to distrust their southern compatriots as persons who adapt too readily to foreign influences and who, in their eagerness for wealth, show disrespect for simple and austere Confucian virtues. This attitude, generally shared by refugees from North Vietnam, is intimately bound up with the historical development of the country (see ch. 3, Historical Setting).

For most South Vietnamese in the mid-1960's, choices of action and attitude in general were determined by expediency rather than by moral dictates (see ch. 17, Political Values and Attitudes). In the climate of insecurity brought on by two decades of war and political instability, actual behavior tended to depart to some extent from the ideal behavior advocated by Confucianism, which stresses loyalty, generosity and sacrifice among a wide circle of kinsmen and close friends. The matter of survival was an immediate, overriding concern, and the welfare of those persons to whom one had the closest, most intimate ties took priority over all other considerations.

**PERPETUATION OF THE FAMILY**

In accordance with his Confucian heritage, a Vietnamese identifies himself almost exclusively as a member of a particular family rather than of a community, occupation group or other informal association. The strongest bond in the society has always been that of family loyalty, and the members of the kin group have been mutually responsible to and for one another. Attachments between kinsmen have been, both in the ideal and in everyday practice, deeper, stronger and more extensive than in Western societies. Family loyalty and filial piety have held the society intact for over 2,000 years, through periods of war, foreign domination and national disaster.

The family is thought of as consisting not of its living members alone but of past and future generations as well. The living members are the link between their ancestors, to whom they owe an unending duty, and their unborn progeny. A man’s duty toward his forebears consists of honoring their memories on feast days, on the anniversaries of their deaths and on all occasions of family joy or sorrow. He is expected to maintain their graves and to offer sacrifices of food and incense to them on the family altar at appropriate times. Land dedicated to the Cult of the Ancestors is set aside by each family, and the revenue from it is used to pay the expenses involved. By fulfilling his obligation to his ancestors, a man assures himself that he in turn will be well treated after his own death and will not be condemned to eternity as a wandering spirit without food and care from anyone.

One of the chief dreads of the Vietnamese peasant is that his family will disintegrate, leave its ancestral home and fail to carry out its duty to the ancestors. It is for this reason that he tries to remain
near the graves of his forebears, even in military operational areas, and will leave only under extreme duress. If the family is separated, its members are generally inclined to make a considerable effort to reunite for Tet, the lunar New Year celebration.

Families bound by traditional values set a high premium on having at least one male heir to carry on the Cult of the Ancestors. The more male heirs, the better. When a couple has been married some years and still there is no son born to them, they will often adopt a young boy, preferably a nephew or cousin. Polygamy, until recently an accepted and commonplace practice, helped to assure that there would be a male heir to carry on the family line. Polygamy has been outlawed, but, in many instances, it is still customary for a man to take a second "wife," to whom he is not officially married, or to live temporarily with different women. Having many children is often mentioned as one of the elements of a good life.

In the context of a morality which holds that the welfare and continuity of the family group are more important than the interests of any individual member, traditionally oriented Vietnamese emphasize strongly the difference in the social roles of men and women. In principle, the head of the family has absolute authority in the household; when he dies, his sons become heads of their own households, with the same rights and duties previously held by their father. A wife must obey her husband and her mother-in-law; a daughter, her parents, especially her father. Girls, accordingly, are given a more confined upbringing than boys, but both boys and girls are strictly disciplined and constantly reminded of the importance of obedience to their elders.

In traditional households the women are still overwhelmingly concerned with household and child-rearing tasks, but within the home they are usually influential, often dominant. Despite the cultural emphasis on obedience and docility in women, they are not regarded as the frail sex. They are often highly self-reliant and strong-willed. In the countryside and in urban lower-class neighborhoods, many women, through circumstances beyond control, live alone with their children and are their sole support. Some follow their husbands to defense outposts manned by government troops in areas of military operations, and a few have been extremely effective guerrilla fighters. Some upper- and middle-class women who have been exposed to Western values, choose to break with tradition and strike out on their own in some profession or business enterprise. Women control an important share of the nation's economy, and a few participate in political affairs.
HARMONY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Most Vietnamese place a high value on maintaining harmony in their social relationships. Both the Confucian doctrine of the Golden Mean and the so-called Middle Path of Buddhism dispose the individual toward flexibility and a readiness to compromise. He calls this “bending like the bamboo.”

From early childhood he is taught that whatever serves to enhance harmony is good and that an insistence on absolutes is to be avoided at all costs. He learns that it is important to bring himself into harmony not only in the social realm but also with his physical environment and the spirits inhabiting it. Harmony is to be sought not only with one’s own family but also in dealings with all other persons.

This emphasis on compromise and avoidance of injury to others was manifested conspicuously during and after the so-called Buddhist crisis of 1963 (see ch. 14, Political Dynamics). From the beginning of the organized movement by the Buddhists to oust President Ngo Dinh Diem, spokesmen of the moderate Buddhist line repeatedly reiterated the importance of compromise and nonviolence in bringing about their desired goal. Decrying more direct and aggressive methods, they employed various techniques of noncooperation and nonviolent resistance, including marches, fasts, strikes and, ultimately, suicide by fire.

The value set on harmony in interpersonal relations is expressed in everyday situations through the use of delicacy, tact, politeness and gentleness in dealing with others. When an arrangement is to be made between two individuals or interested groups, for example, it is customary to hire an intermediary to conduct the negotiations, so as to minimize the possibilities for friction. An intermediary is usually employed, for instance, when a marriage is to be arranged between a potential bride and bridegroom who are unknown to one another. The intermediary makes preliminary soundings, sometimes arranging for the potential bridegroom, and perhaps his parents, to see his girl without her knowledge. By avoiding a face-to-face confrontation until both parties have agreed to the contract, either possible partner, if he so desires, can ease out of the situation gracefully with no offense to the other.

Ideally, the same attitude should be carried over into marriage. A Vietnamese proverb states: “The good husband and wife always treat each other with the same courtesy and etiquette extended to a guest.” Similarly, in the interest of harmony in social relationships the Vietnamese are prone to refrain from litigation and formal processes for settling differences; they prefer to work things out informally.

To avoid offending others, Vietnamese are careful to behave modestly. Bragging and boasting are strongly disapproved. Parents, for example, when hearing their child praised for doing
something well usually reply proudly with the customary polite expression, “He has really done so little.”

Notions of ideal character in men and women reflect the same concern with harmony in dealing with others. Firmness, gentleness, patience and tactfulness are stressed as desirable attributes in men; obedience, gentleness, generosity and delicateness denote exemplary character in women.

Because of the value placed on harmonious relations, a person, if offended by someone of equal or superior social status, will make an extreme effort to maintain his equanimity and to avoid revealing resentment or anger. In other circumstances, however, the same pattern of behavior may not hold. Rival wives and jealous sisters and cousins, for example, quarrel frequently. Often the reunion of a large family group becomes an occasion for backbiting and exchange of malicious gossip among the women.

Concern for harmony in interpersonal relations is manifested characteristically in an indirect approach to issues and ideas. The Vietnamese generally equates directness with rudeness, considering subtlety more pleasant for all concerned. He prefers to tell a pleasant lie rather than a truth that hurts. In responding to a question, he is motivated by the desire to satisfy or please the person who inquires and thus replies in the affirmative whether in actuality he means “yes,” “no” or “perhaps.”

**DISCIPLINE**

Vietnamese culture, reflecting its Buddhist heritage, places a high premium on the disciplined acceptance of things as they are. Life is hard, especially for the peasant, and insecure for all, yet complaints are rarely heard. The peasant who sees his rice crop destroyed, his village burned, his child wounded, typically behaves with notable patience and forbearance. He sets about to rebuild his life as best he can. Stoicism is a major value. Casualties resulting from military operations, no matter how severely wounded, seldom betray any sign of physical suffering or discomfort.

Self-control also demands restraint in conduct; well-bred Vietnamese keep their voices low and conduct conversations quietly. They respect those who show themselves to be gentle and amiable, polite and courteous in dealings with others, and passionate, uncontrolled displays of feeling are strongly disapproved. From childhood the members of traditionally oriented families are taught the importance of discipline and of willing submission to parental authority, and their upbringing is extremely strict. Unquestioning obedience is demanded; offenses are promptly and rigorously punished.
The combined impact of French colonial rule and French culture, the traditional social order, based on the Confucian ethical code, and the system of values supporting it, rapidly began to crumble. As the governing intellectual elite, or mandarinate, became subordinate to alien French governors and reduced in power, so the prestige of the traditional Confucian scholar waned. Patriots returned from abroad, convinced that the defeat of their country lay in the classical Confucian scorn of technical and scientific knowledge, advocated the abandonment of traditional education for the teaching of sciences in the schools, and urged the people to modernize their thinking and living. Concurrently, the French, through the medium of local schools, sought to inculcate French learning and culture. The final blow to Confucian education occurred at about the time of World War I, when the French “reform” of the civil service examinations required European rather than Confucian learning. The Vietnamese responded by avidly turning to the French schools.

These changes impinged largely on the urban centers and involved mainly the foreign-educated elite who had at one time or another lived abroad; but the tendency to reexamine the old values was noticeable among all social groups except the most conservative advocates of classical culture and learning. The decline in traditionalism spread to the villages as well. The mandarins, who provided the link between the villages and the central government, were the intellectual leaders of the traditional order as well as administrators. As they became increasingly self-seeking, their behavior undermined the peasants’ respect for the mandarinate and the precepts it had formerly exemplified. The French further accelerated the process of decline by introducing external controls into village affairs which disrupted customary relationships. Increased taxation drove the peasant to orient himself to a cash economy.

Since World War II and the departure of the French, the traditions of individualism and liberalism, as imparted by French education, have continued to flourish among some members of the upper and middle classes. During this period, however, the insecurity and uncertainties precipitated by two decades of political and military strife have been more important than formal educational processes as an impetus for reappraisal of traditional values. The tendency to question the appropriateness of age-old values became widespread in an atmosphere of terror, death and destruction which instilled in the general population a growing, and eventually almost exclusive, preoccupation with the matter of physical survival.

In the mid-1960’s the Vietnamese society was moving away from its former emphasis on family loyalty and toward a more individual-
istic standard. Political and economic conditions no longer supported the notion of a large group of kinsmen living under one roof or within the same small village and recognizing a complex set of mutual obligations and responsibilities. To put the interests of one's immediate family first in all circumstances was no longer dishonorable.

Similarly, concern for the welfare of future generations of the family lessened. Whereas people formerly had been motivated to work hard and make sacrifices in the hope of transmitting a modicum of advantage to their descendants, the focus has changed to considerations having to do with the immediate present. Parents labored for the well-being safety of their children and strove to provide them with the best education possible rather than for the ultimate benefit of the family members yet unborn.

In the modern period the Vietnamese, always pragmatic in his approach to life despite his concern with spirits and the supernatural world, has become even more practical in his outlook. While focusing on survival, he hopes for a better life, social and legal justice, more land, more material comforts and better schools for his children. He is willing to accept aid supplementing his own efforts toward these goals, and, with characteristic flexibility and adaptability, he appears ready to take it from whatever source he believes will provide him the most benefits.
SECTION II. POLITICAL

CHAPTER 13

THE GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

In early 1966 the character, structure and direction of the entire governmental system were affected by the exigencies of the counterinsurgency efforts. The government of Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky and his military associates was being challenged by Communist subversive forces operating throughout the country, more so in the rural than in urban areas. It was frequently asserted by some Vietnamese that the country was ruled by “two governments”—the Saigon government by day and the Communist-led insurgents (commonly referred to as the Viet Cong—see Glossary) by night.

National leaders seemed convinced that the outcome of the Viet Cong challenge would ultimately hinge on their ability to inspire the people with a sense of commitment to the regime in Saigon. Accordingly, they were attempting to prosecute successfully the counterinsurgency operations on the military front and at the same time preserve gains by extending economic and social benefits to every segment of the population through rural and urban self-help construction and pacification projects officially labeled the Revolutionary Development Program (formerly known as the Rural Reconstruction or Pacification Program).

Formal governmental authority emanated from the provisional constitution of June 19, 1965, prepared by a group of military leaders. Under this constitution the government, on June 24, 1965, proclaimed a “state of war” (equivalent to a state of national emergency, rather than a formal declaration of war on a foreign power). The proclamation authorized the application of “appropriate measures to defend the territory and to maintain public order and security.”

The government was authoritarian and centralized. Executive and legislative powers were being exercised summarily by 10 generals having membership in what was commonly called the National Leadership Committee, and its executive arm, known as the War Cabinet, was headed by Prime Minister Ky. The authoritarian pattern appeared likely to continue so long as the gravity of Communist insurgency persisted.
In February 1966 there was an official announcement that an advisory council would be formed to draft a constitution which was to be ready by November 1966. According to the announcement, a national election would be held sometime during 1967 to prepare for the transfer of power to an elected government. The February plan was revised, however, because of civilian agitation in March and April 1966, for a prompt end of military rule. In mid-April the government issued a decree providing for the election of a constituent assembly in September (see ch. 14, Political Dynamics).

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Before the imposition of French control in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Vietnam was a unified state under a hereditary emperor, and its political system was based on traditional principles of government embodied in Confucian concepts introduced from China. These held government to be the concern of morally superior, benevolent civil officials. Their purpose was to maintain harmony in a hierarchical social order. The ruler, as emperor, presided over an elaborate bureaucracy of scholar-officials. Highly authoritarian, the government combined executive, legislative and judicial authority in the persons of its ranking officials, and it provided no formal limitation on the emperor's power.

When the French took control of Indochina, they retained much of the traditional system, superimposing upon it and its mandarin officials their own colonial administrators. The French colonial administration remained intact until near the end of World War II. In March 1945, with Japanese support, Emperor Bao Dai proclaimed Vietnam's independence and established a short-lived, ineffective national government with Trang Trong Kim as Prime Minister.

After the defeat of Japan, however, the well-organized, Communist-led Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh), called the Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh assumed effective control in the north and in parts of the central and southern portions of the country. In August 1945, Bao Dai abdicated in favor of the Viet Minh, and the new Democratic Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed by Ho Chi Minh on September 2, 1945. The declaration was carefully phrased to imply that the regime had United States and Allied support. No mention was made of the Soviet Union, but many references were made to the spirit of the United States Declaration of Independence, to the French Revolution and to the United Nations Declaration at San Francisco.

Returning to Indochina, in September 1945, the French clashed almost immediately with the Ho Chi Minh regime which soon led the fight to force the French out. In 1949, after 3 years of inconclusive fighting, the French agreed to limited independence for Viet-
nam and established the State of Vietnam with Bao Dai as Chief of State. His French-supported regime, however, was in control only where French Union Forces were present. From 1949 to 1954 these areas of control were limited mostly to the few larger cities and towns, whereas the Viet Minh regime gained increasing support in the rural areas. It controlled large areas of the Mekong River Delta in the South, 60 percent or more of the rural countryside outside of Hanoi in the North, most of the Central Highlands and scattered areas of the Central Lowlands (see ch. 2, Physical Environment; ch. 3, Historical Setting).

With the end of hostilities, under the Geneva Agreement, signed on July 20, 1954, a provisional military Demarcation Line was fixed roughly along the seventeenth parallel. The Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference (July 21, 1954) stated that “the military Demarcation Line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary.” To the north of the Demarcation Line the Ho Chi Minh regime established itself at Hanoi, whereas in the South an independent, sovereign, anti-Communist government emerged under the leadership of Bao Dai as Chief of State and Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister. In the South the signing date of July 20, 1954, has since been regarded as “the saddest day in the history of Vietnam.” It is known as “The Shameful Day.” Its anniversary is officially observed as the “National Unity Day for the Liberation of North Vietnam.”

THE NGO DINH DIEM REGIME

On October 26, 1955, Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem declared South Vietnam to be a republic under his presidency. One of his first official acts was to call for the election of a National Constituent Assembly. The Assembly, whose 123 members were elected in March 1956, appointed a 15-member commission to draft a constitution, which, with certain changes recommended by the President, was formally promulgated on October 26, 1956, the first anniversary of the proclamation of the republic.

In form, the Constitution drew from the example of the United States Constitution and, to a lesser extent, on French influences. It provided for separation of executive and legislative powers on American lines, but in practice the relative strength of the two branches was markedly different. There was no separate, autonomous judicial branch; the court system was under the supervision of the then Department of Justice, following the French precedent. The principle of separation of powers was, however, sufficiently circumscribed, with a stipulation that “the activities of the executive and legislative agencies must be brought into harmony.” The harmony had to be in consonance with President Diem’s conviction that a strong and efficient
executive organization, capable of rapidly solving the complex and urgent problems, was "a guarantee of the democratic regime."

Under the 1956 Constitution the President was elected to a 5-year term by direct and secret vote based on universal franchise. He was designated Chief of State, Chief Executive of the Government and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He was vested with broad emergency powers to rule by decree between sessions of the National Assembly and, in case of war, internal disturbances or financial or economic crisis, to exercise extraordinary powers to institute any appropriate measures. There were certain constitutional checks on presidential powers, but such restraints, if imposed at all by the National Assembly, were perfunctory, since members of the Assembly themselves were largely progovernment.

The entire governmental system revolved around the Office of the President, in which President Diem's political adviser and brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, played a key role as policymaker and supervisor of all governmental activities. Aided by highly personalized networks of political surveillance, the Ngo brothers ruled with iron hands, and their powers extended, formally as well as informally, down directly to the provinces, districts, villages and, even, hamlets. By late 1963 it appeared as if the whole system had been transformed into a personal concern of the Ngo family (see ch. 14, Political Dynamics). Meanwhile, the Communist campaign of terror and guerrilla activities systematically intensified, and conditions within the country continued to deteriorate.

President Diem's regime came to an abrupt end on November 1, 1963, when a group of generals successfully executed a coup d'état (see ch. 14, Political Dynamics). The 1956 Constitution was replaced by the hastily drawn provisional constitutional charter of November 4, 1963. The charter vested all executive and legislative powers in a Revolutionary Military Committee, headed by Major General Duong Van Minh. Despite some structural changes the government's authoritarian control, exercised for the first time by the military, remained unchanged.

On July 2, 1964, the initial provisional charter was replaced by Provisional Charter No. 2, which, in turn, was supplanted by another charter, dated August 16, 1964. Both documents continued to stress the primacy of military leadership and executive powers, but the Charter of August 16 had to be withdrawn shortly after its promulgation because of popular criticisms that it would provide for a military dictatorship. Under the Charter of August 16 a Revolutionary Military Council was defined as "the supreme organization" of the nation, and Major General Nguyen Khanh, who had unseated Major General Duong Van Minh in January 1964, became its chairman, in addition
to being the President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces (see ch. 14, Political Dynamics).

A new provisional constitution—the fourth since November 1963—was proclaimed on October 20, 1964, to provide for an orderly transfer of authority to a civilian government. The civilian leadership installed thereby, however, proved ineffective and in June 1965 handed over its authority to a group of military leaders headed by Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky.

THE GOVERNMENT OF NGUYEN CAO KY

The Air Vice Marshal came to power, in fact, on June 9, 1965, after which the civilian leadership of Chief of State Phan Khac Suu and Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat resigned. On June 14 a group of generals, including Major General Nguyen Van Thieu and Brigadier General Nguyen Huu Co (both were promoted to lieutenant general in 1965), joined the Air Vice Marshal in establishing the National Leadership Committee—a 10-member military directorate. On the same day the Committee appointed Major General Thieu as its chairman, a position comparable to that of Chief of State. The new government was officially formed on June 19, when the Committee named Air Vice Marshal Ky as Prime Minister and proclaimed another provisional constitution—the fifth since November 1963.

Under the vaguely worded provisional constitution—officially called The Convention—authority is temporarily vested in the Congress of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, pending the promulgation of a permanent constitution. The Congress is composed of all of the general officers of the armed forces, including the four corps commanders, the Commander of the Capital Military Region (Saigon) and all division commanders. The executive leadership of this Congress is vested in what is formally known as The Directorate, but is more popularly referred to as the National Leadership Committee (see fig. 9). The government in May convened an Election Law Drafting Committee and empowered it to prepare drafts of an election law and constituent assembly organization law. On the Committee's recommendation, the Directorate was enlarged on June 6 to include 10 civilian members to equal the 10 military members. They are Tran Van Do, Pham Buu Chuong, Phan Khoang, Nguyen Luu Vien, Tran Van An, retired Major General Van Thanh Cao, Nguyen Van Huyen, Vu Ngo Tran, Quang Huu Kim, and Huynh Van Nhiem.

Tentative Plans for Transfer of Power

Since their accession to power, the military leaders generally have maintained that their regime was only "temporary but necessary" and have stressed the need of measures which would pave the way for an
Figure 9. The Governmental System of South Vietnam, April 1966.
orderly transfer of power to an elected government. On January 15, 1966, Prime Minister Ky announced his government’s plan for a return to a constitutional, broadly based government. In mid-April the Prime Minister convened the National Political Congress, in which all major non-Communist groupings were represented, to seek the views of all its members regarding steps to be taken to return to constitutional government. In accordance with the general consensus of the Congress, Chief of State Thieu convened an Election Law Drafting Committee on May 5 and empowered it to prepare drafts of an election law and constituent assembly organization law. After consultations with the government, the Committee’s drafts were incorporated into decree laws promulgated on June 19.

The Central Government

The Directorate (National Leadership Committee)

The Convention entrusts The Directorate, responsible to the Congress of the Armed Forces, with the exercise of both executive and legislative powers and with “the direction of all the affairs of the nation.” The Directorate’s 10 members include: the Chairman, Secretary General, Prime Minister (also known as The Commissioner for the Executive or Chairman of the Central Executive Committee), Minister of War and Reconstruction (also known as Commissioner General for War and Reconstruction), the Chief of the Joint General Staff of the Armed Forces, the Commander of the Capital Military Region, and the four corps commanders (see ch. 21, The Armed Forces).

The Chairman of The Directorate, Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu, functions as Chief of State and appoints, on recommendation by the Prime Minister, ambassadors and plenipotentiary ministers, rectors of universities, Cabinet ministers and subordinate secretaries of states, the prefect (mayor) of Saigon and all judges. In addition, he appoints and promotes all general officers, but in accordance with the decision on The Directory and on recommendation by the Minister of War and Reconstruction. The Chairman is also empowered to proclaim a state of emergency, martial law or a state of war (if the National Security Council so decides); he may also declare war, make peace or conclude international agreements if such decisions are made by the Congress of the Armed Forces. All legislative documents and measures of enforcement deriving from court judgments are issued in the Chairman’s name. Finally, the Chairman enjoys the power on amnesty.

In case the Chairman is incapacitated, the Secretary General is to replace him, but a new Chairman must be named by the Congress of the Armed Forces within a 10-day period. The Secretary General’s duties are to study and outline broad national policies, draft all legis-
relative documents “in agreement with The Directorate” and to convene regular or extraordinary sessions of The Directorate.

The Prime Minister, as chief executive officer, wields extraordinary powers. He may propose draft-laws to The Directory for deliberation and promulgation, and he implements policies recommended by The Directory. He enjoys full powers to organize all executive agencies and to appoint and replace public officials. In his decisions affecting agencies of the provincial government and at the level of directorate general and higher in the central government, the Prime Minister must obtain prior consent from The Directory. This consent is also required for actions affecting the personnel of the rank of secretary of state (deputy Cabinet minister in large departments) or higher.

National Security Council and other Councils

The National Security Council is composed of the Chairman (acting as presiding officer) of The Directory, the Secretary General of The Directory, the Prime Minister, Minister of War and Reconstruction (also designated as Deputy Prime Minister since October 1965) and the Chief of the Joint General Staff. The Council is empowered to recommend to The Directory measures on national security and others relating to the proclamation of a state of emergency, martial law or war. Since the statutory members of the Council also hold key positions in The Directory, the Council’s recommendations are virtually assured of endorsement and for all practical purposes can be regarded as policy decisions.

The Convention provides for two advisory bodies, the Economic and Social Council and the High Council of Magistrates. The Economic and Social Council has broad advisory responsibilities in relation to economic and social problems and policies. The High Council of Magistrates has the responsibility of “safeguarding the independence of the judiciary.” In early 1966 these two councils were not yet established.

Central Executive Committee (The War Cabinet)

The Central Executive Committee, headed by the Prime Minister, is also known as the War Cabinet or “Super Cabinet.” Its statutory membership includes only five ministers representing the portfolios of War and Reconstruction, Economy and Finance, Social and Cultural Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Justice, but in actual official practice the heads of all departments subordinate to the ministers are also regarded as “Cabinet members.” The Committee exercises broad coordinating and supervisory powers over various executive departments and agencies and functions as the initiator of major governmental policies.

Each of the five ministers is sometimes called Commissioner General but is officially designated as a minister. Except for the Min-
istries of Foreign Affairs and Justice, each of the remaining three ministers is in charge of four or more departments of ministerial status. All departments (also frequently referred to as ministries) are headed by secretaries of state of ministerial rank who are commonly, though not officially, called "ministers." The relationship of the three ministers to their respective departments is largely limited to coordination, and, hence, the making of decisions affecting various departmental activities are left, as a rule, to the departmental heads concerned. In early 1966 the Minister of War and Reconstruction, in addition to being the Deputy Prime Minister, was concurrently the Secretary of Defense; similarly, the Minister of Social and Cultural Affairs was the Secretary of Education, and the Minister of Economy and Finance was also the Secretary of Economy.

The most important and powerful unit of the government is the Ministry of War and Reconstruction because of its primary responsibility for the prosecution of counterinsurgency efforts. Four of its six departments are directly involved in other national security measures: the Department of Defense is concerned with both operational and administrative control of the military establishment; Information and Open Arms, with psychological warfare; Interior, with control of all government agencies in the field and of the national police forces; and Revolutionary Development, with socioeconomic efforts in rural and urban areas.

The Department of Revolutionary Development (formerly the Department of Rural Reconstruction) is concerned with activities commonly known as the pacification or rural reconstruction program, which is designed to improve the material well-being mainly of the rural people and also to generate the spirit of collective self-help efforts in their local communities. As a result, the program forms a crucial link in the overall governmental efforts against Communist insurgency throughout the country (see ch. 14, Political Dynamics).

The Judiciary

The court system is supervised, administratively, by the Ministry of Justice. All judges are appointed and do not have security of tenure. The judicial organization is defined, not by the Constitution, but by statute. Decisions relating to the appointment, promotion, transfer, demotion or dismissal of judges are made by The Directory and administered through the Ministry. As a result, judicial integrity and independence have been frequently questioned by the Vietnamese themselves; some judges are known to have been generally indispaced to make decisions unfavorable to the government.

Unlike other governmental branches, the judiciary, except for the military courts, has remained virtually unchanged since 1955 (see ch. 27, The Armed Forces). The number of courts required to administer justice is, by Western standards, relatively small, because the
Vietnamese on the whole are not inclined to excessive litigation. They tend to settle disputes out of court whenever possible.

Before 1954, French citizens were tried under French law. With the transfer of power in that year, the Vietnamese courts acquired full jurisdiction over all cases involving any person residing in the country. The official language of the courts is Vietnamese, although French continues to be used as the second language of legal discourse.

Derived from the French model, the judicial organization is based on the dual system of jurisdiction, each with a separate hierarchy of courts. Civil and criminal cases are heard by what are commonly called judiciary courts, and litigations arising from disputes between a private citizen and the public authorities are handled by the administrative court. Any violation of public order and national security comes under the jurisdiction of military courts (see ch. 27, The Armed Forces).

On the judiciary side the lowest courts are the ordinary Courts of the Peace (or Justices of the Peace), which usually consist of a single magistrate (justice of the peace) assisted by a court clerk. Frequently, a district chief acts as the magistrate. Five in number in late 1962, they try minor civil cases and petty criminal offenses. The Courts of the Peace with Extended Jurisdiction, of which there were 20 distributed throughout the provinces in 1962, exercise control over the Courts of the Peace. Presided over by a single magistrate, these courts have jurisdiction over civil and commercial cases and over all but the most serious felonies.

There are seven Courts of First Instance. On the same hierarchical level with the Courts of the Peace with Extended Jurisdiction, each consists of a presiding judge, an examining magistrate and at least three assistant judges. They have unlimited criminal, civil and commercial jurisdiction.

Appeals from the Courts of the Peace are made to the Courts of the First Instance. Appeals from cases tried ordinarily by Courts of the Peace with Extended Jurisdiction or Courts of First Instance are heard by the Courts of Appeal, of which there are two, one in Saigon and the other in Hue. These courts are divided into two chambers, civil and criminal. Appeals in civil cases are heard by a panel of three judges; those in criminal cases are heard by three judges and two citizens acting as assessors. In addition, the Courts of Appeal exercise judicial control over the lower courts in their territories.

The highest judicial authority is the Court of Cassation (Supreme Court) in Saigon. It hears appeals from the decisions of the military courts and the lower courts. Decisions of the military courts affecting national security, however, cannot be heard by the Court of Cassation. If in its opinion the law has been violated in judicial proceedings, the Court may reverse the decisions of the lower judges and transfer
the case to another court at the same level. Only in cases where a lower court fails to concur with the highest court's opinion does the latter render a final decision.

In addition, there are a number of special courts which are established wherever necessary. By the end of 1961 labor courts had been set up in eight cities; they have separate jurisdiction over labor disputes in public or private enterprise in their respective areas. In places where there is no labor court, a Court of First Instance or Court of the Peace with Extended Jurisdiction may render judgment in labor disputes. Workers involved in disputes are entitled to counsel without fee. In 1957 agrarian reform courts were created to settle disputes arising from the government's Agrarian Reform Policy, and by 1961 four were in operation (see ch. 19, Agriculture). Four Juvenile Courts were established in 1958 to deal with offenders under 18 years of age. Those in Hue and Saigon also function as courts of appeal in juvenile cases. In 1961 six juvenile tribunals were operating.

In February 1966 the government set up a Special Court to deal with cases involving bribery, corruption, misappropriation of public funds and economic offenses such as hoarding, smuggling, profiteering, illegal transfer of moneys, violation of customs regulations and market-cornering practices. Seated in Saigon and to be operative until the end of the state of war, the Special Court has territorial jurisdiction over the whole country but may organize local hearings in the provinces. The Court is empowered to try both civilians and military personnel. It consists of a presiding judge, two assistant judges, a prosecutor and one or more assistant prosecutors. Court procedures are the same as those of military field courts (see ch. 27, The Armed Forces). Defendants are brought before it without preliminary investigation by warrants issued directly by the Prime Minister. Sentences may range from imprisonment at hard labor to death by a firing squad (see ch. 26, Public Order and Safety).

On the administrative side the highest judicial authority is represented by the Council of State in Saigon. The Council hears appeals from decisions of the Administrative Court. The Administrative Court, situated in Saigon, has competence over the whole country as a court of first instance. Cases involving disputes between private citizens and the government or between government agencies themselves are tried by the Administrative Court. The Council of State has additional competence over the Court of Pensions which specializes in the settlement of disputes over pensions paid to the war-wounded. The Council also functions as an advisory body on legal affairs, rendering legal opinions to the government whenever requested by the latter.
CIVIL SERVICE

The civil service system covers only those agencies which are supported by the national budget. The employees of autonomous municipalities (except Saigon) and of provinces, both of which are supported by local budgets, are under the jurisdiction of their respective authorities. Civil servants are divided into career (permanent) and noncareer (temporary) categories; functionally, they are classified into administrative and technical cadre systems, respectively. The civil service function is attached to and controlled by the Office of the Prime Minister. In late 1964 there were about 133,900 civil servants, of whom 33 percent (43,000) were permanent. About 18,600 career employees were stationed in Saigon, and the remaining 24,400 were attached to the field service of the national government.

Modeled initially on the French system, the civil service was established by the Bao Dai regime. In 1949, when the State of Vietnam set up its own system of administration, staffed by Vietnamese nationals, it found itself seriously handicapped by a lack of trained and experienced administrative personnel, the French having previously reserved to themselves most of the high- and middle-level positions of administrative and managerial responsibilities.

Training schools in public administration were established in Hanoi and Saigon, and in 1953 the National Administration School (Ecole Nationale d'Administration—ENAD) was established at Da Lat and began offering a 2-year program. Its students were recruited from recent high school graduates and civil servants with 2 years or more of practical experience. Students spent 1½ years in study at the school and 6 months working in the field with a local administrative body. The curriculum of ENAD preserved the French emphasis on legalistic-oriented administration; instruction was given in both French and Vietnamese.

In 1955 the National Administration School, renamed the National Institute of Administration, was moved to Saigon and brought under the control of the then office of the presidency. Through the United States foreign aid program, American advisers worked with faculty members of the Institute until 1962. Under American influence the school was oriented away from the heavy stress on law and toward practical training in public administration. The training of administrative cadres was the primary responsibility of the National Institute of Administration, whereas technical cadres were trained in specialized schools maintained by the various departments concerned.

Civil servants are recruited through competitive entry examinations and are assigned to either the administrative or the technical corps. Except for certain supervisory positions, they are not recruited for
specific jobs with fixed duties and responsibilities. Within each system there are no specific standards for job classification, and, hence, job assignments are likely to be determined by the personnel needs of various agencies at any given moment; to a large degree, political connections play an important part. Recruits are required to serve probationary periods and may be subjected to another examination before being given full career status. Positions requiring highly specialized skills, administrative or technical, are filled usually through contractual arrangements, renewable on a yearly basis. In late 1964 there were only 1,970 "contract" employees.

One of the major problems affecting the efficiency of the civil service continues to be the preoccupation of administrative personnel with restrictive form and procedure. Inherited from the French colonial administrative service, this legalistic orientation has evoked criticism, because it allegedly tends to make many civil servants reluctant to take initiative and assume responsibility. This tendency, combined with a disinclination to delegate authority to subordinates, has been blamed for frequent administrative bottlenecks at the higher levels of bureaucracy. Under emphasis on form and procedure is also said to have hampered developmental efforts by stifling the flexibility and initiative needed to cope effectively with varying local conditions.

Since the military takeover in 1963 the morale of the civil servants has appreciably improved. Increasing stress is placed on merit rather than on political reliability as the basic criterion for promotion. Officials are no longer sent to remote provincial or district outposts because of questionable political loyalty. The weekly political indoctrination sessions sponsored by the Diem regime for all bureaucrats have been discontinued, and the civil servants are generally secure from excessive political interference, although they are permitted to engage in political activities within certain statutory limitations. Moreover, officials may resign from their posts with relative ease. This situation is in sharp contrast to the days of the Diem regime when officials could not resign unless they had "legitimate" reasons; often, political manipulation was needed to leave governmental service.

FIELD ADMINISTRATION

South Vietnam is administratively divided into provinces (see fig. 10). These in turn are subdivided into districts, cantons (being gradually abolished), villages and hamlets. Six cities (Saigon, Hue, Da Nang, Da Lat, Vung Tau and Cam Ranh) have separate status as autonomous municipalities with administrative powers similar to those of the provinces. Except for the mayor of Saigon, who is appointed by the Chief of State, the mayors of the autonomous municipalities are appointed by the Prime Minister. All field administrative
activities are supervised, in civil matters, by the Department of Interior.

The provinces (43 in early 1966) are grouped into four administrative regions, which are also coterminous with the four military corps areas. Officially designated as Central Vietnam Lowlands (I Corps), Central Vietnam Highlands (II Corps), South Vietnam-East (III Corps) and South Vietnam-West (IV Corps), these regions are each headed by a delegate appointed by and responsible directly to the Prime Minister. Within his area the delegate exercises supervisory and coordinating authority in civil matters over the field offices of the central government and over the province chiefs. In early 1966 the four corps commanders were serving also as delegates in their respective military areas, thus combining both civil and military functions.

Provincial Government

The central government relies on the provincial administration to carry out national policy at the local level. Province chiefs maintain close contact with the authorities in Saigon. In mid-1965 all but three were military officers. Three main channels of contact are customarily employed: with the Prime Minister and members of his office; with the regional delegate who represents the Prime Minister as his regional inspector and as his civil as well as military assistant; and with the various departments and agencies, particularly the Department of Interior, which is directly responsible for the supervision of all administrative affairs in the provinces.

The province chief (governor) is appointed by the Prime Minister and is answerable to both the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for the Interior. He exercises all general administrative powers as well as budgetary and fiscal powers within his area. Specifically, he is responsible for the enforcement of national laws and for the maintenance of security, but, in recognition of the diversified cultural attitudes and ethnic composition of the provinces, he is given wide latitude in adapting the application of the laws to local conditions (see ch. 5, Ethnic Groups and Languages). He can also make recommendations regarding military matters to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Defense. In addition, the chief has supervisory and coordinating authority over services of the central government agencies operating within his jurisdiction and oversees the administration of district, canton and village affairs (see ch. 26, Public Order and Safety; ch. 27, The Armed Forces).

The province chief may be either a civil official or a military officer. He is assisted by two deputies: a civilian deputy chief for administrative affairs and a military deputy chief for political affairs (see ch. 27, The Armed Forces).
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**Figure 10. Administrative Divisions of South Vietnam, April 1966.**
In performing his duties, the chief is advised by a provincial council, an elective body of 6 to 15 members. As created in April 1965 (elections took place in the following month but only in secure areas), the council is empowered to debate and advise on the budget draft and to review the entire range of actions carried out by the province chief, but only "within the framework of policy and courses of action of the government." It has no legislative authority. A council member may communicate directly with the Prime Minister and other Cabinet members to express his views on provincial matters.

**Districts**

To the majority of Vietnamese outside the few urban centers, the district administration is the most concrete symbol and embodiment of governmental authority. The people tend to judge the character and performance of the central government by the success or failure of the district officials. District administrations (241 in February 1966) are each headed by a chief (civil or military), appointed by the Prime Minister on the nomination of the provincial chief. In mid-1965 all but three were military officers, most of them captains or lower ranks. In the governmental hierarchy the district chief is the lowest official appointed directly by the Prime Minister.

The district chief spends much of his time in the field, maintaining direct contact with village officials, local notables and the peasants. His duties are manifold. He is responsible for the maintenance of law and local security and for the coordination of activities of the various governmental services operating in his area. He collects vital statistics and administers programs dealing with public health, schools, agricultural extension, civic action, public works, etc. In addition, he supervises the administration activities of cantons (where they exist), villages and hamlets. Judicially, the district chief may act as coroner and as assistant to the public prosecutor of the province and may also adjudicate minor civil and criminal cases.

**Village Administration**

The village is the lowest formal link of the central government with the rural population and is the basic administrative unit in the governmental system. There were some 2,558 villages in August 1966. They are subdivided into hamlets or settlement areas, totaling some 15,000 in early 1966. The cantons (319 in early 1962), serving as intermediaries between districts and villages, are being eliminated gradually. Where they still exist, they are under the direction of chiefs appointed by provincial chiefs and function as auxiliary administrative arms of the district chiefs.
Traditionally, the Vietnamese village functioned as a nearly autonomous administrative unit. From the first century A.D. onward villages governed themselves, provided that the demands of the central authorities were met for tax collections and manpower for military service and public works (see ch. 3, Historical Setting). Village chiefs were usually chosen from among the senior men of the village by the local people, and each community maintained its own traditions and customs. Each village saw to its own internal order and security and its few public services.

A decisive break with the past occurred in October 1956 when a presidential decree provided for the appointment of village councilors by the province chief, thereby injecting direct government control into the traditionally self-governing community. The purpose of this ordinance was to eliminate the influence of subversive elements, many of whom had risen to positions of local leadership in areas controlled by the Viet Minh during the Indochina War.

The village administrative structure, as of mid-1965, was based on a decree issued in May 1964, which provides for a village administrative committee (formerly village council), composed of a chairman, vice chairman and, usually, four staff members. Each staff member is in charge of one of the following functions: economy and finance; security and police; information and propaganda; and youth and civil defense. The committee is assisted by a village people's council, an elective body of 5 to 11 nonsalaried members, each representing a constituency corresponding to a hamlet.

The chief responsibility of the council, which meets once a month, is to "discuss and decide" communal matters such as the budget plan and village developmental programs. The council functions more or less as an auxiliary to the village administrative committee. It may be dissolved by the province chief if there is evidence of subversive activities by more than half of the council members—a measure designed to remove Viet Cong influence from the local community. A councilor may be dismissed individually on similar grounds, without dissolution of the council.

A village may be divided into varying numbers of hamlets. Each hamlet usually has a locally elected chief and deputy chief. An assistant, appointed by the district chief, is in charge of youth and civil defense matters. The deputy chief is normally responsible for information and propaganda.
CHAPTER 14

POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Since 1960 the counterinsurgency efforts of successive Saigon regimes have overshadowed all nonmilitary matters. After the downfall of President Ngo Dinh Diem, in the absence of any effective civilian alternative, the armed forces both waged the war and sought to maintain political order.

South Vietnam continued to be plagued by insecurity, persistent dissensions among non-Communist forces and the apparent lack of firm allegiance to Saigon of nearly half of the people. Additional complicating factors were the rapidly rising cost of living and growing indications of war weariness on the part of the people. Saigon military leaders were confronted, therefore, with the need to carry out nonmilitary efforts to defeat the Viet Cong on political, social and economic fronts.

Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky, as had his predecessors, affirmed that, to accomplish the two tasks, the formation of a broadly representative government under an elected civilian leadership was needed. In February 1966 he offered plans to transfer power through constitutional processes no later than 1967. Militant civilian pressures, as manifested in the Buddhist-inspired political disturbances of March and April 1966 at Saigon, Hue and Da Nang, however, led to the government’s decision to advance the timetable and to hold an election for a constitution-drafting assembly in September 1966.

In early 1966 the armed forces, the Buddhists and the Catholics constituted the Big Three of the non-Communist forces. Political turbulence since November 1963 had resulted in part from the lack of agreement on fundamentals and in part from the unbalanced position of influence among the three elements. Political peace and cooperation between the two religious groups in particular were regarded in Saigon as a pivotal factor in governmental stability. In early 1966 the Viet Cong movement represented the only organized and disciplined mass following on a national scale. The insurgents’ strength was greater in the rural than in the urban areas.

Non-Communist political activities were largely urban based, and the number of those who were actually involved in political manifestations of one kind or another was small. Political parties proliferated, but none of them had any appreciable mass base.
Organizational discipline was weak, and leaders were lacking in stature. Programmatic statements issued by parties had little popular appeal. Closely related to the irrelevancy of political principles in politics was the people’s indifference toward the so-called ideological aspects of the North-South conflict.

An age-old popular tendency to mistrust nearly everything connected with the ruling authorities still persisted. Moreover, continual exposure to violence and insecurity made many people adopt a prudent attitude of noninvolvement with either the Viet Cong or the Saigon government, unless their physical safety was directly affected. Under these circumstances most of the people continued to rely on personalized relationship as the basis for political, economic and social activities. Family connections, regional or religious identification, professional background or school ties figured prominently.

Under President Diem, the country was in the hands of a single family which allowed no legal political opposition. After the downfall of the regime in November 1963, street demonstrations, hunger strikes or the tactics of self-immolation by fire became the means through which various demands and grievances could be channeled to the ruling authorities. Coups and countercoups became familiar instruments of changing government. Moreover, the government often found itself unable to carry out announced policies and programs because of the unpredictably changing political scene. As a separate political entity (as opposed to the historic entity of the whole of Vietnam) South Vietnam has existed for only 12 years, and during most of this period it has been concerned with the effort to survive the Communist threat. It has no tradition of representative government and is constantly plagued by Communist insurgency, so that the efforts of government leaders to develop a viable political order through constitutional processes continue to be slow and painful.

THE NGO DINH DIEM REGIME (1955-63)

Grave armed insurrections by dissident groups against the central government during the first 2 years of independence apparently led President Ngo Dinh Diem to believe that any political or social organization not under his control represented a threat to him and to the nation (see ch. 3, Historical Setting; ch. 26, Public Order and Safety). To consolidate his control, he relied heavily on his brothers.

The most influential was Ngo Dinh Nhu, who, as political adviser to the President, had a firm grip over all channels of governmental control and of mass mobilization within and outside the government. Nhu’s wife, Madame Nhu (nee: Tran Le Xuan), also played an influential role as the unofficial First Lady at the Presidential Palace. Nhu’s power was limited mainly to the southern region of the republic. The northern half was ruled by another brother, Ngo Dinh Can,
commonly referred to as the unofficial governor of Central Vietnam because he had held no official position in the government. Two other brothers, Thuc (the archbishop of Hue and dean of the Catholic episcopacy) and Luyen (ambassador to Great Britain), helped the President but played secondary roles to Nhu and Can.

President Diem also utilized the Army, police and civil bureaucracy to reinforce his control. Inclined to be suspicious of the southerners (the inhabitants of former Cochin China) and Buddhists, he filled key positions in these establishments with personally reliable figures—many of them Roman Catholic refugees originating from north of the seventeenth parallel. Politically loyal persons were also given special benefits in nongovernmental sectors. Some aspiring and ambitious persons adopted Catholicism, hoping in this way to gain access to choice positions in government.

To ensure loyalty within and outside the government, the Diem regime had at its disposal several organizations tightly controlled by Ngo Dinh Nhu, and Ngo Dinh Can. For example, there was a semi-secret, elite organization called the Revolutionary Personalist Labor Party (Can Lao Nhan Vi Cach Mang Dang), popularly called the Can Lao. Organized by a group of intellectuals and labor leaders under Ngo Dinh Nhu after Diem came to power, the Can Lao claimed membership of some 20,000 selectively recruited persons holding key positions in the armed forces and civil service. The Can Lao, seeking no mass following, did not compete in elections.

Apart from functioning as a political intelligence network, the Can Lao also played a leading role in inculcating its members with the political ideas of President Diem and his brother, Nhu, which were officially labeled as Personalism (Nhan-vi). Conceived as an all-embracing doctrinal alternative to Marxism, Personalism was derived from a movement, started in Paris by the late Emanuel Mounier, editor of *Esprit*, which had attracted a number of Catholic intellectuals in France. Through it, President Diem sought to find a middle ground between capitalist individualism and Communist collectivism, both of which, he said, “have inflicted great damage on man.”

The government also used the National Revolutionary Civil Servant’s League (Lien Doan Cong Chuc Cach Mang Quoc Gia), created in mid-1955. It included in its membership nearly all civil servants. The League was to conduct “study sessions” for civil servants, to acquaint them with Personalism, government policies and anti-Communist strategy and tactics.

To get broad popular support, the regime used the National Revolutionary Movement (Phong Trao Cach Mang Quoc Gia)—the official party of the government. The movement was formally established in October 1954 under the honorary leadership of President Diem, but its actual control was in the hands of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can.
As the dominant party in the National Assembly, it was the only one which had a semblance of a national following. Under official sponsorship, it organized meetings in every village to instruct the citizens in their civic duties and engender enthusiasm for the government. The movement worked closely with a number of auxiliary groups, including the Republican Youth Movement and the Vietnamese Women’s Solidarity Movement (founded and led by Madame Nhu).

There were, in addition, a number of secret police and political intelligence services. Probably the most powerful (and most feared by the people) was the Social and Political Research Service (So Nghien Cuu Xa Hoi Chinh Tri), which was placed directly under the presidency and headed by a close associate of Ngo Dinh Nhu. A primary responsibility of this agency was to conduct surveillance over all politicians, government officials, military officers, professionals, businessmen and intellectuals and to manipulate political, social and student groups for governmental advantages.

The Diem regime by 1959 was well on the way toward firm governmental control. The President had successfully established his claim to national leadership, but his initial popularity declined as his dependence on his family increased and as this dependence led to a monopoly of power by the family.

All political and social organizations, loyal as well as in opposition, were subject to a high degree of official control. No political party could be formed unless officially approved, and any newspaper suspected of being in sympathy with opposition views or critical of the government invariably provoked official retaliation. Because of the government’s tendency to regard all political dissenters as conspiratorial, nearly all opposition elements were forced to operate in semilegal conditions.

The opposition forces themselves were, however, factionally divided, financially weak and lacking mass following—a legacy of the pre-1954 pattern of political activities among non-Communist nationalists. South Vietnam became a virtual one-family and one-party state.

When Communist insurgency increased after mid-1959, President Diem tended to suspect and distrust even the moderate non-Communist opposition. On April 26, 1960, a group of 18 elder politicians and civic leaders who had held many secret meetings at Saigon’s Caravelle Hotel (hence known as the Caravelle Group) issued the Manifesto of the Eighteen. They called upon the President “to liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights and recognize the opposition so as to permit citizens to express themselves without fear, thus removing grievances and resentments, opposition to which now constitutes for the people their sole reason for existence.”

The Manifesto had no tangible effect, and one of the 18 members, Phan Khac Sun (later a chief of state), joined the paratroopers’ coup
of November 1960. The abortive coup attempt, led by Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi and joined also by Phan Quang Dan, who had been a principal opposition leader, was successful for a few hours, but the rebel force was outmaneuvered by Ngo Dinh Nhu and his loyal troops. Colonel Thi and his associates fled to Cambodia and did not return to Saigon until after President Diem's downfall in November 1963. After this incident the repressive actions of Nhu and his wife increased considerably, thereby further reinforcing the unpopularity of the Diem regime.

The government, however, had far less success with the Communists, who, beginning in mid-1959, stepped up campaigns of terror, assassination and subversion, and used propaganda to capitalize on a long list of accumulated peasant grievances. They sought to present themselves as nationalists, concealing their Communist identity.

In order to coordinate and direct the insurgency under a non-Communist label, the Hanoi regime established in December 1960 somewhere in the south, the so-called National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai-phong Mien-Nam). Another function of the organization was to neutralize politically all non-Communist elements. The Saigon government attempted to counter the insurgency mainly through military means, tending to neglect economic and social aspirations of the people. The urban orientation of the officials made them, in many cases, indifferent to the basic needs of the peasantry.

By October 1961, President Diem declared that his regime was confronted with "a real war waged by an enemy who attacks us with regular units fully and heavily equipped...." He proclaimed a state of emergency and on October 24 lodged formal charges of aggression against North Vietnam with the International Control Commission, requesting that the Commission conduct an investigation into the role of the Hanoi regime in its efforts to conquer the South.

By the end of 1961 the government was harassed by about 20,000 guerrillas, as against an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 in 1960. Between 1959 and the end of 1961 some 636 rural schools had to be closed because the safety of the students and their teachers could not be assured. Moreover, many local officials were reported to have been killed by the Communists—about 4,000 of them during one 12-month period alone—causing near paralysis in government activities in some areas. Meanwhile, the Communists established a rival administrative structure in their areas of control, collective taxes, running their own schools and even issuing currency.

The government's attitude toward the question of a more liberal political system was expressed by a senior presidential adviser who, in November 1961, said "When we must make war against the Communists there is no possibility of democracy." An indication of
popular discontent with the regime was the bombing and strafing of the Presidential Palace by two fighter pilots in February 1962. During the same month the Venerable Thich Tinh Khiet, titular leader of the Buddhist movement in South Vietnam, submitted to President Diem a letter urging the government to cease “religious discrimination activities” against the Buddhist community.

Nevertheless, except for occasional complaints by exiled opposition elements in Paris or Cambodia, internal non-Communist political forces were rendered virtually inoperative. The first opposition against the regime came from the Buddhist group, which had by far the greatest potential for mass following.

THE BUDDHIST UPRISING

The Buddhist crisis was touched off on May 7, 1963 (the fourteenth day of the fourth lunar month, celebrated in Vietnam as the anniversary of the Buddha’s birthday). The disturbance broke out at Hue in Central Vietnam, the center of Vietnamese Buddhism and also the seat of Roman Catholic Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc, President Diem’s elder brother and the most powerful voice in South Vietnam’s Catholic community. Politically, Hue was also the seat of Ngo Dinh Can, who had ruled Central Vietnam, often independently of Saigon.

The crisis was precipitated by the government order forbidding the flying of the Buddhist flag. Buddhist followers who had gathered at Hue’s Tu Dam Pagoda on May 7 were aroused by the government’s order, and the next day they staged protest demonstrations to demand religious equality. At this rally Thich Tri Quang, militant leader of the Buddhist movement in Central Vietnam, declared their demand to be “legitimate.” His recorded speech, to be rebroadcast that evening on Radio Hue, was, however, canceled by the authorities. Thereupon, some 10,000 persons defied the local security authorities, who countered by firing into the crowds.

The shooting resulted in the death of nine demonstrators. The authorities blamed Communist terrorists, but the Buddhists held the government troops responsible. On May 9, Thich Tam Chau, a relatively moderate leader of the Buddhist movement in the southern zone of the Republic, appealed to all Buddhists to join in protest against the government. The next day a group of Buddhist leaders, including Thich Tri Quang, called upon the government, in a five-point manifesto, to withdraw the order forbidding the flying of the Buddhist flag, to grant Buddhism equal status and privileges accorded the Catholic Church, to punish officers responsible for the Hue incident and compensate the victims thereof, to allow freedom of worship to the Buddhists and to stop harassing Buddhist faithful. Two weeks later the Buddhist leadership disavowed any political ambition by declaring that they were not advocating the overthrow of the gov-
ernment and that they had "no yearning nor desire to struggle for power."

The government announced on June 1 the dismissal of three senior officials involved in the Hue shooting incident, but this step failed to satisfy the Buddhists. The Buddhist cause was strengthened on June 11 by the self-immolation by fire of an elderly monk, Thich Quang Duc, on a Saigon street. On this date representatives from both sides tentatively reached a compromise agreement whereby the government promised vaguely to satisfy the Buddhist demands.

Thich Tinh Khiet, on behalf of the Buddhist community, expressed the view that the agreement would "inaugurate a new era and that no misunderstanding, no erroneous action from whatever quarter will occur again." The agreement failed to improve the situation, in part because of subsequent government charges that some of the Buddhist leaders were associated with the Communists and in part because of the government's delaying tactics. Moreover, measures reflecting increasingly anti-Buddhist attitudes on the part of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Madame Nhu served to widen the breach between the two sides.

The relation between the government and the Buddhists deteriorated beyond repair after August 20 and 21, when, under the direction of Ngo Dinh Nhu; several hundred armed police and troops raided a number of pagodas in Saigon and Hue, arresting nearly 1,000 monks, nuns and laymen. Three monks, including Thich Tri Quang, evaded the authorities and were granted asylum by the United States Embassy in Saigon. This raid, which resulted in the inactivation of most of the leading Buddhist elements, also occasioned the emergence of student groups as a politically significant force. Despite the proclamation of martial law after the raid, the student groups continued antigovernment demonstrations in major cities; during the final week of August alone some 1,400 students were arrested by the authorities. In early September, 2,400 additional students were detained.

The Buddhist struggle, especially after the raids of August 21, attracted widespread sympathy in South Vietnam and abroad. On August 22, Saigon's Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau, a Buddhist, and Ambassador to the United States Tran Van Chuong (father of Madame Nhu) resigned in protest against the government. The United States Department of State issued a statement deploring "serious repressive measures against the Vietnamese Buddhist leaders." Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with Saigon on August 27. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Saigon, Monsignor Paul Nguyen Van Binh, appealed to the government for religious toleration. At the United Nations on September 4 the representatives of 14 Afro-Asian nations formally requested a debate concerning the question of "The Violation of Human Rights in South Vietnam" at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. On October 24 a 6-nation United Nations Fact Finding Mission arrived in Saigon.
The Buddhist crisis also aroused many military leaders, some of whom had been used and discarded by the Ngo family. The officers in general were concerned over deteriorating security and were especially disturbed by Ngo Dinh Nhu's attempt to shift the responsibility for the August raid to the military establishment. In addition, they appeared to have been alarmed over Nhu's reported disclosure in mid-October 1963 that he had been probing the possibility of direct negotiations with the Hanoi regime.

THE NOVEMBER 1963 COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH

Military Rule

On November 1, 1963, a group of senior generals led by Major Generals Duong Van Minh, Tran Van Don and Le Van Kim carried out a coup d'état against the regime with the aid of troops supplied by Major General Ton That Dinh, then commander of the III Corps and military governor of Saigon. President Diem and his brother, Nhu, fled the Palace but were captured after taking sanctuary in a Catholic church in Cho Lon. The next day, while en route under guard to the General Staff Headquarters, they were killed by army officers. Their death ended the Ngo family's 9 years of rule.

The coup leaders eschewed political ambitions, pledged a relentless anti-Communist drive and on November 2 installed as prime minister Nguyen Ngoc Tho, a Buddhist who had served as vice president since 1955. They also suspended the 1956 constitution and dissolved the National Assembly. An interim civilian-military Cabinet was formed on November 4, and a 24-member Revolutionary Military Council, with authority to exercise executive and legislative powers, was established under the chairmanship of Major General Duong Van Minh.

The Revolutionary Military Council in turn announced programs to establish a "disciplined democratic political structure," to guarantee the freedom of religious worship for all, to recognize all non-Communist political parties "within the framework of national security," and to transfer governing powers to an elected government "when the situation permits." The Council also announced the creation of a 60-member Council of Notables to draft a new constitution.

Furthermore, the Council initiated a series of measures designed to liberalize much of the repressive practices instituted by the Diem regime, including the disbanding of all political and social organizations that had been controlled by the Ngo family. Political prisoners were released, but, at the same time, several hundred persons regarded as leading collaborators of the former regime were arrested for investigation. The Council's attempt to shift personnel of the
top command structure of the military was, however, blocked by internal resistance and rivalry.

The Buddhist leaders, despite their major role in the anti-Ngo Dinh Diem struggle, did not participate directly in the decision-making process of the government. Instead, their new strategy was to develop a cohesive national organization, presumably to assert themselves more effectively in public affairs. On January 3, 1964, they formed a Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (Giao Hoi Phat Giao Vietnam Thong Nhat) under the nominal leadership of the aged Thich Tinh Khiet; in fact, the organization was led by Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau.

The regime of Major General Duong Van Minh was supplanted, in a coup carried out on January 30, 1964, by a group of younger generals headed by Major General Nguyen Khanh (see table 1). He declared that the previous regime had been “too slow to keep up with the progress of the revolution and to respond to the exigencies of the struggle against the Communists.”

He installed himself as prime minister, induced Major General Minh to accept the ceremonial post of chief of state, pledged a more vigorous anti-Communist and antineutralist struggle and promised better living conditions. A new governing body, called the Military Revolutionary Council, was established under Khanh’s chairmanship. In April, Prime Minister Khanh dissolved the Council of Notables and announced plans for the formation of a popularly elected constituent assembly within 4 to 6 months.

The January 1964 coup was coolly received by the public, probably because it ousted Major General Minh, who had been widely regarded, particularly by the Buddhists, as the nation’s most capable and popular general. It was also evident that many people looked upon the coup merely as an offshoot of an ongoing intramilitary power struggle. As a result, the Khanh regime was not popular with the Buddhists, the urban intellectuals or the Catholics. The intellectuals pressed for the early establishment of a civilian government, and the government countered by banning a number of Saigon newspapers. The Buddhists complained that the “remnants of the old regime” continued to harass them in Central Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Catholics charged the regime with being pro-Buddhist, and in June 1964 some 35,000 Roman Catholics staged protest demonstrations in Saigon, Hue and Da Nang.

The Prime Minister proclaimed a state of emergency on August 7, press censorship was reimposed, strikes and public meetings were banned and the government was given additional investigative and detention powers. On August 16, Prime Minister Khanh proclaimed himself president under a new constitution written at his direction.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of change</th>
<th>Chief of state</th>
<th>Chief executive</th>
<th>Real source of power</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954:</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 7</td>
<td>Bao Dai</td>
<td>Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem</td>
<td>Ngo Dinh Diem.</td>
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<td>1955:</td>
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<td>1963:</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>Major General Duong Van Minh</td>
<td>Prime Minister Nguyen Ngoc Tho.</td>
<td>Revolutionary Military Council, under Duong Van Minh.</td>
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<td>1964:</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 30</td>
<td>Major General Nguyen Khanh</td>
<td>Nguyen Khanh</td>
<td>Revolutionary Military Council, under Nguyen Khanh.</td>
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<td>February 8</td>
<td>Major General Duong Van Minh</td>
<td>Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh</td>
<td>Revolutionary Military Council.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 16</td>
<td>President Nguyen Khanh</td>
<td>Acting Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Oanh</td>
<td>Do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 27</td>
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<td>Provisional Leadership Committee (Khanh Minh and Tran Thien Khiem).</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 3</td>
<td>Major General Duong Van Minh</td>
<td>Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh</td>
<td>Khanh, Minh and Khiem, until September 30, 1964.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 26</td>
<td>Phan Khac Suu</td>
<td>Prime Minister Tran Van Huong.</td>
<td>Armed Forces Council (from December 18, 1964 to May 6, 1965) (Minh was dropped in November 1964).</td>
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<td>1965:</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Acting Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Oanh</td>
<td>Armed Forces Council.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 16</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat.</td>
<td>Armed Forces Council (Khanh was ousted on February 21, 1965).</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19</td>
<td>Major General Nguyen Van Thieu</td>
<td>Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky.</td>
<td>The Directory (National Leadership Committee—10 generals).</td>
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1 Attempted coups on Sept. 18, 1964, and Feb. 19, 1965, respectively, failed.
2 Actual takeover by Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky on June 12; the formation of the Cabinet took place on June 19.
The new regime was almost immediately denounced by nearly all political groups as being worse than the Ngo Dinh Diem dictatorship. Massive antigovernment demonstrations were staged by Buddhists and students throughout the country; their demands included an early end to military rule, elections within 3 months, elimination from government of all persecutors of the Buddhists and the resignation of President Khanh. Under pressure, the Military Revolutionary Council announced on August 25 the resignation of President Khanh and the annulment of the August 16 constitution. Two days later, the Council established a three-man Provisional Leadership Committee composed of Major Generals Khanh, Duong Van Minh and Tran Thien Khiem (popular with the Catholics) and dissolved itself. Major General Khanh resumed the post of prime minister on September 3.

This compromise formula pleased neither of the two religious groups; the Buddhists continued to campaign for more thorough purging of the so-called Diemists—many of them Catholics. When Prime Minister Khanh appeared to be yielding to the Buddhist pressure, a group of Catholic officers staged an unsuccessful coup on September 13, presumably to minimize the Buddhist influence. Prime Minister Khanh removed Lieutenant General Tran Thien Khiem from the Provisional Leadership Committee, sending him to Washington as ambassador to the United States. The attempted coup failed mainly because the Prime Minister was firmly supported by then Brigadier General Nguyen Cao Ky, the Air Force commander.

**Civilian Rule**

General elections to a constituent assembly, which had been promised in April 1964, were not held; instead, the Khanh regime appointed on September 26 a 17-member civilian High National Council, which represented various political groupings. A new constitution framed by the Council was promulgated on October 20, and 4 days later Phan Khac Suu was elected by the Council as provisional chief of state. Suu in turn appointed, on October 26, Tran Van Huong as prime minister, and an all-civilian 15-member Cabinet—drawn mostly from the ranks of the civil service—was installed on November 4, 1964. Although in form, at least, the principle of civil supremacy was assured, the exercise of actual power, remained in the hands of military leaders.

The Huong Cabinet was opposed by nearly all political groups as being unrepresentative. Buddhist and Catholic groups as well as many party politicians, including those on the High National Council, alleged that they had not been "consulted in advance" of the formation of the Cabinet. The Buddhists appeared to be especially
displeased with Prime Minister Huong's announced intention to minimize the influence of religious groups on the government.

Buddhists and students once again resorted to street demonstrations. When tear gas was used by the police the Buddhists charged the regime with using the same repressive police tactics as did the Ngo Dinh Diem regime and called on the United States to withdraw its support from the Huong government. Prime Minister Huong implied that the Buddhists were infiltrated by the Communists and fortified his position by declaring martial law in Saigon, imposing press censorship, banning public meetings and closing all schools in the city. Moreover, in December 1964 the Huong regime helped form a rival organization called the General Association of Vietnamese Buddhists, apparently to undermine the influence of the Unified Buddhist Church, which carried by far the most powerful voice in the Buddhist community.

Prime Minister Huong's uncompromising posture was generally backed up by the military. On December 18 some 30 young generals organized themselves into an Armed Forces Council to regain tighter control over the civilian establishments and also to ensure a balance of power among themselves. Two days later the Armed Forces Council, chaired by Nguyen Khanh (who had been promoted to lieutenant general), announced the dissolution of the High National Council on the grounds that it had been "abused by counterrevolutionary elements." The so-called December 20 coup was widely interpreted in Saigon as a blow to civilian politicians and also as occasioning the arrival of the so-called Young Turk generals onto the center of political power.

Amid mounting Buddhist discontent with the government, Prime Minister Huong promised in late January 1965 to hold general elections to a 145-member national legislature in March 1965. The Buddhists, nonetheless, continued to press for the resignation of Prime Minister Huong, whom they described as a lackey of the United States ambassador in Saigon. Antigovernment demonstrations also assumed an anti-American character.

In efforts to contain mounting disorders, the Armed Forces Council, on January 27, 1965, dismissed Prime Minister Huong and, on February 16, appointed Phan Huy Quat as successor. The facade of continuing civilian administration was thus maintained, but the authors of real power were Lieutenant General Khanh and his military associates. The new Cabinet, which included representatives of nearly all political groups, was favorably received by the Buddhist elements. As a transitional legislature, the Armed Forces Council established a 20-member civilian-military National Legislative Council on February 17, under the chairmanship of Major General Phan Xuan Chieu.
On February 19, however, a group of militant Catholic officers who had been implicated in the anti-Khanh coup attempt of September 1964 rebelled once again against Lieutenant General Khanh, whom they denounced as a dictator. The coup attempt was crushed, but on February 21 the Armed Forces Council ousted Lieutenant General Khanh as chairman of the Council and as commander in chief of the armed forces. It appeared that Lieutenant General Khanh had become unpopular with many of the Council members reportedly because of his strong man tendencies.

The Armed Forces Council dissolved itself on May 6 after announcing that it had full confidence in the Quat government and that it had wanted to concentrate on the war efforts. Prime Minister Quat was, however, unpopular with the Catholics, allegedly because of his pro-Buddhist attitudes and policies. He had another difficulty with Chief of State Suu over divergent views on the constitutional powers affecting appointment of Cabinet members. On June 12, 1965, Suu and Quat formally relinquished their offices and invited the military to take over the government.

The Return of the Military

Two days later a National Leadership Committee, frequently called The Directorate, was formed under the chairmanship of Major General Nguyen Van Thieu as the supreme governing body. Major General Thieu, a Catholic convert from Buddhism, after noting that 8 months of civilian rule had hampered counterinsurgency efforts, pledged to return power to an elected civilian government as soon as the war was won and "corrupt elements" were eliminated.

A new "war Cabinet" of 14 civilian and 3 military officers was formed on June 19 under Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, as prime minister. The reinstitution of military rule was protested by the Buddhist, Catholic and student groups alike. In February 1966, Prime Minister Ky formally announced plans for the formation of a civilian government after an election to be held sometime in 1967 (see ch. 13, The Governmental System). Civilian elements, the Buddhists and Catholics in particular, acted in concert in mid-March 1966 to demand the end of military rule.

Civil-military strife was touched off on March 10, 1966, when Prime Minister Ky relieved Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi of the command of the I Corps (comprising the five northern provinces) and from The Directorate "for reasons of health." General Thi had been widely regarded in Saigon as the Prime Minister's chief rival within the military power structure and reportedly had often resisted or delayed the execution of orders from the central government which he did not endorse. His removal almost immediately aroused anti-Saigon feelings among many people of the five northern provinces,
especially in Hue and Da Nang. Also, the General, a Buddhist, was a close friend of Thich Tri Quang, the leader of the militant wing of the Buddhist movement. He was also said to be the only general in the nation having any measure of popular political support, and, in addition, he enjoyed the personal loyalty of many military officers and civil officials in the northern area.

The combination of these factors precipitated a state of political tumult in the northern area. Buddhist leaders instigated a series of antigovernment demonstrations, in which students, civil servants, urban workers, police officers and large numbers of the military participated. In Hue and Da Nang dissidents formed the so-called Popular Force Struggling for Revolution, more commonly known as the “Struggle Force.” Anti-Saigon demonstrations at times became overtly anti-American. By the end of March it became evident that the central government had lost effective control in the northern provinces. Saigon itself became the scene of antigovernmental disturbances in which the Catholics also played a leading part.

In an effort to prevent further political chaos, Prime Minister Ky summoned a National Political Congress in early April to recommend appropriate procedures for establishing an elected civilian government. Some 170 delegates were invited to attend the Congress. Buddhist and Catholic groups initially boycotted the Congress, but later each sent two “observers.”

The Congress submitted a 10-point list of recommendations to the government. One accepted was the Buddhist demand that the participants in Hue and Da Nang demonstrations should not be punished by the government. Prime Minister Ky announced that he would accept the findings of the Congress, and Chief of State Thieu on April 14 announced a decree that general elections for a constituent assembly would be held within 3 to 5 months.

Thereupon, moderate Buddhist leaders in Saigon ordered all anti-governmental demonstrations suspended but vowed “to adopt an appropriate attitude and action” if the government acted in bad faith. The dissidents in Hue and Da Nang, under the Struggle Force, however, continued to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Ky and pledged to maintain their militant vigilance “until Vietnam has a government elected by the people.”

MAJOR POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Insurgency and Rural Uplift

In the early 1960's no stratum or segment of the population, urban or rural, was free from Viet Cong terrorism. In the countryside, the backbone of Viet Cong strength, thousands of local government officials were subjected to intimidation, assassination and kidnapping.
In some instances officials, fearful of Viet Cong vengeance, refrained from taking effective action.

Saigon itself was not immune to occasional Viet Cong raids. Successive regimes in Saigon were seriously handicapped in satisfying the social, educational and economic needs of the rural population. The task was further complicated by the Viet Cong strategy of economically and physically isolating towns and cities from the rural areas. In nearly half of its territory, the Saigon regime barely functioned as an effective government. The greater part of the country was controlled by government authorities during the day and by the Viet Cong at night.

Over the years the Saigon leaders had generally acted on the assumption that internal security could be realized largely through military efforts. As a result, much of the government's efforts and resources were diverted to battlefronts, and little consideration was given to the welfare of the economically distressed people, especially in the rural areas. The Diem regime's attempts to weaken Viet Cong influence among villagers through the agrovilles program in early 1959 (reorganized and modified as the Strategic Hamlet Program in March 1962) proved ineffective (see ch. 19, Agriculture). These programs, initiated mainly to deny Viet Cong agents the food, money, intelligence and recruits that they had been obtaining from the peasants, had little to offer the villagers who had been relocated or uprooted, often forcibly, from their ancestral lands. Because of its unpopular reception, Prime Minister Khanh overhauled the Strategic Hamlet Program and renamed it the New Life Hamlet Program.

By late 1965 it had become evident that the problem could not be effectively solved unless the people themselves had confidence in the government and were willing to fight for their homes and villages against the Viet Cong. To restore security and bring the benefits of governmental services to the countryside. Prime Minister Ky in February 1966 initiated a new rural reconstruction program. He called it the Revolutionary Development Program and gave it top priority as one of the three major governmental objectives for 1966.

Administered by the Department of Revolutionary Development, under the Ministry of War and Reconstruction, this program in mid-1966 was being carried out by some 23,000 revolutionary development cadres, largely of village origin. After training at Vung Tau for a period of up to 13 weeks in information dissemination techniques, military skills, political matters, public health, civic affairs, intelligence work, economic development and census taking, they were assigned to selected villages in teams consisting of 59 to 80 armed men. Operating only in militarily secure areas, each team was expected to stay in one village for about 13 weeks, with the ultimate aim of winning the trust and affection of villagers. The team's functions included initiating
locally needed welfare and developmental projects, establishing local paramilitary defense, making a list of local grievances for corrective action and issuing identification cards to the villagers.

Unlike the earlier *agrovilles* and Strategic Hamlet Programs, the new program did not attempt to relocate villagers. In essence, these revolutionary development teams were attempting to defeat the Viet Cong agents in their own practice of building the basis of popular support of the village level by befriending the peasants. Their mission was to convince the villagers that the Saigon regime recognized their grievances as legitimate and was ready and willing to respond to them; another important objective was to spread the notion that the Saigon regime had more to offer than the Viet Cong in terms of peace, spiritual and material welfare and social justice.

There were signs in 1966 that the Revolutionary Development Program, operating in only 980 hamlets (out of some 15,000), might cut into the Viet Cong capability to exploit rural areas as the bases of their operation. Formidable problems remain to be solved, however, including red tape in the bureaucracy, the continuing need for experienced specialists, governmental instability in Saigon and the problem of checking the rapidly rising living costs (see ch. 8, Living Conditions; ch. 13, The Governmental System; ch. 18, Character and Structure of the Economy).

**Political Disunity**

In the early 1960's, there was little evidence that the major political groups were ready to work together in the task of nation-building. Among non-Communist elements a common ground for concerted political action appeared to be lacking, and at times, the threat to national survival itself seemed to be of secondary importance. In fact, the reason for the nation's own existence appeared to be unclear and unintelligible to many. Nonetheless, the body politic somehow demonstrated the capacity to survive one crisis after another, without suffering total disintegration.

Because colonial Vietnam was ruled as three regional entities—Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China—the people of each region had no single identifiable focus of allegiance except the common awareness of being Vietnamese and the accompanying desire for independence. Combined with partisan sentiments for their respective regions, people living in the former Annam could not readily reconcile themselves to accepting Saigon as their political and intellectual capital; those of former Annam, along with those of former Tonkin, tended to regard the people of former Cochin China unpolished and lacking in drive and vigor (see ch. 12, Social Values).

President Diem's regime came to be identified mainly as a government by northerners and Catholics; other major political forces of
the nation seldom had any opportunity to work together in competitive harmony. Therefore, South Vietnamese exposure to free partisan politics began only after 1963, and then only in a limited way. It appeared likely that the process of resolving conflicting demands and of achieving agreement would be subjected to further stresses and tensions. Frictions between the Buddhists and Catholics, between civilian politicians and military leaders, between ethnic minorities and the Vietnamese, and among other groupings appeared likely to persist in years to come, whether in war or peace.

Disunity was also fostered by the popular tendency to distrust strangers and all ruling authorities and by the resultant inclination to remain indifferent and apathetic toward the nation's political life. Many Vietnamese are prone to assume that everyone acts out of selfish motives. Furthermore, more than two decades of wartime conditions and attendant human miseries have caused many Vietnamese to develop a prudent, opportunistic outlook. Because of the government's inability to provide protection from Communist terrorism in many areas, they tend to believe that their physical survival depends largely on their own efforts. In many cases, the people seem to prefer nonparticipation in activities involving political extremes, and to avoid being harassed by any outsiders, whether the Viet Cong or the government. Moreover, because of their deep-rooted seeing-is-believing attitude, most of the population tends to react against all political ideologies and slogans (see ch. 12, Social Values; ch. 17, Political Values and Attitudes).

Still another complicating factor is the South Vietnamese propensity to rely on highly personalized relationships in their social and political behavior. No organized sector of this society is free from the frequently divisive influence of this personalized social relationship. The civil service, the armed forces, political parties and organizations, labor unions, student organizations and even religious organizations tend to function on the basis of personality factors rather than on the basis of abstract political principles or a set of codes governing organizational life. Personal relationship is in turn conditioned by the cross-currents of regional origins, family connections, school ties and religious background.

In the early 1960's charges of irregularity among officials and also among businessmen were frequently raised. After his takeover in June 1965, Prime Minister Ky pledged relentless elimination of those whom he called "corrupt officials, horders and speculators." The Prime Minister declared these elements to be even "more dangerous than the Communists" and announced his intention to establish "a government of the poor, the hungry." He continued to warn, in his March 1966 speech to the nation, that dishonest elements should be regarded as "the nation's enemies because they have hindered a great deal the struggle of the people."
MAJOR POLITICAL FORCES

The Armed Forces

Under the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, the armed forces were subordinate to civilian leadership and, despite their potential as a political force, elements of the military establishment as a group seldom sought an independent political role. Their political involvement, confined mainly to the officer corps, was carefully dictated by the President and his family, and many of the senior officers, a large proportion of them Catholics, derived their favored position from demonstrated personal loyalty to the Ngo family.

The dominant position of the armed forces after November 1963 was attributable to the absence of any alternative civilian groups with effective leadership and organization. Collectively, the officer corps drew its power and influence from control of the troops and the governmental administration down to the district level (see ch. 13, The Governmental System). Moreover, its political importance was enhanced by its leading role in the counterinsurgency efforts.

The officers on the whole have proven their unity in counterinsurgency operations, but their behavior in relation to other matters seemed to be less cohesive. The officer group is a mixture of diverse elements. Among them are Catholics and Buddhists as well as northerners and southerners. There are still others whose political activities cannot be explained in terms of either religious or regional background.

Latent mutual jealousy and suspicion between Buddhist and Catholic officers often affected adversely the solidarity of the officer corps. A desire to minimize the disruptive influence of religious factors on the military and also on the society in general, for example, appeared to be the main consideration in filling the membership of the 10-member Directory with five Buddhists and five Catholics; in addition, the question of regional balance was also taken into account in its makeup.

At times, however, religious considerations proved to be irrelevant. For example, Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi, former I Corps commander, had a number of Roman Catholic officers on his staff as did other Corps commanders. General Thi’s successor, Major General Ton That Dinh, was also a Roman Catholic, but he was well received by the antigovernmental and anti-Catholic Buddhist-inspired members of the Struggle Committee at Hue and Da Nang. Prime Minister Ky, whose resignation was demanded by a group of militant Buddhists, was himself a Buddhist.

The officer corps in general disliked any single man becoming too powerful or domineering. Prime Minister Ky repeatedly emphasized that he was merely a coequal among the 10 generals of The Directorate
and that no one general could be singled out as more influential than another. Such public assertions were intended apparently to allay the common apprehension that no single political or religious group should be predominant.

In terms of political influence, the commanders of the four corps, the Capital Military Region and the Air Force were regarded in early 1966 as important. In most instances, support or lack of it from the III Corps, elements of which surround the capital area, and from the Air Force, was sufficient to prolong or shorten the life of a Saigon regime. The traditional popular belief that government is the function of civil officials has also been a factor contributing to the existing friction between military and civilian elements.

It appeared likely in early 1966 that the armed forces would remain an influential political force. They would go on playing the role of watchdog, political stabilizer or arbiter, as in June 1965 when the political deadlock between Chief of State Suu and Prime Minister Quat culminated in the military takeover.

**Religious Groups**

The Buddhists

Between 70 and 80 percent of the South Vietnamese population, or more than 11 million persons, are considered to be Buddhists, but only about half of them adhere closely to the precepts of that faith (see ch. II, Religion). Political activists among them probably number no more than 2 million, but this numerical strength is sufficient to assure them a major role in national politics.

Buddhists are found on all levels of society, in all regions, in urban and rural areas, in the civil service and in the armed forces. They include party politicians, professionals, students, merchants, labor union members and peasants. Among them are nationalists, proponents of neutralism, anti-Communists and infiltrated Communists in Buddhist disguise. Geographically, they are divided into the so-called northern and southern groups of South Vietnam. In addition, they are divided into numerous sects (see ch. 11, Religion).

Given effective leadership, organizational discipline and unity, the Buddhists could readily convert their numerical superiority and cross-sectional representation into a powerful political movement. On a national scale, members of the hierarchy are probably in closer touch with the people than any other political group. At the village level, monks and nuns are accepted as an integral and natural part of the daily life. Usually, Buddhists are regarded as more Vietnamese than are Catholics, partly because Buddhism was not closely identified with the French administration, which had favored Catholicism as an instrument for political and cultural colonization. This negative attitude toward Catholicism was further reinforced during the unpopular, Catholic-oriented Diem regime.
The massive upsurge of Buddhist influence was the direct result of President Diem's policy of repressing organized political opposition. His downfall in November 1963 resulted in a political vacuum, and the Buddhists, who had been the only political group independent of the government, found themselves, along with military figures, at the forefront of national politics. Thereafter, the Buddhist hierarchy sought to portray itself as the guardian of 80 percent of the Vietnamese people, whom they claimed as the Buddhist faithful. The Buddhist leaders have repeatedly eschewed political ambitions and have asserted that they were not foreign-oriented. As early as May 25, 1963, a group of leaders, including Thich Thien Khiet, Thich Tam Chau and Thich Tri Quang, declared:

Who has made the most sacrifices, who has made the most contributions to the fight against foreign invasion and for national revolution? Who has had more deaths on the battlefronts rather than sit tight at desk jobs and enjoy life in the cities? Who has been and is making most of this kind of contribution and yet never wanted to know about foreign aid nor had any desire to get to power? . . . Who are they, if not the Buddhist faithful, and Buddhist soldiers themselves?

Political developments since early 1964 indicate that, seemingly at least, the Buddhist leadership could often dictate the direction of government actions. Their opposition activities were responsible for General Khanh's relinquishing the presidency in late August 1964 and for the downfall of Prime Minister Huong in January 1965. Buddhist pressure in March and April 1966 also caused the government of Prime Minister Ky to agree to the transfer of power to an elected government earlier than it had originally intended. The standard Buddhist tactics included street demonstrations, hunger strikes and self-immolation by fire. The principal participants were mostly high school and college students, supplemented at times by adult sympathizers.

It was difficult in mid-1966 to ascertain the extent and depth of the Buddhists' real political potential. It was likely that, because Buddhist leaders are highly regarded in the country for their integrity and self-renunciation, many people willingly followed their leadership. On the other hand, it was equally possible that many of the street demonstrators took advantage of the Buddhist-instigated rallies as convenient forums for voicing their discontent with the ruling authorities without actually endorsing the Buddhist political posture.

Except for small numbers of monks and nuns genuinely motivated by doctrinal considerations, it became increasingly evident that most of the protestors were driven more by personal grievances than by religious motives. They appeared to be protesting, under Buddhist cover, as politically aroused, and sometimes exploited, individuals troubled by one or more of the problems involving the rising cost of living, physical insecurity, intense but formless nationalist sentiments,
war weariness, uncertain political future, regional feelings or recurring frictions between Buddhist and Catholic groups.

The Buddhists' role in antigovernmental activities often reflected the society's social and economic tensions. There is no tradition of loyal opposition. In the absence of popularly based political parties and free information media, efforts to change government leadership tended to be made through conspiratorial maneuvers, and attempts to convey political messages to the leaders took extremist forms.

In early 1966 the dominant Buddhist organization was the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam under the titular leadership of Thich Thien Khiét (see ch. 11, Religion). Established in January 1964 the Unified Buddhist Church carried on its political activities through the Institute for the Execution of Dharma (Vien Hoa Dao), more commonly known as the Buddhist Institute for Secular Affairs, headed by Thich Tam Chau.

After April 1966 the political activities became the exclusive concern of a newly created Vietnam Buddhist Force (Luc Luong Phitat Giao Vietnam) but subject to overall control by the Vien Hoa Dao. The Vietnam Buddhist Force, directed by a steering body called the Buddhist Forces Leadership Committee, was set up to coordinate and centrally control all Buddhist-inspired political activities under the chairmanship of Thich Thien Minh, head of the Youth Department in the Vien Hoa Dao and the third most important leader within the Unified Buddhist Church. A protege of Thich Tri Quang, Thich Thien Minh played a leading role in the anti-Diem movement in late 1963. Next in command in the Vietnam Buddhist Force was Thich Ho Giac, head of the Lay Department in the Vien Hoa Dao.

In September 1964, Thich Ho Giac, as the publisher of the Hai Trieu Am (Echo of the Rising Tide), the official organ of the Vien Hoa Dao, called on the Viet Cong to lay down arms and indirectly criticized alleged United States interference in Saigon's internal affairs. He was reportedly censured by Thich Tam Chau for his stand.

The Vien Hoa Dao exerted its influence down to the village and hamlet level through its extensive territorial organization (see ch. 11, Religion). Taken together, this organization, with its regional, provincial, district, and village and city branches, constituted, for all practical purposes, a sort of shadow government parallel to that of the Saigon administration.

Buddhists based in Hue and Da Nang are regarded as more politically partisan, militant and nationalistic than Buddhists based in Saigon. In their attitudes and activities, the northerners, led by Thich Tri Quang, generally took a militant line, while the southerners, led by Thich Tam Chau, were more conciliatory. The northerners' attitude derives from Thich Tri Quang's personal influence, strong regional feeling in the five northern provinces, the severity of anti-
Buddhist discrimination under the Diem regime and the relatively more severe economic depression of the region (see ch. 18, Character and Structure of the Economy).

Other prominent bonzes were Thich Phap Tri, Thich Tam Giac, Thich Minh Chau, Thich Quang Lien, Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Thien Hoa. Among leading laymen were Tran Quang Thuan, formerly chairman of the Buddhist Student Association and secretary of state for social affairs in Prime Minister Khanh's Cabinet, and Mai Tho Truyen, spokesman for the Buddhists of former Cochin China.

The Unified Buddhist Church declared that Vietnam should not become “one of the Sino-Russian satellites or a colony of the Western imperialists.” It also repeatedly expressed the hope that a “fratricidal war in Vietnam” be brought to an end through “an honorable solution.” The Buddhists firmly opposed any form of military rule and similarly displayed sensitivity to any signs of a Catholic political comeback. Toward the Communist insurgents, denounced by Buddhist leaders as antinational and atheistic, the Unified Buddhist Church demanded that they be disbanded and withdrawn to North Vietnam. On a more positive note, they asserted that the government should be managed by civilians representing all segments of the population and that all persons who had contributed to the downfall of the Diem regime be returned to active political life. The Buddhist leaders, however, seldom went beyond the generalities to touch on specifics.

The Catholics

The Roman Catholics, numbering about 1.5 million, or approximately 10.5 percent of the population, were the most important political group under the Diem regime. Although their dominant position was taken over by the Buddhists after November 1963, the Catholics continued in 1966 to constitute a highly influential group because of their cohesiveness and extensive representation in the officer corps of the armed forces, in the higher echelon of the civil service and among the liberal professional elements. The Catholic community, comprising some 700 parishes throughout the country, is, on the whole, better educated and more affluent than any other aspiring groups.

The Catholics, like the Buddhists, are divided into militant and moderate groups. The militant element, often called the northern group, is made up of about 700,000 refugees from Communist North Vietnam, mostly from the Red River Delta area. They are regarded as being more partisan, anti-Buddhist and anti-Communist than their southern compatriots, who are made up of those Catholics native to the former Annam and Cochin China regions. The northern group is led by Father Hoang Quynh, chairman of the Greater Unity Force (Luc Luong Dai Don Ket), or Greater Solidarity Bloc as
it is sometimes called, a lay organization which has provided the bulk of the Catholic activists since March 1965.

In mid-April 1966 this organization was rechristened the Vietnamese Catholic Citizens Bloc. Still led by Father Hoang Quynh, it claimed to represent all Catholics, regardless of regional origins, and its apparent purpose was to serve as a single political arm of the Roman Catholic Church in South Vietnam, presumably to counter the Unified Buddhist Church and its newly created political arm, the Vietnamese Buddhist Force.

The southern Catholics are led by the Archbishop of Saigon, Monsignor Paul Nguyen Van Binh, who is assisted by Father Ho Van Vui. The southern adherents of Catholicism were less favored by President Ngo than those originating in the former protectorate of Tonkin. As a result, the southern Catholics tended to sympathize with the Buddhist grievances against the Diem regime and generally took a more relaxed and conciliatory attitude toward the Buddhist-Catholic frictions.

In early 1966, Monsignor Binh, through the Liaison Office of the Archdiocese of Saigon, continued to exert a moderating influence upon the militant northerners. Despite occasional signs of internal friction between Monsignor Binh and Father Quynh, their united front vis-a-vis the Buddhist community was generally maintained.

Political developments since November 1963 indicated that governmental stability in Saigon would depend in part on the balance of power between the Catholics and the Buddhists or on governmental ability to accommodate the conflicting demands between the two religious groups. The post-Diem regimes generally attempted to cultivate the good will of both groups, but failed to please either of them, partly because of the suspicion between the two and partly because of the nearly one-sided upsurge of Buddhist influence. In their efforts to offset the Buddhist strength, therefore, the Catholics often sought to enlist the support of two other religious groups, the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao (see ch. 11, Religion).

The Catholics, as a whole, regard themselves as more pro-Western and anti-Communist than the Buddhists. In principle, however, their political aspirations represented no appreciable departure from those of their adversaries. Catholic leaders generally stood for the goals of national unity, social revolution, peace, the development of new political forces and the establishment of a truly representative form of government. In addition, Catholic students publicly urged the United States to respect Vietnam's sovereignty. To achieve these goals, the Catholic leaders repeatedly emphasized that the choice of political means and its timing should exclude any form of compromise with the Viet Cong insurgents.
In actual political conduct the Catholics have been hypersensitive to any action that might result in Buddhist predominance in the government, civil or military, in war or peace. They have consistently alleged that any governmental yielding to Buddhist pressures would amount to a policy of anti-Catholic revenge and discrimination. This underlying fear largely accounts for their antigovernment demonstrations in the summer of 1964 against the alleged pro-Buddhist posture of Prime Minister Khanh. It also explains the two coup attempts of September 1964 and February 1965 by a group of pro-Catholic officers. Furthermore, the militant Catholic opposition was a prime factor in causing the resignation of Prime Minister Quat’s civilian regime in June 1965.

In early 1966 it became evident that the Catholics were apprehensive about Prime Minister Ky’s decision to hold elections in September 1966 instead of sometime in 1967 as initially announced—a turn of events for which the Catholic agitation was partially responsible. They feared that an electoral contest held at such an early date would give the Buddhists distinct advantages and believed that they needed more time to live down the effects of former political ties with the Diem regime.

The Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao

The Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, commonly referred to as politicoreligious sects, are the other two politically significant religious groups (see ch. 11, Religion). Their adherents, predominantly peasants, are concentrated mainly in the areas northwest and southwest of Saigon. These sects together claim nearly half of the 6 million people in the Mekong Delta region. By mid-1954 they had a combined strength of 35,000 men under arms. Until late 1955 their political strength was derived from independent control of administrative machinery and private armies in their respective territories, which had constituted the so-called states within a state.

The political behavior of the sects was conditioned mainly by their nationalist-oriented, anti-Communist but autonomy-oriented sentiments. During World War II they collaborated with the Japanese occupation authorities against the French, who had suppressed the sects for their anticolonial activities. After the war, however, in return for arms and other assistance from the French, both sects fought the Communist-dominated Viet Minh to resist its increasing inroads into their respective domains. Their separatist sentiments culminated in their demands in 1948 for political independence, control of foreign relations and maintenance of their own national armies. The high point of their separatist behavior was the armed insurrection in 1955 against Prime Minister Diem to resist his efforts to bring them under his direct control.
After being militarily subdued by Prime Minister Diem's forces, both sects lost much of their former influence, and, outwardly at least, their leaders gave periodic expressions of allegiance to the Saigon regime. Some militantly dissident members, however, fled to Cambodia, and some reportedly joined the Viet Cong to continue their opposition to Saigon. After November 1963 this collaboration with the Communist insurgents reportedly was discontinued.

President Diem's successors came to recognize that the sects' separatist orientation had tended to serve as a barrier to Communist infiltration. Although a sizable number of Communist elements have been operating in parts of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao territories, the sects' adherents, on the whole, have been less receptive to Communist agitation and less subject to Viet Cong harassment than those in other areas of South Vietnam. Therefore, in order to win their loyalty, various Saigon regimes have appointed Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao representatives to Cabinets and to advisory councils; high provincial officials and district chiefs in their respective areas have been appointed mainly from among the followers of the sects. Sect adherents also have been allowed to defend their respective areas as members of the Regional or Popular Force troops.

In early 1966 their separatist sentiments were far less evident than formerly. Although they appeared to favor civilian rather than military rule, neither of the sects took overt action against the Saigon generals, nor did they side with the Buddhists or Catholics, apparently hoping to antagonize neither of them. This passive attitude could be explained in part by the absence of any mass following outside the sects' respective territories and in part by the lack of unity between the two sects, which have tended to be mistrustful of each other. Moreover, both sects have been troubled by acrimonious factional strife.

Nevertheless, the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao leaders appeared likely to be represented sizably in an elected national legislature because of their close touch with the peasants. This possibility was contingent on the effectiveness of leadership and internal cohesion for both sects, the evidences of which were, in early 1966, not readily discernible.

Both sects regard themselves as political and religious minorities and, hence, with little chance of dominating the Saigon power structure. Therefore, in early 1966 indications were that they wanted to enhance their political position by employing one or more of the following three alternatives: to form a joint parliamentary working group to exact concessions from the dominant group; to form a "third force" with other marginal parties and groups; and to support, individually or jointly, either the Buddhist or the Catholic group, with the possible consequence of swaying the balance of power one way or another between them.
In early 1966 the spiritual leader of the Cao Dai was Cao Hoai Sang. Among active secular leaders were Le Trung Nghia, Le Van Tat, Tran Quang Vinh, Nguyen Thanh Phuong and Nguyen Hoang Bay. Among the more militant elements was Phan Duy Nhung, who in early 1965 had issued a peace manifesto calling for a neutral federation of North and South Vietnam and for withdrawal of the United States from the country as soon as peace was restored. He was arrested in 1965 on charges of serving communism and in mid-April 1966 was still under detention.

Among prominent Hoa Hao spiritual leaders was Luong Trong Tuong, president of the Hoa Hao Religious Institute, the governing body of the sect. In political circles Trinh Quoc Khanh, Phan Ba Cam, Nguyen Giao Ngo and Madame Cao Thi Nguyet were influential. Madame Cao Thi Nguyet is one of the three widows of Huynh Phu So, founder of the Hoa Hao faith who was murdered by the Communists in 1947. None of these Hoa Hao and Cai Dai leaders had any national stature.

The Students

After mid-1963 student participation in numerous politically inspired demonstrations and activities became a standard feature of South Vietnamese society. The politically active elements appeared to represent only a small part of the total student body. Evidently, they had not been directed and controlled by any single student or outside political organization, partly because they, like other political groups, were divided into a number of subgroupings based on religious, regional and political tendencies. Thus, it proved to be difficult, and often meaningless, to separate the students' political activities from those being carried out by the older generation. In actuality, the students tended to play the part of action arms or instruments for the various religious groups and parties, none of which before 1963 had had any trained reserves of cadres for political purposes.

The most politically active students were those who had been associated with Buddhist and Catholic groups. They were at the forefront of all the antigovernmental demonstrations sponsored by either of the two religious groups. Often Buddhist-Catholic clashes in the streets, as in the summer of 1964, involved students affiliated with the respective faiths. The political importance of these youths was officially recognized, for example, by Prime Minister Ky's invitation to them in April 1966 to send group representatives to the 170-member National Political Congress. Two of the student leaders figured prominently in Congress activities: Le Dinh Thai, as deputy secretary general of the executive committee; and Le Dinh Thong, as a drafter of the Congress' 10-point list of recommendations.

The students as a group are idealistic rather than practical in their political orientations; they are intensely nationalist and extremely
sensitive to any signs of foreign domination or interference in Saigon's internal affairs; some believe that the threat of Communist China must be eliminated before peace can be restored.

They prefer an elected civilian leadership, desire an early end to the war and tend to regard themselves as the genuine watchdogs of government and society. Compared to the older generation, they appear to have greater self-confidence in their ability to win over the Communist insurgents. They are inclined to believe that the Viet Cong are first nationalist-oriented Vietnamese and only secondarily misguided conspirators. Moreover, they seem to believe that when elements of compulsion and terror are eliminated from Viet Cong-controlled areas, the people in them will be less susceptible to Communist manipulation and control.

Labor Unions

Labor unions, which claim the membership of close to half a million, seldom sought an independent role under President Diem, partly because of strict official supervision. Until 1962 most of the unions supported the Diem regime in return for government subsidies. Union members are largely urban based and, hence, are more susceptible to worsening living conditions than the rural population (see ch. 8, Living Conditions). Moreover, because political protest activities take place mainly in urban areas, the proven ability of the unions to bring many members to the streets on a short notice could become an important factor to be reckoned with by various political groups, especially the Buddhists and Catholics.

In early 1966 two of the more influential labor organizations were the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (formerly the Vietnamese Confederation of Christian Labor) and the Confederation of Unions of workers of Vietnam (also known as the Vietnamese Workers Syndicate Confederation). Of the two, the former was the larger and better organized and was led by Tran Quoc Buu, a Roman Catholic, who had been implicated in the anti-Khanh coup attempt of September 1964, which was staged by a group of pro-Catholic military officers; its leaders regarded themselves as more anti-Communist than those of the Confederation of Unions of Workers of Vietnam (see ch. 21, Labor). Although Catholic and Buddhist influences were apparent in these and other unions, none of them were exclusively identified with any religious or political groups. Despite recurring official hints that some of the unions had been infiltrated by the Communists, there were few overt indications, up to early 1966, that any of the unions had been utilized for subversive purposes.