

Viet Regime's Downfall— A Step to Losing the War

Neutralist Trend Part of Red Plot

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South Viet Nam's political deterioration as evidenced by the downfall of yet another government is interpreted here as carrying the country closer to a neutralist position.

Anti-Communist Vietnamese sources view the resignation of anti-Communist Premier Phan Huy Quat and the re-emergence of a deeply divided collection of military leaders as perhaps a major turning point.

These sources fear that important political forces—religious and secular—in Saigon are on the verge of making a behind-the-scenes tacit agreement with the Communist Viet Cong fighters and their political organization, the National Liberation Front (NLF), to form an official neutralist coalition government.

Anti-Communist sources equate a negotiated political settlement at this time with capitulation to the Communists.

These anti-Communist sources say, however, the fundamental question is still whether Hanoi and the NLF would in the near future settle for a neutralist coalition in which they would be assured of a controlling interest in the government.

Instead, Hanoi and the NLF may follow the Peking line and hold out for the total defeat of the American position. Vietnamese security officials estimate that the Communists need at least two more years to seize and totally hold political power in Viet Nam. This estimate assumes that the present pacing of political and military deterioration remains the same.

Since the fall of the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem in November, 1963, the effect of each successive

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coup d'etat, false coup, counter-coup and government crisis has brought a sharp deterioration of anti-Communist morale and a diminishing of anti-Communist strength and influence.

Since the fall of Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh as anti-Communist strongman nearly four months ago, the anti-Communist sector has lacked a man, political party or apparatus in which to unify the anti-Communist position. Instead, tough-line anti-Communist officers are either publicly discredited or quietly maneuvered out of positions of power. This has affected the government administration, security and planning from the central level in Saigon to the outlying provinces. This deterioration is expected to be hastened by this last government crisis, marked as it is by serious disagreement among the generals themselves.

During the past month in Saigon, the hottest speculation among Western diplomats was whether South Viet Nam would collapse in Chiang Kai-shek style. French sources openly predicted it might; other Western sources "did not exclude the possibility."

Then, as press reports flowed into Washington telling of the political turmoil last week, one anti-Communist Vietnamese explained, "This is goodbye, Viet Nam; this is the end of the American dream—part I—their dream of ending Communist imperialism."

Anti-Communist Vietnamese sources do not see the political re-emergence of the Vietnamese military leaders as a solution, but as a symptom of the problem. These sources explain that the essence of the political problem is the increasing Communist penetration, on the one hand into every aspect of Vietnamese government, police, armed forces and civilian life and on the other hand, the unwillingness of American officials to exercise their political power to combat actively the subversion for fear of being labeled "colonialists" and the inability of Saigon anti-Communists to do so.

"The persons working for the Communist version of neutralism have even infiltrated into the Girl Scouts," one Vietnamese Catholic housewife explained, as she burst into tears fearing that even the members of her family would soon be arrested or assassinated. "These persons working for the Communists are even moving within Catholic circles, creating divisions among us."

"The way it works," she explained, "is like this. Suppose you have three Catholics in the room. The persons working for the Communists will criticize one for being a southerner, one for belonging to a certain political party. Pretty soon, the three Catholics refuse to work with each other and then they start fighting each other. None of my family will say anything about politics to the people we used to consider our friends. We don't trust anyone any more."

Interwoven with the Catholic opposition to Prime Minister Quat was the sectional differences between southern-born Vietnamese and the largely northern-born elements within the Quat cabinet. Acting Chief of State Phan Khac Suu, who resigned yesterday, was born in South Viet Nam and attracted that segment of the population in his conflict with the Prime Minister over a constitutional matter. During the Quat-Suu conflict, however, pro-neutralists made house-by-house visits to prominent southern-born families, urging the Southerners "to stick together" in opposing Mr. Quat.