

VIEW FROM SAIGON

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The biggest question in South Viet Nam is when Maj-Gen. Nguyen Khanh will return to power. He has been Armed Forces Commander since stepping down as Premier three weeks ago.

A parallel question circulating among Gen. Khanh's enemies is: "How shall we murder him?"

The 37-year-old Gen. Khanh appears to be the key that American policymakers hope to use to turn the losing trend into victory on the military front and the disintegration into stability on the political front.

The current civilian government headed by Premier Tran Van Huong appears to be marking time until it falls. This leads to educated predictions that Gen. Khanh again will hold the reins of government power, perhaps while retaining his post as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces.

Premier Huong, by imposing martial law in Saigon last Wednesday, has adopted his policy of optimum strength. Now he can only act in a "more - of - the - same" direction—more troops, more blood, more arrests or longer curfew hours.

Few observers expect this policy to succeed, as Mr. Huong's government is considered a stubborn one but not a strong one. This again throws the problem into the hands of the Army—and Gen. Khanh.

Yesterday, Saigon's military governor, Brig. Gen. Pham Van Dong, threatened to execute violators of the martial law decree "on the spot" in a move to protect the government against renewal of the anti-Huong rioting that raged in the capital for four days last week.

The country's High National Council meanwhile published a resolution giving grudging support to Mr. Huong's 24-day-old government, while at the same time urging Cabinet changes that would give South Viet Nam a regime capable of fighting the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas effectively.

A Buddhist leader yesterday called on the council to use its authority to oust Mr. Huong on the ground that the Premier "no longer has the confidence of the people." Thich Tam Chau, head of the Buddhist Institute for Secular Affairs, told a Saigon news conference that "if the council does not do this, then we will do so ourselves by a program of non-co-operation and non-violence against the government."

Lists of key political personalities are already being drawn up for consideration in a new government. There is speculation that second civilian government will be formed—and that it too will fall—before Gen. Khanh reasserts himself in the political limelight.

In this event it is feared his enemies would resort to assassination.

That possibility has been a worry to Gen. Khanh's

security officers since he entered the Premier's office on Jan. 30. However, in the past, their chief fear was a coup d'etat by the armed forces, then headed by Lt. Gen. Tran Thien Khiem and by the Dai Viet political party headed by Dr. Nguyen Tom Hoan.

Since August, both Gen. Khiem and Dr. Hoan have been virtually exiled. Gen. Khanh, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, is considered to be in a stronger position now than when he emerged on the political scene.

However, not long ago one of Gen. Khanh's chief security aids warned him: "Anyone can murder you at any time. It's the simplest thing in the world." Gen. Khanh replied with a noncommittal shrug.

Since the late August pro-Buddhist student demonstrations that ended in Gen. Khanh's step-down, the political and military situation has deteriorated sharply.

Even more disintegration is predicted before Gen. Khanh again emerges as a strongman. The fall of the Huong government is likely to bring turbulence that would ripple out to the provinces, already enmeshed in fighting the Viet Cong guerrillas, and further reduce the already low morale of the armed forces and civil servants.

BUDDHISTS

The enemies of the Huong government are pro-Buddhist students, Buddhist movement leaders and a few disgruntled politicians. These are the same forces that toppled Gen. Khanh and promoted the overthrow of the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem last November.

This fact leads many observers to predict that these forces possibly will attempt to topple any future government.

Many sources, including Buddhist laymen, openly say the Buddhist and student movements are penetrated by Communists.

Saigonese are taking seriously the prediction of the Buddhist politico-priest Thich Tri Quang that blood will flow on the streets of Saigon before the end of the year. Buddhist leaders are also saying they will call for a ceasefire in the anti-Communist war within the next few months.

Among the arguments used to oppose Mr. Huong, the main one appears to be that the boyish-faced 63-year-old Premier has not set up the machinery for selecting the National Congress. The Congress, supposedly to be established in December, would include more than 100 members who would confirm the appointment of Phan Khac Suuias chief of state and would be responsible for drafting the permanent constitution by November, 1965.

Once the Congress is established—if ever—pro-Communist Buddhist leaders would be given a legal source of political power to influence the selection of future governments and the general prosecution of the war.