570.1 REFUGEES(VIETNAMESE) (U) 1959
1960
1961

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOREIGN SERVICE POLITICAL REPORTING APPRAISAL

Security Classification of Appraisal

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TO *(Post)*: Amembassy BANGKOK

DATE OF APPRAISAL: August 15, 1960

DESPATCH NUMBER: 58

DATED: August 3, 1960

SUBJECT: The Vietnamese in the Northeast of Thailand

AUTHOR: LGPickering

CONTRIBUTORS:

These comments do not necessarily represent the views of all agencies concerned. Nothing in this document should be construed as instructional material or as altering outstanding instructions:

REPORT WOULD HAVE BEEN OF GREATER VALUE TO US IF IT HAD:

- ☐ Drawn conclusions and made recommendations
- ☐ Adequately presented conflicting viewpoints
- ☐ Indicated and evaluated sources of information
- ☐ Been received earlier
- ☐ Been more thorough
- ☐ Been more concise and better organized

REPORT IS COMMENDABLE FOR ITS:

- ☒ Timeliness
- ☐ Display of alertness and initiative
- ☐ Display of resourcefulness
- ☒ Thoroughness
- ☐ Comprehensiveness
- ☒ Clarity
- ☐ Good organization
- ☐ Interpretation and Analysis
- ☐ Objectivity
- ☐ Conclusions or recommendations
- ☒ Contributions to basic or current intelligence needs
- ☐ Use of other United States field sources of information

COMMENT:

An extremely interesting and illuminating report, which gives an excellent picture of the situation prevailing in the Vietnamese community in Northeast Thailand and of the ostrich-like attitude of Thai officials towards it.

15 SEP 1960

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Ret. To Emb

Anthony Clinton Swezey

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570.1 Refugees-Vietnamese

X 123 Pickering

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Air Pouch
PRIORITY

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY, BANGKOK

58
DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

August 3, 1960
DATE

REF :

SUBJECT: The Vietnamese in the Northeast of Thailand

570.1 Refugees - Vietnamese

Enclosed is a copy of a report prepared by the USIS Provincial Public Affairs Officer stationed in Udorn, Mr. Nicholas Volk, Jr., containing an assessment of the strength of the Communist organization among the Vietnamese refugees in Northeast Thailand and a description of some of the activities of that organization. This report is of special interest in view of the operation currently in progress to repatriate these refugees to North Vietnam under an agreement between the Red Cross organizations of Thailand and North Vietnam.

The report concludes that the strength of the Communist organization gives it "almost complete control over the lives and actions" of these refugees, and stresses the role played by this organization in persuading refugees to choose to return to Hanoi.

It is also of interest to note that Mr. Volk found among Thai officials, whether civil, army, or police, a tendency to minimize the strength of the Communist organization among the refugees, while those (especially Catholic missionaries) who have worked with these refugees for years and who have a fluent knowledge of the Vietnamese language provided impressive evidence of the power and influence of the Communists.

For the Chargé d'Affaires a.i.:

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Douglas N. Batson
First Secretary of Embassy

Enclosure:

Operations Memo dated July 22, 1960.

Copies to: Ambassy, Saigon.
Intelligence Officer, COMNAVPHIL.

FSO: ICPickering/sra
REPORTER

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INFORMATION COPY

8-3-60

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OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM

TO: USIS Bangkok

FROM: USIS Udorn

Date: July 22, 1960

SUBJECT: The Vietnamese in the Northeast

REF: None

The depth and strength of the Communist organization gives it almost complete control of the Vietnamese refugees in the Northeast. This is particularly true in the border provinces of Nongkai, Nakorn Panom, and Ubol, and also in Udorn. It is believed to be true as well in Sakorn Nakorn but there is no clear cut report of it there. However, one of the activities of the Sakorn organization will be described below.

In conversations the reporting officer has had with Thai civil officials and police and army officers the strength of this organization has always been minimized. Governors, police commanders, and Army commanders all claim that the persons and activities of this organization are closely controlled and watched. In Udorn the police state that in case anything happens they have the names, street address, and house numbers of all Vietnamese suspected of having Communist inclinations, and that they could immediately round up these persons. Throughout this post's area there continues to be a certain naivete about this organization, its strength, and the ability of Thai forces to control it amongst the officials and officers who direct the government, police, and military organizations.

One notable exception is the District Officer of Amphur Tat Panom, Nakorn Panom. He believes that about 90% of the over 4,000 Vietnamese in his district are Communists, and is concerned about it.

The major portion of this report is therefore based on talks with American, Thai, and French Catholic missionary Fathers who have worked extensively with the Vietnamese for the past 8-10 years in the Northeast. This officer believes their reports to be the most accurate available because of their long work with the Vietnamese refugees, their fluent knowledge of the language, and their strong anti-Communist beliefs.

Over the years the Vietminh have found it [illegible] easy to send its agents into the Northeast to propagandize and organize the Vietnamese refugees. Consequently today the organization has almost

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complete control over the lives and actions of all the Vietnamese. The fact that nearly 30,000 signed up to return to Hanoi is a direct result of this organization and in many cases not the wishes of the refugees concerned. Those few who defy the organization must suffer continual social ostracism by the majority of the Vietnamese. Occasionally, but in fewer cases, physical violence is resorted to. Outside the immediate city area of Udorn last South Vietnam Independence Day a Vietnamese displaying the South Vietnam flag had his garden and immediate source of livelihood destroyed. In Nongkai shrines to Ho Chi Minh are a must in every household, under fear of social, mental, and possibly physical punishment within the Vietnamese community.

Another aspect of the organization is the clandestine schools operated throughout the area, and again particularly in Nongkai, Udorn, Sakorn Nakorn, Nakorn Panom, and Ubol. Reports are that all Vietnamese who have not had this special schooling must attend, both students and adults. The classes are generally held before dawn or after dark.

An American Catholic, Vietnamese speaking Father witnessed such a school in Nongkai. He said that it was held in a Vietnamese home in the Vietnamese district with a class of both students and old people. The teacher would start with "Whom should we hate?, to be repeated almost inaudibly by the class. Then he would continue with the litany - "French imperialists! "American capitalists!" and continue through many of the free world countries.

Occasionally one of these schools will be uncovered by the Thai police, as this same Father said happened recently in Ampher Tabor, Nongkai. The teacher or teachers are then arrested, generally for operating an illegal school and not for the curriculum content, which is all taught in Vietnamese and incomprehensible to Thai. In this one case an immediate collection was taken throughout the Vietnamese community, given to buy off the police, and the school was in operation the following day. There was no further police or court action in this case.

These schools are now considered to be more "legal" or less ill-legal now in view of the fact that it is explained that the refugees must be prepared for going "home". Vietnamese leaders, explained a French Father in Ubol, say it then becomes a necessity to hold some kind of school for these people to learn to read, write, and speak Vietnamese before they are repatriated. Formal requests are not made to establish schools, but more leniency is shown toward their operation-all teaching still in Vietnamese.

A consensus of already listed sources indicates that these schools have been in operation for many years in Nongkai, Udorn, Sakorn Nakorn, and Nakorn Panom. The French Fathers stated that these schools in Ubol have been established more recently.

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An overt activity of the organization has been the donation to certain Buddhist wats (or churches) on main highways or in public places of gates or memorials. There is one in Udorn just outside of the city on the road to Nongkai. Others are between Amphur Sawanngdanlin and Pannanikom, Sakorn Nakorn, on the main road from Udorn; between Sakorn Nakorn and Nakorn Panom on the main road, and at the principal Buddhist wat of the changwad of the Thammayut Order in Sakorn Nakorn. These have been placed at the wats in memoria of the Vietnamese who are leaving, showing the devoutness of religion of the Vietnamese community in a concrete form that will stand for many years - and even though most Vietnamese call themselves Catholic.

At the dedication ceremony of the memorial bell tower at the chief Thammayut wat in Sakorn Nakorn last April I asked the Vietnamese man greeting the guests whether he was the director of the Vietnamese Information Service. He replied in the negative, stating that he was the representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Vietnam from Hanoi (see attached photo; man on left). Present were most of the top officials of the changwad.

These are several of the manifestations of the strength of this organization which has firmly rooted itself into and controls almost every aspect of life of the Vietnamese refugees in the Northeast. The same source also agree that there is also close cooperation between this organization and the Thai and Chinese Communist organizations in the area as well.

In addition to Embassy and possible Washington distribution that may be made of this report it is requested that a copy be sent to: Intelligence Officer, Commander Naval Forces Philippines, FPO, San Francisco, per his request to me while I was on active duty for training there.

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