

Minh Named to Head
Government in Move
To End the
Vietnam War

VOTE BY ASSEMBLY

APR 28 1975

Shift Viewed as Last Step to Meet Initial Vietcong Demands

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Monday, April 28 — With an overwhelming Communist army nearing the edges of Saigon last night, the South Vietnamese National Assembly adopted a resolution approving the transfer of all presidential power from President Tran Van Huong to Gen. Duong Van Minh.

The naming of General Minh to full power was considered to remove the last major obstacle to meeting initial Communist demands. There seemed little question that heavy shelling of the city, with possible infantry and tank attacks from all directions, would begin if those basic demands were not met.

Even after the Assembly's vote, there remained some doubt whether the action it had taken would satisfy the Communists, who signaled at least some continuing disapproval by firing another volley of rockets into Saigon last night. Two of the rockets struck along the Saigon River waterfront, one of them hitting the street in front of the Majestic Hotel, which was damaged in an attack Saturday night, and another hitting the navy yard. The exact number of rockets was not immediately known nor the extent of casualties, if any.

Emergency Session Held

The Assembly, convened in emergency session at 7 P.M., an hour before the curfew, was asked by the Senate President, Tran Van Lam:

"Who approves of President Tran Van Huong's transferring all presidential power to Gen. Duong Van Minh to find ways and means of restoring peace in Vietnam?"

After a very brief debate, 134 of the 136 assembled Representatives and Senators voted "yes." Then Mr. Lam said:

"May I inform you that following this vote, President Huong will be immediately informed of our resolution, and I will respectfully ask him to transfer presidential power to General Minh very quickly."

Joint Session Planned

Mr. Lam also said that news of the vote would be broadcast immediately and that a joint session of the National Assembly would be convened, to which General Minh would be invited.

Two hours after the vote, the news was broadcast.

Mr. Lam did not specify when the Assembly would be convened, but it will presumably be later today.

The difficulty in this procedure is that the Vietcong have rejected "all so-called

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constitutional solutions," demanding simply that a Government acceptable to the Vietcong be installed immediately. They have made it known that General Minh, a long-time proponent of peace and reconciliation in Vietnam with a neutralist policy renouncing foreign intervention, would be acceptable.

At 4:30 P.M. yesterday, after several days of great pressure from almost all domestic political factions as well as French and American diplomats, President Huong dropped his rigid objection to resigning unless he was removed from office, and sent a letter to Mr. Lam, who was waiting in the garden of General Minh's villa.

The letter said:

"Ref. resolution by Assembly on April 26, 1975: According to Article 2 of the above-mentioned resolution, I am permitted to choose a man to replace me to realize the task of looking for ways and means to restore peace to South Vietnam with the approval of Congress. To

meet the situation, I am giving back to Congress this right to make a choice. This is also in conformity with the general spirit of the April 26 resolution.

"After a personality has been chosen by Congress to carry out the above sacred task, I will transfer all powers of the presidency of the Republic of Vietnam to that personality. This should be done, the sooner the better."

Everything seemed to depend on whether the Communists would accept last night's vote as representing sufficient progress to order their artillerymen and tank crews to defer the attack for which they are now in position.

Capital Now Cut Off

Their dissatisfaction with an equivocal speech by President Huong Saturday was expressed by a rocket bombardment of Saigon early yesterday and strong attacks around its outer perimeter, which effectively sealed off the capital from the rest of the country.

Maneuvering very large military units with great speed, the Communists have closed the road from Saigon to the sea and the road to the south over which food supplies must come, and have driven their way to Bien Hoa to the northeast and Ben Luc to the southwest, both only 12 miles from Saigon.

With an unusual blood-red sunset over Saigon last evening, the Communists were drawing closer to the city by the minute, shelling towns, sealing roads and driving refugees before them from all directions.

The worst situation was the region immediately northeast of the capital.

Starting Saturday evening, large Communist infantry units supported by tanks and heavy artillery began their move with a shelling followed by a tank and infantry attack against Phuoc Le. Phuoc Le, 37 miles southeast of Saigon, controls Route 15, the capital's only access to the sea.

Escape Route Cut

By yesterday evening the Communists had broken through local defenses and were in Phuoc Le. Thus the port of Vung Tau, from which many Saigon residents have been hoping to escape the country in boats and ships at the last moment, was cut off.

Swiftly moving up the road to Long Thanh, a district seat, the Communists heavily shelled the area yesterday morning, especially a large refugee camp. This afternoon bodies of many victims were still strewn around

the area and on the road itself. By 9 A.M. yesterday, the situation had become so serious at Bien Hoa that authorities imposed a 24-hour curfew on the town, which is reported under sporadic shelling.

Refugees from Bien Hoa and communities along Route 15 that were not yet cut off began pouring toward Saigon.

Late yesterday the four-lane road from Bien Hoa to Saigon, the country's widest and most modern highway, was so jammed with refugees that movement in the opposite direction, even for army trucks, had become impossible.

Toward evening, army trucks were moving back into Saigon, loaded with ammunition. It was clear that all or most Government troops in the area were being pulled back into the capital.

Marines and airborne troops were preventing the tide of people from getting to Saigon, firing warning shots over their heads. One of their main reasons for doing so was the suspicion that many of the refugees might actually be Communist soldiers in civilian clothing.

Adding to the pandemonium on the highway, along which Saigoneses used to like to picnic on Sunday afternoons in the shade of rubber plantations the Communists began shelling the road.

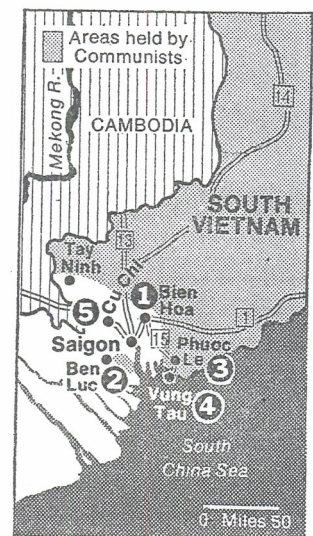
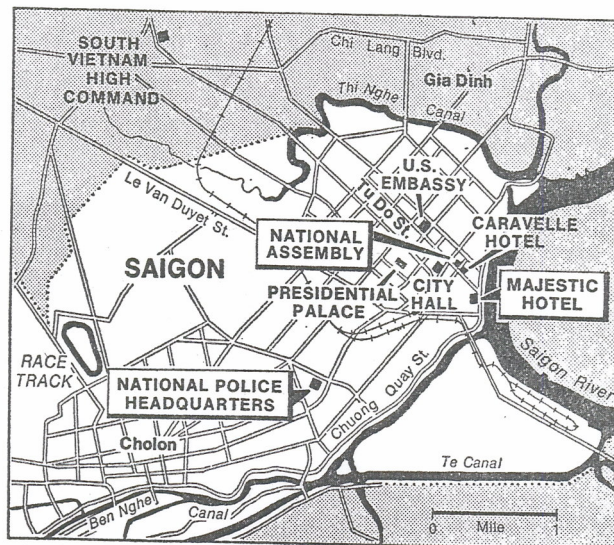
One barrage was directed by a Communist mortar battery against a bridge between Bien Hoa and Saigon, less than 10 miles from the capital. Mortars are short-range weapons capable of firing only a few thousand yards, and they are used by infantry. The implication was that Communist infantry was within a few hours' marching distance of downtown Saigon.

town Saigon.

One would-be traveler set out in his car for Vung Tau yesterday morning but had to stop at a hastily organized Government roadblock before reaching Long Thanh. Meanwhile, other roadblocks were set up behind him, and he was forced to abandon his car, make his way on foot through the jungle back to the main road at Thu Duc and thence return to Saigon.

The situation was nearly as bad to the south.

In Long An Province only 12 miles southeast of Saigon, Communist roadblocks went into position in several places on Route 4 yesterday near the town of Ben Luc, which has an important bridge.



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In Saigon (larger map) a slum around national police headquarters was hit hardest by rockets. Another rocket demolished top floor of Majestic Hotel. Many foreigners are housed in hotels along Tu Do Street. In other areas (smaller map), Communist forces drove to Bien Hoa (1) in the northeast and to Ben Luc (2) to the southwest, coming within 12 miles of the capital. Later they invaded Phuoc Le (3) and thus cut off the port of Vung Tau (4) from Saigon. Route 1 was reported cut at Cu Chi (5).

The closing of the road cut Saigon off from the entire south, including the Mekong River delta, from which it obtains most of its food. A Government spokesman said a counterattack to open the road had been launched, but the chances of its success seemed remote.

Military sources also disclosed that Route 1, one of the main roads to Tay Ninh and the Cambodian border, had been cut at Cu Chi, 17 miles northwest of here. All other roads were believed blocked by nightfall as well.

It is assumed by all competent military observers here that the Communists now have enough heavy artillery rockets, field guns and mortars in position all around Saigon virtually to level the city, if the signal is given.

Many large neighborhoods in Saigon are as inflammable as those that were consumed in the great fire storm that destroyed large parts of Tokyo in the spring of 1945 after American bombing.

Even accidental fires, particularly during the dry season, which is almost at an end, can destroy thousands of shanties. One of the rockets that hit



Associated Press

PRESES DEMANDS: Col. Vo Dong Giang, Vietcong officer in Saigon, calls for the ouster of the entire "stooge clique" of Nguyen Van Thieu. Behind him is a picture of Ho Chi Minh.

Saigon early this morning started a fire that rapidly burned several hundred houses to the ground.

The business center of the

city, whose axis is To Du Street, is less vulnerable. Large, fairly modern concrete buildings, including the Caravelle and Continental Hotels where many foreigners are now housed, line Tu Do Street.

Despite the small but devastating rocket barrages, the desperate and deteriorating situation just outside the city and a harsh warning by the Hanoi radio last night to the effect that the Communists had about lost patience, the pace of political deliberations in Saigon seemed incredibly leisurely.

"My God, don't these people realize that hundreds of thousands of lives are in the balance, not some indefinite time in the future, but right now, tonight?" a Western official who is playing a pivotal role in developments asked, his voice taut. 20-26 APR

Last week, the United States was moving as swiftly as possible to meet all demands made by the Vietcong, both on Washington and on the Saigon Gov-

ernment.

It is widely felt that the loss of life in this city of more than three million would be staggering if the Communists should order an attack.

The substantial Government force now in the city, with the chance of a cease-fire gone, exit routes sealed off and no other options, would probably fight hard in its final stand, making the situation far worse.

There has been no discussion here of an outright, formal surrender, although Buddhist leaders informed their followers yesterday that the installation of General Minh as President would be tantamount to surrender and that they should prepare themselves for a new type of life.

If the Communists consider their first demands met because of last night's action by the Assembly, at least the slaughter may have been averted.

The first part of the apparent Communist ultimatum was that the United States speedily remove from Vietnam all "American military personnel and advisers disguised as civilians," all intelligence agents and all warships in Vietnamese territorial waters. The United States was also told today to abstain from any future interference in Vietnamese affairs, to withhold any further military aid and aid of any kind to the "Nguyen Van Thieu clique."

U.S. Meeting Demands

In recent days, American officials here have made it plain

that Washington intends to meet every Vietcong demand unconditionally, including the tacit surrender of the Saigon Government, to save lives.

To that end, American transport planes have been leaving Tan Son Nhut Airport every few minutes loaded with Vietnamese and Americans. By last night, most of the 7,500 official and private Americans who had been here not long ago had left, with probably fewer than 1,000 remaining.

By means of many direct and indirect signals, Washington has been conveying to Hanoi and the Vietcong its willingness and eagerness to comply before the Communists' apparent deadline runs out.

Besides carrying out the measures for which Washington alone is responsible, American diplomats here have been working around the clock, cajoling, lobbying and reiterating the gravity of Communist threats to Saigon political leaders.

It has been necessary for many Vietnamese as well as many Americans to spend all their time persuading President Huong and his Government to resign immediately, persuading General Minh to take over swiftly rather than insist on every constitutional nicety

and persuading various obstructionists to drop their objections.

But whether this would be accomplished before the Communists began an all-out attack became a cliff-hanger last week, reaching a climax last night.

President Huong, who as Vice President succeeded President Thieu after Mr. Thieu's resignation six days ago, has balked at every step.

The 71-year-old former teacher insisted on taking his job seriously, with every intention of remaining in office and prosecuting the war to the end, unless he should be removed from office constitutionally—a process that normally would be extremely complicated.

Thus, when he made a partial concession in a speech Saturday, he did not resign but merely invited the National Assembly to consider the problem. 26 APR

This required more intensive lobbying and even threatening of Representatives and Senators, and of the powerful figures they largely represent. The Assembly is made up mainly of adherents of former President Thieu, most of them strongly anti-Communist.

Much of the final caucusing yesterday afternoon was in the tree-shaded garden of General Minh's large villa.



Associated Press

South Vietnamese soldiers, most of whom have shed their weapons, retreating along Route 15 toward Saigon.

Among those present besides General Minh were the President of the Senate, Mr. Lam, and Vu Van Mau, a Buddhist neutralist and former Foreign Minister who is expected to have a key role in the new government.

As they talked under the trees, American diplomats, receiving alarming reports by the minute from the fighting outside Saigon, became more and more anxious. In the end, Senator Lam emerged smiling, having been informed of President Huong's apparent capitulation.

Removal by Force Pondered

Until that moment, there had been growing talk here that it might be necessary to remove President Huong by force if he held out too long.

To make certain that all Representatives and Senators understood exactly how serious and urgent the situation was, the Assembly was given a 45-minute briefing behind closed doors before taking up the resolution asking Mr. Huong to transfer power to General Minh.

The briefing was given by Lieut. Gen. Tran Van Don, the Defense Minister, Lieut. Gen. Cao Van Vien, chairman of the Joint General Staff, Lieut. Gen. Nguyen Van Minh, Governor of Saigon, and Nguyen Can Hao, the Deputy Premier for Economy.

One Representative emerged afterward shaking his head and saying, "The situation is very, very dark."