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Background Brief:

Loudspeakers in Hanoi Join the Cacophony of Street Noise

August 10, 2022

We are preparing a report about Vietnam's plans to bring back loudspeaker announcements/propaganda. We request your assessment of the following issues:

Q1. Do you think these kinds of practices will be effective? Or will most people find them heavy-handed and unconvincing?

ANSWER: Loud speakers in major municipalities, such as Hanoi, are archaic and redundant. Hanoi's plans to have a loudspeaker audible by each neighbourhood by 2025 will be ineffective because they will be drowned out by street noise. Vietnamese citizens will continue to use their smart phones to access needed information.

Hanoi government authorities say they want to create neighbourhood networks when local networks can easily be created on-line by special Apps. The average Vietnamese citizen prizes his/her independence to access news and information independently. Loudspeakers will be only one more object creating noise pollution in already noisy Hanoi.

Q2. What domestic political factors are pushing Vietnam to embrace these seemingly archaic policies?

ANSWER: According to the Hanoi Department of Communications and Information, loudspeakers continue to operate in twenty provinces. The reintroduction of loud speakers in Hanoi was a local initiative by the new leader of the municipal People's Committee to empower local leaders at ward level. The loud speakers would serve as a conduit to promote local initiatives. There is no indication at the moment that this will be a nationwide initiative.

Q3. Are there other examples of the government turning to the past like this?

ANSWER: To the contrary, the prime focus on information and communications in Vietnam is future orientated with a focus on digital technology such as wide screen displays and electronic banners.

Q4. How does this fit into the ongoing press crackdown? Is it an attempt to fill the void with more official voices? Or is it something else?

ANSWER: The introduction of loudspeakers is unrelated to the crackdown on activists who use online social media to promote views critical of the one-party state. The loudspeakers in Hanoi are designed to focus on local community issues.

The state media serves as a reliable conduit for the transmission of approved news and information. The state media also offers a very diverse range of publications in hard copy and online and is well patronised by the general public.

The introduction of loudspeakers in Hanoi is also unrelated to regime insecurity or the on-going anti-corruption campaign. There is scant evidence that the legitimacy of the current regime is losing widespread public support that can be remedied by the reintroduction of loud speakers on the streets of Hanoi.

The anti-corruption campaign is a national issue, while its victims are mainly local. The key concern of the informed general public seems to be how widespread is corruption. In other words, are the recent high profile arrests the tip of the iceberg?

The regime has widely publicized what party norms and state laws have been violated over television, on radio, and in the media, both hard copy and online. The victims of the anti-corruption campaign are diverse. In many cases, such as price gouging for COVID medicine, return airfares to Vietnam and oil smuggling, their arrest and punishment is accepted as just by the general public.

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