

NSC BRIEFING

5 December 1956

DISORDERS IN NORTH VIETNAM

I. Hanoi has recently admitted that a "counterrevolutionary uprising" had occurred in North Vietnam.

A. The uprising occurred during mid-November in a Catholic population center near Vinh, some 160 miles south of Hanoi. It was suppressed only after troop reinforcements were sent into the area.

1. The approximately 1,000,000 Catholics remaining north of the 17th parallel have long constituted the most likely source of resistance to Communism in North Vietnam.

2. The disorders seem thusfar to have been confined to the rural population, both in Catholic and non-Catholic areas. They were apparently inspired by peasant dissatisfaction with the Communist land reform program.

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B. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] confirm Hanoi's guarded admissions of popular disaffection.

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1. [Redacted] Viet Minh leaders are "at their wits' end."

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2. [Redacted] discontent is also very strong in Haiphong, North Vietnam's primary port.

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DOCUMENT NO. 2  
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. (1)  
DECLASSIFIED  
NEXT REVIEW DATE:  
DATE: 8/20/00 372044

3. "How can I get to South Vietnam?" is a most common  
25X1X6 question asked of foreigners.

4. [REDACTED] the regular army  
(267,000 troops) remains loyal to the Viet Minh regime.

II. The Viet Minh leadership was reshuffled in October, on the grounds that "mistakes" had been committed in land reform.

A. Truong Chinh, longtime Communist secretary-general, lost his post and was replaced by Ho Chi Minh (now both chairman and secretary-general of the Party, and ~~the~~ president of the government). However, Truong Chinh retains his membership in the politburo and still appears prominently on public occasions.

B. Two other leading Communists were dropped from their positions in the politburo and central committee ~~respectively~~ and were forced out of government jobs as vice-ministers  
25X1X6 of Agriculture and Interior respectively.

III. [REDACTED] the population of North Vietnam appears to be almost totally unaware of recent events in Hungary. Thus, the recent disorders seem to have been triggered by internal problems, rather than events abroad.

A. However, the Viet Minh leaders--strong supporters of the Moscow line--are fully aware of East European developments, and their reaction has been conditioned by this awareness.

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- B. In mid-November, the cabinet promised a "democratization" program, involving elections in 1957 and reforms in the legal system.
  - C. In domestic broadcasts, they are now declaring that "important lessons" will be drawn from the "Hungarian situation" and that the leaders will now "pay adequate attention to the people's living conditions."
  - D. At the same time, the Viet Minh leaders are cautioning against an "excess of democracy" that could be exploited by "enemy saboteurs."
- IV. In summary, the prospect is for continued disaffection in North Vietnam, and further disorders are a strong possibility.
- A. However, the regime itself--supported by a loyal army--is in no immediate jeopardy.
  - B. The contrast between continued progress in South Vietnam and popular discontent in the North will weaken ~~both~~ Viet Minh efforts <sup>BOTH</sup> to undermine the Diem government and to effect unification on Communist terms.

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