

Death of Le Duan Government appointments Relations with USA, China and France

Summary and key dates

Death of Le Duan (July 10, 1986).

Election of Truong Chinh as party general secretary (July 14).

Dismissal of Deputy Premier (Jan. 30).

Appointment of new Cabinet ministers (June 21).

Relations with USA (February-September).

Canadian report on alleged Vietnamese use of chemical weapons (May 28).

Relations with China (January-October).

Announcement of agreement with France on repatriation of war dead (Aug. 6).

Report of death sentence on opposition leader (Aug. 9).

Mr Le Duan, general secretary since 1960 of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and its predecessor the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP), died on July 10, 1986, and was buried in Hanoi (the Vietnamese capital) on July 15.

Mr Le Duan was born into a successful farming family on April 7, 1908, in Annam, one of the five colonies of French Indo-China. He became politically active during the 1920s while working for the Vietnam Railway Company and in 1928 joined the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League. He was one of the 211 charter members of the Communist Party of Indo-China (CPIC), founded in 1930 by Ho Chi Minh.

The French authorities arrested Mr Le Duan in 1931 and sentenced him to 20 years in prison. Among his various cell mates were members of the current Vietnamese leadership, including Mr Truong Chinh, Chairman of the Council of State, Mr Pham Van Dong, Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Premier), and Mr Pham Hung, a Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Deputy Premier) and Minister of the Interior. Mr Le Duan was one of many released from prison in 1936 when the left-wing Popular Front came to power in France [see 213 H]. In 1939 he was appointed to the standing committee of the CPIC.

Following the Japanese 'temporary occupation' of Indo-China in 1941 [see 4715 A] Mr Le Duan was again imprisoned, until the surrender of Japan in 1945, when the *Viet Minh* communist/nationalist League for the Independence of Vietnam established a provisional government [see 7778 A] based in northern Vietnam, and Mr Le Duan was assigned to organize the anti-French resistance and CPIC party organization in the southern section of the country (Cochin China). In 1951 the CPIC divided into the VWP (renamed as the CPV in 1976) and separate Kampuchean and Lao formations.

Following the Geneva Conference on Indo-China which culminated in July 1954 in the partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel [see 13689 A], Mr Le Duan, then secretary of the VWP's Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), took control of all political and military activities in the southern zone. By 1956 Mr Le Duan was urging the government in North Vietnam to back a COSVN-led insurgency in the south, a policy subsequently adopted in 1960 at the VWP third national congress at which Mr Le Duan was elected general secretary (Ho Chi Minh being chairman).

President Ho Chi Minh died in 1969 [see 23581 A] and Mr Le Duan gradually emerged as the most powerful figure within a government which worked under an operational code of collective leadership. Throughout the Vietnam War (1965-75) he successfully avoided being identified with the contending strategists within the leadership. His experience in the south strengthened his position within the party leadership after the formal reunification of Vietnam in July 1976 [see 27917 A], and at the party's fourth national congress in 1976 he was re-elected as first (general) secretary [see 28277 A].

In January 1986 Mr Le Duan visited Moscow for medical treatment and upon his return reportedly relinquished his duties to other senior figures, including Mr Truong Chinh and Mr Pham Van Dong. The authorities designated July 11-15 as days of national mourning and Mr Truong Chinh was named as head of the state funeral committee. The Soviet Union, Laos and Kampuchea were invited to send representatives to the funeral.

The CPV central committee on July 14 elected Mr Truong Chinh to succeed Mr Le Duan as party general secretary.

Mr Truong Chinh was born Dang Xuan Khu on Feb. 9, 1907, in the northern province of Ha Nam Ninh and later changed his name to Truong Chinh, 'long march', after the Long March of Chinese revolutionaries in the 1930s. A founder member of the CPIC, he was elected general secretary of the party's central committee in 1941, holding this post until his resignation in 1956 [see 15349 B] over the implementation of an agricultural collectivization policy which led to numerous peasant revolts. He was re-elected to the party's politburo in 1960, having meanwhile become a Deputy Premier in 1958, and was from 1960 chairman of the standing committee of the National Assembly (of North Vietnam until 1976 and since then of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam). He was elected Chairman of the Council of State in July 1981 [see 31589 A]. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* on July 24, 1986, described Mr Truong Chinh as a 'hardliner', who was regarded within the CPV as a 'staunch doctrinaire communist'.

Indicating some previously unannounced changes in the CPV leadership, a Hanoi radio broadcast of the composition of Mr Le Duan's funeral party on June 10 suggested that Mr Le Duc Tho had been dropped from his long-standing post within the secretariat of the CPV Central Committee. Mr Nguyen Van Linh was identified as a new secretariat member.

Mr Nguyen Van Linh had been reappointed to the CPV politburo in July 1985 [see page 34101] following a three-year period in disgrace and was considered one of the leading government 'reformists'. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported on Sept. 18 that the Vietnamese media had recently started referring to Mr Nguyen Van Linh with the unique title of 'standing member' of the secretariat.

Mr Tran Phuong was dismissed from his post as a Deputy Premier following a meeting of the Council of State on Jan. 30, 1986. The official Hanoi radio reported on Jan. 31 that his dismissal had been proposed by the Council of Ministers, and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of Feb. 13 reported that Mr Tran Phuong's removal indicated the leadership's dissatisfaction with the results of recent economic reforms [see 34101 A].

Hanoi radio announced on June 21 that the Council of State, at the request of Mr Pham Van Dong, had decreed a number of changes in the composition of the Council of Ministers.

These changes affected in particular the economic ministries and according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of July 10 strengthened the position of economic reformers within the government. The article further suggested that the reshuffle was a precursor to major government and party changes expected to be made at the sixth congress of the CPV scheduled for December 1986. [Details of the sixth congress and of developments in the economy during 1986 will be published in a forthcoming article.]

Mr To Huu, a conservative who had supported Mr Tran Phuong's devaluation of the dong with effect from April 1985 and the introduction of a new currency in September 1985 [see 34101], was replaced as Deputy Premier by a fellow politburo member, Mr Vo Chi Cong. Mr Vo Chi Cong was also a member of the CPV secretariat and a strong advocate of greater autonomy for state economic enterprises.

Mr Le Duc Thinh was replaced as Minister of Internal Trade by Mr Hoang Minh Thang, a member of the VCP central committee and secretary of the party committee of Quang Nam-Da Nang province; Mr Le Khac was replaced as Minister of Foreign Trade by Mr Doan Duy Thanh, an alternate member of the VCP central committee and chairman of the Haiphong people's committee; Mr Nguyen Duy Gia was replaced as Director-General of the State Bank (a ministerial position) by Mr Luu Minh Chau, who was described by the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of July 10 as a director of Ho Chi Minh City's import-export company; Mr Bui Danh Luu, hitherto a Vice-Minister of Communications and Transportation, was appointed Minister in the same department, replacing Gen. Dong Si Nguyen, who retained his post as a Deputy Premier; Mr Vu Tuan, hitherto Minister of Food Industry, was appointed Minister of Finance in place of Mr Chu Tam Thuc; Mr Nguyen Chan and Mr Nguyen Van Hieu were dismissed as Minister of Mines and Coal and Minister of Culture respectively and were not replaced. The new Council of Ministers was as follows [see page 31592 for previous list]:

Mr Pham Van Dong	Chairman
Mr Pham Hung	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Mr Vu Dinh Lieu	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)

Mr Vo Van Kiet	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Mr Do Muoi	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Mr Tran Quynh	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Mr Vo Chi Cong	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Gen. Dong Si Nguyen	Vice-Chairman (Deputy Premier)
Mr Doan Trong Truyen	Minister, General Secretary of the Council of Ministers
Mr Pham Hung	Interior
Gen. Van Tien Dung	National Defence
Mr Nguyen Co Thach	Foreign Affairs
Mr Vo Van Kiet	Chairman of the State Commission for Planning
Mr Do Quoc Sam	Chairman of the State Commission for Capital Construction
Mr Dang Huu	Chairman of the State Commission for Science and Technology
Mr Bui Quang Tao	Chairman of the Government Inspectorate
Mr Hoang Van Kieu	Chairman of the Government Committee for Nationalities
Mr Phan Van Tiem	Chairman of the State Pricing Commission
Mr Vu Tuan	Finance, Food Industry
Mr Luu Minh Chau	Director-General of the State Bank
Mr Nguyen Ngoc Triu	Agriculture
Mr Phan Ngoc Tuong	Construction
Mr Bui Danh Luu	Communications and Transport
Mrs Nguyen Thi Binh	Education
Mr Nguyen Van Kha	Engineering and Metals
Mr Nguyen Van Chinh	Food
Mr Doan Duy Thanh	Foreign Trade
Mr Phan Xuan Dot	Forestry
Mr Nguyen Dinh Tu	Higher and Secondary Vocational Education

Mr Hoang Minh Thang	Internal Trade
Mr Phan Hien	Justice
Mr Dao Thien Thi	Labour
Mr Nguyen Chi Vu	Light Industry
Mr Nguyen Tien Trinh	Marine Products
Mr Pham Kai	Power
Mr Dang Hoi Xuan	Public Health
Mr Hoang Duc Nghi	Supply
Mr Song Hao	Disabled Soldiers and Social Affairs
Mr Nguyen Canh Dinh	Water Conservancy

*New appointment.

†Altered portfolio.

The issue of US servicemen who had gone missing in action (MIA) during the US involvement in Indo-China continued to dominate relations between the USA and Vietnam in 1986. A nine-member US congressional delegation led by Mr Gerald Solomon, chairman of the US congressional committee for Americans missing in South-East Asia, visited Vietnam on Feb. 14–15, 1986, for talks with Mr Hoang Bich Son, a Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On the final day of their visit the US delegation reportedly announced that Vietnamese officials had acknowledged that American servicemen were alive in Vietnam and living in remote areas not under government control. The Vietnamese government subsequently denied, however, that it had made any such statement. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* of March 17 reported a recent statement by the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry clarifying their position on the possibility of Americans living in Vietnam. The statement suggested that any American in Vietnam had either been ‘planted behind for a post-war plan’ or had ‘illegally infiltrated’ into the country.

Officials from the Hawaii-based Joint Casualty Resolution Centre (JCRC) led by Lt. -Col. Joe Harvey, met with Vietnamese officials in Hanoi on Feb. 27–28.

Vietnam gave the US team a list of 49 cases of US MIAs currently under investigation. Hanoi radio reported on April 11 that the remains of 21 American servicemen and ‘material evidence’ relating to three others had the previous day been handed over in Hanoi to representatives of the US government. At the same time US officials returned two sets of remains delivered in August 1985 [see page 34102] which had since been determined as not being those of missing US servicemen.

On April 18 Vietnam announced the immediate suspension of all talks with the USA on the MIA issue in response to the US air attack on Libya on April 15 [see 34454 A].

Talks resumed on June 12–13 when JCRC officials met Vietnamese officials in Hanoi for discussions on 21 specific cases. Following a further meeting on July 2–3, the Agence-France Presse (AFP) news agency reported that the Vietnamese side had agreed to let US officials participate in investigation into reports about live Americans in Vietnam. The Vietnamese News Agency (VNA), on the other hand, announced on July 3 that such reports were ‘sheer fabrication prompted by ill intention’ and reaffirmed that there were no American prisoners of war in Vietnam.

A further meeting of JCRC officials and Vietnamese officials was held in Hanoi on Aug. 14–15.

The Vietnamese side presented information gathered during a recent search, and in a ceremony at Hanoi airport on Sept. 17 the remains of a man identified as a US Air Force captain were handed to US officials.

On Nov. 25 the remains of three US servicemen, identified tentatively from documents and dog-tags found with them, were handed over to US officials in Hanoi.

The first direct bilateral talks between Vietnam and the USA to discuss the issue of Amerasian children in Vietnam were held in Hanoi on Sept. 1. Mr Nguyen Co Thach had told a visiting US delegation in October 1985 that the children were free to leave for the USA [see page 34102]

The VNA reported the release on Aug. 13 of Mr Robert Schwab, a US citizen who had been held in a Vietnamese jail since April 1985.

Mr Schwab had been arrested on April 23, 1985, in the central coastal province of Nghia Binh having left from the Philippines in a sailing boat in an attempt to locate a Vietnamese woman and her child. Mr Schwab had reportedly met the woman whilst serving in the US Army in Vietnam during the early 1970s. He was released into the custody of Mr Richard Childress, director of Asian Affairs for the National security Council, after paying a fine and promising his captors he would make no attempt to return to Vietnam.

The release of a document challenging claims repeatedly made by the US government since 1981 that Vietnamese troops had been using various Soviet-designed chemical weapons against their enemies in Indo-China, was authorized by the Canadian government on May 28, 1986.

The initial claim had been made by Gen. Alexander Haig, then the US Secretary of State, in a speech in West Berlin in September 1981 [see pages 31417-18], in which he suggested that the USA had 'physical evidence' of the use in South-East Asia of non-indigenous 'potent mycotoxins ('yellow rain'). The US State Department had repeated the accusations on numerous subsequent occasions.

The Canadian report covered the testing in 1984 of 280 blood samples collected from Laotians and Kampucheans living in five areas of Thailand. It found that approximately 2 per cent of the people tested had toxins in their blood, but that the toxins probably derived not from any chemical attack, but from fungus-infested food. A similar study carried out by British scientists had also reportedly supported the argument that chemical weapons had not been used by the Vietnamese in South-East Asia. According to the *Washington Post* on May 30 Prof. Matthew Meselson, professor of biology at Harvard University and a critic of the American allegations [ibid]. had found that samples of 'yellow rain' usually contained a proportion of pollen. This finding led Prof. Meselson to propose that 'yellow rain' was probably pollen-laden bee faeces.

A US government official on May 29 rejected the Canadian data and repeated the assertion that the Soviet Union, through its Vietnamese allies, was waging chemical and toxin warfare in South-East Asia.

Xinhua (the New China News Agency) reported on Feb. 2, 1986, that Vietnamese troops had launched 33 attacks into China's southern Yunnan province since Jan. 1, resulting in the death or wounding of 65 Chinese civilians and soldiers.

The report coincided with Vietnamese accusations of Chinese aggression. Hanoi radio accused China on Jan. 20 of launching an artillery barrage in mid-January and killing or injuring 21 civilians.

The official communique arising from the 13th regular meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Indo-Chinese countries (Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea), held in Hanoi on Aug. 17-18, declared Vietnam's readiness to enter into talks with China 'at any level and anywhere whatsoever'.

According to *Le Monde* China rejected the Vietnamese offer on Aug. 20 on the grounds that it could not enter into normalization talks until all Vietnamese forces were withdrawn from Kampuchea. [See page 34425 for the advancement to 1990 of the target date for the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea]. Mr Truong Chinh reportedly proposed on Oct. 18 to negotiate an unconditional settlement with China, but the offer to negotiate was immediately rejected.

On Sept. 6 China and Vietnam exchanged a number of prisoners on the border adjoining the Vietnamese province of Lang Son for exchange of prisoners in 1985 [see page 34103].

China released 34 prisoners of whom 25 were soldiers and four were described as spies. Vietnam in turn released 27 prisoners described as 'illegal Chinese intruders'.

Heavy fighting was reported in mid- and late October between Chinese and Vietnamese troops stationed on the border between Ha Tuyen province (Vietnam) and Yunnan province (China). Each side accused the other of initiating hostilities. On Oct. 20 Vietnam claimed that 250 Chinese troops had been 'put out of action' in the fighting [for previous hostilities in this area, *ibid*].

The Voice of Vietnam radio station announced on Aug. 6, 1986, that Vietnam and France had signed an agreement on the exhumation and repatriation over a two-year period of approximately 25,000 French soldiers killed in Vietnam between 1939 and 1954. According to the report representatives of both

governments had recently met in Hanoi at the request of the French government. [Le Monde] of Sept. 27 reported that the terms of the agreement had been finalized on Sept. 23.

M. Didier Bariani, Secretary of State attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and M. Georges Fontés, Secretary of State for Ex-Servicemen, visited Vietnam on Oct. 7–9 for talks with Mr Nguyen Co Thach and to collect the remains of 720 French servicemen.

According to a report by AFP on Aug. 25, Mr Ngo Van Truong (also known as Ngo Quang Toan), the leader of a secret opposition group–Militia Front for the National Renaissance of Vietnam–had been sentenced to death on Aug. 9 after being charged with forming ‘an extremely dangerous counter-revolutionary organization’.

A former soldier in the South Vietnamese Army, he had been arrested in January 1984 in Ho Chi Minh City whilst boarding a train for the central city of Hue carrying some 400 leaflets for distribution. Other members of the organization, all reportedly former officials in the government of South Vietnam, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from three years to life.

About 400 people were killed and 2,500 injured when a typhoon struck the northern Red River delta provinces of Ha Nam Ninh and Thai Binh in early September. On Oct. 28 the European Commission approved an emergency aid package to the value of 435,000 European currency units (ECUs–ECU 1.00=US\$1.02849 as at Oct. 29, to aid the victims. –(Far Eastern Economic Review Times Guardian Independent Financial Times - International - Herald Tribune - Le Monde - Inside Asia - Vietnam Courier - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts)