

# Advances On Saigon

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SAIGON, April 27 —

With the military situation worsening hourly, and with North Vietnamese divisions advancing rapidly on the capital from several directions, the National Assembly voted unanimously Sunday night to have President Tran Van Huong transfer power to retired Gen. Duong Van (Big) Minh.

The vote of the National Assembly is tantamount to an order. Saturday the assembly had voted to allow Huong to choose his successor, providing the assembly retained the right to approve his choice.

The move is seen as a last ditch effort to bring about some sort of negotiations with the Communists to avoid a straight military takeover of Saigon. But with the city's outer defenses now crumbling rapidly, there is apprehension here that it may be too late. Huong is expected to resign Monday and Minh is expected to ask for an immediate cease-fire.

Heavy fighting, ending a week-long lull, was reported all around Saigon and in the Mekong River Delta Sunday night with Communist forces attacking near the military complex of Longbinh and on the outskirts of Bienhoa, 17 miles north of Saigon.

The city of Bienhoa itself is under a 24-hour curfew. Bienhoa is South Vietnam's biggest air base and, if the Communists press home their attack, its loss is now considered a foregone conclusion.

Fifteen miles to the east of Saigon, the North Vietnamese are fighting in the district town of Longthanh and Route 15, connecting Saigon with Vungtao and the sea, has been cut. Baria, the capital of Phuctuy Province, also was reportedly under heavy attack Sunday night, which means that Route 15 is cut in two places.

Fighting is reported in the Mekong Delta and Route 4 has been cut about 18 miles south of Saigon near the town of Benluc.

In the northeast it was reliably reported that South Vietnamese forces could not

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longer reach the district town of Cuchi, about 17 miles from Saigon.

With all roads leading out of the capital now being systematically cut, and with Saigon and its airbase now well within range of North Vietnamese artillery as well as rockets, few options seem to be left for the South Vietnamese.

There is still hope, however, that the Communists would prefer to take over Saigon gradually through a temporary political coalition and that their rapid military advances in the last 24 hours are designed to put even more pressure on Sai-

Although they have not said they are willing to conduct talks with Minh, the Communists have said that the answer to the problem was a neutralist-leaning government in Saigon, made up of people unconnected with Saigon to force negotiations on their terms.

former President Nguyen Van Thieu. This administration would then renounce dependency on the Americans. Gen. Minh, who has been in the political wilderness since he was deposed as chief of state in 1964, has opposed Thieu.

Minh was installed as chief of state after the overthrow and assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. Little is known of what Minh will propose, beyond a cease-fire, but the U.S. embassy is apprehensive that he might halt the airlift of Vietnamese out of the country.

(A close associate of Minh told AP that the new government "will seek by all possible means and good will to achieve a political solution with the Provisional revolutionary Government. The government of Gen. Minh is putting all its confidence in the dialogue which will take place between Vietnamese patriots of both sides to achieve independence, reconciliation and national concord in the framework of the Paris agreement.

("The government of Gen. Minh will include individuals who have struggled for so many years for peace and the independence of the country. The government will not include any element of the former government of President Nguyen Van Thieu," the associate said.

(Col. Vo Dong Giang, deputy leader of the Vietcong delegation in Saigon, refused to say whether his government will be in talks with Minh. He told Reuter: "It is impossible to make assessments about individual figures. It is important to know what policy that figure will follow.") 21 APR

After Thieu's resignation Monday night, there was a comparative lull on the battlefield that was widely interpreted as a move to allow Saigon to come up with a government acceptable to the Communists. That lull ended late Saturday and on Sunday morning Saigon was rocketed for the first time since the cease-fire of 1973.

(News agencies reported that three rockets hit Saigon's riverfront area Sunday night.)

The renewed fighting was interpreted as a signal of impatience over the amount of time Saigon's politicians have been taking to form a new government. The Communists have made it very clear that they considered President Huong to be a Thieu "flunky" and therefore unacceptable to them.

The city seemed to sense that the end was near Sunday. The normally light Sunday traffic seemed more restless, with more people in the streets than usual.

There was no sign of out and out panic, such as befell Danang. It was more a mood of fatalistic expectancy.

On the two-lane American-built highway to Bien-hoa Sunday, thousands upon thousands of refugees could be seen pouring in toward the capital. With darkness descending, under a rain-swollen sky pierced by lightning, the column stretched away over the rolling countryside like a moving dragon in the reddish light of the passing day. Buses, cars, tractors and bicycles inched slowly forward with the noise of engines and clashing gears blending into a coughing growl.

The police were out in force trying to prevent the refugees from coming into Saigon itself, and the people who live in shacks along the road were all out watching in silence as once again whole populations were on the move.

The assembly decision followed days of intense diplomatic and political pressure on Huong to step down in favor of Minh, with Huong reluctant to go outside the constitutional process.

On Sunday night, Saigon was quiet but nervous. Teenage boys of the defense force, armed with American rifles, sat on street corners in the curfew-silenced city. One of them smoked a cigarette and said he guessed the end of the republic was near and he doubted very much if he or his friends would resist the Vietcong should they enter the city.

"What would be the point?" he asked.

### ***Vietcong Reiterate Conditions for Talks***

By Paul Webster  
Manchester Guardian

PARIS, April 27—The Vietcong Sunday night spelled out the conditions under which it would agree to negotiate with a new Saigon government led by Gen. Duong Van (Big) Minh. The Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government spokesman in Paris said the new government must abolish the present administration, dismantle the war machine and reject all American influence.

He said the "third force"—the political groupings which identify neither with the Vietcong nor with President Thieu's old government—must be ready to make a concrete commitment to a lasting peace.

The Vietcong conditions are technically an invitation to Minh to repudiate the past administration, and to reject openly any future co-operation with the United States. As the French, the key gobetweens, have already outlined the future conditions which the Vietcong will impose, Minh must already be fully aware of the compromises he must make if there is to be peace.

French sources are optimistic that the transfer of power will satisfy the Vietcong, who are in close and constant contact with the French government. The French ambassador in Saigon, Jean-Marie Merillon, has played the key role in transmitting the Vietcong's demands to Saigon leaders, and France has strongly backed Minh.

News agencies reported these other developments:

• Nguyen Huu Tho, president of the Vietcong's National Liberation Front, Friday called for the United States to "abandon the bellicose, dictatorial puppet clique that the people are overthrowing" in South Vietnam, saying "the new administration in Saigon is a Thieu administration without Thieu, intended to con-

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tinue neocolonialism." Tho's statement was reported by the PRG news agency in Hanoi.

• Taiwan Ambassador Jsu Shao-chang said in Taipei that the Saigon embassy had suspended operations and all staff was being withdrawn.