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28 September 1963

SUBJECT: Students

SOURCE : Seven CAS Officers in Saigon

1. Students' movements comprise the following:

A. The Buddhist Student Organization: This has been organized about one year but up until May 8 had only about 80 members. By now it claims 1,000 in the universities and about 3,000 in high schools. It has developed a clandestine cell structure of only moderate efficiency. Its president, , was arrested in August. He began life wanting to be a monk and was sent to Edinburgh University for advance studies. He lost his calling, however, and married but he has maintained his active interest in Buddhism, attending the World Federation of Buddhist recent meetings in Tokyo and Phnom Penh. In recent months before May 8, he became increasingly upset at what he has deemed as Catholic repression of Buddhism and moved to a political position of opposition to the GVN.

B. The National Union of Students: This was developed by Tran Kim Tuyen as a GVN front. As a consequence, it never had any real life although it served as the Vietnamese representative in the COSEC, International student organization. Its leader, Khanh, like several of its officers, are now in hiding as they do not dare at this point to come out either for or against the GVN.

C. There are other minor and some clandestine student organizations of small numbers, such as the Catholics, the VNQDD, etc. All of these student organizations are thus weak and clandestine although the morale of the students is bitter and intense.

2. Mass arrests have generally taken place at demonstrations or to prevent a specific demonstration. In addition, however, there have been some selective arrests of officers of students' groups, etc. For the normal student the arrests have not been serious as other than some brutality in the course of mass arrests or demonstrations they were not mistreated. For the leaders, however, there was some brutality and beating. There were some indications that this mistreatment was accomplished without the knowledge of the Palace.

3. The possibilities of an explosion by students are not considered high for the following reasons:

A. The student dislike of the GVN is quite intense and they are very bitter. However, there are very few who are so intensely concerned that they are willing to risk death.

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B. The students have no clear hope of success or support by other elements. This affects the willingness of students to take major risks if there is not a better hope of success. Some of the students have to some degree adopted the attentecism of their parents and are looking for a clear indication before taking major steps. This is to some extent a reflection of the bureaucratic origins of many of them. There is also little indication of real support by other elements such as labor, the military, the Americans, etc.

C. An explosion might be induced by a clear case of "visual brutality" with a resultant shock value. Non-visual brutality, however, has a less immediate impact.

D. The absence of effective leadership or organization, primarily due to the strong control measures of the government. While the students are clandestinely organizing this has not proceeded very far yet.

E. The degree of control and penetration of the students by police services, permitting the police to forestall many of the students' plans.

4. The student attitudes toward the Viet Cong are as follows:

A. There is very little inclination by students to go to the forest and join the Viet Cong to express their intense distaste of the GVN.

B. There is somewhat greater but still not very much tendency to take an active subversive role in place by joining a VC cell engaging in terrorism, etc. Some of the "cowboys" may take these steps but few others, in part due to the cautious backgrounds of families of many of the students.

C. There is a slight degree of passive support for the National Liberation Front and the VC, although the potential for greater allegiance along this line is possible.

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