

Bloodbath: A Theory Becomes a Fear

Most Killing Reports Unverified

By Michael Getler and Marilyn Berger
Washington Post Staff Writers

Top U.S. officials feel certain that at least some reports of murder and execution carried out by Communist forces in recently captured South Vietnamese territory are true, but there is still little evidence of what is happening and on what scale.

American officials keeping track of these reports, most of them unverified at this point, think it may take another month or two before more reliable information on the extent of killing carried out even thus far may be available.

And, if historical patterns are a guide, many officials believe it will take many more months for an actual "bloodbath" in the south to unfold if it is going to happen.

These specialists believe, for example, that Communist captors immediately get rid of the police—there are

reports that this has happened in places like Phuoclong, Banmethout and Danang. Then, the local population is generally encouraged to settle down and calm down. Later, local Vietcong, with lists of government supporters kept up to date over many years, single out those who are to be punished or killed.

Yesterday, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said he had "received reports which seem plausible to us of execution of certain categories of personnel" in Communist-controlled areas.

Though Kissinger added that at this point it is impossible to make a full judgment on what is taking place, he told the House International Relations Committee: "We expect the Communists to eliminate all possible opponents."

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A Terrified Embassy Secretary

By William Tuohy
Los Angeles Times

SAIGON, April 18—Increasingly in this beleaguered capital, fears are being expressed about the nature and extent of reprisals by the Communists if and when they take over.

While U.S. officials and Southeast Asia historians may debate the validity of the "bloodbath theory," many Vietnamese are very frightened.

The reason is clear: for years, the propaganda from the Provisional Revolutionary Government and from Hanoi has warned that those who support the Saigon government or work with the U.S. government would be dealt with severely.

One might not expect a Vietnamese secretary in the U.S. embassy's personnel section to fear for her life, yet she says, "I am terrified. I am afraid of what they will do, not only to me but to my family."

If this young woman's fears turn out to be unfounded, they are nevertheless shared by many. Such feelings pose an enormous problem, morally and logistically, to U.S. embassy officials, U.S. businessmen and news media managers when it comes to deciding which Vietnamese employees should be eligible to board whatever evacuation flights may be in the offing.

In the Mekong Delta, a U.S. official says, "I've got 60 Vietnamese employees and their families and they are all counting on me to get them out."

In Saigon, an American reporter was approached by a former employee who has not worked for the American news organization for six years, but who still asks if he can be put on the newspaper's evacuation list.

See BLOODBATH, A9, Col. 1

Viet Killing Reports Mostly Unverified

KILLING, From A1

During the Tet offensive in 1968, U.S. officials say, the Communists came in with lists to liquidate police officials while the battle was going on.

If a policeman was found at home he usually was tied up and forced to watch while his family was killed one by one.

Alleged atrocities in recently conquered territory include:

- A report from a Buddhist monk at Banmethuot who claimed to have witnessed a Communist roundup in the central market square of 300 local notables and their families. The heads of the families were reportedly shot on the spot. Their families were taken out of town and killed later.

- A report from a Vietnamese who claims to have been an eyewitness to a

rocket attack on a bridge that was being crossed by refugees from the II Corps area. The refugees were shot while trying to swim ashore. The eyewitness estimated that about 2,000 persons were killed.

- Another report from Banmethuot from a Vietnamese who said he was told by a friend in the Vietcong to get out while he could because they were planning to classify the inhabitants and take the class enemies to the "slaughterhouse."

A number of American antiwar groups, most notably the Indochina Resource Center, have in the past challenged accounts of previous alleged Communist massacres, especially the report that some 5,000 persons were executed in the city of Hue in 1968 because of their affiliations with the Saigon government.

BLOODBATH, From A1

One has only to look at the pathetic lines of Vietnamese women at the American consular office here with telegrams from ex-boy friends in the United States, hoping that such messages will somehow qualify them for travel documents, to sense the fear in the air.

So far, there have been no direct reports from the occupied provinces of reprisals, let alone bloodbaths.

"Of course, it would be illogical for the Communists to carry out reprisals this soon," said a Western expert. "For the moment, it is in Hanoi's interest to restore law and order and keep the cities functioning. Executions now would only create more tension."

There are conflicting views here on the extent of possible Communist reprisals in the event of the takeover of the rest of South Vietnam.

The most hopeful view, which is held by some Vietnamese, though usually not those who work for the government, is that Hanoi will be more lenient than generally believed if it gains its ends in the South.

"Hanoi wants to create an international, public image of lawful succession to power," said an experienced Vietnamese journalist. "They don't want to come in and kill a lot of people. And they won't have to, once they have control of the whole country."

The opposite view, however, maintains that the "blood debt" list that the Communists have often referred to is very large indeed, and that those debts will be called in, if not immediately, then in good time.

Those who hold this view of Communist intentions make varying estimates of the size of the blood debt list, ranging anywhere from 50,000 to three million.

Whatever the actual figures, most observers concede that the chief targets for a blood purge would be South Vietnamese senior police officers, particularly those involved in counter intelligence, senior army officers, hamlet officials and key public administrators in Saigon; some revolutionary

development cadres and top members of the landlords and business classes.

Teachers are high on the list of marked men, since the Hanoi government, valuing heavily the power of the word, believes they are a particularly dangerous class.

Political leaders and intellectuals are also expected to be singled out, but they may well avoid execution, it is said, as long as they recant past errors and offer no threat to a Communist regime.

Most ordinary soldiers and policemen may be spared punishment on the ground that they were forced to fight or serve in the Saigon government.

The 2 million South Vietnamese Catholics believe they will especially be marked for unfavorable treatment, particularly those who fled Hanoi after the Communist takeover in 1954.

Similarly, non-Catholics who chose to leave the North tend to think that they will come in for harsher treatment under a Communist rule than their native southern brethren.

It is conceivable that in the event of a military stalemate, the United States might negotiate with Hanoi for the removal of those South Vietnamese who worked with the United States and wish to leave.

But it is unclear whether the North or the present Saigon government would agree to such an evacuation. The belief here is that the very South Vietnamese officials who would like to take advantage of an evacuation are those who are holding the country together administratively.

Obviously, not everyone who worked for the Americans would be endangered. Dishwashers, cooks and drivers are thought to be in no danger. But many of higher-level workers, rightly or wrongly, fear they will be tainted by their association with the United States and treated harshly by the Communists.

"Basically, the Communists view this as a class war," sums up one expert here. "And if nothing else, most South Vietnamese from business leaders to cab drivers are capitalists of the most *laissez-faire* kind."