

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES - NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

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January 26th, 1961

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Dean of International Programs  
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Dear Wes:

Thanks for your letter of January 10th that just reached me from New York. I believe you will find TERROR IN VIETNAM through the N. C. News Service as you were advised.

I have talked to the President several times since returning to Vietnam and he is convinced that the basic groundwork has been laid for the development of the country in the economic area and that the country's economy is due for a sharp rise as a result of that. He feels that the systematic rubber planting program will provide the foreign exchange needed within five to ten years. Progress is being made in the matter of cement, fertilizers, water for Saigon and electric power. There are other lesser items also but these are the main ones. The agricultural development program is always pointed to with pride.

The President feels that the rank and file of the people in the country are with him. I know he would like to retire to private life but I doubt that he feels he can do so at this time. I understand that there will be at least three other candidates in the Presidential elections, but everybody that I have talked to (and of course my contacts are limited to a definite area) feels that stability of government and the strong position of the President are far more to be desired than the chaos that might result from a ~~Khong Lee~~ type of trouble in this country. As you well know, the President has long been concerned with security matters, forecast years ago the type of trouble that we are having in Vietnam now, and is presently forecasting similar type of outbursts even in the city of Saigon. His earlier forecasts are certainly coming true at the present time. There are many many more incidents of Communist activity around the provinces now than there were in the past. Their infiltration tactics are succeeding to a certain extent at least and it's quite common to hear talk of nightly meetings in the provincial villages and small towns held by the Communists, assassinations, battles with the civil guard, etc. On its side, the government has been using the Army extensively for security purposes. Armies are organized to fight wars. We are only in the preparatory stage of war at the present time and other tactics are required. The civil guard has recently been incorporated into the Army and falls under the jurisdiction of MAAG as far as the United States is concerned.

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There seems to be an outstanding question to be resolved as to whether the government intends the entire civil guard to be incorporated into the Army or only those in the Seventh Military District. This is a problem that will have to be worked out between the Vietnamese Government, MAAG, USOM and the Embassy. At this point it seems to be an important question because USOM has assembled a highly qualified Public Security Division intended to train the police to handle situations such as the present one.

There was no participation of the civil population in the recently attempted coup. Such participation could be organized in the future by the Communists, and Army techniques are not normally intended to cope with that kind of a problem.

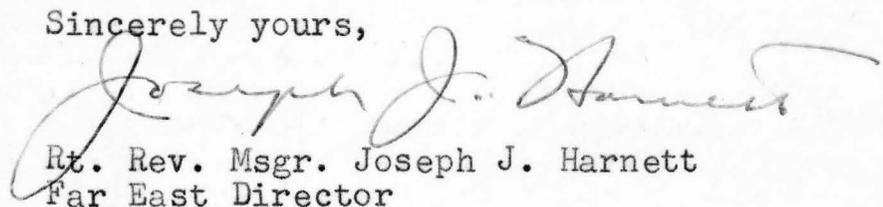
The government is aware of all of these problems along with many others and continues to work deliberately, rather than lethargically, to resolve them. The usual opposition with which you are familiar exists and is less restrained than in the past. I believe it's a loyal opposition, but that does not prevent the Communists from taking advantage of a decidedly unsatisfactory situation.

From my limited contacts I think that it's safe to say that the people were relieved that no harm befell Diem. As you know, a lot of untrue, but still useful propaganda and accusations were made against his family. I believe the President is loath to take action detrimental to his family whom he needs, particularly inasmuch as he feels that the accusations made against them are false. In his eyes it would amount to yielding to pressures exerted by the enemy, and you know as well as I do that he would consider that cowardly and unworthy. It may be good or bad politics, but it derives from his high personal integrity.

Briefly, therefore, Wes, we are still in trouble. I guess in view of the basic tenets of dynamic materialism we should never expect peace, and we should learn to live in a world of continued unrest. As a Catholic I will add that the diabolical powers still roam about the world and that their eventual control over the advance of man will depend to a large extent on how closely we are willing to unite ourselves with God both as individuals and nations.

With kind personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,



Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph J. Harnett  
Far East Director

JJH:m