

Hungarian Embassy to North Vietnam, Report, 9 April 1965. [Summary]

This document was based on a conversation that one of the Hungarian diplomats had with a female member of the NLF, who recently returned from South Vietnam to the DRV, on 8th April. She emphasized the difficulties the southern resistance movement had had to cope with in the late 1950s. The best southern cadres of the Viet Minh went north in 1954-55, and most of those who remained were imprisoned or murdered by the dictatorship of Ngo Dinh Diem. Those male members of the Viet Minh movement who escaped the worst were often in such a dire situation that they were compelled to join the South Vietnamese army (ARVN). Therefore it was the women who had to carry the brunt of the fighting in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They had to substitute for men in all spheres of life, producing food for their families and also for the guerrillas. Even now, she stated, the majority of those who participated in the resistance movement was composed of women. Until 1959-60, their struggle was essentially a political one, but the events proved that this did not work. She described in detail the terror of the Diem regime, e.g. the barbarous tortures the political prisoners were subjected to. A number of ARVN men believe, she stated, that if they ate human liver or ears, this would make them strong. [Note: some American observers also reported about such mutilations committed by ARVN soldiers, though it is quite impossible to verify how widespread or isolated these atrocities were.] These methods of the Diem regime compelled young and old alike to join the NLF. Although the NLF achieved successes both in the political and the military field, its difficulties were serious. They had to pay with serious sacrifices for the military successes, for they had to fight an enemy equipped with the most up-to-date weapons and their own weapons were quite primitive. Not counting surprise attacks, their only advantage was the knowledge of local conditions. The guerrillas were underfed; they often received half the amount of the food they needed. One could not say, she emphasized, that the enemy was defeated or that it could be defeated under the present conditions. This also held true for the political situation. Though the NLF managed to gain sympathy among the rural population, the students, and the Buddhists, the Saigon regime could secure its grip on the cities. She emphasized that the NLF knew well that it could not defeat the enemy without the support of the Communist countries, and she described the support hitherto given to them as insufficient. She expressed her disagreement with those statements of North Vietnamese propaganda which declared that if the whole nation took up arms, the Americans would be defeated. Only international cooperation could yield substantial results, she said. As for the possibility of a negotiated settlement, she stated that neither the NLF nor the Americans were willing to negotiate from the position of weakness, and she saw little hope for such a solution unless the international situation forced the United States to seek a compromise.

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