

Suggested title: Premier Khiem's Family Mafia

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Despite the well-publicized charges last year concerning the alleged involvement of a Vietnamese General in the drug traffic, the Nixon Administration managed to hush up a far larger drug smuggling scandal which reached all the way to the Prime Minister of South Vietnam, General Tran Thien Khiem.

General Khiem, brought back from political exile to become Minister of Interior when President Thieu began to consolidate his power in 1968, has clearly been the second most powerful man in Vietnam ever since then. Although he would not become Prime Minister until August, 1969, he began immediately to put his own brothers and relatives in many of the most sensitive posts in the government. This family empire which he quietly established was especially interesting because all of the posts were important to the disruption or facilitation of large-scale smuggling into Saigon.

Last year, a major scandal implicating one of Khiem's brothers in the drug traffic was uncovered by U.S. officials. Tran Thien Khoi, nominated in 1968 to the position of director of the Office of Fraud Repression, the customs directorate, was responsible for stopping the use of Saigon's Tansonhut airport for the smuggling of contraband goods.

But American officials, being pushed hard to do something about the massive drug traffic in South Vietnam, soon discovered that he was one of the major reasons why smuggling through Tansonhut had been so easy. The Provost Marshall's office of MACV, in a report on the drug problem, said "at least one high GVN customs official in the Fraud Repression Service is a principal in the opium traffic." The official was described in the report as having "an opium habit which costs approximately 10,000 piasters a day," and as visiting a local opium

Col. Do Kien Nhieu, Khiem's brother-in-law, was named Mayor of Saigon-Cholon in 1968 and still remains in city hall, despite the fact that the Minister of Defense protested his nomination on the grounds of his past record of flagrant corruption. (He was among the 27 government officials on a list of those known to be involved in significant corruption, compiled by the Ky government in 1966 at the request of the U.S. Mission.) With his grip on the administrative apparatus in Saigon-Cholon, Col. Nhieu exercises power over the businessmen who manage the enormous commerce, both legitimate and illicit, which is centered in the capital.

Two other ^{relatives} ~~brothers~~ of Prime Minister Khiem, moreover, have held key positions guarding access to Saigon by land and by sea. Col. Tran Thien Thanh, ^{first cousin} ~~brother~~, who had been in charge of the ill-fated Saigon municipal bus company in 1964, when it was disintegrating under the weight of massive corruption, was named in 1968 to the position of Deputy Commander of the Capital Military District and assistant to the military governor of Saigon-Gia Dinh. In this position, he has authority over all transportation in and out of the capital. It is Thanh who signs all authorizations for travel on the roads during curfew hours and in other special circumstances. Lt. Col. Tran Thien Phuong, the ^{2nd} ~~third~~ brother of Khiem's in a key post, was named Director of the Port of Saigon in 1968, considered by political observers in Saigon to be the source of enormous enrichment for the incumbent. (Premier Ky had named his brother-in-law to the post.) The possibilities for collusion with smugglers are obvious.

The Provost Marshall's report concluded, after surveying the known facts of the drug traffic, that it was "quite apparent...that the degree of sophistication which the trafficking in drugs (especially heroin) has achieved could not exist without at least the tacit approval, if not active support, of senior officials of GVN." What is known already about Premier Khiem's family mafia and its control

over the key points of entry into Saigon and the organs of law enforcement charged with preventing smuggling makes it obvious that there is more than coincidence. The fact that this apparatus, bound together by family ties, is still intact and Khiem himself still in office should be sufficient basis for questioning the propriety of any further American aid of any kind to that malodorous government.

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