News Analysis

Since the 1960 coup attempt, Diem has built around himself an elaborate private army with intricate checks among its various elements. No major troop movements are allowed in the country without his approval.

Diem personally knows officers down to the rank of lieutenant colonel; leading generals known to be dissatisfied with the regime have been assigned staff positions without command of troops. Other generals in the Saigon area are selected not on their military abilities or personal loyalties to the President but on their willingness to remain neutral in a coup and their refusal to cooperate with Americans.

Unit commanders are also watched by "political commissars," civilians or other military officers.

The key unit in the President's private army is the

elite, black-bereted Presidential Guard, all members of which are especially selected for their personal loyalty to the palace. Highest ranking American officers and officials have been unable to discover its exact strength, but it is thought to contain more than 1000 men.

In 1960 coup, the Presidential Guard was the only significant unit that valiantly fought for the President until loyal troops arrived from the provinces. Since the 1960 coup, it has been equipped with a squadron of junior tanks, bazookas and grenade launchers that could counter an attack of armored units.

The 135th Territorial Regiment is the only regular army unit with the primary purpose of protecting the President and key installations around Saigon instead of fighting the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas. It is one of the few units in the

country known to be over-strength.

Also under the Department of Defense are more than 100 red-capped, khaki-clad members of the gendarmes who patrol streets near the presidential palace along with policemen.

Saigon, with a population of an estimated 2 million, has one of the largest police forces per capita of any city in the world. Four hundred civil disturbance policemen on constant 24-hour alert, can rush with machine guns to any part of the city in five minutes.

A secret police net checks on the army, the regular police, anti-Diem opposition elements and on its own members. Little is known in Saigon about the secret police, which is several distinct organizations. Two of the President's brothers—Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can—are known to have their own private secret police organizations.