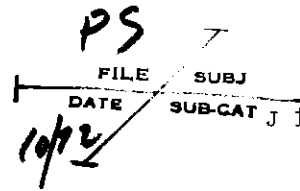


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10-26-72  
IV. 27 Oct 72

T H A I L A N D



COMMENTARY ON COALITION GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Bangkok POST in English 26 Oct 72 p 4 D

[Theh Changkhadiki] commentary: "Tripartite Coalition: Formula for Chaos"]

[Text] It is the fashion today to think that tripartite coalition governments could solve problems of nations. The latest country where a tripartite government is expected to be a major political solution is South Vietnam. History has shown that coalition governments had been successful only when a country was in danger of invasion or where national unity is needed to tide the nation through war. When the danger passes or when the war ends, the coalition inevitably breaks up and government by the party elected by the majority is resumed.

Those proponents of a tripartite government in South Vietnam should imagine for themselves the troubles that would arise for the United States if the Republicans were required to set up a coalition with the Democrats and, say, the Black Panthers and other dissident groups.

The should also think of the problems that Britain would face if the Conservatives were required to share Cabinet posts with the Laborites and the Liberals. Ideologically, no such mixture is possible. The Conservatives would push for free enterprise, the Laborites would want to nationalise all industries--and the Liberals would have to vote with one side or the other.

South Vietnam, under a tripartite government, would be like a carriage pulled by three horses in three different directions. One of the horses would have to become dominant to force the other two to fall into line and drag them towards its own destination--or the carriage would be torn to pieces.

The rightists would want to continue free enterprise and free speech, they would continue to prefer capitalism, they would like close ties with the United States. The leftists, or the Viet Cong, would like to impose socialism as soon as possible and control the press so that it serves only ideological interests. They would like to lessen, if not sever, ties with the United States while emphasising relations with the so-called socialist countries.

There is no true or valid neutralist group in South Vietnam, although political leaders like General Doung Van Minh or "Big Minh" are considered neither pro-Thieu nor pro-Viet Cong. Whoever represents the third party in the government could not be a powerful enough group to keep a proper balance or keep as much harmony as possible within the government. The tripartite government--or "troika", as it is described by the Soviets at the time of the Geneva Conference--was tried out in Laos without success. Prince Souvanna Phouma, considered a true neutralist, was named to head the coalition. Prince Souphanouvong, his half-brother generally known as the Red prince, represented the leftists as deputy prime minister. The other deputy prime minister, representing the rightists, was Prince Boun Oum.

At first the neutralists appeared to be siding with the leftists, and the rightists, not liking the trend, tried a coup. The leftists, finding they could not take over control of the government, broke away and set up a rival regime in northern Laos. Prince Souvanna Phouma kept their cabinet positions vacant in the hope that they would return one day.

Some of the neutralist forces broke off to join the leftists. Now some forces have defected to the government.

The rightists have tried to dominate the government but Prince Souvarna Phouma, with outside support including Thailand's, continues as in the top post.

The coalition in Laos hasn't worked out, but it is necessary to maintain the fiction that it is a government of national unity.

Those who fear coalition governments leading to total communist takeover, dislodging them is a real problem. [as published] Where the communists have seized power, has there been any successful attempt to overthrow them--except in Guatemala, where outside forces were necessary for the overthrow to be successful?

There has been talk about guarantees to be made against communist takeover. Who are to make the guarantees? Hanoi? There is sense in what Prime Minister Pham Van Dong said in his interview with NEWSWEEK. When asked why North Vietnam would not attempt to transform a three-sided coalition regime in South Vietnam into a communist government, the prime minister was quoted: "We wouldn't do such a foolish thing. You cannot do the impossible. We are not stupid. We don't want to do anything dangerous that would imperil national concord. We now want to avoid internal divisions and a resumption of hostilities. That is our objective."

It is comforting to know that the North Vietnamese leaders are realistic. They would find it most difficult to impose communist rule on the southerners, who have known freedom and have tasted the right to protest and demonstrate against the government. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that Hanoi has given up its ultimate objective of uniting North and South Vietnam under a communist government. Coalitions and other formulas are only temporary measures to Hanoi, which believes in the "historical inevitability" of its goal.

Then, should an international body provide the guarantees against the communists overthrowing the tripartite government from inside and taking over control of South Vietnam? The Geneva conference has been notably unsuccessful in implementing guarantees provided for in the Geneva agreement. The International Control Commission, set up as an instrument of the Geneva conference, has been a great failure.

Will America--or should America--provide the guarantees? The American electorate may not want their government to make any further commitments in Southeast Asia, while the communists would not want America involved in any way. Many Americans, including legislators, have publicly stated that they did not care if South Vietnam--even Southeast Asia--turned communist.

A tripartite government will add to, rather than subtract from, the problems of South Vietnam.

The trouble is that South Vietnam's problems will become not only her own but also those of Southeast Asia. What happens there will have repercussions on Thailand and other countries in this region. So it is essential that the leaders of our countries get together, discuss the situation, and make our opinions and feelings known about a proper settlement of the Vietnam war--a settlement which would permit us to go ahead with developing our economies and improving the living standards for our people. But objections to a tripartite government for South Vietnam should not be allowed to stand in the way of a peace settlement. We must end the war.

Let the Vietnamese work out their own destiny. We should be ready to help them--but they must decide their own fate.