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Vietnam War Entering New Phase; Showing Signs of Political Struggle;
Military Clashes Steadily Decreasing

(Saigon, November 1, Correspondent SAKANAKA) South Vietnam greeted the 7th anniversary since the downfall of the Ngo Dinh Diem Government in 1963, on November 1. General Duong Van MINH, who was the principle leader of the coup d'etat at the time, held a small reception, commemorating this day, and called for the solidarity of the people. The THIEU Government, however, decorated the streets of Saigon with national flags, and seems to be trying to demonstrate the control power of the Government. From this day, the southern part of South Vietnam, centering on Saigon, will finally enter the dry season. The THIEU Government advocates the progress of the pacification program. At the same time, the military offensives by the North and the Liberation Front forces have subsided completely, recently. It seems that the Vietnam war, now entering the dry season, is coming to a new phase, where emphasis will be on political struggles more than on military fighting.

The military situation in South Vietnam has come to calm down very greatly, since the Cambodian operations. One big reason for this lies in the progress of the withdrawal of U.S. Forces, and in the fact that the U.S. Forces have now changed their strategy from flushing out the enemy and wiping them out to the defense of key footholds. The offensives by the North and the Liberation Front forces which occurred on more than 500 occasions in the 11 provinces around Saigon, in June, decreased to 166 cases in September. Furthermore, they are mainly rocket attacks at night-time, and they are mainly terrorist and undermining operations.

The U.S. and the South Vietnamese side attribute this decrease in military clashes to the large-scale decrease in the fighting power of the North and the National Liberation Front forces since the Cambodian operations. A U.S. military source even stated definitely that in the 3rd and 4th military districts, where about two-thirds of the population of South Vietnam live, there has been no supply of materiel or personnel from the North in the past three months, since the Cambodian operations.

According to U.S. military sources, the North's 1st Division, which had been deployed from the Mekong Delta to the borders of Cambodia, up until the Cambodian operations, has now retreated to the mountain areas to the north of Kompong Som. They also take the view that the military operations headquarters which had been situated in the "fish-hook" area, has now been withdrawn far west from the border, and that it has been moved to an area between Kratie and Tonle Sap Lake. It is also observed that the Liberation Front's 9th Division, which had been deployed in the border areas around Tay Ninh Province, has withdrawn to about 130 kilometers west from the border, and that the North Vietnamese 7th Division and the Liberation Front's 5th Division, which were considered to be strategic reserve forces, have also withdrawn to the mountain areas in the northeastern part of Cambodia.

It is true that the sense of heavy pressure by the North and the Liberation Front over the whole southern area has lessened. However, on the northern front, it is said that they still deploy 20 regiments, including the artillery forces of the North, on the other side of the demilitarized zone, and that they are confronting two U.S. divisions and two South Vietnamese divisions. The northern part of the country is still in the midst of the rainy season, and the use of the U.S. Air Force is limited. Therefore, the view is strong that the North may change to a considerably strong offensive.

However, among American sources, there are people who take the view that, since the Cambodian operations, there has appeared a difference in views on the guidance principle of war, within the Northern leadership, between Chairman TRUONG Chinh of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress, who attaches primary importance to military combat, and Workers Party First Secretary LE DUAN, who lays main emphasis on the uprising of the people, and that it will not carry out large-scale military offensives.

From these circumstances, President THIEU stated in his speech at the National Assembly on the 31st that the South Vietnamese Government now controls 99.1 percent of the population and 96.9 percent of all villages. He stated unequivocally that he absolutely rejects any coalition government which includes communists.

What this statement means is that the South Vietnamese Government is not considering any political compromise with the Liberation Front, but that by promoting the pacification program and the Vietnamization program, and by continuing to maintain military supremacy, it will start a new plan, under the name of "warriors of peace," which will revise the "return to allegiance" program, calling for the surrender of the North, and that it has already decided on the policy that those who surrender to South Vietnam, giving up their arms, will be treated in the same way as refugees from the North. It can be seen from this policy that the THIEU Government takes a considerably optimistic outlook regarding its maintaining of superiority in the military situation.

Meanwhile, the North and the Liberation Front side also clearly rejected U.S. President NIXON's ceasefire proposal, and is seeking the establishment of a coalition government of the peace forces, which will exclude THIEU, KY and KHIEM. It does not seem likely that the North and the Liberation Front side is thinking that the Vietnam war can be led to a ceasefire and the ending of the war through negotiations with the THIEU Government. Rather, its intention seems to be to lay emphasis on struggles in the political aspect, in order to cover up its military inferiority in South Vietnam, shake the political foundation of the THIEU Government, and waiting for the withdrawal of the U.S. forces, once again launch military offensives.

The "Central Military Headquarters 14th Resolution," which was recently seized by the U.S. side, emphasizes the strengthening of guerrilla warfare and the importance of political struggles. Recently discovered orders from a local committee of the Liberation Front also instructed "the boycotting of the farmland program being carried out by the South Vietnamese Government, in accordance with the instructions of the Central Military Headquarters." What these documents mean is that they are aiming at shaking the foundation of the THIEU Government and weakening it, by strengthening struggles in the political, economic and social aspects.

In the midst of this situation, the call for the people's solidarity by a third force, including General Duong Van MINH, who still retains great political influence as the main leader of the 1963 coup d'etat, can be said to have considerable significance. Although taking a critical posture toward the THIEU Government, General MINH's third force has been showing a considerably clear-cut anti-communist posture. General MINH's message, issued on the 1st, emphasized the "revolutionizing of consciousness in all fields of politics, economics and society, and the securing of all the people's support." It is surmised that he made this appeal, knowing that with the de-escalation of military fighting, there will be development of a new phase.

President THIEU, in his speech on the 31st, adopted an unprecedentedly strong tone, calling for the overthrow of the communist forces. This shows his policy of endeavoring to secure the support of the South Vietnamese people by this, and solidify the foundation of his Government. The third force, led by General MINH, is showing the posture of trying to cope with the war in the new phase, by internally reforming the THIEU Government. Even though the temporary lull in the military situation were to continue, even after the rainy season ends, it will only mean a new war in a new phase for the THIEU Government, and it cannot be said with any certainty that its future is firmly decided.