

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY : NARA
RECORD NUMBER : 176-10036-10192
RECORD SERIES : National Security Files
AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

ORIGINATOR :
FROM :
TO :
TITLE : Variations in Vietnamese Attitudes
DATE : 9/25/1963
PAGES : 2
SUBJECTS :
DOCUMENT TYPE :
CLASSIFICATION :
RESTRICTIONS :
CURRENT STATUS :
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 9/10/2000
OPENING CRITERIA :
COMMENTS : National Security Files, File 11: Vietnam

SECRET

25 September 1963

SUBJECT: Variations in Vietnamese Attitudes

SOURCE : Eight CAS officers during dinner discussion

1. The consensus was that the recent Buddhist disturbances and the repression thereof had had little effect in the provinces outside Saigon. There was some awareness of these developments, however, and their effect in the provinces may be expected to grow.

2. In Saigon there is only moderate basis for the public attitude of concern over repression, but the public attitude on the subject is most intense despite this limited basis. Despite this concern the normal civil servant or liaison official is doing his job in the government at about the same pace as formerly.

3. Some liaison officials have taken a very cautious approach toward their American counterparts and are avoiding intimacy or even an uncooperative spirit.

4. A senior Vietnamese official sympathetic to Diem pictured the current problem by the following analogy. Vietnam was like a child lost in the jungle and saved from tigers by a friendly father figure. This father figure raised the child but at maturity insisted that the child be a musician for which the child had no inclination or desire. This divergence of views and the fact that Diem's insistence on certain policies seemed, in this Vietnamese official's eyes, to be similar to the present problem. The Vietnamese people, as the child, retain much respect for the father but find themselves unable to accept his injunction.

5. The students in general, as a result of recent events, will be more vulnerable to anti-GVN appeals and activity, not solely of a Viet Cong nature.

6. One source has indicated that the Viet Cong can be expected to react to the present situation by turning to a more vigorous political as distinct from military action as the political field is now more fertile for their sowing.

7. The analogy was suggested that the danger of an explosion in Vietnam is somewhat similar to a diesel cylinder. The air would be represented by the degree of organization of the students and of the political elements. The fuel would be represented by the degree of morale, discipline, and tactical ability of the police and military forces of order. These two elements would then be subjected to the pressure of a cylinder, representing the degree of governmental repression and public opposition thereto. The consensus of these

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officers was that the present situation does not offer the elements of an explosion in that the students are relatively disorganized and only reasonably intense, the morale, discipline and tactical efficiency of the police forces is reasonably good and there is an awareness that the real repressive acts are relatively limited, although there is considerable rumor and some feeling about more dramatic repression.

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