

# A big win for big brother in Hanoi

BY MATTHEW DANIELS, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 04/08/19 01:30 PM EDT  
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The anticlimax of the heavily hyped summit between the U.S. President and the chairman of the North Korean regime obscured the real winner of the meeting: Viet Nam’s Communist regime. Hanoi got the limelight it craved — with few talking about Hanoi’s glaring dark side. The main exception are the courageous bloggers willing to overcome Vietnam’s extensive censorship and brutal police force.

“These days, West Hanoi is booming,” crowed Fox News anchor Bill Hemmer on location of the Donald Trump-Kim Jong Un scripted reality show in Hanoi. The talking heads were quick to point out that Chairman Kim was remiss in not taking a tour of the shiny housing developments arising from the economic miracle of Vietnam’s industrial sector. The White House pointed to more good news, with nearly \$13 billion in sales of U.S.-manufactured aircraft and engines to Viet Air and Bamboo Air.

Behind the Cinderella success story, however, was a back story: the actual reality of one-party Communist state repression. Political dissidents are routinely beaten by plainclothes police or hauled into court, tried for subversion and sentenced to long prison terms. True, Vietnam is not a gulag state on the order of North Korea, but it’s an Orwellian nightmare for human rights advocates all the same.

The world knows about the mean side of the workers’ paradise in Hanoi only because of courageous bloggers like Mother Mushroom, an outspoken critic of Vietnam’s regime. Blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, also known by the pseudonym “Mother Mushroom,” made her reputation blogging about Vietnam’s cruel treatment of prisoners and blind eye toward pollution. Quynh, 39, was freed from jail in 2018 and packed onto a plane to the United States to join her mother and children. She was the second Vietnamese dissident released that year.

Nearly a hundred political dissidents are still in jail for exercising the most basic freedoms of speech in Vietnam. They frequently go through long periods of detention with no access to legal representation or basic due process. First Lady Melania Trump honored Quynh in absentia with an

International Woman of Courage Award in 2017. Sometimes it pays to become known for the company you don't keep.

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Another blogger turning the tables on Hanoi is Roman Catholic activist [Huynh Thuc Vy, who founded the organization Vietnamese Women for Human Rights](#). Vy has kept the world apprised of [the regime's persecution of ethnic minorities](#) and [suppression of those who dare to speak out](#) against the Vietnamese party bosses. Vy was sentenced in December to [33 months in prison for Facebook post](#).

Other targets of the Vietnamese police include blogger Pham Doan Trang, a contributor to [Luat khoa Tap chi](#), an online magazine that focuses on law and human rights. On August 15 of last year, fellow activists reported on their Facebook pages that [Trang was taken to the police headquarters that night and beaten repeatedly](#).

Some Vietnamese expats wondered aloud why the President utilized the summit to praise his Vietnamese hosts while ignoring their glaring human rights abuses.

It's a shame that the putative leader of the free world cannot imitate [the moral stance of Ronald Reagan towards the Soviet Union](#), an approach that is [widely credited by Soviet dissidents with having won the Cold War](#) by exposing the bankruptcy of Soviet ideology. But consider this bright side: During the dark days of the Soviet Union's evil empire, dissidents had to smuggle out letters through hand-produced "Samizdat" underground publications. Now, because of the light of the internet, authoritarian governments can be held accountable in the court of public opinion within hours.

The internet has disrupted monopolies in many areas, so we should welcome the democratization of the human rights enterprise. So in the aftermath of the latest failed Trump-Kim summit, let's celebrate those heroic men and women in Vietnam who are doing what our own leaders are increasingly unwilling to do: Standing up for the humanity and fundamental rights of the victims of totalitarianism.

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