



“We Don’t Want a Munich”: Hanoi’s Diplomatic Strategy, 1965–1968

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1965, the United States intervened in the intensifying Vietnamese civil war by dispatching a substantial and soon rapidly increasing military force to South Vietnam. The Vietnamese Workers’ Party (VWP) and the government of the Democratic Republic of [North] Vietnam (DRVN) responded with a series of strategies their leaders called the “Anti-American Resistance for National Salvation” (*cuoc khang chien chong My, cuu nuoc*).¹ The strategies incorporated three interrelated “modes of struggle.” “Military struggle” (*dau tranh quan su*), the cornerstone, aimed to confront and overcome the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies on the battlefield.² “Political struggle” (*dau tranh chinh tri*) aimed to win popular support for the resistance in the South (*dan van*), recruit partisans and cadres there, and encourage defection of troops from the South Vietnamese Army (*binh van*).³ “Diplomatic struggle” (*dau tranh ngoai giao*) aimed to secure political and material support from the Soviet Union, China, and other Socialist allies, and to mobilize world opinion and international support for the resistance.

The resistance aimed above all to advance the twin objectives of the Vietnamese revolution: the reunification and Socialist transformation of the nation under the authority of the VWP. This in turn meant defending the North against American attack and “liberating” the South from the control of the “puppet” regime in Saigon. VWP leaders pledged to pursue these objectives to “complete victory.” To that end, Hanoi would need maximal political and material support from its Socialist allies and other “progressive” forces worldwide, hence the orientation of its diplomacy. Contrary to customary diplomatic

1. The strategies are outlined in “Nghì quyêt Hoi nghi trung uong lan thu 11 (dac biet), ngay 25, 26, 27 thang 3 nam 1965: Ve tinh hinh va nhem vu cap bach truoc mat,” in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 26: 1965* [Party Documents—Complete Series Volume 26: 1965] (Hanoi, 2003) [hereafter VKD: 1965], 105.

2. Le Duan, in 1965 the First Secretary of the VWP, later defined the strategy as *lam chu de tieu diet dich, tieu diet dich de lam chu*, which meant “control [land] to annihilate the enemy, annihilate the enemy to control [land].” Le Duan, *Tiep tục nghiên cứu xây dựng lý luận quan su Viet Nam* [Continuing to Study and Build Vietnamese Military Thought] (Hanoi, 1979), 4.

3. David W. P. Elliott, “Hanoi’s Strategy in the Second Indochina War,” in *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, ed. Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (Armonk, NY, 1993), 71; Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People’s Army of Vietnam* (New York, 1986), 244–45.

practice, it obdurately refused to dialogue with the enemy despite opportunities to do so. It took this stance because of the ideologically based belief that talks would signal a lack of resolve in pursuing the goals of the resistance in view of the fact that achieving a diplomatic settlement incorporating its maximalist goals was impossible in 1965 and likely to remain so in the immediate future. The Vietnamese were determined not to show any weakness, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong confided to the French general delegate in Hanoi at the time. “We don’t want a Munich which will spare us from war now but bring dishonor upon us.”⁴ Thus, as Washington increased troop levels in the South and bombing in the North, Hanoi intensified its commitment to the resistance, soliciting greater allied support for its war effort and rejecting American and third-party requests for negotiations. According to Tran Buu Kiem of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (NLF, the so-called Viet Cong), “the only possible recourse [for the DRVN/NLF] was the application of a sustained military pressure” until the Americans decided to “change their mind.”⁵ “The greater the escalation of USA troops,” Pham Van Dong defiantly observed, “the greater would be [our] ultimate victory.”⁶ Far from deterring North Vietnamese decision makers, the American military intervention solidified their resolve to struggle until decisive, unequivocal victory. This defiant resolve dominated Hanoi’s strategic thinking until circumstances late in the war forced a reassessment.

This article explores Hanoi’s diplomatic strategy during the early stage of what Americans call the Vietnam War (1965–73). It uses an assortment of Vietnamese, Western, and other materials to elucidate the meanings and usages Hanoi attached to diplomacy in those years, to describe the related maneuverings of North Vietnamese leaders, and to identify the forces shaping those maneuvers.⁷ The focus here is on not actual initiatives but the reasoning behind

4. Quoted in French General Delegation, Hanoi [hereafter FGDH] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris [hereafter MFA], April 4, 1965, #99, *Asie-Océanie: Vietnam Conflit* [hereafter AO:VC], Archives Diplomatiques de France, La Courneuve, Paris [hereafter ADF], 1.

5. French Embassy, Phnom Penh to MFA, “Note,” December 18, 1965, #311, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

6. Quoted in Andrew Preston, “Missions Impossible: Canadian Secret Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace in Vietnam,” in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964–1968*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX, 2004), 131.

7. This article relies on British and French documents to corroborate arguments based on Vietnamese materials. London and Paris maintained missions in Hanoi after 1954 that produced revealing reports on political and economic issues in the DRVN. (London opened a consulate in Hanoi in 1946, which was upgraded to a consulate-general in 1954. That office remained open throughout the war and became an embassy following the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1973. France’s High Commission in Indochina, headquartered in Hanoi, became a *délégation générale* following the 1954 Geneva accords. The delegation was upgraded to embassy in 1973.) London’s Foreign Office and the Quai d’Orsay similarly generated insightful reports on the DRVN, as did French and British embassies in Moscow and Beijing. The article also relies on key Bulgarian documents, which have been largely untapped by Western scholars, that include fascinating insights into Hanoi’s attitude toward Moscow, Beijing, and negotiations with the United States. I am indebted to Lorenz Lüthi of McGill University for sharing these sources with me.

them. Following the onset of the “American War,” Hanoi rejected negotiations with Washington, but that did not mean that diplomatic struggle was nonexistent or that it was ever tertiary to military and political struggle.⁸ From that time state and party organs used diplomacy to mobilize world opinion, to solidify bonds with Socialist and nonaligned states, and to navigate the Sino-Soviet dispute through stratagems that amounted to much more than “playing the Chinese and Soviets off against one another” to satisfy Vietnamese war aims.⁹ Admittedly, diplomatic priorities changed over time, but diplomatic struggle itself remained at the heart of the Anti-American Resistance. Ultimately, that struggle proved no less important than the military and political ones in contouring the outcome of the Vietnamese-American war.

A number of scholars have addressed the DRVN’s diplomatic strategy during the period in question. Much of their work has focused on Hanoi’s negotiations with the United States and considered other aspects of its diplomacy only tangentially. Allan Goodman and Gareth Porter were among the first to assess North Vietnamese dealings with foreign actors. Due to the limited source material available to them in the 1970s when they wrote, their accounts were variously partial and speculative, and are now dated.¹⁰ Using among other sources Communist documents captured during the war, David Elliott and William Duiker made more recent assessments.¹¹ Many of their conclusions remain valid but can now be more authoritatively advanced thanks to sources subsequently released in Vietnam as well as in Western, Eastern European, and Chinese archives. Qiang Zhai’s *China and the Vietnam Wars* and Chen Jian’s *Mao’s China and the Cold War* introduced detailed and fascinating new evidence from Chinese archives, but their too-exclusive reliance on Chinese sources encouraged them to see the Vietnamese through Chinese eyes and thus as more passive than they actually were in their exchanges with Beijing, especially in connection with the Sino-Soviet dispute.¹² A similar criticism may be made of Ilya Gaiduk’s *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, which relies on Russian archival materials to reconstruct the story of Soviet-Vietnamese relations.¹³ In a work on the foreign policy of the NLF, Robert

8. Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 3.

9. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, “Cold War Contradictions: Toward an International History of the Second Indochina War, 1969–1973,” in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (New York, 2008), 220.

10. Allen E. Goodman, *The Lost Peace: America’s Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War* (Stanford, CA, 1978); Gareth Porter, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam and the Paris Peace Agreement* (Bloomington, IN, 1975).

11. See, among other works, Elliott, “Hanoi’s Strategy in the Second Indochina War”; William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO, 1996).

12. Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001).

13. Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996).

Brigham offers useful details on Hanoi's diplomatic strategy but focuses on the NLF's diplomatic activities.¹⁴ My own and Lien-Hang Nguyen's efforts to understand Hanoi's diplomatic strategy during the Vietnam War provide important new insights but neglect the period before 1968.¹⁵ Harish Metha's study of North Vietnamese diplomacy in 1965–72 is a tour de force, but it is concerned less with Hanoi's strategic thinking than the initiatives the party and state undertook to meet the aims of the diplomatic struggle as well as the effects of those initiatives in both Western and Eastern bloc countries.¹⁶

Several considerations informed Hanoi's strategic calculus following the war's onset. Ideology and experience were foremost among them. Hanoi's perception of diplomacy as "one of the most important weapons in war" as well as its early rejection of negotiations were rooted in an essentially Maoist understanding of Marxism-Leninism validated by the failure of the Geneva accords after 1954.¹⁷ After the Tet Offensive in early 1968, those attitudes evolved somewhat as ideology lost some of its luster as a result of the shortcomings of the Anti-American Resistance as well as the disappointing behavior of Socialist allies. From that point, VWP leaders manifested a degree of flexibility and pragmatism in the diplomatic struggle, leading to the decision to participate in talks with the United States in Paris. However, they refused to actually negotiate and continued to reject compromise, largely because ideological considerations still permeated their thinking. In retrospect, there seems to have been no "lost chance" for peace in Vietnam during the period covered in this study. Confident that proletarian internationalism and its own determination would propel it to victory, Hanoi showed no inclination to engage in serious negotiations with its adversaries and even less desire to end the war by means of a compromise agreement.

It is too early to give the final word on the history of Hanoi's diplomatic struggle. The aim here is to present a new perspective on that subject by focusing on the concerns and dispositions of VWP leaders as they conducted the diplomatic aspects of the Anti-American Resistance. Hopefully, the result will encourage further study and debate among historians of the war.

14. Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

15. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*; Lien-Hang Nguyen, "Between the Storms: An International History of the Second Indochina War, 1968–1973," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2008; Nguyen, "Cold War Contradictions," 219–50; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese Split and the Indochina War, 1968–1975," in *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–1979*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (New York, 2009), 12–32.

16. Harish C. Metha, "'People's Diplomacy': The Diplomatic Front of North Vietnam during the War against the United States, 1965–1972," Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 2009.

17. The quoted passage is from Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 17.

DIPLOMACY AS WAR BY OTHER MEANS

Committed to “fight to victory”—that is, until unconditional U.S. disengagement and removal of the surrogate regime in Saigon—following the onset of the Vietnam War in spring 1965, Hanoi implemented a diplomatic strategy geared toward securing political and material support from its Socialist allies and moral support from “progressive forces worldwide,” including those in the United States.¹⁸ Like other Marxist-Leninist ideologues, VWP leaders regarded diplomacy not as a means of conflict resolution but as a “servant and whipping boy of the revolution,” an instrument of war.¹⁹ Diplomacy typically facilitates the interaction of adversaries outside the realm of violence, thereby functioning as an “antidote to war.”²⁰ To VWP policymakers in the early years of the war, however, it was a function of revolutionary struggle. They understood that function in terms of such pronouncements as those by Mao Zedong that “political bargaining was an intrinsic part of the military and political struggle,” and Truong Chinh, the VWP’s own theoretician, who remarked during the war against France that diplomacy could have “profound repercussions on our war of liberation” and create “eminently favorable conditions” for final victory.²¹ The *raison d’être* of DRVN foreign policy after 1965 was thus winning support for the state and the resistance to achieve unmitigated triumph on the battlefield.

Mobilization (and manipulation) of world opinion was “an important requirement” of this effort to “secure the victory of our people.”²² International political support for Vietnamese independence and sovereignty, and concomitant condemnation of American intervention, would “isolate” (*co lap*) American “imperialists” and their Vietnamese “lackeys,” thus pressuring Washington to end the war by withdrawing its forces. “*Isolating the enemy to defeat him*, such is the standard tactic of a [social] class or a people determined to struggle and to win,” Truong Chinh had maintained.²³ Hanoi furthered these goals through extensive informational, propaganda, and public relations efforts: staged press

18. “Information [undated],” in Lorenz Lüthi, “Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents on Vietnam and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1964–1966,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* no. 16 (2008) [hereafter *CWIHPB* 16]: 395; Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai: Vi su nhiep gianh doc lap, tu do, 1945–1975* [Contemporary Vietnamese Diplomacy: For Independence and Freedom, 1945–1975] (Hanoi, 2001), 214; *Mot so van kien cua Dang ve chong My cui nuoc, Tap II* [Some Party Documents on the Anti-American Resistance for National Salvation, Volume 2] (Hanoi, 1985), 24.

19. Paul Gordon Lauren, Gordon A. Craig, and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Challenges of Our Time* (New York, 2007), 63; Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory, and Administration* (New York, 2000), 151.

20. Gordon Lauren, Craig, and George, *Force and Statecraft*, 3, 61; Hamilton and Langhorne, *Practice of Diplomacy*, 239.

21. Mao is quoted in Tang Tsou and Morton H. Halperin, “Mao Tse-tung’s Revolutionary Strategy and Peking’s International Behavior,” *American Political Science Review* 59, no. 1 (March 1965): 94–95; Truong Chinh, “La résistance vaincra” (1947), in Truong Chinh, *Écrits, 1946–1975* [Selected Writings, 1946–1975] (Hanoi, 1977), 154.

22. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 212.

23. Truong Chinh, “La résistance vaincra,” 93. Emphasis in original.



Figure 1: Delegates from around the world assembled in Hanoi for the Second Conference of the International Trade-Union Committee for Solidarity with the Workers and People of Vietnam against the U.S. Imperialist Aggressors, June 2–5, 1965. Courtesy Vietnamese Revolution Museum, Hanoi.

conferences; adroit appeals for peace; participation in peace, youth, and other international congresses receptive to its message; dispatching DRVN and NLF delegations to communicate to international audiences the righteousness and correctness of its cause; disseminating “informational” materials through its diplomatic missions and ideologically allied groups and individuals abroad; cultivating relationships with friendly nongovernmental organizations in the West; extending moral and whatever other support it could muster to national liberation movements and other “progressive” causes worldwide; and inviting high-profile sympathetic foreigners to the DRVN to witness the effects of the American bombing of the North and spread the news of its “dreadfulness” via their access to the international media (Figures 1 and 6).²⁴ “They genuinely do feel that ‘world’ opinion will have its effect,” Western diplomats in Hanoi wrote of VWP leaders masterminding these efforts.²⁵ “The Hanoi government has provided plenty of evidence over a long period,” wrote the British consul, “that they value the support of public opinion in the world at large (not merely in Communist countries, but wherever there is latent anti-American sentiment) and have done their utmost to use it.” “The DRV propaganda machine” and foreign policy establishment, the consul continued, were “now devoting [their]

24. See Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*; Metha, “People’s Diplomacy.”

25. British Consulate-General, Hanoi [hereafter BCGH] to Southeast Asia Department, London [hereafter SEAD], April 23, 1965, FO 371/ 180519, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, England [hereafter TNAUK], 1.

entire effort to soliciting sympathy from abroad . . . and the picture of a small, weak people struggling for unity and national identity and refusing to be bullied, has been well drawn.”²⁶ “The North Vietnamese derive much comfort from the peace-seeking efforts of [Egyptian] President Nasser, Tito and [Ghanaian president] Nkrumah, [Indian] Prime Minister Shastri, and . . . some of the Scandinavian leaders,” the Czechoslovak ambassador reported of the endeavors of neutralist and third world leaders critical of the U.S. role in Vietnam, making the same point. “So long as these efforts can be interpreted in some way or other as condemnation of the Americans, the North Vietnamese see them as underlining the correctness of one of their favorite theses; that world public opinion is on their side, and that it is only a matter of time” before that opinion compelled Washington to extricate its forces.²⁷ Shortly thereafter, the same ambassador thought “the attitude of North Vietnamese leaders was currently more rigid than ever” in their opposition to the American presence in the South, and he could “detect no signs whatever that they were prepared to negotiate.” Indeed, VWP leaders were “heartened” by recent “world-wide demonstrations against United States policy.”²⁸ When the Swedish government agreed to permit Bertand Russell’s International War Crimes Tribunal to convene in Stockholm in 1967, DRVN ambassador to Beijing Ngo Dinh Loan hailed the decision as “more valuable than shiploads of weapons.”²⁹

Vietnamese historian Nguyen Vu Tung has criticized in realistic terms the policies that occasioned these assessments. While Hanoi publicly professed its interest in ending the war diplomatically between 1965 and 1968, it did so, Tung has written, only to win “internal and external support” and enlist “the sympathy of nationalist countries.”³⁰ The professions were of willingness for “talks,” not pledges to negotiate.³¹ Admittedly, Hanoi’s “peace proposals” in the early years of the war aimed to manipulate foreign sympathies, not to encourage efficacious negotiations. An important purpose was to appear flexible, undogmatic. While VWP leaders privately embraced the “current Chinese line” concerning world revolution, the British consulate noted, in “their efforts to win friends overseas, especially in Africa, the Vietnamese are careful not to associate themselves with the more crude forms of Chinese polemics; in fact, they strike a more cautious

26. BCGH to SEAD, March 29, 1965, FO 371/ 180595, TNAUK, 1.

27. Reported in BCGH to SEAD, September 1, 1965, FO 371/ 180519, 1, TNAUK; British Embassy, Saigon to Foreign Office, London [hereafter FO], September 6, 1965, FO 371/ 180519, TNAUK, 2.

28. BCGH to FO, October 22, 1965, FO 371/ 180526, TNAUK, 1.

29. Fredrik Logevall, “The ASPEN Channel and the Problem of the Bombing,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 195. Russell, a longtime critic of the war, intended the tribunal to pass judgment on American “war crimes” in Indochina. Members of the tribunal included Jean-Paul Sartre and Stokely Carmichael. See John Duffet, ed., *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal* (London, 1968).

30. Nguyen Vu Tung, “The 1961–1962 Geneva Conference: Neutralization of Laos and Policy Implications for Vietnam,” paper presented at *Indochina between the Two Geneva Accords (1954–1962): The Failure of Peace?*, Montreal, Canada, October 6–7, 2006, 4.

31. Preston, “Missions Impossible,” 132.

note.”³² Such apparent flexibility encouraged the perception that Hanoi was less concerned with conquering and, eventually, communizing the South than with national independence, reunification, and peace.

Cultivating that perception encouraged the antiwar movement in America and elsewhere. VWP leaders understood the vulnerability of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration to the vagaries of American politics. They understood especially well that American public opinion could be manipulated. “Hanoi presumed that the war of attrition the United States was waging in South Vietnam would be paralleled by a war of attrition for the hearts and minds of Americans back home,” one historian has shrewdly noted. As VWP leaders recognized, “The general weakening of the American people’s support for a war with no apparent end, brought about primarily by the alienation of important American opinion makers, would lead to eventual victory.”³³ “Winning over the American people is very important,” Ho Chi Minh told DRVN Foreign Ministry cadres in March 1966.³⁴ Sufficiently aroused, antiwar sentiment in the United States would force the Johnson administration to scale back its military aggression or wage the war within limits that brightened the prospects of resistance forces in the South. Even if those forces eventually floundered and their failure forced Hanoi to the negotiating table, an American public estranged from its own leaders could lead to a settlement more favorable to Hanoi than would otherwise be the case.

Equally central to the strategic purposes of the VWP was obtaining maximum material assistance from Socialist allies (Figure 2).³⁵ “The diplomatic activities of the two Vietnams, of the State, of the party and of the people aimed at securing assistance from the socialist camp, particularly the Soviet Union [and] China,” a senior diplomat wrote later of the effort.³⁶ That was easier said than done. Sino-Soviet differences over relations with the West and strategies to advance world revolution were just then wreaking havoc within the Socialist camp.³⁷ “Vietnam at the moment has to subordinate all questions to the conduct of a successful struggle against U.S. imperialism,” a foreign diplomat reported of this sensitive situation. Having to depend on “a unilateral bond to either the Soviet Union or China would greatly damage [that] struggle.”³⁸ “North Viet-

32. BCGH to SEAD, November 28, 1965, FO 371/ 180528, TNAUK, 1–2.

33. Melvin Small, “Who Gave Peace a Chance? LBJ and the Antiwar Movement,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 92.

34. “Bac Ho noi chuyen voi can bo ngoai giao, thang ba 1966,” in *Bo Ngoai giao—Ban nghien cuu lich su ngoai giao, Bac Ho va hoạt động ngoại giao: Mot vai ky niem ve Bac* [Uncle Ho and Diplomatic Activities: Some Remembrances of Uncle] (Hanoi, 2008), 76.

35. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 214.

36. Luu Van Loi, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–1995* [Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945–1995] (Hanoi, 2004), 339.

37. On the origins and evolution of the Sino-Soviet dispute, see Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split, 1956–1966* (Princeton, NJ, 2008); Sergei Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967* (Stanford, CA, 2009).

38. “Note on Two Conversations with the Minister Counselor of the DRV Embassy, Comrade Hoan Muoi, on 26 January 1966, in the Cuban Embassy, and on 27 January 1966, on



Figure 2: Chinese rice delivered to North Vietnam by Soviet ship (undated). Courtesy Vietnamese Revolution Museum, Hanoi.

nam’s ties with China were for a variety of obvious reasons much closer than to the Russians or other European Communist countries,” the Romanian chargé d’affaires in Hanoi noted, though “this did not mean that [VWP leaders] were permanently sold out to China.”³⁹

Following the onset of the war, Beijing encouraged Hanoi to put its faith in armed struggle, a stance consistent with Mao’s emphasis on the centrality of such struggle in national liberation movements. That stance encouraged Hanoi no less than Beijing to oppose negotiations because “the conditions and timing” for their success “are not mature.”⁴⁰ Negotiating under such conditions would manifest “weakness in front of American imperialism” and “help” Americans

the Occasion of a Farewell Visit to Our Embassy, 27 January 1966 [Excerpts], in *CWIHPB* 16, 391.

39. Quoted in BCGH to SEAD, August 5, 1965, FO 371/ 180519, TNAUK, 1.

40. “Zhou Enlai and Pakistani president Ayub Khan, Karachi, 2 April 1965,” in Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tønnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg, eds., “77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1977,” Cold War International History Project Working Paper no. 22 (1998), [hereafter “77 Conversations”], 77 (Note: all pages cited from this source may not correspond in other versions). According to Lorenz Lüthi, Beijing strenuously objected to Moscow’s February 1965 proposal to reconvene the Geneva Conference. “China’s antagonistic attitude toward negotiations,” he writes, “was rooted in Mao’s view of the country’s place in the world and, ultimately, its domestic politics (Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 316, 336). According to French documents, Beijing was amenable to the idea of convening an international conference to resolve the Vietnamese crisis until the commencement of American combat operations; thereafter, its stance hardened, and it considered holding such a conference “impossible.” See Direction des Affaires Politiques Asie-Océanie—Ministère des Affaires Étrangères [hereafter DAPAO], “Chronologie des principales interventions française à propos du Vietnam depuis Juillet 1962,” April 6, 1965, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 5.

“escape the difficult situation” they faced in Indochina.⁴¹ “China and North Vietnam [do] not trust the Americans,” the People’s Republic of China (PRC) ambassador told the British consul in mid-1965. “China and the United States had been negotiating for ten years in Warsaw, but without result.”⁴² “Our two parties agree that the U.S. shows no sign of wanting peace,” Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi told his Vietnamese counterpart in December 1965. The Americans “just want to open the talks to deceive public opinion.”⁴³ “Americans and Russians thought they could rule the world,” the Chinese ambassador remarked in November 1965, but “both were wrong,” and the Vietnamese could make them realize that.⁴⁴ In the name of Socialist solidarity and no doubt to nudge Hanoi away from Moscow, Beijing dramatically increased its assistance to Vietnam after 1965.⁴⁵ According to David Marr, “a Liberation Army recruit in the south was” at that point “likely to be supplied with a Chinese AK-47 rifle, to employ Chinese antipersonnel mines, and to be treated with Chinese medicines.”⁴⁶ Beijing also dispatched engineering and anti-aircraft units of its own armed forces to improve rail and road systems and defend important installations above the twentieth parallel, “allowing [North] Vietnamese soldiers to focus on fighting the U.S. in southern Vietnam.”⁴⁷ It even agreed to train Vietnamese pilots, build air bases for DRVN forces on the Chinese side of the border, and commit its combat forces to the war should the United States invade

41. “Oral Statement of the PRC Government, Transmitted by PRC Vice Foreign Minister Liu Xiao to the Chargé d’Affaires of the USSR in the PRC, Cde. F. V. Mochulskii, on 27 February 1965,” in *CWIHPB* 16, 376.

42. BCGH to SEAD, July 28, 1965, FO 371/ 180528, TNAUK, 1.

43. “Chen Yi and Nguyen Duy Trinh, Beijing, 17 December 1965,” in “77 Conversations,” 89. American proposals for peace talks were to Beijing “a mere ploy to eliminate revolutionary forces in Vietnam,” historian Niu Jun has written (Niu Jun, “The Background to the Shift in Chinese Policy toward the United States in the Late 1960s,” in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia*, ed. Priscilla Roberts [Washington, DC, 2006], 339). Beijing also condemned Moscow’s “mistaken policy of Soviet-American cooperation for the solution of international problems” and of the “Vietnam question” specifically (“Oral Statement by the Head of the Department for the USSR and for the Countries of Eastern Europe of MFA PRC, Yu Zhan, Transmitted to the Embassy on 8 June 1965,” in *CWIHPB* 16, 380). As Lorenz Lüthi has noted, at the onset of the American War, “Beijing pursued a hard line,” “rejecting any negotiated settlement” and “advocating people’s war as the only method to fight” (Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 338).

44. Reported in BCGH to SEAD, November 25, 1965, FO 371/ 180528, TNAUK, 3.

45. “The Chinese seem to recognize [the] importance of [the] Soviet role [in the] Vietnam situation and are doing their utmost at this stage to pull the rug from under them, or at least to ensure that conditions are made as difficult as possible for any eventual Soviet initiative,” British diplomats in Beijing observed (British Embassy, Beijing to FO, 8 May 1965, FO 371/ 180527, TNAUK, 1.

46. David G. Marr, “Sino-Vietnamese Relations,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 10, no. 6 (1981): 54.

47. Chen Jian, *Mao’s China*, 221, 229; William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Concise Political and Military History*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD, 2009), 96. More than 320,000 Chinese troops had served in Vietnam by March 1968 (Hu Sheng, ed., *A Concise History of the Communist Party of China* [Beijing, 1994], 595). The passage in quotes is from Christopher E. Goscha, “Vietnam, the Third Indochina War and the Meltdown of Asian Internationalism,” in *Third Indochina War*, 158.

North Vietnam.⁴⁸ While substantial, Chinese assistance was inadequate to defeat the Americans and their “war of destruction” against the North in particular. Chinese planes and anti-aircraft weaponry could do little against U.S. air forces. Vietnam needed more advanced Soviet guns and missiles, and in large quantities. By one account, “only the Soviet Union possessed the military equipment and expertise necessary to fashion a reasonable counter-strategy” to America’s air war.⁴⁹ Moscow was also a credible deterrent to an American invasion of the DRVN. To succeed, the resistance had to have full Soviet support.

The consonance of policy and purpose between Hanoi and Beijing raised concerns in Moscow, suggesting, as it did, Vietnamese alignment with the Chinese Communist party in the Sino-Soviet dispute. It also for a period acted as a restraint on Soviet support for Hanoi’s war.⁵⁰ “On the surface,” a Soviet diplomat noted in early 1965, “the Vietnamese leaders were maintaining a very firm position of unequivocal support for the Chinese ideological line, and for their pronouncements and policies generally in the Far East.”⁵¹ To assuage such concerns, *Nhan dan*, the VWP organ, as well as the Foreign Ministry and other agencies in Hanoi immediately became “careful to avoid any direct expression of solidarity between the governments of Viet-nam and China.” Hanoi also undertook to solidify its relations with Moscow. “The Vietnamese Communists, who want all the aid they can get, will keep their relations with the Russians as warm as they can,” Western diplomats in Hanoi observed.⁵² Toward this end VWP and DRVN officials muted criticism of the Soviets, reducing the latter’s felonious “revisionism” to the ideological level of “dogmatism,” a lesser crime.⁵³

In early 1965, Moscow agreed despite certain reservations to aid the DRVN “in developing the people’s economy and strengthening the defense capability.”⁵⁴ Two factors informed that agreement, in historian Ilya Gaiduk’s estimate:

48. Chen Jian, *Mao’s China*, 216; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 132.

49. Marr, “Sino-Vietnamese Relations,” 56.

50. Vien nghien cuu chu nghia Mac-Lenin va tu tuong Ho Chi Minh, *Lich su Dang cong san Viet Nam, Tap II: 1954–1975* [History of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Volume 2: 1954–1975] (Hanoi, 1995), 343–45, 357–58.

51. Quoted in BCGH to SEAD, January 27, 1965, FO 371/ 180534, TNAUK, 1. The Soviet diplomat added, “All was by no means well between the Chinese and Viet-namese” as “the Chinese were ‘trying to get the Viet-namese to do certain things that they do not want to do’” (ibid.).

52. British Embassy, Saigon to SEAD, October 21, 1965, FO 371/ 180536, TNAUK, 2.

53. “The VWP and the International Communist Movement,” folder 08, box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13—The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, 25; Chen Jian, *Mao’s China*, 231. Since the Central Committee of the VWP had condemned “modern revisionism” at its ninth plenum in 1963, an East German diplomat noted in July 1966 “a significant change” in public statements on that subject. See “Note on a Conversation with the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, Comrade Sverev, on 8 July 1966 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. at the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi, 9 July 1966,” in *CWIHPB* 16, 393.

54. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 46. Moscow was reluctant to become deeply involved in Vietnam because the “danger center for a new war is not Vietnam,” First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev told the French foreign minister

“Moscow’s obligation to an ally” and “the necessity of proving its leadership of the socialist camp and of the world Communist movement.”⁵⁵ That necessity “obliges [Moscow] to support without pressure, more or less officially, the North Vietnamese position,” the French Foreign Ministry noted.⁵⁶ The Soviets “go to some lengths to avoid exposing themselves unnecessarily to Chinese attacks,” Western diplomats in Moscow noted at this conjuncture of events, “but they have not modified their basic policy to any appreciable extent.”⁵⁷ “The Russians are certainly at pains not to say or do anything which might put them at odds with the Hanoi Government,” the British embassy in Moscow reported at the same conjuncture.⁵⁸ The Soviets “are inhibited in part by the effects of the Sino-Soviet dispute, in part by their support of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong demand for the withdrawal of American forces and in part by the fear that in the present phase of an active counter-offensive by imperialist reaction any evidence of Communist anxiety or readiness to compromise might be a mistake.”⁵⁹ In the interests of peaceful coexistence, the Soviets refused aid to the liberation of South Vietnam, though they understood that supplies earmarked for the defense of the North would be used against the Americans in the South.⁶⁰ Moscow “did not desire a confrontation with the United States over Vietnam, which would entail the risk of major military conflict with unpredictable consequences,” Gaiduk has written of this policy.⁶¹ “The Soviet Government understands the aspiration of France to find ways to bring about a settlement of these [Indochinese] problems at the bargaining table,” Moscow told French President Charles de Gaulle even before the war began.⁶² The Soviets continued to encourage Hanoi to negotiate with Washington after the onset of war and even tried to facilitate contacts between the two.⁶³

Privately, VWP leaders deplored this policy as fence-straddling, even duplicitous, with its repeated urgings that “we negotiate with the Americans.”⁶⁴ But

in November, “it is in the heart of Europe, in Germany” (French Embassy, Moscow to MFA, November 4, 1965, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 3).

55. Ilya Gaiduk, “Peacemaking or Troubleshooting?: The Soviet Role in Peace Initiatives during the Vietnam War,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 261.

56. DAPAO, “Le Nord Vietnam et l’offensive diplomatique américaine,” January 12, 1966, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

57. British Embassy, Moscow to FO, June 30, 1965, FO 371/ 180596, TNAUK, 2.

58. British Embassy, Moscow to SEAD, May 14, 1965, FO 371/ 180534, TNAUK, 2.

59. British Embassy, Moscow to FO, “Soviet Reaction to United States Policy in Vietnam,” May 24, 1965, FO 371/ 180534, TNAUK, 3.

60. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 47.

61. Gaiduk, “Peacemaking or Troubleshooting?” 261.

62. “Remis au General de Gaulle par M. Vinogradov le 23/2/65,” February 23, 1965, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 3.

63. Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective* (New York, 2002), 107; Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 47–53, 79–80; Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 60.

64. Tran Quang Co, “Duong loi quoc te dung dan va sang tao cua Dang trong thoi ky chong My, cuu nuoc,” in *Bo Ngoai giao, Mat tran ngoai giao voi cuoc dam phan Paris* [The Diplomatic Front and the Paris Talks] (Hanoi, 2004), 74.

they stood their ground. “Cautious words from Moscow . . . urging moderation and negotiation,” foreign diplomats in Hanoi noted, “have so far fallen upon totally deaf ears.”⁶⁵ Some Vietnamese officials even manifested in their attitude “coldness toward the Soviets.”⁶⁶ In July 1965, VWP Organization Committee head and Politburo member Le Duc Tho confided to a French journalist that Soviet leaders “do not believe in our victory and this pushes them to search for a resolution of the Vietnamese question by way of negotiations.” “We believe,” Tho added, “conditions for negotiations have not ripened yet.”⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, Pham Van Dong “made it clear” to a French diplomat that “he was not in agreement with the Soviet/East European attempts to persuade the North Vietnamese to adopt more moderate attitudes” toward negotiations.⁶⁸ “Despite supporting Vietnam [in its war] against the Americans the Soviet Union still wanted Vietnam to quickly find a solution to conclude the war by means of peace negotiations,” Hanoi’s Institute of International Relations later wrote of this situation.⁶⁹ Moscow itself acknowledged that “talks with the Vietnamese leaders have shown that certain ideological differences in opinion with the leadership of the DRV still continue to exist.”⁷⁰ (In line with that acknowledgment, VWP leaders in 1967–68 conducted a purge of pro-Soviet, “rightist deviationists.”⁷¹ This purge, according to Lien-Hang Nguyen, was “intimately connected to the deliberation on military strategy and planning for the South.”⁷²) Unwilling to press VWP leaders “so hard as to estrange them and thus forfeit Moscow’s influence in the country,” Moscow eased its pressure for a diplomatic settlement of the war.⁷³ “The Vietnamese wanted to solve their problems themselves,” Soviet premier Kosygin told the Indian ambassador in Moscow in early 1965. “With regard to a peaceful settlement the Soviet Government must pay heed to the people of Vietnam.” In this, “The people of Vietnam must have their way.”⁷⁴ After 1965 Moscow “often suggested that the DRV should negotiate” with

65. BCGH to SEAD, November 18, 1965, FO 371/ 180528, TNAUK, 2.

66. French Embassy, Beijing to MFA, April 15, 1965, #99, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

67. Quoted in Gaiduk, “Peacemaking or Troubleshooting?” 264.

68. Reported in BCGH to FO, November 12, 1965, FO 371/ 180526, TNAUK, 1.

69. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 208.

70. “Information No. 098 by the CPSU CC to the SED CC, 24 February 1965 [Excerpts],” in *CWIHPB* 16, 375.

71. Sophie Quinn-Judge, “The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967–68,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 479–500.

72. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, “The War Politburo: North Vietnam’s Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, nos. 1–2 (2006): 25; Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” 55 (Note: all pages cited from this source may not correspond in other versions). By 1968, Lien-Hang Nguyen has written, “the militant faction [had] managed to wipe out any real domestic opposition to [its] policies for the remainder of the war.” See Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, “Negotiating While Fighting or Just Fighting?,” paper presented at *Colloque International: “Guerre, diplomacie et opinion. Les négociations de paix à Paris et la fin de la guerre au Vietnam (1968–1975)”*, Paris, May 13–14, 2008, 11 [hereafter *Colloque International*].

73. Gaiduk, “Peacemaking or Troubleshooting?” 262–65.

74. The comments are reproduced in British Embassy, Moscow to FO, February 27, 1965 (21:18), FO 371/ 180534, TNAUK, 1–2.

Washington, Luu Doan Huynh, a retired Vietnamese diplomat, has written of the situation. "But, following the DRV's rejection of these suggestions, it no longer insisted or tried to impose its views."⁷⁵

While endeavoring to remain outwardly neutral in the Sino-Soviet dispute, "not expressing agreement with this side against that side," Hanoi worked to increase unity with, as well as between, Moscow and Beijing.⁷⁶ "The Vietnamese insist for the unity of all anti-imperialist and democratic forces and above all of the socialist countries," a Bulgarian report noted of this endeavor, "in order to make collective and effective pressure on the U.S. to end the war" on the "best possible conditions for Vietnam." Unlike others who "did not have the bravery to express openly their positions," this report continued, Vietnamese leaders "called for the 'unity of the socialist countries and the international Communist movement and workers' movement on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism."⁷⁷ This effort rested on the conviction that "American imperialists exploited [the Sino-Soviet dispute] to escalate [and] intensify to very high levels their war of aggression against both the South and the North of our country."⁷⁸ To defeat the imperialists' purposes, Hanoi ordered that its diplomats "absolutely make no negative comments about" China or the Soviet Union. They should instead "talk about the contributions of [both] the Soviet Union and China" to socialist internationalism.⁷⁹ The effort had some success. "While the war of words between Peking and Moscow grows in acerbity and bitterness," the British consul noted, "the North Vietnamese leaders apparently still find no difficulty in striking the delicate balance, refraining from public commitment, and travelling cheerfully, (by Chinese aircraft) to Peking en route for Moscow, there to discuss modalities, while agreeing to differ on matters ideological."⁸⁰

During the early stages of the war, as the resistance proceeded to their satisfaction, VWP leaders renounced "the most important function of diplomacy," negotiations.⁸¹ The decision against holding talks with Washington and Saigon on ending the war was not unanimous. A number of party leaders questioned its merits; some even expressed doubt that a war against the Ameri-

75. Luu Doan Huynh, "The Paris Agreement of 1973 and Vietnam's Vision of the Future," in *Third Indochina War*, 88.

76. Nguyen Dinh Binh, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945-2000* [Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945-2000] (Hanoi, 2005), 211; Luu Van Loi, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 346.

77. "Information: On the Visit of the Vietnamese Party—Governmental Delegation in Beijing, 5 December 1971," in *CWHPB* 16, 307.

78. Ban chi dao tong ket chien tranh truc thuc Bo chinh tri, *Chien tranh cach mang Viet Nam, 1945-1975: Thang loi va bai hoc* (Hanoi, 2000), 155; Tran Quang Co, "Duong loi quoc te," 68-9; Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 239; Nguyen Dinh Binh, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 202. "Our foremost international activity was strengthening strategic alliances," a study by the Institute of International Relations in Hanoi reports (*Hoc vien quan he quoc te, Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 221).

79. Nguyen Dinh Binh, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 210-12.

80. BCGH to SEAD, November 18, 1965, 1-2.

81. G. R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (New York, 2005), 91.

cans could be won.⁸² The doubters were numerous enough to lead historian Lien-Hang Nguyen to argue recently that a "peace" faction coalesced within the VWP calling for a diplomatic settlement of the war as the surest way to preserve the gains already achieved by the revolution.⁸³ Nguyen's assessment is corroborated by a number of sources, including reports of Eastern European diplomats in Hanoi. Some "Vietnamese comrades," wrote an East German diplomat in April 1965, "on the basis of their complicated situation and in connection with the talks with representatives of the fraternal parties start to rethink their position" on negotiating with the Americans.⁸⁴ For the majority, however, the onset of war solidified the resolve to forego negotiations and to pursue "victory at any price," as Ho Chi Minh told a French diplomat.⁸⁵ VWP policymakers thus adamantly committed themselves to defeating the Americans and their allies militarily and silencing all critics of their strategy.⁸⁶

Why did VWP leaders outrightly reject peace talks against so imposing an enemy as the United States? The short answer is that ideology conditioned the choice, and experience validated it. Even before the American intervention, VWP leaders had been convinced that negotiations and thus compromise on anything they or the Americans considered fundamental would undermine everything they stood for: the Vietnamese revolution, "proletarian internationalism," prospects for "world revolution." "As long as [the enemy] will not renounce its aims of conquest" the Vietnamese would "not lay down our weapons," Truong Chinh wrote at the height of the war with France. "We will fight to the last man, to our last breath, without bargaining." "To bargain under such conditions is to capitulate," he concluded.⁸⁷ By defeating the Americans and their Saigon allies in the looming struggle, the VWP and the Vietnamese people would make a landmark contribution to the defeat of world capitalism, a contribution perhaps equal to that of the Cubans in defying American opposition to their revolution, in routing the U.S.-sponsored invasion at the Bay of Pigs, and in standing tall during the Cuban missile crisis.⁸⁸ Vietnam would thus

82. Gareth Porter, "Hanoi's Strategic Perspective and the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict," *Public Affairs* 57, no. 1 (1984): 13; Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 48-49.

83. Nguyen, "War Politburo," 20-22.

84. "Note by the GDR Embassy in Hanoi on a Conversation with Ambassadors of the Other Socialist States in the Soviet Embassy on 2 April 1965, 25 April 1965," in *CWHPB* 16, 379. See also the comments by French diplomats and correspondents reported in BCGH to SEAD, July 21, 1965, FO 371/180519, TNAUK, 1.

85. Quoted in Maurice Vaisse, "De Gaulle and the Vietnam War," in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 163. The solidification of Vietnamese resolve following the start of U.S. combat operations in North and South Vietnam is underscored in British Embassy, Moscow to FO, April 7, 1965, FO 371/180524, TNAUK, 1; DAPAO, "Note," August 25, 1965, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 1; FGDH to MFA, April 12, 1966, #83, AO:VC, ADF, 4.

86. Nguyen, "War Politburo," 4-58.

87. Truong Chinh, "La résistance vaincra," 211.

88. On these episodes and their implications for third world national liberation movements see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York, 2005).

become a model for revolution, a vanguard in the small nations of the third world, including Africa, as China had been for Asia.⁸⁹ “The Vietnam problem has become a problem of international significance,” a confident VWP First Secretary Le Duan told southern party leaders in late 1965.⁹⁰ The Americans “will suffer a bitter defeat, and not only a defeat in Vietnam but before the whole world,” a Foreign Ministry official remarked with the same confidence.⁹¹ VWP leaders understood the American intervention as not just an aggression against the people of Vietnam and their revolution, but an attack on the Socialist camp, and the struggle in the South as “part of the world revolution.”⁹² “We are committed to fight with all our strength and to defeat the American aggressors and their lackeys,” Truong Chinh remarked, “to achieve our noble national and international obligations and earn the trust of our brothers and friends around the world.”⁹³ VWP leaders “believed that they really were in the forefront of the anti-United States struggle and passionately believed that they must continue the struggle whatever the cost,” DRVN diplomats in Beijing reportedly insisted. Their leaders back home “realized that Hanoi would probably be attacked and destroyed but not even that would make them surrender. They would bow to the storm but not break,” the diplomats affirmed.⁹⁴ As Le Duan insisted, “The ultimate goal of all the Communist and workers’ parties is the establishment of socialism and communism all over the world.”⁹⁵ That insistence made negotiations with Washington or even Saigon unacceptable and accommodation with either or both unthinkable.

To be sure, the men who dominated the top echelon of the VWP in 1965 were invested Communists and uncompromising ideologues. They saw the world in black-and-white terms, with no intermediate shades. “Their breed of Communism is so deeply ingrained into them that they can easily convince themselves that all is well” in a time of the most perilous war, Western diplomats in Hanoi reported in late 1965, “and it would be [in their view] a major crime against Marxist/Leninist doctrine to allow weakness and doubt.”⁹⁶ For them, Marxism-Leninism—as they interpreted it—was not rationalization trumped by calculations of power; it was a guiding philosophy for successful revolutionary

89. Richard Lowenthal, *World Communism: The Disintegration of a Secular Faith* (New York, 1964), 128–31. According to one report, the Vietnamese already inspired “the awakening of the conscience” of oppressed people in Africa (British Embassy, Bamako to SEAD, June 11, 1965, FO 371/180525, TNAUK, 1).

90. “Gui Trung uong Cuc mien Nam, thang 11 nam 1965,” in Le Duan, *Thu vao Nam* [Letters to the South] (Hanoi, 2005), 102.

91. Quoted in Preston, “Missions Impossible,” 135.

92. *Tim hieu lich su Dang Cong san Viet Nam qua cac Dai boi va Hoi nghi Truong uong, 1930–2002* [Understanding the History of the Vietnamese Communist Party through Congresses and Plenary Sessions] (Hanoi, 2003), 422.

93. Truong Chinh, “Sur la voie tracée par Karl Marx” (1968), in Truong Chinh, *Écrits*, 722.

94. British Embassy, Beijing to FO, May 8, 1965, FO 371/180525, TNAUK, 1.

95. Quoted in Stein Tønnesson, “Tracking Multi-Directional Dominoes,” in “77 Conversations,” 50.

96. BCGH to SEAD, November 29, 1965, FO 371/180596, 1, TNAUK.

struggle. The ideologues included Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, Secretary of the South Vietnam Commission of the Central Committee Pham Hung, and Secretary of the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) General Political Department and Commander of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) General Nguyen Chi Thanh. All were veterans of the First Indochina War with strong ties to the South, regretted the party’s decision to accept the 1954 Geneva accords that wasted the victory at Dien Bien Phu, and accepted violence and avoidance of negotiations as requirements for successful national liberation. In late 1963, they had emerged triumphant from a bitter intraparty struggle against more moderate and pragmatic rivals, so-called rightists, led by Ho Chi Minh and PAVN General Vo Nguyen Giap.⁹⁷ After their triumph, they assiduously combated “rightist deviationists” and “revisionists” within the party and the state.⁹⁸ Le Duan, in particular, opposed all revisionism “of the Titoist kind,” as a French historian later noted, and “could only conceive of reunification within the victory of the Revolution.”⁹⁹ A party of “real” Communists, of men who feared no sacrifice and sought no refuge in peace talks, Le Duan and his acolytes believed, had better odds of prevailing against the Americans than one dominated by pragmatists willing to minimize the loss of life and property by putting the interests of individuals over those of the state or by otherwise compromising with, “appeasing,” capitalism. As they revamped the party leadership after 1963 Le Duan and his associates had engaged the North more deeply than ever in the effort to reclaim the South for the revolution, embarking the DRVN on a collision course with the United States.

By the onset of the American War, Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung, Nguyen Chi Thanh, and like-minded supporters controlled the Politburo and the Central Committee of the VWP, the main policymaking organs in the DRVN.¹⁰⁰ Moderates too prominent to be purged from the party, including Ho

97. BCGH to SEAD, October 7, 1965, FO 371/ 180519, 2, TNAUK; Nguyen, “War Politburo,” 13–19; Martin Grossheim, “‘Revisionism’ in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: New Evidence from the East German Archives,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 451–77; Quinn-Judge, “Ideological Debate in the DRV,” 483.

98. “Adherents to perfectionist ideologies, like Marxism-Leninism, tend to be intolerant of different interpretations of the same body of thought,” Mark Haas has written. “Recognizing the legitimacy of the same perfectionist belief system is difficult because this admission tends to undermine a core claim of these types of ideologies: the ability to understand perfectly for all times and places the laws and politics.” Consequently, Haas notes, “relations among groups dedicated to different strains of the same perfectionist ideology tend to degenerate into sectarian battles over ideological ‘correctness’ and ‘purity.’ To this logic,” he concludes, “there can only be one true interpreter of a perfectionist belief system; the rest are perceived as heretics.” See Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), 147.

99. Philippe Franchini, *Les guerres d’Indochine, Vol. 2: De la bataille de Dien Bien Phu à la chute de Saïgon* [The Indochina Wars, Volume 2: From the Battle of Dien Bien Phu to the Fall of Saigon] (Paris, 1988), 186.

100. The most notable of these supporters were Party Cultural and Ideological Committee Secretary To Huu, a poet; Interior Minister Tran Quoc Hoan; Chief of the PAVN General Staff Van Tien Dung; Foreign Minister and Politburo member Nguyen Duy Trinh; and Party

Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, served in largely ceremonial capacities, as elder statesmen (or “wise men” in American parlance) and ambassadors of the Vietnamese revolution abroad.¹⁰¹ The dominant faction’s unwavering objective was not peace or national reunification in themselves, nor even the creation of a new political order in the South. It was instead the amalgamation of the social and economic order of the area below the seventeenth parallel into the polity already created above that line, under their exclusive control. That entailed abolishing the Saigon regime, unifying Vietnam under Communist governance, and completing the Socialist transformation of the nation. After 1965, these men sought not compromise with American aggressors and their Saigon collaborators but triumph on the battlefield. The material and human cost of their resoluteness they knew would be high, but they were confident of “decisive victory in a relatively short period of time.”¹⁰² “They will sacrifice Hanoi, if necessary,” the Indonesian ambassador said of them.¹⁰³ “There was no alternative” to their course of action, Pham Van Dong told a French diplomat. “The ‘correct political line’ is to maintain confidence in [our] ability to do [what we must] no matter what.”¹⁰⁴ As historian Ralph Smith put it some years ago, these doctrinaire men wanted victory “on their terms.”¹⁰⁵

The intractability of VWP leaders concerning negotiations and compromise was rooted also in battle-hardened experience and lifetimes of sacrifice for the revolution. As intimated above, a disproportionate number of core leaders were from the South and/or had spent years fighting there. After the partition of the country and the failure of the Geneva accords sanctioning that partition, they had witnessed the near annihilation of the southern revolutionary movement they had sacrificed so much to build and sustain.¹⁰⁶ The fruits of their effort had in their view been dissipated by misguided faith in peace talks and an untimely renunciation of military struggle. These experiences steered their thinking and sense of revolutionary purpose. The specter of the Geneva accords and their aftermath militated against any interest they might otherwise have had in negotiations in 1965.¹⁰⁷ Thereafter they “resolved never again to be put in a position where matters of vital Vietnamese national interests were subject to big power bargaining,” David Marr has written.¹⁰⁸ “While they are sometimes unbelievably

theoretician and Chairman of the DRVN national assembly Truong Chinh (Bui Tin, *Following Ho Chi Minh* [Honolulu, 1999], 46, 53).

101. According to one biographer, Ho thenceforth spent most of his time “fulfilling his growing image as the spiritual father of all Vietnamese people and the soul of the Vietnamese revolution.” Increasingly, he took on the persona of “Uncle Ho,” cultivating—conceivably, being compelled to cultivate—an image of affable father of the nation and an admired symbol for its youth. See William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York, 2000), 508.

102. “Gui Trung uong Cuc mien Nam, thang 11 nam 1965,” 110.

103. Reported in BCGH to FO, June 4, 1965, FO 371/180519,1, TNAUK.

104. BCGH to SEAD, November 29, 1965, 1.

105. Ralph B. Smith, *Viet-Nam and the West* (London, 1968), 13.

106. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 9–10.

107. Metha, “‘People’s Diplomacy,’” 63.

108. Marr, “Sino-Vietnamese Relations,” 53.

incompetent and riddled with bureaucracy and suspicions,” the British consul wrote of VWP leaders in November 1965, “they are a highly resourceful lot” and “well aware” that “tenacity and resource[fulness]—not to mention full capacity for callous ruthlessness—has paid off in the past.”¹⁰⁹ After the overwhelming victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, their predecessors as leaders of the Vietnamese revolution had decided against pressing the fight against the French and opted instead for negotiations.¹¹⁰ The resulting accords produced no monumental gains for the revolution and, in fact, created myriad setbacks.¹¹¹ Negotiations had thus forfeited the fruits of victory won on the battlefield.¹¹² Equally galling was the consent to partition the nation, which allowed antirevolutionary “reactionaries” to retain political power in the South. Southern revolutionaries were “haunted” by these decisions, among them Le Duan, to whom they constituted a “sellout” of the revolution.¹¹³ “There are many ways in which North Viet-Nam might be expected to take advantage of any negotiated settlement and it is hard to see why they do not think this the easiest way to victory,” a senior British diplomat observed with these considerations in mind. “The 1954 Geneva Agreement and their disappointment at being cheated of the success which they must have believed this would bring” at least partially accounted “for such wariness.”¹¹⁴ The collapse of the 1962 Geneva agreement on the neutralization of Laos, which Hanoi also blamed on Washington and its allies, reinforced perceptions that diplomatic settlements undermined the goals of the revolution. VWP leaders were determined to avoid past errors.¹¹⁵ “On the basis of experience validated on two occasions already, after the Geneva accords of

109. BCGH to SEAD, November 29, 1965, 1.

110. On the 1954 Geneva Conference, see François Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d’Indochine—Genève 1954* (Paris, 1979); James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (London, 2000); Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, *End of a War: Indochina, 1954* (New York, 1969); and Duiker, *Communist Road to Power*, 170–73.

111. David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnam War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930–1975*, concise ed. (Armonk, NY, 2007), 85–110.

112. William J. Duiker, “Victory by Other Means: The Foreign Policy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam,” in *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, ed. Marc Jason Gilbert (New York, 2002), 67. Following a meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart the British ambassador to Guinea reported that the former “clearly reckoned that the casualties to be expected” from the fight against the Americans were “well worth it to achieve the victory that he had no doubt would be theirs, and that negotiations could serve no purpose except to cheat them of this victory.” See British Embassy, Conakry to SEAD, June 12, 1965, FO 371/ 180526, TNAUK, 1.

113. Turley, *Second Indochina War*, 48; Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 48. According to historian Stein Tønnesson Le Duan had felt personally betrayed by acceptance of the Geneva accords by the VWP leadership, then dominated by Ho and Giap. Tønnesson believes that Le Duan “may well have blamed his own national leaders” more than other actors or circumstances for the division of Vietnam after mid-1954. See “Le Duan and the Break with China: A 1979 Document Translated by Christopher E. Goscha, with an Introduction by Stein Tønnesson,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* nos. 12/13 (2001): 277.

114. FO to BCGH, August 25, 1965, FO 371/ 180519, TNAUK, 1.

115. Unsurprisingly, VWP leaders rejected French President Charles de Gaulle’s repeated appeals in 1965–66 to convene an international conference fashioned after the 1954 Geneva Conference to settle the Vietnamese crisis. See Vaisse, “De Gaulle and the Vietnam War,” 163.

1954 (on Vietnam) and 1962 (on Laos,) [Vietnamese] Communists would accept a solution, a settlement, a convention only if they were assured of [its] conditions or of dispositions facilitating future violations of their compromises," a French assessment observed.¹¹⁶

It followed from these convictions that any terms those leaders offered American negotiators would amount to a demand for American capitulation. The DRVN's famous Four-Point Plan offered to the Americans in April 1965, to illustrate, was never intended as a basis for discussion; it was instead a take-it-or-leave-it offer.¹¹⁷ It demanded unilateral withdrawal of American forces and support personnel from Indochina, cessation of attacks against the DRVN, settlement of political issues pertaining to the South by the people there preceded by replacement of the regime in Saigon with a provisional coalition government dominated by neutralists and Communists, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Vietnam consistent with the terms of the 1954 Geneva accords.¹¹⁸ Only after Washington accepted these proposals, Pham Van Dong reminded U.S. antiwar activists visiting Hanoi in January 1966, "would it be possible to envisage the holding of a new international conference" on Vietnam.¹¹⁹ As incredible as this must have seemed in Washington, Dong added to the incredibility by telling a French diplomat that American troops "would have to go" before talks on these proposals "could take place."¹²⁰ Such a precondition was "visibly unacceptable," French diplomats, whose government opposed the American war in Vietnam, surmised.¹²¹ Hanoi refused to negotiate as long as it remained "under threat," a French Foreign Ministry assessment noted.¹²² "It is clear to everybody that the other side [i.e., Hanoi] are not prepared to talk on any reasonable terms," the British embassy in Saigon reported of the Four-Point Plan.¹²³ Further undermining the plan was its lack of specificity on the mechanisms of national reunification. "Any agreement between the two sides stating that they would coexist within South Vietnam was necessarily going to be a farce," Edwin Moïse has written on this point. "If the [NLF] had been a genuine united front in which communist and noncommunist forces shared power, it would have opened up a serious possibility that a neutral government in which communists and noncommunists shared power could be

116. "Notes au sujet des négociations éventuelles sur la neutralization et l'unification du Vietnam," March 4, 1965, #314, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

117. "Four-Point Position of the DRVN Government (Presented by Premier Pham Van Dong to the DRVN National Assembly on April 8, 1965)," in *Bases for a Settlement of the Viet Nam Problem* (Hanoi, 1971), 26–27.

118. "Chi thi của Ban Bi thu, So 94-CT/TW, ngày 2 tháng 4 năm 1965: Ve cong tac tu tuong trong tinh hình truoac mat," in *VKD: 1965*, 131.

119. Quoted in FGDH to MFA, February 3, 1966, #83, AO:VC, ADF, 3.

120. British Embassy, Moscow to FO, April 7, 1965, 1; French Embassy, Budapest to MFA, April 22, 1965, #99, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

121. French Embassy, Washington to MFA, November 17, 1965, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

122. DAPAO, "Note: Situation au Vietnam—position de la France," March 23, 1965, #163, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

123. British Embassy, Saigon to FO, May 26, 1965, FO 371/ 180595, TNAUK, 5.

created by a peace settlement.” However, Moïse concludes, “the united front was largely a sham: the noncommunist leaders of the NLF were there more as window dressing than as genuine power sharers.”¹²⁴ VWP leaders thus “had no intention of negotiating unless they could be sure of achieving their primary objective,” as an Indonesian diplomat in Hanoi observed, which was “withdrawal of United States forces from Viet Nam.”¹²⁵

Shortly after Hanoi offered the Four-Point Plan, it demanded a new condition for negotiations: unconditional suspension of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam.¹²⁶ “Let them stop; then we will see,” Pham Van Dong told a French diplomat.¹²⁷ Despite its own reiterated desire to negotiate, the Johnson administration would never agree to such an unconditional concession and other such demands, and Hanoi knew that.¹²⁸ “The difficulty, from the Communist point of view,” a British assessment noted, “is that President Johnson has said that the Americans will not withdraw; that they will not allow themselves to be defeated, and that they will use force to ensure this.” Thus, “unless one side, or the other, or both, are induced by the course of military operations or the pressure of opinion to modify their present demands, talks will fail.”¹²⁹ The United States soon had more than half a million troops in Indochina, and during this buildup, the Saigon government significantly increased its armed forces. Despite continued infiltration of PAVN forces into the South and expansion of the People’s Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF, the armed wing of the NLF), the “balance of forces” below the seventeenth parallel remained “not at all in [Hanoi’s] favor.”¹³⁰ As long as that imbalance persisted, the enemy would negotiate “from a position of force” and to the disadvantage of the resistance.¹³¹ Thus, “The only way to avoid suffering an unmitigated defeat in the struggle for control of South Vietnam” was to defeat the enemy, as Edwin Moïse has written.¹³²

Imbued with that logic, VWP leaders had no faith in the professed longings of the Johnson administration to end the war through give-and-take negotiations. The Americans expressed “an attitude which we deem is lacking in goodwill,” the DRVN Foreign Ministry said.¹³³ In fact, party leaders attributed failures of third-party initiatives to jump-start negotiations to American intrans-

124. Edwin E. Moïse, “The Mirage of Negotiations,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 81.

125. Reported in BCGH to FO, June 4, 1965, 1.

126. Robert K. Brigham and George C. Herring, “The PENNSYLVANIA Peace Initiative: June–October 1967,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 59.

127. Quoted in BCGH to SEAD, April 21, 1965, FO 371/ 180524, TNAUK, 1.

128. On that issue, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA, 1999).

129. British Embassy, Moscow to FO, “Soviet Reaction to United States Policy in Vietnam,” May 24, 1965, 3.

130. Nguyen Khach Huynh, “Les pourparlers de Paris 40 ans après—un regard rétrospectif et réflexions” [The Paris Peace Talks 40 Years Later—A Retrospective Look and Reflections], paper presented at *Colloque International*, 2.

131. “Information” [undated], in *CWHPB* 16, 395–96.

132. Moïse, “Mirage of Negotiations,” 73.

133. Quoted in Preston, “Missions Impossible,” 135.

sigence and duplicity, though their own truculence was an equal if not larger cause.¹³⁴ “Hanoi’s intransigence was more absolute, and perhaps more remarkable, than Washington’s, and neither side allowed third parties to move them into negotiations before they were ready,” historian David Kaiser has plausibly written.¹³⁵ “We welcome the good intentions of those who seek to solve the South Vietnam problem through peaceful means,” a NLF spokesman stated shortly after the landing of the first American combat forces in the South, “but we continue to affirm that American imperialism must withdraw itself [from Vietnam] to let the South Vietnamese people settle its internal affairs on its own.”¹³⁶ In April, the DRVN government was quick to reject a call by seventeen nonaligned states for the opening of negotiations without preconditions.¹³⁷ American “imperialists” had meddled in Indochinese affairs since 1950, VWP leaders thought, and there was no reason to believe the Johnson administration would break that tradition or negotiate equitably.¹³⁸ Washington remained implacably hostile to communism and national liberation; its offers to negotiate were no more than lures to fool the weary or the unwary, conceits to conceal Johnson’s intention to wage war in Vietnam to the death of the last revolutionary.¹³⁹ “American imperialists are trying to dupe the peoples of the world, including the American people,” the NLF spokesman cited above remarked.¹⁴⁰

134. On those initiatives, see Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Tiep xuc bi mat truoc Hoi nghi Pa-ri* [Secret Contacts before the Paris Conference] (Hanoi, 1990); David Kraslow and Stuart A. Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (New York, 1968); Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964–1968* (Berkeley, CA, 1980); George C. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, TX, 1983); James G. Hershberg, “A ‘Half-Hearted Overture’: Czechoslovakia, Kissinger, and Vietnam, Autumn 1966,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 292–320; James G. Hershberg (with L. W. Gluchowski), “Who Murdered ‘Marigold’?—New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland’s Secret Initiative to Start U.S.–North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966,” Cold War International History Project Working Paper no. 27 (2000).

135. David Kaiser, “Discussions, Not Negotiations: The Johnson Administration’s Diplomacy at the Outset of the Vietnam War,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 57.

136. Quoted in French Embassy, Beijing to MFA, March 9, 1965, #6, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

137. FGDH to MFA, “Rejet de l’appel des pays non-engagés,” April 20, 1965, #99, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

138. According to David Kaiser, Hanoi interpreted the Johnson administration’s intentions accurately. The administration’s strategy after 1965, he writes, was “to emphasize its interest in peace and imply the possibility of imminent negotiations with public statements and bombing halts, while *rejecting* actual negotiations until the North Vietnamese gave clear signals that they were willing to meet American terms” (Kaiser, “Discussions, Not Negotiations,” 53). Emphasis in original.

139. “Chi thi cua Bo Chinh tri, So 81–CT/TW, ngay 7 thang 8 nam 1964: Ve tang cuong san sang chien dau chong moi am muu cua dich khieu khich va pha hoai mien Bac,” in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 25: 1964* [Party Documents—Complete Series, Volume 25: 1964] (Hanoi, 2003), 185; “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị, Số 154–NQ/TW, ngày 27 tháng 1 năm 1967: Về day mạnh đấu tranh quan su va dau tranh chinh tri o mien Nam (tháng 10 va 11 nam 1966) in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 28: 1967* [Party Documents—Complete Series, Volume 28: 1967] (Hanoi, 2003), 145 [hereafter referred to as VKD: 1967].

140. Quoted in French Embassy, Beijing to MFA, March 9, 1965, 1.

Even the “San Antonio formula,” under which Johnson occasionally ceased bombing the North to nudge Hanoi to the bargaining table, made no impression in the DRVN capital, where it was denounced as a “worn-out trick of deceit and threat.”¹⁴¹ “The U.S. government talks about peace to cover up its war designs, and each time it speaks of ‘peace negotiations,’ it makes a further step in intensifying the war of aggression in South Vietnam and ‘escalating’ the war in North Vietnam,” Hanoi publicly stated in 1965. “Faced with ever stronger protest from the people of the world, including the American people, it has been compelled to resort to hypocritical talks about ‘peace negotiations’ with a view to deceiving and appeasing peace and justice loving public opinion.” Washington sought no compromise settlement, Hanoi noted, because “the United States always regards South Vietnam as a separate nation [i.e., country], that is to say, it wants the partition of Vietnam to be prolonged indefinitely.” The American “scheme” was thus “to achieve at the conference table what it has been unable to gain on the battlefield.” Its “cease-fire trick[s]” were “designed in fact to compel the Vietnamese people in both zones to lay down their arms while the U.S. troops continue to be reinforced, to occupy and [to] commit aggression against Vietnam.” They were also “attempt[s] to play for time to consolidate the puppet administration and army, to increase forces for further expansion of the war in Vietnam.”¹⁴² Thus, when the British consulate on behalf of the U.S. State Department delivered a secret note to the DRVN Foreign Ministry in May 1965 proposing peace talks, the ministry returned the note within hours without response or explanation.¹⁴³ Days later, the American ambassador in Moscow attempted to open “informal contacts” with the DRVN embassy; the embassy “categorically refused the opening.”¹⁴⁴ By August the DRVN had rejected “without discussion” fifteen direct and indirect American offers for talks, claiming that it would not be duped by Washington’s “shenanigans” (*supercheries*).¹⁴⁵ Until Hanoi could negotiate from absolute strength, diplomatic engagement of the United States could only be counterproductive.

Given such reasoning, “the only conclusion” VWP leaders could entertain was “continuation of armed struggle with the aim to achieve a great military victory.”¹⁴⁶ As long as they could hope for such a victory, they would agree to no

141. Quoted in George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 4th ed. (New York, 2002), 160. See also Herring, ed., *Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 536–44, 717–71. According to Western observers, the North Vietnamese “largely used the halts to set up new anti-aircraft batteries” in the DRVN (FGDH to MFA, March 12, 1966, #83, AO:VC, ADF, 3).

142. “Memorandum of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam Concerning the So-called ‘Peace Negotiations’ Proposal of the U.S. Government on the Vietnam Problem,” Hanoi, September 1965, document in author’s possession.

143. British Embassy, Washington to FO, May 16, 1965; BCGH to FO, May 18, 1965 (05:46); BCGH to FO, May 18, 1965 (10:05), FO 371/ 180595, TNAUK.

144. French Embassy, Moscow to MFA, May 26, 1965, #99, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

145. French Embassy, Washington to MFA, July 30, 1965, #99, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

146. “Information” [undated], in *CWHPB* 16, 395–6.

peace talks, not even to expose American deceitfulness and intransigence and exploit public opinion. “Our way of preparing for peace is to wage war,” Pham Van Dong tellingly confided in a western diplomat.¹⁴⁷ “The Vietnamese people will never slacken their fight,” Hanoi insisted, “so long as U.S. troops still occupy Vietnamese territory, and so long as their sacred national rights,” including “independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity,” were not “achieved and guaranteed.” “The Vietnamese are determined to fight on till total victory, even if this will take 5, 10 or more years.”¹⁴⁸ They were ready for anything, including the destruction of their cities and of the national economy, the DRVN ambassador to Poland noted.¹⁴⁹ “The unfailing continuation of the war is demanded,” the East German ambassador wrote of this strategy.¹⁵⁰ “Hanoi’s refusal to accept a political settlement,” historian Douglas Pike has added to this assessment, “was not the result of rigid unreasonable stubbornness in the Vietnamese character or some fanatic intransigence.” It was instead “a product of Hanoi’s objective—unification.” As Pike points out, “some goals in warfare are given to negotiated compromise. Conflict over political power and control of territory are, at least in theory, negotiable, as they can be shared and divided.” However, national unification “by its very nature was an indivisible objective.”¹⁵¹ Melvin Gurtov described this situation in somewhat different terms: Hanoi refused to consider compromise, he stated, because it considered its resistance to be a “sacred war.”¹⁵² Under these circumstances, as another scholar has added, there was “absolutely no possibility whatever” of a “genuine compromise settlement.”¹⁵³ Echoing this assessment, Pham Van Dong shared with a senior French diplomat “his complete conviction in the successful outcome of the [Vietnamese] liberation war.” Dong was, the diplomat believed, “obsessed with [the] theory that gradual lassitude by the United States public will eventually cause the United States to” end the war on Hanoi’s terms. Dong therefore “remains adamant that North Vietnam’s ‘just cause’ will create [a] similar situation to that which brought France to Geneva in 1954.” “There can be no question of outright defeat for the United States and other forces in the South,” Dong told the diplomat.¹⁵⁴

Hanoi’s strategic line remained unchanged for nearly two years.¹⁵⁵ For the rest of 1965 and through 1966, it relentlessly solicited political and material support from outside and continued to insist on the withdrawal of all American

147. Quoted in French Embassy, Phnom Penh to Paris, “Note,” December 18, 1965, 5.

148. “Memorandum of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam,” 2, 4.

149. French Embassy, Warsaw to MFA, July 15, 1965, #99, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

150. “Excerpts from a Note by GDR Ambassador to the DRV Kohrt on the Current Policy of the Chinese Leadership, 11 December 1965,” in *CWHPB* 16, 385.

151. Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union* (Boulder, CO, 1987), 93.

152. Melvin Gurtov, *Hanoi on War and Peace* (Santa Monica, CA, 1967).

153. Moise, “Mirage of Negotiations,” 73.

154. Reported in BCGH to FO, November 12, 1965, 1–2.

155. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 211; FGDH to MFA, January 28, 1966, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

troops and other preconditions before talks could even begin. That insistence “precluded all possibility of mediation,” the French Foreign Ministry concluded.¹⁵⁶ Mai Van Bo, the DRVN representative in Paris, intimated during a meeting with a French official in January 1966 that his government’s position on negotiations was perhaps “unreasonable.”¹⁵⁷ “If things continue to develop as they have up to now,” a French report noted, “then we are moving toward an interminable conflict that could jeopardize world peace.”¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Hanoi continued to “mobilize world opinion in its favor” in an effort to “remove all moral support provided to the United States by non-aligned and allied countries.” To its credit, “international opinion has not been indifferent” to the effort, which made VWP leaders feel “optimistic” about their prospects for victory.¹⁵⁹

Despite some notable successes, the Anti-American Resistance produced outcomes that fell short of the expectations of VWP leaders. Dashed hopes and other “anxiety-inducing factors” eventually gave way among those leaders to frustration and even exasperation by 1967.¹⁶⁰ By their own account, the impasse in the military situation in the South was fueling “counterrevolutionary” (*phan cach mang*) sentiment within the DRVN itself, threatening national as well as party unity, and thus “public security.”¹⁶¹ It was not that resistance forces were losing but that they were making only slow progress. Annihilation of the South Vietnamese Army, critical to meet the goals of the resistance, remained little more than a pipe dream; in fact, the balance of forces upon which VWP leaders relied to measure revolutionary success was unchanged since 1965.¹⁶² Moreover, by 1967 American bombing of the DRVN, though restricted, was hindering economic progress and physical development, which remained priorities even after the outbreak of war.¹⁶³ Rice shortages compounded these

156. DAPAO, “Note: Position de la Chine à l’égard du problème du Vietnam,” June 6, 1966, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

157. DAPAO, “Note: Entretien entre Mai Van Bo et J. de Beaumarchais,” January 29, 1966, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 3.

158. French Embassy, Washington to MFA, September 9, 1966, #162, AO:VC, ADF, 5.

159. FGDH to MFA, April 12, 1966, 1, 3.

160. DAPAO, “Note: Situation au Vietnam,” February 1, 1967, #314, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

161. “Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, So 145-CT/TW, ngay 13 thang 3 nam 1967: Ve viec tang cuong giu vung an ninh mien Bac trong buoc leo thang nghiem trong moi cua de quoc My,” in *VKD: 1967*, 213–30.

162. Ban Chi dao bien soan Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, *Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, Tap 2: 1955–1976* [History of the Vietnamese Government, Volume 2: 1955–1976] (Hanoi, 2008), 295.

163. “Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria [PRB] in the DRV: Regarding Talks with the Deputy Minister Hoang Van Tien during the Farewell Lunch with the Delegation of the Foreign Ministry of the PRB, Led by Comrade M. Tarabanov on August 19, 1971,” August 19, 1971, opis 22p, archivna edinita (file) 33 [hereafter a.e.] [translated by Simeon Mitropolitiski], Arkhiv na Ministerstvoto na Vunshnite Raboti (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia), Sofia, Bulgaria [hereafter AMVnR], 210–11. “Producing while struggling” (*vua san xuat, vua dau tranh*) became a popular slogan in the DRVN after March 1965. See “Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, So 94-CT/TW, ngay 2 thang 4 nam 1965: Ve cong tac tu tuong trong tinh hinh truoc mat,” in *VKD: 1965*, 127. The economic woes faced by

problems.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the diplomatic struggle was rallying world opinion and securing material support for the resistance but failing to bridge or even narrow the ideological gap between Moscow and Beijing. In fact, that gap widened over Beijing's reluctance to facilitate Soviet aid deliveries to Vietnam, making Hanoi "increasingly anxious about the tensions between the fraternal socialist countries."¹⁶⁵ Hanoi was "preoccupied by China's attitude," a French assessment noted. Specifically, it feared that "if the rupture between Peking and Moscow became quasi total, China would completely refuse the transit [of Soviet matériel], which it was already limiting in considerable proportions."¹⁶⁶ For Beijing, another assessment concluded, "the anti-revisionist struggle had priority over the Vietnamese war."¹⁶⁷ By that time too, the antiwar movement in the United States had grown but not enough to seriously constrain White House policy in Indochina.¹⁶⁸

In January 1967, the VWP Central Committee reaffirmed its commitment to the goals and tactics identified at the onset of the resistance.¹⁶⁹ According to a recent history, the reaffirmation actually demanded a redoubling of the effort to rally world opinion and "isolate" the Americans.¹⁷⁰ Hanoi did make a meaningful amendment to its diplomatic strategy on January 28, when Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh told Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett during an interview, "If the Americans wish to enter into contact with the DRVN, they only need to definitively and unconditionally cease bombings of the North; then meetings will be possible between the United States and North Vietnam."¹⁷¹ Henceforth, the withdrawal of U.S. forces was no longer a precondition for negotiations, suggesting that Hanoi "might be ready to consider a gradual settlement of the Vietnamese problem and to separately discuss issues concerning the end of hostilities" in North and South Vietnam.¹⁷² According to French assessments, this "softening" of the DRVN position was symptomatic of

DRVN authorities in 1967 are reported in "Dien khan cau Ban Bi thu va Thuong vu Hoi dong Chinh phu, So 20, ngay 31 thang 3 nam 1967: Yeu cau khac phuc kho khan cua vu san xuất dong-xuan," in *VKD: 1967*, 243-44; and "Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, So 154-CT/TW, ngay 24 thang 6 nam 1967: Quyét tam phan dau gianh vu mua thang loi lon," in *VKD: 1967*, 338-39.

164. DAPAO, "Note: Situation au Vietnam," February 1, 1967, 2.

165. Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 232-33; Shu Guang Zhang, "Beijing's Aid to Hanoi and the United States-China Confrontations, 1964-68," in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, 273-74; Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, 67.

166. FGDH to MFA, November 27, 1966, #83, AO:VC, ADF, 2.

167. French Embassy, Beijing to MFA, "Objet: Chine-Vietnam," July 21, 1972, #145, AO:VC, ADF, 5.

168. Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1988), 88.

169. "Nghị quyết Hội nghị lần thứ 13 của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương, So 155-NQ/TW, ngày 27 tháng 1 năm 1967: Về đẩy mạnh đấu tranh ngoại giao, chủ động tiến công địch, phục vụ sự nghiệp chống Mỹ, cứu nước của nhân dân ta," in *VKD: 1967*, 171-79.

170. Ban Chỉ đạo bien soạn Lịch sử Chính phủ Việt Nam, *Lịch sử Chính phủ Việt Nam*, 295.

171. Quoted in DAPAO, "Note: Évolution récente de l'affaire vietnamienne," February 20, 1967, #314, AO:VC, ADF, 1-2.

172. *Ibid.*, 2.

emerging cleavages, or “divergent tendencies,” over strategy within the VWP leadership.¹⁷³

Amendment of the DRVN’s position on negotiations produced no breakthrough. In October the French Foreign Ministry reported that recent public declarations and private confidences by the two sides indicated no change in their stance on negotiations. “The prospect for a negotiated settlement of the war remains distant as ever,” the Ministry concluded.¹⁷⁴ Diplomats from both Western and Socialist countries who met with North Vietnamese leaders around this time found them to be “optimistic” about the prospects for military victory. The leaders were, the diplomats reported, “as resolute as ever in their determination to continue the struggle” and had “no intention of sacrificing one of their objectives to facilitate negotiations and expedite the end of the war.”¹⁷⁵ In late 1967, VWP leaders decided it was necessary to “win a decisive victory in a short period of time” to break the impasse and compel the Americans to “admit defeat, militarily.”¹⁷⁶ Such a victory would transform the war, bringing “a new era, an era of attacks and uprisings,” and, hopefully, American withdrawal.¹⁷⁷ The fact that 1968 was a presidential election year in the United States increased the confidence of VWP leaders in the chances of success of this initiative. “A strategic opportunity had arrived,” the Politburo concluded in October.¹⁷⁸

PEACE TALKS

The result of this conclusion, in early 1968, was what came to be known as the Tet Offensive. The offensive had two objectives: to end the military stalemate by annihilating at least several enemy divisions, thereby prompting a “general uprising” against the Saigon regime; and in the wake of these achievements to break America’s “will of aggression” by discrediting the narrative of the Johnson administration about the state of the war, thus widening the credibility gap between that narrative and what the American people would then perceive to be the reality of the war.¹⁷⁹ The Tet Offensive was thus to serve the aims of diplomatic as well as military struggle.

173. DAPAO, “Note: Situation au Vietnam,” February 1, 1967, 3; DAPAO, “Note: Évolution récente de l’affaire vietnamienne,” February 20, 4.

174. DAPAO, “Note: Au sujet du conflit vietnamien—ses aspects militaires et politiques,” October 31, 1967, #314, AO:VC, ADF, 1.

175. *Ibid.*, 17.

176. Quoted in Ralph Smith, “The Vietnam War ‘From Both Sides’: The Crisis of 1967–68 in Perspective,” unpublished paper in author’s possession, 22.

177. Le Mau Han, *Dang cong san Viet Nam: Cac Dai boi va Hoi nghi Trung uong* [The Vietnamese Communist Party: Congresses and Plenary Sessions] (Hanoi, 1995), 104.

178. Quoted in Bo Quoc phong—Vien lich su quan su Viet Nam, *Lich su quan su Viet Nam, Tap 11: Cuoc khang chien chong My, cuu nuoc, 1954–1975* [Vietnamese Military History, Volume 11: The Anti-American Resistance for National Salvation, 1954–1975] (Hanoi, 2005), 234.

179. “Nghì quiet Hoi nghi lan thu 14 cua Trung uong Dang, thang 1 nam 1968,” in *Dang Cong san Viet Nam, Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 29: 1968* [Party Documents—Complete Series, Volume 29:1968] (Hanoi, 2004) [hereafter *VKD: 1968*], 50–57.

Ironically, the offensive achieved the second objective without realizing the first. In the calculations of VWP leaders, the heavy casualties sustained in the offensive and in follow-up efforts overshadowed the political and propaganda victory over the Johnson administration.¹⁸⁰ The failure to generate uprisings against the Saigon regime or to shake the American presence in the South plus the frightening cost in men and matériel made it clear to VWP leaders that the kind of victory they hoped for was problematic if not impossible under current or foreseeable circumstances.¹⁸¹ In dramatizing the misguided intractability of Le Duan and his ruling circle, thereby threatening their legitimacy, the Tet debacle had a sobering effect on them. It chastened their revolutionary assurance, for a period at least, and prompted a reassessment of how they must go about realizing their goals. Most notably, it obliged them to recognize the fecklessness of their dogmatism as well as the fallibility of their variant of Marxism-Leninism as a blueprint for anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle. Thereafter, VWP leaders began thinking more realistically about the future course of the resistance and the role of diplomacy therein. “Inwardly,” Lien-Hang Nguyen has surmised, “Le Duan and the militants in his Politburo realized that their gamble [i.e., the Tet Offensive] had failed and that they would have to shift tactics to save the revolution.”¹⁸²

The ongoing Cultural Revolution in China may also have prompted the VWP leadership to exercise more pragmatism in decision making. Members of the vanguard of that revolution, the Red Guards, infiltrated into Vietnam to fight the Americans, causing “complications” for Hanoi.¹⁸³ The revolution also caused “considerable delay and in some cases outright pillaging” of trains carrying supplies to Vietnam, disruptions among ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, as well as “concern” among VWP leaders “about the possible ideological impact of Red Guardism” on VWP and NLF members as the revolution highlighted the dangers of excessive dogmatism.¹⁸⁴ More importantly, the Cultural Revolution’s erratic, indeed unpredictable character raised doubts about China’s ability to stay the course with Vietnam in a drawn-out war with the United States.¹⁸⁵ “On

180. On casualties suffered by the PAVN and PLAF, see Tran Van Tra, “Tet: The 1968 General Offensive and General Uprising,” in *Vietnam War*, 37–65; Van Tien Dung, *Buoc ngoat lon cua cuoc khang chien chong My* [The Great Turning Point of the Anti-American Resistance] (Hanoi, 1989), 183–234; and Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York, 1993). On the Tet Offensive generally, see Nguyen, “War Politburo”; Marc Gilbert and William Head, eds., *The Tet Offensive* (Westport, CT, 1996); Ronnie E. Ford, *Tet 1968: Understanding the Surprise* (Portland, OR, 1995); Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (New York, 1971).

181. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, 5.

182. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, “Negotiating While Fighting or Just Fighting?” 1.

183. “Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 10 April 1967,” in “77 Conversations,” 102.

184. Marr, “Sino-Vietnamese Relations,” 56.

185. “Although Hanoi dismissed the Cultural Revolution as an internal affair of the PRC,” Lorenz Lüthi observed, “it certainly was aware of the political dangers of China’s political radicalism in international affairs and in domestic politics” (*CWIHPB* 16, 369). See also Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam bien dai*, 223. In May 1967, *Hoc tap*, the VWP’s

the basis of realistic conditions," the Soviet embassy in Hanoi told Moscow, "one has to state that the position of the DRV toward 'Mao Zedong ideology' in the most recent 'Cultural Revolution' must be judged to be negative."¹⁸⁶

The consequent review of ideology and policy in Hanoi produced a revision of the strategy of the Anti-American Resistance. VWP leaders remained committed to military victory but decided to scale down military activity and intensify political struggle in the South.¹⁸⁷ Also, in the wake of Johnson's decisions not to seek reelection and to curtail the bombing of the DRVN below the twentieth parallel, they reassessed their diplomatic priorities and agreed to peace talks.¹⁸⁸ Explaining the reassessment to southern cadres, the VWP Secretariat stated, "Our representatives are preparing to make contact [*tiếp xúc*] with American representatives to decide with the American side the matter of unconditional cessation of American bombing and all other acts of war against the [DRVN] so discussions can begin [*de cuoc noi chuyen co the bat dau*]." That "contact" would serve the aims of diplomatic struggle by helping expedite de-escalation of the war, "win over" world opinion, exploit "contradictions" within the United States and between Washington and Saigon, and "isolate" American warmongers politically.¹⁸⁹ Consenting to talks under current circumstances violated what had become a seminal principle of the diplomatic struggle, namely, that Hanoi would dialogue with its adversaries only from a position of absolute strength and after Washington unconditionally stopped bombing the North. As recently as July 1967, Pham Van Dong had told French diplomats, "We want an unconditional end of bombing and if that happens, there will be no further obstacle to negotiations."¹⁹⁰ Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh had reiterated that

theoretical journal, published an article describing the Cultural Revolution as Mao's doing, as problematic for Vietnamese interests, and of dubious merit. "A leader of the working class does not separate the working class from its vanguard, the communist party," the article observed. "Correct leadership determines the success of the activities of millions of people. The leadership's errors have serious consequences in the revolutionary task." A good Marxist-Leninist leader "associates himself with the group of the party's leadership organ, obeys this group, fully implements the party's platform and rules, and strictly complies with the party's principles governing its activities." Furthermore, a leader who "commits errors" and "refuses to correct them and insistently maintains them cannot keep his leadership role forever." See Hong Chuong, "Leaders and Masses," in *Hoc tap*, no. 5 (May 1967) quoted in "The VWP and the International Communist Movement," 26–27.

186. "Note on a Conversation with the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, Comrade Sverev, on 8 July 1966 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. at the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi, 9 July 1966," in *CWIHPB* 16, 393.

187. Vien nghiên cuu chu nghia Mac-Lenin va tu tuong Ho Chi Minh, *Lich su Dang cong san Viet Nam*, 448–49.

188. Hanoi responded positively to an American request communicated by the American embassy in Vientiane to the DRVN embassy there. See Nguyen Dinh Bin, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 223.

189. "Dien mat cua Bo Chinh tri, ngay 3 thang 4 nam 1968," in *VKD: 1968*, 203–5.

190. Quoted in "Memorandum for the Negotiations Committee: Visit to Hanoi by Two Unofficial French Representatives, August 2, 1967," in Herring, ed., *Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 720.

condition in December.¹⁹¹ To camouflage the change in course, the Secretariat labeled the talks “contacts,” not “negotiations” (*thuông luông*).¹⁹² Despite this circumlocution, the decision to “talk about talks” constituted an important revision to the diplomatic struggle.¹⁹³

In agreeing to talks, Hanoi was not abandoning military struggle or military victory as the ultimate goal, or suspending the effort to secure support for those objectives from abroad. Vietnamese decision making became more pragmatic after 1968, but the commitment to the twin objectives of the revolution and to the original aims of the diplomatic struggle remained unchanged. Hanoi was also not abandoning the “Chinese line” in favor of the “Soviet line.” While the Soviets hoped the decision to talk signaled Hanoi’s “acceptance of our views,” they “still perceived Hanoi as following a policy of balancing between Moscow and Beijing.”¹⁹⁴ Despite its continuing prickliness, Hanoi’s consent to peace talks improved Soviet Vietnamese relations.¹⁹⁵ That in turn facilitated Soviet aid, which enhanced the capabilities of battered resistance forces and reduced the dependence on China.¹⁹⁶ Conversely, the decision to agree to talks without consulting Beijing, and in defiance of its revolutionary prescriptions, angered Chinese leaders and “greatly strained Sino-DRV relations,” for a moment.¹⁹⁷ Beijing “reproached us that the negotiations were useless, that only the military struggle would solve [our] problems,” a DRVN official reported later. “We . . . did not agree. But we always . . . proved our considerations; we defended our position and line.”¹⁹⁸ In defending his government’s position,

191. Ban Chi dao bien soan Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, *Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam*, 296.

192. In fact, that matched their behavior precisely once talks actually began in 1968. On this, see Pierre Journaud, “Des artisans de paix dans le secret de la diplomatie: vers un règlement pacifique de la guerre au Viêt Nam, 1967–1973” [Peace Artisans in the Secret of Diplomacy: Toward a Peaceful Settlement of the Vietnam War, 1967–1973], unpublished paper in author’s possession. See note 29 in particular.

193. Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” 56.

194. Quoted in Stephen J. Morris, “The Soviet–Chinese–Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970s: The View from Moscow,” Cold War International History Project Working Paper no. 25 (1999), 12.

195. Lüthi, “Beyond Betrayal,” 59.

196. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 145–55.

197. Chen Jian, “China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968–1973,” in *Third Indochina War*, 37–38; Qiang Zhai, “China’s Response to French Peace Initiative,” in *Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 283. Possibly, Hanoi failed to consult Chinese leaders for fear the latter might leak the information in a way detrimental to Hanoi’s purposes. Given its high stakes in the Sino-Soviet dispute, Hanoi could not discountenance the possibility of the Chinese divulging the logic of its agreement to talk to Moscow, or even to Washington. If the Soviets were capable of “disclos[ing] secrets to the enemy,” as they were known in Hanoi to have done in the past, surely the Chinese could do the same (Quoted in “77 Conversations,” 56). The VWP may also have kept knowledge of its purposes from Beijing to demonstrate that Sino-Vietnamese relations were no longer in “the pattern of the tributary relationship in the past” (Nguyen Vu Tung, “Interpreting Beijing and Hanoi: A View of Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1965–1970,” in “77 Conversations,” 63). More likely, Hanoi kept its plans to itself because it was customary to keep such things secret. That was another way of asserting autonomy.

198. “Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PRB in the DRV: Regarding Talks with the Deputy Minister Hoang Van Tien during the Farewell Lunch with the Delegation of

Pham Van Dong noted that for months Beijing had been talking with Washington in Warsaw. Therefore, “the Chinese comrades will have to agree with us” that talking in and of itself was not harmful.¹⁹⁹

The DRVN-U.S. talks opened in Paris in May 1968.²⁰⁰ Given the sensitivities at stake, Moscow “limited its involvement to backstage activities,” helping the sides on “secondary” issues, including the shape of the negotiating table, and “leaving all principal issues to the representatives of the opposing parties.”²⁰¹ “Some friends previously have given us advice to start negotiations with the U.S. and to look toward a political solution of the Vietnam problem,” a DRVN official reportedly said of the Soviets. “We haven’t accepted this thesis, because there weren’t conditions that would have allowed us to assure the further development of the revolution and to move us toward the goal that we have set. When we decided that the conditions were ripe and favorable for negotiations with the U.S., we got them started.”²⁰² In other words, VWP leaders conducted the talks on the basis of their own perceived imperatives, not to please Moscow or alienate Beijing.²⁰³ “The Soviet Union and China were our strategic allies,” a retired Vietnamese diplomat recently wrote of the talks. “However, their private interests [*loi ich rieng*] did not fit with our policy line. Therefore, we had to follow our own independently autonomous line [*duong loi doc lap tu chu*] guided by proletarian internationalism.”²⁰⁴ As VWP leaders told the Chinese, “We make decisions by ourselves.”²⁰⁵ The Soviets characterized the Vietnamese stance as “not sufficiently sincere and trustworthy,” not “truly brotherly.”²⁰⁶

the Foreign Ministry of the PRB, Led by Comrade M. Tarabanov on August 19, 1971” AMVnR, 209.

199. “Noi chuyen tai Hoi nghi ngoai giao lan thu bay, thang Muoi mot 1968,” in *Bo Ngoai giao, Pham Van Dong va ngoai giao Viet Nam* [Pham Van Dong and Vietnamese Diplomacy] (Hanoi, 2006), 496.

200. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives from the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York, 1971), 505; Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Pari* [The Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris] (Hanoi, 1996), 12.

201. Ilya Gaiduk, “Peacemaking or Troubleshooting?” 274. “From May 1968, the USSR acted as go-between with compromise solutions to various issues, including the form of the negotiating table,” Luu Doan Huynh has written. “But it did not try to impose its views” on Hanoi (Luu Doan Huynh, “Paris Agreement of 1973,” 88).

202. “Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PRB in the DRV: Regarding Talks with the Deputy Minister Hoang Van Tien during the Farewell Lunch with the Delegation of the Foreign Ministry of the PRB, Led by Comrade M. Tarabanov on August 19, 1971” AMVnR, 209.

203. According to Ilya Gaiduk, Moscow “found it sometimes . . . difficult to deal with the independent [Vietnamese] tail that successfully wagged the [Soviet] dog.” See Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 247.

204. Tran Quang Co, “Duong loi quoc te dung dan va sang tao cua Dang,” 69–70.

205. Quoted in “Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng and Pham Van Dong, Hoang Van Thai, Pham Hung and Others in the COSVN Delegation, Beijing, 20 and 21 April 1969,” in “77 Conversations,” 156.

206. Quoted in Morris, “Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle,” 13. This independence manifested itself again in 1968—problematically so for the future of Chinese aid—when Hanoi refused to join the Chinese in condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Instead, the VWP remarked that Moscow’s decision to crush counterrevolutionary forces in Prague was

Hanoi used these semipublic talks not to negotiate but to cultivate its image, to “penetrate and influence the domestic politics of other states” and thus to “win the support of public opinion for the resistance of the Vietnamese people,” to “divide and isolate the enemy,” and to “probe” or “study” the intentions of the Johnson administration.²⁰⁷ As a recent Vietnamese history put it, the aim here was to facilitate achievement of maximalist goals by winning over “the support of international opinion” while “continuing to press the Americans to completely halt the bombing of the North” and unconditionally withdraw from Vietnam.²⁰⁸ To those ends, DRVN representatives in Paris refused to discuss substantive issues. Instead, they accused Washington of aggression and imperialism, denounced American “war crimes” in Indochina, and iterated Hanoi’s commitment to peace and to the terms of the 1954 Geneva accords (Figures 3 and 4).

Washington was bound to reject this posturing. The talks thus stalemated, becoming a veritable “*dialogue de sourds*” (dialogue of the deaf), in the words of a French observer.²⁰⁹ However, continuing problems in the South soon prompted Hanoi to err on the side of caution, as it were, and agree to private talks to “investigate [the other side’s intentions], but not yet to bargain,” and to take advantage of the lead-up to the American presidential election in November, “an opportune time” to “pressure the United States to de-escalate” the war.²¹⁰ To those ends, Hanoi even agreed to a four-party conference including representatives of the Saigon regime and the NLF (Figure 5). The hope was that the Johnson administration would view this as a concession meriting a de-escalation of the war while the antiwar movement would recognize it as a gesture to help the Democratic party retain the White House against the hawkish Richard M. Nixon.²¹¹ “We conduct fighting while negotiating,” Pham Van Dong told Mao of this approach in fall 1968. “But fighting should be

“noble.” See August 1968 *Nhan dan* editorial quoted in “The VWP and the International Communist Movement,” 11. At the same time Hanoi told southern cadres that “the attitude of our Party is to support the action taken by the USSR since it was a legitimate and essential action.” Moscow’s action was necessary because the “loose control exercised by the dictatorship of the proletariat” in Czechoslovakia was incapable of defeating “the extremist elements of the bourgeoisie, the backward intellectuals who refused to reform their thoughts, the reactionary socialists, democratic socialists, and religious groups in the country” which had “established relations with the [foreign] imperialists.” Quoted in *ibid.*, 11–12.

207. “Bao cao tai Hoi nghi Ban chap hanh Trung uong lan 15, ngay 29 thang 8 nam 1968: Ve thang loi to lon cua ta tren mat tran dau tranh ngoai giao va hoat dong quoc te tu dau xuan 1968 den nay,” in *VKD: 1968*, 362; Hamilton and Langhorne, *Practice of Diplomacy*, 153; Luu Van Loi, *Nam muoi nam ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–1995, Tap I: Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–1975* [Fifty Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945–1995, Volume 1: 1945–1975] (Hanoi, 1996), 273; Nguyen Dinh Binh, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 227; Nguyen Manh Ha, “Paris Peace Talks: The Double Standard Policy of ‘Stick and Carrot’ of R. Nixon and H. Kissinger,” paper presented at *Colloque International*, 2.

208. Ban Chi dao bien soan Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, *Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam*, 298.

209. Comments by Ambassador François Bujon de l’Estang at *Colloque International*.

210. Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong*, 14–15, 36.

211. Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” 59.



Figure 3: The public face of DRVN negotiators in Paris, Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy, 1968. (Tho on the left). Courtesy Vietnamese Revolution Museum, Hanoi.

concluded to a certain extent before [actual] negotiations can start.” “Sitting at the negotiating table” did not mean Hanoi would “stop fighting.” “On the contrary,” Dong said of circumstances at the time, “fighting must be fiercer,” a strategy that meant “we can attain a higher position, adopt the voice of the victorious and strong, who knows how to fight to the end and knows that the enemy will fail eventually.” “This is our attitude,” Dong assured Mao, “determined to fight until the final and total victory.” “If we think otherwise, we will not win.”²¹² These statements assured Mao that Hanoi remained committed to military victory even as it felt obliged to pay lip service to Soviet calls for a diplomatic settlement.²¹³

212. “Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 17 November 1968,” in “77 Conversations,” 144, 152.

213. “Beijing’s leaders, after watching the development of the Hanoi-Washington peace talks in Paris in the preceding several months,” historian Chen Jian has written, “had gradually realized that they had very limited impact upon the decision-making process of the Vietnamese Communists.” See Chen Jian, “China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement,” 41.



Figure 4: The private face of DRVN negotiators in Paris, Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy, 1968. (Tho on the right). Courtesy Vietnamese Revolution Museum, Hanoi.



Figure 5: NLF envoy Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh (center, wearing scarf), in Paris to attend four-party talks, being greeted by the local Vietnamese community, 1968. Courtesy Vietnamese Revolution Museum, Hanoi.



Figure 6: Xuan Thuy hosting representatives of an international women’s organization at the DRVN’s mission in Paris (undated). Courtesy Vietnamese Revolution Museum, Hanoi.

EPILOGUE

Johnson ceased bombing the North on the eve of the presidential election. Hanoi considered the cessation unconditional and a signal that the American president was desperate to end the war to appease antiwar sentiment in the United States.²¹⁴ This “victory of Vietnamese diplomacy” emboldened Hanoi as it evinced Johnson’s political weakness.²¹⁵ Nguyen Khach Huynh, a member of the DRVN delegation at the talks, wrote of the bombing halt that “the 1968 negotiations allowed solving only one problem: the United States stopped all bombing of northern Vietnam.”²¹⁶ With that achieved, Hanoi resolved anew to “fight to chase out the Americans, fight to overthrow the puppets” (*danh cho Mỹ cut, danh cho ngụy nhao*).²¹⁷ That fight would prove significantly more difficult than anticipated.

214. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, “Memorandum on the Occasion of the 15th Anniversary of the Signing of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Viet Nam (July 20, 1954–1969),” Hanoi, 1969, document in author’s possession, 2; “Directives from Ben Tre Province Party Committee,” in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions, Volume II* (Standfordville, NY, 1979), 518–19.

215. Nguyen Dinh Binh, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 231–32; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, 10.

216. Nguyen Khach Huynh, “Les pourparlers de Paris 40 ans après,” 2.

217. Nguyen Dinh Binh, ed., *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 231–32.

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