

## Ho Chi Minh's Gift

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*A legacy of corruption, economic ruin, repression and ethnic cleansing*

By Scott Johnson

Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, and on the anniversary of his birth this May the old guard in Hanoi predictably imposed another state celebration in his honor. More than just 'keeping up appearances,' the Vietnamese communist regime is fighting to retain ideological justification as today's "money-making communists" cling to power. Since North Vietnamese forces in Soviet tanks first crashed the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon however, some three decades ago the Vietnamese communist party has done nothing but fail their people .... and fail them in spectacular fashion.

Vietnam hosts one of the most corrupt regimes in the world and in 2008 was rated by Transparency International as 121st 'most corrupt' amongst 180 nations. Likewise Vietnam is also one of the poorest with the average wage being a few dollars a day. Initially, the post war communists found an easy out, blaming its economic woes on French and American wars but as the years went by, the communist lie became harder to defend. Doi moi (renovation) grew older and the Vietnamese tiger remained asleep in the forest. The communist victory in Vietnam however, was doomed from the outset, predestined to birth a template for economic decay and endemic corruption ... and like their brutal human rights record, the failure in Vietnam is nothing less than a self-inflicted wound.

The origins of Vietnam's problems can be traced to its conception. In the 1950s, Ho Chi Minh and his communist party murdered an estimated 50,000 people in Northern Vietnam. It was called the "Land Reform Program" but the only reform it did was the execution and starvation of tens of thousands of peasants and landowners. Earlier during the 1930s and 1940s, Uncle Ho and his gang eliminated their political opponents in a series of assassinations. Yes, murder, where the communists in mafia-like fashion shot and killed their opposition, thus ending the true Vietnamese nationalist parties, the Quoc Dan Dang and Da Viet.

It is through this use of terror that Uncle Ho and his cohort General Giap came to power forging the Viet Cong's strategy of "terror." The deliberate massacre of thousands of Vietnamese civilians in 1968 at the imperial city of Hue or the 1967 butchery of hundreds of tribal Montagnards by flamethrowers in the village in Dak Son would become a testament to Ho Chi Minh's brutality. After taking over South Vietnam, the communists would further murder at least 80,000 Vietnamese people in Stalinist style re-education camps.

Today the children of Ho follow his legacy by mimicking China, North Korea, Cuba, Burma and Iran by maintaining power through brute force and censorship of the press. In March 2009 Reporters Without Borders declared Vietnam an "enemy of the internet" and all a citizen of Vietnam needs to do today is criticize the regime and security police will come for you with handcuffs.

The brutal repression of Vietnam's tribal peoples also continues unabated. The U.S. State Department acknowledged killings of Montagnards by security forces and there are today hundreds of Montagnard political and religious prisoners rotting in Vietnamese jails.

The Montagnards of Degar people have in fact been subjected to decades of persecution in a "creeping" form of "ethnic cleansing." The attack upon these indigenous peoples started in 1975 with the execution

and imprisonment of their political and religious leaders. The next phase of attack was aimed at the Montagnards's lifeblood, where the communists confiscated their ancestral lands to make way for forced migrations of ethnic Vietnamese. The Montagnards today have been driven into poverty and their natural resources, the once great forests of Vietnam have been deforested by companies controlled by the Vietnamese Army.

Religious persecution against Christians continues also and in April 2008 a 42-year-old Montagnard woman named Puih Hbat was arrested for having Christian prayer services in her home. Officials from the U.S. Embassy and the European Commission have investigated her case, yet Puih Hbat has not been heard of since and her family believes she may have been murdered in custody.

Vietnam's Communist Party deny any such human rights violations, but have tried placating concerns raised by foreign investors. Party Chief Nong Duc Manh stated in 2006 that "Corruption threatens the survival of our regime," and yet institutionalized corruption continues to plague the country at every level. The problem is, Hanoi hosts a most stubborn regime and unlike its former patron the Soviet Union, never undertook even the most palatable of communist admitted failings such as "de-Stalinization." Hanoi responded to Krushchev's denouncement of Stalin's murderous reign with official idolization, calling Stalin a "marvelously noble ideal communist." Never mind that Stalin killed millions of his own people.

Today Vietnam's state press continues espousing paranoia of the threat to their sovereignty by overseas "hostile forces." Hanoi went so far as to formally accuse the U.S. based Montagnard Foundation with terrorist allegations in the United Nations. While they lost this bogus bid to silence its critics Hanoi continues today to persecute the Montagnards with a vengeance.

In a comical farce, Vietnam's leading newspaper the *Nhan Dan* actually ran an article on May 6, 2008 titled, "The Everlasting Vitality of Marxism." Such diatribes against capitalism seemingly have no effect upon trade delegations from the West who eagerly reap the profits of Vietnam's cheap labor markets. Yet reform is slow and party rhetoric won't cure Vietnam's deeply rooted communist ills. In March 2009, top secret politburo documents uncovered by the Paris based Vietnam Human Rights Committee described Hanoi's plan to "maintain a climate of permanent fear" so they can "stay in power for another 20 years."

So goes the strange saga of Vietnam. Communist on the outside, capitalist on the inside and...corrupt all over. It is stranger still, given their hatred of religion that Hanoi dared to promulgate its own religion. Yet they did exactly that in preserving Ho like Lenin for public display and proclaiming his saintly status, by alleging he was celibate! Truth be known Ho had numerous mistresses and the Vietnamese author Duong Thu Huong reports party officials murdered one such mistress named Xuan in 1957 by party officials just to keep the celibate myth alive. Bui Tin, the North Vietnamese Colonel who defected in 1989, also confirmed Ho's sexual affairs, and lest we forget, communist party general secretary Nong Duc Manh long built his career on claims he was the illegitimate son of Ho Chi Minh!

Ho Chi Minh's gift to the people of Vietnam however, was not his macabre corpse entombed in the stone monstrosity in Hanoi. His gift was authoritarianism, lies, corruption and repression built on the blood of the Vietnamese people. A gift of creeping ethnic cleansing, that glides across the Vietnamese landscape in a deathly bid to silence an ancient race of tribal people.

While the powers to be no doubt are trying to massage Vietnam out of its slumber, foreign aid and trade deals have yet to shake off Hanoi's chains of corruption. The regime has entrenched its power and the transition to true democracy is held hostage by Uncle Ho's ever recalcitrant children, the Vietnamese communist party.

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