

China War Peril Impels Inquiry Now—Fulbright

VIET ELECTION SPED

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SAIGON.

A secret decision was made at last month's Honolulu conference to try to speed up South Viet Nam's elections for a national legislative body—previously announced for late 1967—to "early 1967 or as soon as possible," reliable sources indicate.

The sources attributed the decision to substantial American pressure—including the desire of President Johnson himself—to speed up the vote.

Vietnamese observers view the action as an index of the desire of the Johnson administration to attempt to negotiate a peace settlement here by offering substantial concessions to the Hanoi regime through rearranging the Saigon political and governmental structure.

Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, before the conference, had announced the late 1967 timetable, which would give the government almost two years to pacify large blocs of the rural population now under some Communist control.

Observers here doubt the anti-Communist South Vietnamese government will secure and control a safe proportion of the population by the earlier dates.

The anti-Communist generals, who actually hold the reins of power in South Viet Nam, are considered to be reluctant to support the speed-up, but have little alternative except to do so.

METHODS

Observers believe there are two distinct approaches to negotiation. The first is a formal, "around the table," type of international conference, such as the 14-nation Geneva conference which ended the French Indochina war in 1954. The second is an "under-the-table" agreement made by rearranging the power structure within the Saigon political arena.

Both approaches can be made simultaneously, but the second is likely to be more productive than the first.

This second approach is being set in motion as the Vietnamese government begins its first of an "evolutionary" three-stage process for "democracy-building."

These three stages are:

1. The formation of a "democracy-building" council, slated to be named Thursday. This council of 80 to 100 civilians will include one representative from the 43 provinces plus representatives of four religious groupings and two political parties. This

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ernment based on civilian authority, which takes a softer line on dealing with the Communists, would be more amenable for possible internal arrangements leading to a peace settlement within the next several years.

As long as Vietnamese politicians, intellectuals and civic leaders had to choose between supporting the American-backed, anti-Communist regime or the Communists, most would select—reluctantly and with grumbling—the anti-Communists. Now, however, a third choice is being made available—a pro-French, pro-neutralist solution.

Catholic leaders, for example, have consistently chosen the Americans over the Communists. But many Catholics are French-trained and their sympathies will swing toward the third alternative.

Almost all of the members said to be slated for the democracy-building council are of older generations, more influenced by the French than by the Americans. Almost all speak better French than English, some speak better French than Vietnamese.

There has been considerable in-fighting and intrigue in connection with the membership of the democracy-building council. But one fact is clear:

The civilian politicians have served notice on the military junta that either they will get substantial powers—more than advisory powers—or else they will resign en masse. Some reliable sources believe the military junta may be creating a political Frankenstein monster that it will not be able to control in the future.

The questions raised by the controversy between Sen. Robert Kennedy and the Johnson Administration over the possible inclusion of the Viet Cong into the Saigon government will be answered by the members of the democracy-building council.

The true worry of the anti-Communists here is not that the Viet Cong as a political organization will be included in the government—they don't believe the Viet Cong will now accept it. The worry is that covert Viet Cong agents posing as nationalists will be included, the power and the opportunity to legally subvert the future government's institutions.

Almost all the government agencies—police, army, political parties and religious groupings—are considered to have been infiltrated long ago by Communist agents.

One of the most significant power blocs within the country, which will probably be represented in the democ-

racy-building council, is the militant Buddhist organization. In central Viet Nam—operating behind American tactical units—the Buddhist organization is considered—by other Buddhist leaders—to be from 50 to 70 per cent infiltrated by Communist agents.

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council is to draft a national constitution and draw up regulations for future elections.

2. The draft constitution would then be submitted to a national referendum, currently scheduled to be held in November of this year.

3. Then a national legislative assembly would be elected.

If the draft constitution calls for a prime ministerial system of government—as distinct from a residential system—the national legislative body would be responsible for naming a new government.

The civilian legislative council and the constitution drafting council are important in that the military junta will be phased out of existence and the legal basis of government will be in the hands of elected representatives—probably civilians.

At the sub-surface political level, the change-over is almost certain to shift the government from a hard anti-Communist line to a softer, potentially pro-neutralist position.

Reliable observers believe the Hanoi regime now finds unacceptable any negotiations with a hardline military junta, which would be a sizeable obstacle to Communist political maneuvers. However, a gov-