

NSC BRIEFING

3 December 1953

IMPLICATIONS OF HO CHI MINH'S STATEMENT

- I. Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh quoted on 29 November in non-Communist Stockholm newspaper Expressen as "prepared to discuss" a proposal from France for a settlement in Indochina.
 - A. Ho's statement said to be in response to questions submitted on 5 November through the Viet Minh embassy in Peiping.
- II. Ho said that to arrive at an armistice, "the French government must suspend hostilities The basis for such an armistice is that the French government really respect the independence of Vietnam."

- A. While leaving door open for neutral intercession, stressed that negotiations "are essentially an affair between the governments of France and the Viet Minh."
- B. Spoke of France's victimization by "American imperialism," which is pressing the war in Vietnam in order to weaken France, and take over its position in Vietnam.
- C. Referred to American pressure for the ratification of EDC, which, he said, "implies that German militarism will be reborn."

III. Statement adds up to assertion that Ho is willing to negotiate, but that France must take the initiative.

- A. Ho sees a cease-fire as a cessation of hostilities by French, but makes no commitment of his own.
 - B. He ignores the Vietnam government and Bao Dai; says the Viet Minh alone represents the Vietnamese people.
- IV. Statement is most forthright yet made by Viet Minh on the question of negotiations.
- A. No more than vague hints at negotiation in the past.
 - B. But there is no convincing evidence that the Viet Minh at this time urgently desire the prompt conclusion of a negotiated settlement.
 - C. Ho appears primarily interested in causing confusion.
 - 1. Wants to generate doubt and suspicion in the minds of non-Communist Vietnamese.

D. Likely that Orbit policy will continue in the immediate future to be based on the premise that a war of attrition in Indochina offers greater advantages than either peace or expanded Communist war effort.

V. From Paris the American Embassy reports that President Auriol summoned Premier Laniel at 3:00 A.M. on 30 November to tell him to consult immediately with representatives of the Associated States, with a view to early negotiations with Ho. 25X1X6

A. Laniel [REDACTED] refused Auriol's request, and that France will make no change in its Indochina policy pending full discussions at Bermuda.

B. Meanwhile, the French press and party leaders from all parts of the political spectrum have indicated that they want Ho's offer fully explored.

VI. Official and unofficial opinion in Vietnam is unanimously opposed to negotiations.

A. Vice-premier has called Ho's offer a trap.

B. Bao Dai described it as a sign of Communist weakness, and rejected any talks with Ho.

C. Premier Tam's view, expressed in Paris, that negotiations might be undertaken under certain conditions is distinctly in the minority.

D. Vietnamese opposition to negotiations with the Viet Minh raises a formidable barrier to any French attempts to deal with Ho.

VII. Regarding Ho himself, many reports received that he is dead.

- A. Now 63 - quite old for a Vietnamese - has always appeared frail.
 - B. Not seen by a non-Communist since 12 May 1947. This was the occasion of a visit by a French emissary.
- VIII. If Ho is dead, no positive indication of it in Viet Minh propaganda up to the present.
- A. Referred to as being very active, addressing the Viet Minh assembly, and presiding over cabinet meetings.
 - B. Various Communist journalists claim to have interviewed him.
 - 1. Most recently, Joseph Starobin of the New York Daily Worker said he saw Ho in March 1953.

C. The Security Service of the North Vietnam government declared itself certain in March 1953 that Ho was not only alive but actively at the head of the Viet Minh.

D. French and Vietnamese experts believe that a photograph of Ho in their possession was taken between October 1952 and January 1953.

IX. Nevertheless, the Viet Minh almost invariably broadcasts Ho's statements in morse, not in voice.

A. In the case of exceptions to this procedure, it has not been possible to determine whether or not the voice was actually Ho's.

X. Prior to the interview with the Swedish newspaper, the most recent comment attributed to Ho on the subject of peace occurred in a morse broadcast of 25 October.

A. Ho deplored the misery which the Indochina war had brought the French and Vietnamese peoples.

B. He declared as the common goal of France and Vietnam "fraternal cooperation on the basis of independence, justice, and peace."