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its internal political position in South Vietnam, a country with an estimated population of 12 million. The national referendum in October 1955 established the legitimacy of the Government of Vietnam (GVN), and completed the elimination of Bao Dai as Chief of State and as a major political factor in South Vietnam. By the end of March 1956, Diem reduced the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao groups to political impotence by a series of moves which culminated in the elimination of the Cao Dai army as an independent military force and the capture, trial, and execution of Ba Cut, the last important active Hoa Hao resistance leader.

36. On 4 March 1956, in South Vietnam's first national elections, 80 percent of the eligible voters participated in electing 123 deputies from 405 candidates for the Constituent Assembly. The returns gave pro-Diem forces a substantial majority. Although nearly one-third of the government-favored candidates were defeated, no openly anti-Diem deputy was elected. This was due in part to government manipulation of the election campaign and in part to a boycott of the elections by most of the opposition parties. Despite efforts by the Vietnamese Communists and other resistance groups to disrupt and sabotage the voting, the elections generally were calm and orderly. The Constituent Assembly will sit for a four-year term as the first National Assembly.

37. The deputies in the Constituent Assembly, which convened 15 March, are divided among political parties as follows: National Revolutionary Movement (NRM), 61; Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP), 15; Citizens Rally (CR), 26; Movement of Struggle for Freedom (MSF), 6; and Independents (including one Dai Viet), 15. The NRM is the Diem government's primary source of organized political power. Although Information Minister Tran Chanh Thanh is its titular head, a large part of the party is controlled by Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Can, who controls Central Vietnam. The RWP, also a government party, is led by Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. While the CR, MSF, and most Independents now support Diem, they contain some members

who have reservations about some of Diem's methods and are potential centers of parliamentary opposition.

38. Diem will probably maintain his dominant political position in South Vietnam during the period of this estimate. The constitution, which has been drafted under Diem's supervision, gives the President wide powers including the right to appoint the first Vice President and to suspend civil rights during the life of the first Assembly. Diem's personal prestige will probably be enhanced by improvement in internal security and by continued frustration of Vietnamese Communist objectives. However, he will continue to face serious problems in attracting additional active support for his government, in part because of his reliance on a small circle of relatives and trusted friends. While Diem's control of the Assembly during the period of this estimate will probably be adequate to insure adoption of any important measure he wishes enacted, his inclination to hold a tight rein on the legislature may accelerate the development of an active opposition.

39. The appointment of a Vice President by Diem, now 55, will remove much uncertainty over presidential succession. Nevertheless, Diem's death, whether by natural causes or assassination, could result in serious factional disputes in the government and among the major political parties which could strain the new governmental institutions. Ngo Dinh Nhu and Tran Chanh Thanh, key figures in the RWP and NRM, have a great deal of political power and would play important roles in any redistribution of power, but neither of these men has a wide popular following. To some government critics and government supporters Thanh symbolizes the more regressive features of the Diem regime. At the moment, Secretary to the President and Acting Minister of the Interior Nguyen Huu Chau appears to enjoy Diem's favor and has grown rapidly in stature and power, but he has no organized political backing apart from his support by Diem and Nhu. Ngo Dinh Can would probably play an important behind-the-scenes role in any redistribution of power, but his lack of national stature and poor

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