

Thayer Consultancy
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Background Brief:

Vietnam's Anti-Corruption Campaign and the Future of Nguyen Phu Trong and Pham Minh Chinh

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We request your assessment of Vietnam's current anti-corruption campaign and its relationship with the recent dismissals of two deputy prime ministers who are also members of the Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee.

Q1. Do you think General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong's anti-corruption campaign is based on law, policy, ideology, or it's only the further consolidation of power by the Trong and his followers/his group? Why?

ANSWER: General Secretary's Nguyen Phu Trong's anti-corruption campaign is grounded in ideology and based on party rules and state law. Trong's entire career has been wrapped up in party-building, including a PhD from Russia and years working on the party's journal *Tap Chi Cong San*.

Trong's anti-corruption campaign is conducted along two lines. The first involves party rules and norms. Trong has been quite active in revising party rules or introducing new rules to suit his campaign. The signpost of this is the list of things party members must not do. Party members who transgress are expelled from the party and all positions they held.

The second line in Trong's anti-corruption campaign is legal. Party members who face party discipline are also investigated by the police to see if they violated the law; if so they are tried, convicted and sent to prison.

Secretary General Trong is motivated to keep in power party members who share his views on ideology. His anti-corruption campaign may be viewed as his legacy to the Vietnam Communist Party. Trong is not trying to consolidate his power by staying in office for a fourth term. Prior to the 13th national party congress, Trong picked a successor, Tran Quoc Vuong, and put his name forward. In an unexpected development, the Central Committee rejected Vuong. In these unprecedented circumstances Trong did not retire but was kept on for a third term.

One of the duties of the party General Secretary is to groom a successor. It is not clear yet whom Trong favours at this stage. Preparations for the 14th party congress usually begin around the halfway point, which would be mid-2023.

Q2. In your assessment, how can Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh survive his term as he must reshuffle his cabinet due to the anti-corruption campaign?

ANSWER: Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's tenure in office is not under threat due to the dismissal of two deputy prime ministers. Chinh is new to office and cannot be held responsible for transgressions allegedly committed by Pham Binh Minh and Vu Duc Dam prior to 2021.

Chinh has experience in personnel selection as the former head of the party's Central Organisation Committee and as a member of the Politburo. It appears the Politburo has already decided who the new deputy prime ministers will be. This decision apparently has the concurrence of the Central Committee. Chinh will put the nominations to the National Assembly along with any other changes to his Cabinet. It is very likely these nominations will be approved. Since reunification in 1976, the National Assembly has rejected the prime minister's nominations on ministerial candidates only twice (Cao Si Kiem, Governor of the State Bank in 1997 and Le Minh Huong, Minister of Public Security in 2002).

Q3. In your assessment, what will Trong due in the future, especially as he created a lot of enemies around him?

ANSWER: General Secretary Trong failed to get his protégé Tran Quoc Vuong approved as the next party leader because a coalition of provincial party leaders reportedly found Vuong too abrasive in executing Trong's anti-corruption campaign. Trong was given an unprecedented third term in office because no consensus could be reached on any other candidate.

Trong will retire at the next national party congress in 2026 if not sooner. Trong will quietly canvass members of the Politburo, Secretariat and other senior party officials about his successor. In the meantime, Trong will continue with his "burning furnace" campaign because he knows that corruption in the party is the major threat to its legitimacy to rule Vietnam.

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