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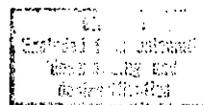
Presentation Before FSI Special Course on Vietnam
27 October 1964, 9-11 am

The Coup d'etat of November 1963 and its Aftermath

It seems incredible to me that only one year has passed since those tension-filled days of October 1963 which led up to the military coup of 1 November and the demise of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

The coup had cast a long shadow before it. In 1954, when Diem first took office, his authority was immediately threatened by three dissident sects and by the Francophile Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army, Nguyen Van Hinh. Hinh had openly boasted that he could oust Diem between siesta hour and dinner, and Diem's sister-in-law, Madame Nhu, had equally openly dared him to try to do so. For many reasons Hinh did not, and left quietly for France where he remains today.

Diem's rule was threatened again in November 1960 when a military group headed by the paratroop commander, Nguyen Chanh Thi, stormed the palace, took possession of the key points in Saigon, and forced Diem to negotiate. Diem temporized long enough to allow units from outside Saigon to overwhelm the rebel paratroopers and force the flight of their leaders and the surrender of their units. In this Diem was much aided by the action of a forceful young ~~colonel~~ brigadier general named Nguyen Khanh who helped organize the forces which caused the downfall of the rebels.

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In February 1962 elements of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, the VNQDD, inspired two young pilots to bomb Diem's palace in Saigon. The record is not clear as to whether this was to be a prelude to a general military uprising, as one of the pilots who was captured later asserted. Diem was saved, however, though the palace was so badly damaged it was subsequently torn down and is being replaced by a more modern structure. The perpetrator of this plot, Nguyen Van Luc, is at present a member of the ~~newly appointed~~ High National Council. The pilot who was captured re-emerged after 1 November from a dungeon under the botanical gardens. He was crippled, and both of his hands had been severed from his arms.

After the failure of each of these attempts against Diem's life and regime, the President apparently emerged strengthened and had developed an almost messianic attitude toward his divine calling to lead the nation. ^{by 1963} had

The year 1963 opened on a bright note in Vietnam. Good effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program which had been so vigorously pursued by Diem and particularly by his alter ego brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were beginning to be felt in the countryside. The program had not been evenly applied everywhere; its implementation lagged in the delta but in the central highlands and coastal plain there was good reason to believe an answer had been found to the Viet Cong challenge.

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Diem continued his autocratic ways, however, skipped channels of command to directly order about Vietnamese Army units, shelved some of his key military officers, such as Gen. Duong Van (Big) Minh and Gen. Le Van Kim, who were both given innocuous and powerless sinecures. Gen. Khanh, the brilliant former Chief of Staff, was transferred to II Corps to keep him distant from political maneuvering in Saigon. Gen. Ton That Dinh, a youthful and mercurial personality, was by contrast placed in charge of the Vietnamese III Corps with headquarters in Saigon, because Diem had greater faith in his loyalty. Gen. Tran Thien Khiem, generally regarded as politically colorless, although a member of Diem's own Can Lao Party, had become Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff, replacing Khanh. Gen. Tran Van Don, who had served without particular military distinction but with considerable popular support from both the military and civilian populace in the I Corps area in northern South Vietnam, had been relieved of command and held a powerless position as Inspector General of the Army.

In those early months of 1963 there were many optimistic reports from Saigon concerning the course of the war. It was believed that the war had turned a corner and the path ahead lay upward. There was considerable good foundation for those beliefs.

The situation began to change dramatically, however, on 8 May 1963 when Buddhists celebrating Buddha's birthday in Hue were ordered

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to subordinate their display of the Buddhist flag to the display of the national flag, and in an angry demonstration at the radio station in Hue, troops opened fire on a Buddhist crowd killing nine. Those were indeed the shots heard 'round the world.

Buddhist-government differences began to flare in many places in Vietnam following the initial engagement in May and on 11 June. Buddhist monk Quang Duc carefully poured gasoline over himself in a downtown Saigon street and set himself afire.

This had been threatened by the Buddhists for some time if the government did not accede to their demands with respect to an end to alleged discrimination in favor of the Catholics.

Whereas the situation had been charged since May, it now became explosive. The courage and determination of the Vietnamese Buddhists to defend their cause against suppressive acts on the part of the Diem government had caught the imagination of youthful, heretofore nominal Buddhist adherents, students, younger army officers, and, of course, the always oppositionist Vietnamese politicians and intellectuals of Saigon.

The Diem government agreed to negotiate with the Buddhist leadership and down from Hue came a trio of Buddhist leaders, clearly under the sway of Tri Quang, the Buddhist demagogue whose fiery oratory originally assembled the Buddha's birthday celebrants in Hue.

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Just in time to avert major demonstrations, a statement was signed by the Buddhist leadership and Diem on 16 June and the cremation of the self-immolated monk proceeded without serious incident.

Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, however, chose the very moment of the cremation to call a meeting of her Women's Solidarity Movement and to announce her opposition, as well as that of her movement, to concessions to politically inspired religious groups.

The Buddhist leadership throughout the remainder of June and early July maintained an uneasy truce with the government but expressed open skepticism with respect to the government's fulfillment of its agreement. The skepticism was further confirmed when Ngo Dinh Nhu issued a secret communique to his Republican Youth urging them to combat Viet Cong penetration and pressure on the government disguised as legitimate religious complaint. The Buddhist leadership which had many sources of information within the government immediately circulated this communique ~~to the~~ Republican Youth and Nhu was forced to issue a subsequent clarification which did not wholly rectify the damage of his earlier statement.

Privately Tich Tri Quang is alleged to have said that he never expected the government to live up to its agreements and that, if they had met his five demands fully, he would have five more, and then five more, and then five more. He had caught the scent of victory and later

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admitted his objective was the down fall of the entire house of Ngo Dinh Diem.

Through July and into August Buddhist self-immolations occurred in Phan Thiet and Nha Trang and in Saigon a young Buddhist girl attempted in Xa Loi Pagoda to cut off her arm with an axe in protest to government actions against the Buddhists. The mother of Vietnam's most outstanding scientist and ambassador to several African states had become a Buddhist nun and threatened to burn herself if the government did not live up to its agreements. When Ngo Dinh Nhu was questioned on what his reaction to the self cremation of this venerable nun might be, he replied and I quote: "If she wants to barbecue herself, I will furnish the mustard." This is the last known of Nhu's many epithets concerning the Buddhist situation. A month later he was dead.

The Buddhist leadership took up headquarters at Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon and larger and larger crowds visited daily to hear the fiery oratory of Tri Quang and his associates. A veteran's group, clearly inspired by the government, staged a counter-protest at the pagoda and young monks began to arm themselves with simple weapons in preparation for further government action against them.

No amount of urging on the part of American leaders with respect to conciliation with the Buddhists appeared to have substantial effect upon President Diem. In this atmosphere, Ambassador Frederick Nolting, who was so highly respected by Diem as well as by the entire American mission and who had been a staunch supporter of the successful

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Strategic Hamlet Program, completed his tour in Saigon and departed for another post. Mr. William Trueheart, now Director of South East Asian Affairs of the Department of State, became Charge and able negotiator of America's interests at one of the darkest hours of American/Vietnamese relationships.

In the early morning hours of 21 August, the Xa Loi Pagoda as well as other major pagodas in Saigon were invested by police, backed up by Vietnamese Special Forces under the leadership of the strongly pro-Diem Special Forces commander, Col. Le Quang Tung. American reaction to these events was one of dismay, not only because of the suppressive nature of the action itself but also because these units had been trained, equipped, and financially supported by the United States Agency for International Development, by the Military Assistance Program

In conjunction with this crackdown on the Buddhists, martial law was declared and ^{Gen.} ~~Gen.~~ Ton That Dinh became the military governor of Saigon. The Buddhist leadership, including Tich Tri Quang, was arrested. Tri Quang, however, had previously disguised himself by shaving his eyebrows and took the identity of a junior and inconsequential monk. After a routine interrogation he was released and immediately made his way to the American Embassy where in a dramatic tug of war between the U. S. Marine guards and the Vietnamese police, he gained political asylum and remained until after the coup.

These events occurred as Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was en route to assume his post as Ambassador in Saigon. Ambassador Lodge

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took up where Ambassador Nolting had left off in attempting to urge the government and the Buddhists to further conciliation in order to prevent the political deterioration injurious to the war effort.

Vietnamese students, in turn, took up where the Buddhist leadership, now imprisoned, left off and there were once again demonstrations in the streets of Saigon leading eventually to a mass arrest of ^{thousands of} high school and university students, including many who had no part in the demonstrations. Buddhist agitation resumed under guidance of an underground second echelon Buddhist leadership.

As the students were unavailing in opposing the position of President Diem, so were the President's ears closed to the entreaties of Ambassador Lodge. Seeking only the release of non-implicated students, of reopening of the schools, the disinvestment by troops and police of the pagodas, ^{and the temporary departure of Nhu} the Ambassador was rebuffed at every turn by Diem. Ngo Dinh Nhu continued privately to press a hard line against the Buddhists upon the President, and Madame Nhu did so openly and publicly.

Considerable debate developed in the American press and among official circles in Washington and in Saigon as to whether the United States should continue its considerable material and financial support to Vietnam under circumstances where the ^{VIETNAMESE} government found itself in open and contentious dispute with an organized and legitimate segment of one of the world's great religions, ~~Buddhists~~. Without making any specific announcement, U.S. non-military economic aid ground to a halt. There was no sudden termination of this aid, rather monthly

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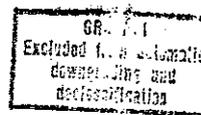
authorizations for the importation of goods under the Commodity Import Program were delayed and not signed. ~~The~~ Government of Vietnam inquiries concerning the situation met with temporizing responses. The displeasure of the United States was clear for all to see. Both Vietnamese who were genuinely concerned with the political future of their nation as well as long-time political opportunists sought to read the handwriting on the wall. In a more finite move, both the Military Assistance Program support to Vietnamese Special Forces was specifically curtailed pending the reorganization of the Special Forces under the established chain of command. It was General Dick Stilwell and I who delivered this ultimatum to Special Forces Commander Tung and his Chief of Staff and brother, Le Quang Trieu, It was the last time I saw either Tung or his brother alive.

At this the Government of Vietnam struck back. CIA was accused of attempting to overthrow the Vietnamese Government by military coup and Mme. Nhu's personal organ, the Times of Vietnam, faithfully and daily forwarded these charges. This was a critical mistake on the part of the Diem regime since it was later learned that the eventual successful coup plotters gave some credence to the Times of Vietnam accounts

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and gleefully interpreted them as a sign that perhaps the U.S. would support their coup. Thus it can be said that, ^{remotely} ~~in part~~, Mme. Nhu dug the grave of the Diem regime with her own mouth.

The Government of Vietnam began to grind to a halt. Ministries and the bureaucracy ^{handily} went through the motions. Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau ^{now Ambassador at London} shaved his head and left his post. However, National Assembly elections which had earlier been postponed because of martial law, were held without incident and without noticeable enthusiasm. On 27 September the UN General Assembly opened general debate on the question of human rights in South Vietnam and agreed to send observers on this question to Saigon. Their mission was not completed until after the government had fallen.

In this parlous situation, coup plotting began to be reported from a number of quarters. Immediately prior to the 1 November coup CIA reported some ten different coup groups in existence, one of which, a group headed by [redacted] had actually [redacted] begun to move but aborted at the last minute on 24 October.

Among the other groups was one headed by the President's intelligence chief, Tran Kim Tuyen, who had been one of the earliest and strongest supporters of the Diem regime, but who bore considerable guilt for some of the more drastic acts of the regime. Tuyen had become disaffected because of his and his wife's battles, both personal and

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9
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and political, with Ngo Dinh Nhu and Mme. Nhu. An astute politician, Tuyen saw considerable room for maneuvering and was carefully organizing a group of security officials, younger army officials and civilian politicians.

Tuyen's group had liaison with but was apparently separate from that of Col. Thao and Huynh Van Lang. Lang had been one of the founders of the Can Lao Party, Chief of the Finance Bureau of the Can Lao and Chief of the Office of Exchange of the Vietnamese Government. He had been ousted a short time before for financial speculation and had begun to organize a group of the younger and more articulate bureaucrats and politicians in Saigon. Thao had the contacts with the military.

Another group was that of Gen. Le Van Nghiem, a devout Buddhist, who had been relieved by Diem from his position in the Hue area when Nghiem refused to take strong action against the Buddhists.

A Dai Viet group also existed and has subsequently surfaced as a significant power since the coup.

Vietnamese Nationalist Party, the
The VNQDD which had staged the bombing of the palace in 1962 and had been driven underground was also attempting to carefully line up support for a military putsch against the government.

A group of colonels and other junior officers from the air borne, marines and armor, had also met to discuss military action.

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Most significant, however, was a generals' group headed by General "Big" Minh with Gen. Tran Van Don as contact man and Gen. Le Van Kim as political organizer. What in effect happened was that the generals' group subsumed several of the other smaller groups which had been under the organizational talents of Col. Thao, Dr. Tuyen, Huyn Van Lang, and the Dai Viets. The key negotiator between the generals and the young officers was Tran Thien Khiem in that he acted as liaison between the younger officers' group and the senior officers' group.

Ngo Dinh Nhu was not without some knowledge of these activities and in a move probably intended to shock and make them aware of his knowledge, he called the generals together and proposed to them what sounded strangely like an overthrow of his own brother in order to place Nhu in power.

This was not Nhu's only gambit, however. He had also conceived of a Machiavellian scheme in which he had enlisted the support of the Vietnamese Special Forces Commander, Col. Tung, and the Commander of the III Corps, Gen. Ton That Dinh. According to the scheme, a phony coup would be staged by relatively minor military elements from the area around Saigon. These units would invade Saigon, institute a reign of terror directed in part at Americans and eventually be put down by forces under the command of Dinh and Nhu. This scheme was supposed

11

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to convince the Americans that the alternative to Diem was anarchy and to force the Americans to capitulate to the Diem-Nhu view re Buddhist dissidence and the continuance of the war.

The Buddhists, from sources inside the government, knew of this scheme almost immediately.

Generals Don and Kim also had been aware, however, some time previously that a key to their plan to overthrow Diem would be the actions of Ton That Dinh, since the latter commanded the troops in the vicinity of Saigon. With this in mind they deliberately played on Dinh's ego, which was not inconsiderable to begin with, and had convinced Dinh to go to Diem and demand the post of Minister of Interior as payment for his past faithful service. As Don and Kim suspected, Dinh was flatly refused by the President and from that time forward, Nhu's phony coup and the generals' very real coup were merged as Dinh betrayed Nhu into the hands of the generals.

On the morning of 1 November, Admiral Harry Felt, Commander in Chief, Pacific, was concluding a visit to Saigon. At 1030 he paid a courtesy call on President Diem in the company of General Harkins and Ambassador Lodge. The conversation was correct but somewhat cool with Diem urging Admiral Felt to help heal current differences between the U.S. and Vietnam. With this, Admiral Felt was escorted to the airport

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by Gen. Tran Van Don and a formal farewell was said. Gen. Don left Ton Son Nhut Airport to go to a luncheon meeting of generals and senior commanders at nearby Joint General Staff headquarters. At this luncheon meeting were virtually every senior commander in the Vietnamese armed forces. As the generals were eating, truckloads of troops which Nhu had thought were in support of his phony coup, but which were actually resolved to end the Diem regime forever, began to pour into Saigon. As dessert was served, a detail of Vietnamese MPs entered the generals' dining room, surrounded it with sub-machine guns at the ready, and Gen. "Big" Minh announced that he was taking over the government.

Almost simultaneously, an attack began on Vietnamese Special Forces headquarters immediately adjacent to the Joint General Staff compound. Col. Tung, with a pistol at his head, was forced to phone to his senior officer in charge and order a cease fire. Tung was then taken out into the Joint General Staff compound and summarily shot to death. One by one the other commanders who had not already been privy to the coup joined in it. There were some exceptions. Col. Hien, the commander of the Vietnamese Air Force, was simply stripped of rank and command and released; Capt. Quynh, commandant of the navy, had been prematurely killed on his way to the luncheon by over-enthusiastic coup supporters; Col. Vien, commander of the airborne, now Gen. Vien, ~~Chief of Staff of~~

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~~the Joint General Staff~~, refused to accede to demands that he join the coup, remained loyal to Diem and offered to resign his commission or suffer the fate of Col. Tung. Vien's sincerity was so widely and well accepted that he was merely detained for the period of the coup and later promoted to his present position.

The battle for Saigon lasted 17 hours. Throughout the remainder of 1 November and into the morning of 2 November, opposition to coup forces came primarily from the Presidential Guard and from the 42nd Ranger Battalion which had not gotten the word that the phony coup was off and a real coup was on and had considerable difficulty in eventually joining the coup forces which they apparently had wanted to do all along. During the night, 600 rounds of 105 artillery and 81 MM mortar landed on the presidential guard barracks and Gia Long Palace. In the early morning hours of 2 November after a lengthy tank duel the Presidential Guard surrendered and Diem phoned the generals to offer unconditional surrender.

The exact sequence of events between 6:50 in the morning of 2 November and 10:00 o'clock the same morning is still somewhat shrouded. It is certain that, by 10:00 a. m., Diem and Nhu were dead. The most probable reconstruction of events indicates that sometime near 8:00 p. m. on the night of 1 November Diem and Nhu had learned emphatically that the coup in progress was not their phony coup but was in fact a major

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military effort to unseat them. They then left Gia Long Palace through a secret underground tunnel in company with the director of the Republican Youth Movement, Cao Xuan Vy. They arrived at the home of a wealthy Chinese Nationalist businessman in Cholon around 9:30 p. m. They had already taken the precaution of rigging the Palace switchboard so the phone calls between them and the generals apparently originated from the Palace, but actually after 9:30 p. m. were conducted from the home of the Chinese businessman. After Diem had offered to surrender at 0650 on 2 November, a military detachment was dispatched to Gia Long Palace to conduct ^{him and Nhu} ~~them~~ to the Joint General Staff headquarters. Diem and Nhu themselves went to the nearby St. Francis Catholic Church and were seen there between about 8:00 and 8:30 in the morning.

The last unchallengeable fact in this series is that they were conducted into an M-113 armored personnel carrier at approximately 9:00 a. m. after some discussion had occurred between Diem, Nhu and the MP and armored group which had come to arrest them. They were dead on arrival at Joint General Staff headquarters in the same armored personnel carrier at approximately 10:00 o'clock.

Pictures which I believe to be authentic and which came into my possession on the morning of 3 November showed Diem and Nhu with their hands tied behind them, apparently bullet riddled, and unmistakably dead on the floor of an armored personnel carrier. On the morning of 3 November the Vietnamese radio, then controlled by the generals,

15
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announced that Diem and Nhu had committed suicide by taking poison in the church in Cholon. A later story which was circulated was that Nhu had secreted grenades in his clothes and exploded them at the moment of capture. A third story was that Nhu had shot Diem and then himself shortly after their capture.

The pictures do not bear out these allegations. Diem apparently received one or two at most small caliber, probably pistol, wounds in the back of his head. Nhu was apparently literally hacked to death. The most likely account I have heard is that Nhu had taunted a young officer who was their escort to Joint General Staff headquarters. This same officer's wife had been allegedly severely tortured by the Vietnamese secret police. Goaded by Nhu, the officer took his carbine bayonet and stabbed Nhu, according to the report of the French doctor who issued the death certificate, more than 30 times Diem attempted to intercede and the officer shot Diem in the back of the head with a pistol. A usually reliable eye witness reported to me having seen this same young officer with his arm covered with gore and brandishing his bayonet on arrival at the JGS compound. It may be some time before all the facts associated with these events are known fully.

The generals had originally planned to install a civilian government as quickly as possible and to take only a minimal part in the task of governing. In the struggle to form a government in the days following

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1 November 1963, it became evident, however, only "Big" Minh himself had the power to hold the many contending factions together. Civilian politicians wrangled interminably among themselves and with the generals with respect to who and what groups should be represented. Gen. Le Van Kim, probably the most astute of the coup group, dealt with this problem and told me with some exasperation in early November that he had the hardest job of any of the generals, that the others had only to fight, which they were trained to do, whereas he had to argue with the politicians which he was not trained to do and for which task he evidently had very little taste. The government which emerged had "Big" Minh as Chief of State with Nguyen Ngoc Tho, who had been Vice President under Diem, assuming the premiership. The generals took only ~~four~~ *three* other posts, that of National Defense under Gen. Tran Van Don; Information under Gen. Tran Tu Oai; ~~Youth and Sports under newly-promoted Gen. Doan Mau.~~ The post of Minister of Security went to the irrepressible Gen. Ton That Dinh, who had been in charge of the raids on the pagodas and the Military Governor of Saigon following that incident. Gen. Dinh immediately reinstated dancing in Saigon, which had long been banned by Mme. Nhu, and to the chagrin of his co-conspirators, exhibited with maps and charts to all who visited his office how he singlehandedly conducted the coup that unseated Diem. Significantly perhaps, Gen. Dinh was convinced to give up his direct command of troops in the III Corps

17
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area and the functions of police authority and control over province chiefs were stripped from the office of Gen. Dinh prior to his assumption of his ministership.

The new government immediately ran into a basic problem. There were ~~immediate~~ demands on the part of the formerly suppressed political groups to purge Diemists in government, but the opposition offered so little by way of talent to replace the purgees, in many cases the only replacements available were persons of acknowledged third or fourth rate capabilities.

The Viet Cong, which apparently had been caught short in exploiting the coup itself, did not miss their opportunity to extend their power in the countryside while Saigon sought to erect a new edifice of government. Since lines of authority were confused and exercise of authority by remaining Diemist officials was questionable, a great lethargy set in upon both the civilian bureaucracy and the military establishment. The Viet Cong attacked their primary targets, the strategic hamlets, entered many unopposed, destroyed others, tore down fences, and occupied areas previously closed to them.

A great game of musical chairs began throughout the governmental heirarchy. Province chiefs, who are the most fundamental echelon of governmental control in the countryside, were in some places changed five or six times within a three-month period. New and younger military commanders were established within the military echelons and the

18
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generals promoted themselves liberally. The younger officers who carried the brunt of fighting the coup, however, received few promotions.

At the center of the fight for privilege and promotion was Premier Tho, never a particularly effective administrator, long absent from the mainstream of events because his position as Vice President under Diem was entirely a sinecure. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems that faced Vietnam, he became the symbol to many of continuing Diemist influence and of indecision and weakness, contrasting in a strongly unfavorable light with the previous decisive, if unpopular, leadership of Diem. Both military and civilian leaders awaited their orders to continue the battle against the Viet Cong. Few orders were forthcoming and those which were promulgated were in many cases confused or overestimative of the capabilities of those charged with their implementation.

The prime activity of the previous government, the strategic hamlet program, was revamped and achieved a rather minor position in the planning of the new government. There was, in fact, not a little official denigration of the previous strategic hamlet endeavors.

Remaining aloof from the struggle and turmoil of Saigon, Gen. Nguyen Khanh had been appointed commander of the I Corps area, encompassing the four northern-most provinces of South Vietnam. He had given his support to the coup group of 1 November but with the specific

19
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stipulation that the life of President Diem be spared. In fact, Khanh's part in the 1 November coup had been to assure the non-interference of troops under his command in the II Corps area and to evacuate Diem by air to the country of Diem's choosing. Khanh had been promoted to Major General but was apparently deliberately exiled to this northern war zone in order to isolate him from the political bickerings of the capital. His popularity among the military, due to his previous position as Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff, made him an all too apparent threat to the unique control exercised by the principal perpetrators of the coup.

In December 1963, Gen. Khanh began to grow a beard and confided to a close associate that he would not shave it until he believed the revolution had been completed. In late December, he went into a kind of hibernation, remaining in his quarters, apparently deeply depressed by events, cut off from contact with all but his closest associates and obviously giving serious consideration as to his future.

Former Diem regime exiles began to pour back into Saigon. A boatload of returnees from Poulo Condore, the Devil's Island of Vietnam, included the venerable politician Pham Khac Suu, who had been so mistreated as to have virtually reached senility at the age of ~~60~~⁶⁰; Dr. Pham Quang Dan, who had denounced the Diem regime over the radio during the coup of 1960, by contrast emerged full of health but somewhat

20
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discredited due to his pleadings for pardon in the months just prior to the demise of the House of Ngo.

From France came Gen. Nguyen Van Vy, a former officer in the Vietnamese Imperial Guard who had left at the time of Bao Dai's ouster. From Switzerland came Hoang Co Thuy, a young lawyer who had been the political backer of the 1960 coup. From Cambodia came Col. Nguyen Chanh Thi, the paratrooper leader of the assault on the Palace in 1960. Out of hiding came Nguyen Van Luc, perpetrator of the February 1962 bombing of the Palace. Perhaps the most significant returnee, however, was a Vietnamese of French nationality, Lt. Col. Tran Dinh Lan, an officer The shadowy Col. Lan, Vietnamese by birth, had amassed a reputation for conspiracy and intrigue and his arrival in Vietnam and his appointment to work with the Francophile chief of police, Maj. Gen. Mai Huu Xuan, immediately brought cries of dismay from the newspapers and the Francophobes. In January Saigon was flooded with rumors concerning the possibility of a pro-French coup, inspired, according to these rumors, by Col. Lan. The Deputy Chief of National Police, Col. Tran Ba Than, added somewhat to the speculation by his release of a few key Viet Cong prisoners, the destruction of Viet Cong dossiers, the exile and arrest of strongly anti-communist police and Surete officials, and the placement in a key bureau in the Surete of a police officer who had several months before openly

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defected to the Viet Cong and who, it was subsequently learned, probably had been a Viet Cong agent all along. Col. Than, as well as Gen. Xuan, were widely thought to be agents. In the case of Than, it is more likely that he was and is a North Vietnamese agent.

On the night of 28 January 1964, Gen. Khanh called in his American military advisor and told him that he was very disturbed concerning information he had received regarding French machinations in Saigon and that he would be going to Saigon to investigate the situation himself. Gen. Khanh arrived in Saigon on 29 January and entered into conversations with Gen. Tran Thien Khiem, who, it will be recalled, was the key liaison point between the generals coup group of 1 November and the younger commanders who controlled troops in the Saigon area. These officers were already restive because of their failure to achieve any recognition for conducting the coup of 1 November, greatly affected by the rumors of French plotting, somewhat disgusted at the actions of contending factions within Gen. Minh's government, and considerably concerned over the virtually unopposed advances of the Viet Cong in the 90 days following "Big" Minh's assumption of power.

At 4:00 a. m. on the morning of 30 January 1964, marine, air borne, paratroop and armored units, practically the same units which had conducted the coup of 1 November, overthrew the Minh government in a bloodless coup de main and installed Gen. Khanh in power. The coup

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was over by 7:00 a. m. Gens. Don, Dinh, Kim, Xuan and Vy were arrested and, though never officially charged, were accused of complicity of plotting with the French to renew French influence in the area. Gen. "Big" Minh, who at first refused to cooperate with the Khanh government, to preserve the military unity accepted the powerless position of Chief of State at the appointment of Khanh, who then installed himself as Prime Minister. Gen. Khiem became Minister of National Defense.

Gen. Khanh's coup, though it was not known at the time, marked a decisive end not only to the Diemists remnants within high places in government, such as Premier Nguyen Ngoc Tho and Gens. Don, Dinh, etc., it also broke the mold of the ruling class which has existed in Vietnam for more than a century. During that period, Vietnamese leaders have been typically of the Mandarinal class, Anamese and Catholic because of the special educational advantages, accorded under the French, to Catholics and converts. The new leadership of Vietnam is Cochin Chinese, Buddhist and very much removed from the Mandarinal disciplines of their predecessors. They are also on the whole younger and less experienced. The second coup within 90 days also meant that the dragon's teeth which had been sown since the Buddhist demonstrations of May 1963 had taken root. The whirlwind to be reaped has not yet blown itself out. Whereas the Diem regime had gambled heavily on its authoritarian power to extend

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the strategic hamlets quickly into the countryside and through them to isolate the peasant from the Viet Cong, the more fragmented and divisive society which emerged after Diem could only hope to proceed more cautiously in slower and smaller stages toward the eventual elimination of the Viet Cong. The banana republic tradition of military coups became part of the thinking of every ambitious troop commander, and the task of the United States became increasingly complex in applying its military and financial strength to the problem of insurgency because of the shaky political base in Saigon. Whereas before thousands of strategic hamlets had been planned and a good quota of them built, emphasis shifted away from this concept to that of the oil spot whereby the centers of power would be consolidated and their influence extended to the countryside in a hopefully perceptive fashion. The political leavening of authoritarian force dropped away from government programs and no positive political catalyst has replaced it. In its stead have come clamorings of special privilege groups, the Buddhists, the Catholics, the students, the laborers, the military factions. With Khanh the changes of faces and appointments began anew. Civilian political parties, such as the Dai Viet and the VNQDD and now the National Salvation Councils, have arisen to call for their place on the appointments list and to seek the disarray of their real or imagined opposition.

In brief retrospect which the events of 1 November have afforded, I conclude that, while it was probably not possible to go with Diem since,

SECRET

SECRET

in fact, the momentum of the Diem regime had ground to a virtual halt, the Vietnamese have not yet replaced that regime with a fundamental decisive leadership or an underlying political philosophy necessary to provide the cutting edge in a war that requires the conviction and responsiveness of the majority of the population in order to achieve victory. We cannot turn the clock back one year and I doubt that it would be useful to do so. There is still time, there is still hope. A new peacefully chosen government is emerging in Vietnam at this moment. The hour is very late. ^{later} Historians will judge whether this is the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning.

October 1964

SECRET