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cabinet 1 (normass/deepe)

(This is the first of a two-part series on the newly-installed Cabinet of Prime Minister Tran Van Huong.).

SAIGON, MAY 27--Against the backdrop of the Paris peace talks, and as government soldiers fought Viet Cong troops amongst this capital's suburban swimming pool and ~~snob~~-snob-set villas, the words of Prime Minister Tran Van ~~Huong~~ Huong in introducing his new Cabinet this ~~week~~ week-end seemed poignantly accurate:

"The country is facing a difficult situation...Vietnam is turning another historic corner more decisive than others...My purpose to cooperate with the President is to sacrifice the rest of my life for our country because I believe the life or death of Vietnam depends on the honesty, competency and responsibility of those who have authority."

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cabinet 2 (normass/deepe)

Huong, with thick-lens~~a~~ glasses perched mid-nose, spoke into a battery of microphones in the middle of the ~~Paris~~ Presidential Palace ballroom, aglitter with Louis-XIV-styled chandeliers and lush, hand-woven Vietnamese carpets. His words were directed at two men at the other end of the expansive ballroom: President Nguyen Van Thieu, wearing a dark-colored civilian suit, and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, wearing a high-buttoned bush-jacket outfit, often called by some Vietnamese as a ~~Chao~~ Mao-Tse-Tung outfit sans ~~and~~ mandarin collar.

Thieu's response to Huong's ~~wer~~ words were agreement that the country was in a difficult ~~posi~~ position, agreement that the constitution must be respected, indicating that the President was the key policy-decision-~~maker~~ maker with the Prime Minister simply executing ~~po~~ the announced policy, agreement that the ~~ine~~ integrity and prestige of the new Cabinet was critical at this moment. Unlike Huong, Thieu spoke of the Paris peace talks:

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cabinet 3 (normass/deepe)

"The Communists have taken advantage of these talks in Paris and the partial bombing halt to increase the war, and to increase their infiltration into the South. They hope to take advantage of the peace talks to obtain on the battlefield what they could not obtain on the battlefield. They are going to launch more suicidal attacks with the hope of making noise abroad and at the same time to attack the cities to create death, suffering and homelessness to tens of thousands of people."

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Thieu and Ky then stode across the carpet—all this being televised to the Vietnamese people—to congratulate Huong and his cabinet, standing in formation across the expanse of the ballroom.

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cabinet 4 (normass/deepe)

It seemed that these three men--Thieu, Ky and Huong--would decide the direction of what Huong had termed Vietnam's historical turning point--its life-and-death destiny.

Is the installation of Huong and his new Cabinet a step towards peace in South Vietnam?

American officials, speaking in private, viewed the sit question in all its simplicities and answered yes. Vietnamese political sources viewed the questions in its labyrinth of complexities and answered maybe.

The American mission, speaking officially, regarded the Cabinet change as an "internal Vietnamese matter" and hence beyond official comment. In private, though, American sources said the Mission had pushed for Huong for Prime Minister inx last November--before serious contemplation of the Paris peace talks-- and would have preferred him over the outgoing Prime Minister, ~~Nguyeh~~-Va Nguyen Van Loc. These sources say Huong's Prime Minister-ship opens a significant, potential accomodi accomodation between the Saigon regime and the Communist side, specifically the Na Southern-oriented National Liberation Front.

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cabinet 5 (normass/deepe)

They argue that Huong gives more prestige to the civilian components of the government, which we may be more willing to compromise with the National Liberation Front, while simultaneously concurrently reducing the power of the Vietnamese militant Vietnamese generals who are currently unwilling to agree to an internal political compromise with the NLF.

Vietnamese political sources, including some in the current government and some close to Huong, regard this line of reasoning, in the words of one, as to the world "a first-class American Madison Avenue snow job designed to sell the idea that Saigon will accommodate wants to accommodate with the Communists." These sources said Huong's first order of business is not to accommodate with the Communists—but to unify the nationalities. They note that the key certainty is not an accommodation with the Communists—but the pivotal uncertainty of unification of the nationalities.

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cabinet 6 (normass/deepe)

"South Vietnam is not prepared for peace any more than it was prepared for war a decade ago," one Vietnamese influential politician explained. And, as another added, "The question is whether Huong can unify the Vietnamese nationalists enough to prepare us for the luxury of peace."

If Huong succeeds in this unification process, then the non-Communist government could in some way allow the Communists into the legal government--if, of course, the Communists are willing to enter it. If this entrance into Saigon government --very much on Saigon's terms--would be possible because the Washington-Saigon bargaining position in the peace talks would be greatly enhanced by having some a large chunk of the non-Communists unified, these sources say. If Huong fails, then to allow the Communists into the government, even as an organized minority, would still mean then could "swallow up" the ~~non-Communist~~ dis-organized, non-Communist majority and ultimately seize dominant control in the South and eventual re-unification with North Vietnam.

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cabinet 7 (normass/deepe)

In short, Vietnamese political sources believe the American officials are selling the ideal of Huong's appointment as a significant step towards an accommodation with the Communists because it reduces the power of the opposition Vietnamese generals. But, the Vietnamese believe it may enhance the prospects of peace in the South--assuming p Paris peace talks reach this t stage--by strengthening the American position in Paris.

"The qu important question is whether Huong succeeds or fails in bringing unity to the nationalist side," one Vietnamese source explained. "The secondary question is whether he will accommodate with the Communists. If he succeeds, South Vietnam has a chance to survive as a free country and the Americans will continue to support South Vietnam to remain free. If he succeeds, there is still the hope of defeating the Communists politically, ~~// as well as militarily //~~ in the Saigon arena at at the conference table. B

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cabinet 8 (normass/deepe)

"If Huong fails, the Vietnamese think the Americans will still force Saigon to accommodate with the Communists--and this will amount to an American sell-out. The non-Communist nationalists must get unified before an accommodation is reached with the Communists--or else it is a political defeat for both the non-Communists Vietnamese and for the American position."

Beyond Huong's prodigious task of unifying the nationalists lies the question of how much compromise either the Americans or the Communists will make from their relatively frozen positions regarding the future Saigon government. These concessions center around President Thieu--not Huong--who is the anchor man of the legal government.

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cabinet 10 (normass/deepe)

American sources here believe that in the coming weeks the political focus of personalities may well shift from President Thieu to ~~President~~ Prime Minister Huong--with Huong gaining more of the public limelight to establish "the national image," in the words of wone. But, Vietnamese sources here view the foundation of the ^{legal} Saigon government as still resting in the Presidency, based on the American-promoted elections of last year.

But, Vietnamese sources believe some compromise solution is shaping up to break through the officially-stated impasse ~~between~~ of the Communists and the non-Communists regarding the future Saigon government. These sources believe the newly-appointed foreign minister, Tran Thanh Chanh, is more of a negotiator than a foreign minister. (He met both American envoy ~~Harrison~~ ^{Walter} ~~Hari~~ Harriman and North Vietnamese ~~env~~ representative Xuan Thuy, now in Paris, during the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos). ~~Thanh would be~~ ready to go to Paris to represent South Vietnam--if the Paris talks evolve into discussions about the future of the South--these sources believe.

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cabinet 11 (normass/deepe)

Officially, the South Vietnamese government position for some years has been that Saigon would discuss the future government in the South with Hanoi—but not with the National Liberation Front, which was regarded as simply a puppet of Hanoi's Communist regime. Later, the stand was modified by to say, as did American Secretary of State Dean Rusk, that the National Liberation Front could be present represented on the Hanoi delegation. Then, six weeks more than a month ago, the outgoing Foreign Minister Tran Van Do stated that Saigon would meet with the National Liberation Front, and the Front, if disarmed, would be treated much like a political party. Hence, this gradual softening, plus the appointment of Foreign Minister Thanh, has increased the view here that in the event of a second-has public phase to the Paris discussions, Saigon would officially begin talks with the National Liberation Front, either publica publicly or secretly secretly in Paris or elsewhere.

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