Revisionism Triumphant

Hanoi's Diplomatic Strategy in the Nixon Era

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Introduction

Following the onset of the "Anti-American Resistance for National Salvation" in the spring of 1965, the leaders of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP—the Communist party), which controlled the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, i.e., North Vietnam) after partition of the country in 1954, pledged to fight foreign "aggressors" and their South Vietnamese "lackeys" until they achieved "complete victory" and the "liberation" of the South.[1] To those ends, DRV foreign policy was oriented toward securing optimal material support for the war from socialist allies, as well as political support from "progressive" forces worldwide. Intent on "winning *everything*," VWP leaders rejected a negotiated settlement of the war.[2] Indeed, they would not even agree to peace talks with the enemy because that might signal a lack of resolve on their part to achieve all of their goals.[3] They would not "show any weakness," just as they would "agree to no Munich—no peace with dis-

1. Meeting the goals of the "Anti-American Resistance" was necessary to achieve the objectives of the "Vietnamese Revolution," which aimed to bring about reunification and socialist transformation of the nation under Communist aegis.

2. Robert S. McNamara, James Blight, and Robert Brigham, *Argument without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), p. 183, emphasis in original.

3. On the efforts to jumpstart negotiations before 1968, see Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Tiep xuc bi mat truoc Hoi nghi Pa-ri* (Hanoi: Vien quan he quoc te, 1990); David Kraslow and Stuart A. Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1968); Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964–1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); George C. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); James G. Hershberg, "A 'Half-Hearted Overture': Czechoslovakia, Kissinger, and Vietnam, Autumn 1966," in Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964–1968* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), pp. 292–320; and 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," CWIHP Working Paper No. 27 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 2000).

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honor."[4] Thus imbued with dogmatism, VWP leaders went so far as to instigate a purge of prominent party, government, and other figures in late 1967 to quell existing or potential dissent (i.e., "rightist deviationism") in the DRV. According to Sophie Quinn-Judge, the purge resulted from a "contest" between moderates committed to "national unity, scientific development, and technological progress" and extremists who believed in "the transforming power of violent revolution." The "disagreements" between the two sides, she writes, were essentially "part of the Sino-Soviet debates over 'dogmatism' and 'modern revisionism.'" The sidelining and silencing of as many as 300 notable moderates in the so-called Anti-Party Affair critically undermined party democracy by "restricting the choices before the communist leadership," imposing a veil of "absolute secrecy" over VWP decision-making (the "inner life of the party"), and enhancing the authority of extremist, dogmatic, hardline decision-makers in Hanoi.[5]

In the aftermath of the Tet Offensive of early 1968, the DRV agreed to negotiate with U.S. representatives in Paris. But the North Vietnamese used the resulting talks with the Johnson administration not to negotiate in any traditional sense but to probe U.S. intentions and to influence the domestic politics of other states.[6] Hanoi continued this charade until 1969, when domestic and international circumstances forced a gradual yet major reassessment of its diplomatic strategy.

This article explores that reassessment. It relates the story of Hanoi's "diplomatic struggle"—the foreign policy initiatives undertaken to meet the aims of the resistance—and of its march toward a negotiated settlement of the war with the United States. The article builds on previous, more comprehensive efforts by Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, Ang Cheng Guan, Lien-Hang

4. Comments by a DRV diplomat made to a French counterpart quoted in Moscow to Foreign Office (FO), London, 7 April 1965, p. 1, in FO 371/180524, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK).

5. Sophie Quinn-Judge, "The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967–68," *Cold War History,* Vol. 5, No. 4 (2005), pp. 479–500. The "absolute secrecy" (p. 494) that VWP leaders maintained about the "inner life of the party" after the Anti-Party Affair is part of the reason that VWP decision-making remains difficult to assess. Strong yet circumstantial evidence indicates that First Secretary Le Duan and Chairman of the Organization Committee Le Duc Tho dominated the decision-making process in the DRV after 1968, with support from the theoretician and chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, Truong Chinh, and Secretary of the South Vietnam Commission of the Central Committee Pham Hung. But it is still impossible to say just how total that domination was, how the party arrived at decisions, and who was behind each decision. Available documentary evidence does not allow us to discuss intra-party dynamics in a fully nuanced fashion.

6. "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 Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 29: 1968* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2004), p. 362; and Luu Van Loi, *Nam muoi nam ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–1995, Tap I: Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–1975* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 1996), p. 273.

Nguyen, and others (including me) who have in varying ways studied the events that prompted Hanoi to embrace a new diplomatic strategy during the first year of the presidency of Richard M. Nixon and culminated in the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973.[7] Drawing on published and unpublished Vietnamese sources, French and Bulgarian documents, and other materials untapped or largely overlooked by scholars, the article sheds new light on Hanoi's diplomatic strategy and related initiatives after the Tet Offensive and elucidates the VWP's shifting perceptions of the uses and purposes of diplomacy during that period. The article identifies the forces shaping strategy, initiatives, and perceptions.[8] Military and economic setbacks in the South and in the North, combined with recognition of the limits of socialist solidarity, forced Hanoi first to talk secretly and then to negotiate seriously with the Nixon administration and, ultimately, to accept a peace agreement that fell far short of the announced objectives of the resistance. Although the article does not offer a radically new understanding of the diplomatic aspects of the Vietnam War, it highlights new ways of looking at those

7. The most insightful treatments of Hanoi's diplomatic strategy after 1968 include Allen E. Goodman, *The Lost Peace: America's Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978); Gareth Porter, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam and the Paris Peace Agreement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975); William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam,* 2nd ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Pari* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Cong an nhan dan, 1996); Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Lien-Hang Nguyen, "Between the Storms: An International History of the Second Indochina War, 1968–1973," Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2008; and Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Useful works addressing the subject less directly include Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Lorenz M. Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal: Beijing, Moscow, and the Paris Negotiations, 1971–1973," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 57–107; Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

8. The article relies on French and Bulgarian documents to corroborate arguments based on Vietnamese materials, an exercise warranted by the spotty Vietnamese documentary record in print, the Vietnamese authorities' continued refusal to give scholars access to party archives on high diplomacy, the limited usefulness of government documents available at National Archives Center 3 in Hanoi, and the subjectivity of Vietnamese secondary sources. Viewed favorably by DRV authorities because of its opposition to the Vietnam War, the French government was privy to much sensitive information emanating from Hanoi. Its *délégation générale* in the North Vietnamese capital, which became an embassy after the signing of the Paris agreement in 1973, similarly maintained generally close and cordial relations with its hosts, as well as with the diplomatic missions of socialist countries, which were themselves privy to information of even greater sensitivity. French diplomatic archives thus abound with insightful reports and other materials on North Vietnamese foreign policy. Bulgarian documents, largely untapped by Western scholars, include fascinating insights into Hanoi's attitude toward Moscow, Beijing, and negotiations with the United States. The Bulgarians maintained cordial relations with the DRV/VWP. We may thus safely assume that Vietnamese "confessions" made to Bulgarian diplomats were generally sincere and hence reliable. I am indebted to Lorenz Lüthi of McGill University for sharing these sources with me.

aspects, of thinking about the role of diplomacy in Hanoi's conduct of the Vietnam War, and of interpreting key decisions of North Vietnamese policymakers from 1969 through 1973. In particular, the discussion emphasizes the active agency of DRV policymakers in the events in which they were involved.

A long-standing assumption in the historiography of the Vietnam War, iterated or implied in many works, is that after the opening of peace talks Hanoi followed a "primitive, simplistic" diplomatic strategy of "fighting-while-talking."[9] That interpretation downplays the importance the North Vietnamese attached to aspects of diplomacy other than negotiations and makes little allowance for understanding the evolution of Hanoi's uses of diplomacy and of its reasons for refusing for so long to negotiate seriously. Manipulating world opinion, coaxing allies and progressive forces worldwide, propagandizing Vietnam's role as vanguard of the world revolution, and militating against the debilitating effects of the Sino-Soviet dispute were as central to the DRV's diplomatic strategy as negotiating the complete disengagement of the United States from Vietnam on acceptable terms. Although the importance of each of these imperatives waxed and waned over time, leaders in Hanoi always recognized the merits of diplomatic struggle. Quite possibly, that struggle was more significant in deciding the outcome of the Vietnam War than even the military struggle.

A variety of forces shaped Hanoi's diplomatic strategy in the Nixon era. Following the opening of peace talks, North Vietnamese leaders initially refused to negotiate and rejected compromise because of ideological considerations. Notions that capitalism and socialism could not coexist and that revolutionary violence had transformative powers governed their strategic thinking at this point. But in 1970–1971, problematic circumstances in the South and elsewhere in Indochina forced them to think more pragmatically, just as Soviet leaders had been doing for a period and the Chinese had recently started doing, and to acknowledge that a compromise settlement with Washington might be preferable to continuing the war under battlefield and political circumstances that then prevailed. From that point VWP leaders no longer considered diplomacy an adjunct weapon of war, as their interpretation of Marxist-Leninist dogma dictated, but accepted it as a possible antidote to war, a means of achieving a peace they could eventually use to pursue their revolutionary objectives. Such pragmatism in VWP decision-making became even more manifest in 1972, when U.S.-Soviet détente and Sino-American rapprochement exposed the limits of proletarian internationalism as the basis of the DRV's anti-American strategy. This realization plus the disappoint-

9. See William H. Sullivan, foreword to Goodman, *Lost Peace,* xv; and George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal,* 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 310.

ments of the so-called Easter Offensive and concerns about the effects of renewed U.S. bombing of the North convinced VWP leaders to negotiate seriously and purposefully. Thus, even though ideology informed Hanoi's decision-making after the onset of war, pragmatism—"revisionism" as the men in charge in Hanoi had heretofore called accommodation with the West at the expense of ideological rigor and the global revolutionary process—ultimately triumphed.

Hanoi's Diplomatic Struggle in the Early Nixon Era

Nixon's ascendance to office in January 1969, and with it command of the U.S. war, alarmed Hanoi. The emergence of a staunch Cold Warrior and the precarious military situation in the South prompted VWP leaders to "broaden" their diplomatic struggle—which until then had been designed to mobilize world opinion, solidify ties to socialist allies and nonaligned states, and mitigate the effects of the Sino-Soviet dispute—and to accept Nixon's offer to open secret (not just private) talks while sustaining the semi-public dialogue initiated in the final year of Lyndon Johnson's presidency.[10] As with the earlier decision to agree to semi-public talks, the North Vietnamese made this move without consulting or informing the People's Republic of China (PRC) or the Soviet Union. They did so chiefly because their military forces in the South were still reeling from the results of the Tet Offensive and because the Sino-Soviet dispute was reaching new heights with deadly border clashes along the Ussuri River in March 1969. Hanoi hoped at a minimum that the secret talks with the United States would help the resistance by dissuading Nixon from escalating the war. That the talks were secret meant Hanoi had little to lose by agreeing to them; that is, secrecy itself compromised neither revolutionary goals nor the ideological considerations underlying them. However, secrecy posed challenges that delayed the talks, which did not begin until August. The death of Ho Chi Minh in September seemed to validate Hanoi's decision to accede to secret negotiations. On the international stage Ho had been "the most powerful source of unity for the communists," as historian Ang Cheng Guan has noted; and his death "weakened . . . Hanoi's finely calibrated relations with Moscow and Beijing."[11] Under those circumstances, the secret talks became a safety valve, a diplomatic channel Hanoi might exploit should the armed struggle stall or international conditions become unfavorable.

10. Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnam War,* pp. 20–22.

11. Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 142.

The decision to hold secret talks surprised Beijing, which took it to mean that the VWP had decided to end the war by compromise, and to do so sooner rather than later.[12] Dismayed at that prospect, Beijing urged Hanoi to cling to the goal of military victory. At this point the Chinese were "progressively averring to be more open to the idea of a negotiation" but not yet "expressly rallying" behind the idea or "renouncing [their] themes on 'struggle until final victory.'"[13] "You may negotiate," PRC Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong admonished in May 1970, "but your main energy should be put on fighting."[14] The North Vietnamese resented this lecturing and reminded the Chinese that the PRC had goaded them into accepting the compromises in the 1954 Geneva Accords, which had cost Hanoi the fruits of its victory at Dien Bien Phu. "We will always remember the experience of 1954," VWP Politburo member and DRV "special envoy" to the Paris peace talks Le Duc Tho remarked shortly thereafter. "Because both the Soviet Union and China exerted pressure, the outcome became what it became." Now, Hanoi "should be independent in thoughts."[15]

Initially, the VWP refused to negotiate substantively in the secret talks, just as it was still doing in the semi-public talks and had previously done in private discussions with Johnson administration officials. The rigid dogmatism of North Vietnamese leaders precluded doing otherwise. Besides, they were confident that domestic and international pressures would sooner or later force Nixon into major concessions, perhaps including unilateral withdrawal of U.S. forces.[16] The state of the resistance in the South remained problematic, but Hanoi saw no point in making concessions while Washington's political will seemed to be eroding. More importantly, VWP leaders thought the war was still militarily winnable in the long run and could thus still serve to advance the world revolution (even though the delayed victory would likely be less central to the world revolutionary struggle than they had

12. Beijing knew of the secret negotiations by September 1970, possibly earlier. See "Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 19 September 1970," in Odd Arne Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1977,* CWIHP Working Paper No. 22 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 1998), p. 173.

13. Direction des Affaires Politiques Asie-Océanie—Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (DAPAO), "Note: Des prises de positions chinoises sur le problème vietnamien," 4 January 1971, p. 4, in No. 145, Asie-Océanie: Vietnam Conflict (AO:VC), Archives Diplomatiques de France, La Courneuve, Paris (ADF).

14. "Meeting Minutes of Mao Zedong Meeting with North Vietnamese Leaders, 11 May 1970," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* pp. 163–169.

15. "Le Duc Tho and Ieng Sary, 7 September 1971," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 178.

16. *Chu tich Ho Chi Minh va cong tac ngoai giao* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1990), pp. 231–233; and Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 85.

once supposed).[17] Also for ideological reasons, VWP leaders distrusted Nixon's motives in pursuing backchannel negotiations while continuing semi-public talks. "Of late," the DRV Foreign Ministry publicly noted at the time, "the United States has given noisy publicity to the 'unilateral' withdrawal of a number of troops" and to the ongoing semi-public negotiations. The U.S. administration, the ministry claimed, was trying "to soothe public opinion which is demanding the cessation of the war, the total and unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops and those of other foreign countries belonging to the American camp, and also to cover up its scheme for carrying on the war, prolonging its military occupation, and clinging on to South Viet Nam." Thus, "the so-called 'de-Americanization' and 'Vietnamization' of the war" were in fact "trick[s] to carry on and intensify the war under new signboards, and to prolong the presence of the U.S. expeditionary corps in South Viet Nam."[18]

Hence, despite the opening of secret talks, the DRV's diplomatic strategy at this point remained essentially what it had been at the onset of the war. It consisted of encouraging foreign political and material support for Vietnam's revolutionary struggle in the name of socialist solidarity, promoting the unity of the socialist camp, and exploiting "contradictions" in the enemy camp to advance the Vietnamese and world revolutions. This last objective was to be furthered by fomenting antiwar sentiment in the United States and elsewhere to "isolate" *(co lap)* U.S. decision-makers from public opinion and thereby force them to curtail U.S. military involvement in Indochina. According to Nguyen Khach Huynh, a senior North Vietnamese diplomat, these strategies translated into "carrying out diplomacy and peace talks [*pourparlers*] for the sake of armed [and] political struggle on the battlefield [and] the gathering of international friends, and in support of the antiwar movement of the American people."[19] To those ends Hanoi in June 1969 approved formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of the Republic of South Vietnam. A viable PRG was seen as enhancing the legitimacy of the southern insurgency and rallying support for the resistance.[20] "For us and for Nixon, di-

17. Asselin, *Bitter Peace,* pp. 20–21.

18. 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, pp. 3, 8, in author's personal archive.

19. Nguyen Khach Huynh, "Les pourparlers de Paris 40 ans après—un regard rétrospectif et réflexions," paper presented at Colloque International: "Guerre, diplomatie et opinion: Les négociations de paix à Paris et la fin de la guerre au Vietnam (1968–1975)," Paris, 13–14 May 2008, pp. 2–3.

20. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy,* pp. 85–91; and Ban Chi dao bien soan Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, *Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, Tap 2: 1955–1976* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2008), p. 347.

plomacy is a play of words," DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong told Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in September 1970. "Neither we nor he has any illusion about [bilateral DRV-U.S.] diplomacy." However, keeping negotiations alive, particularly the semi-public ones, was important to "win the sympathy of the people of South Vietnam, especially the ones in urban areas," and to "influence the anti-war public opinion in the US that includes not only the people at large but also the political, business, academic, and clerical circles." The objective was thus to "corner Nixon" while "supporting the military and political struggles in the South." VWP leaders had no "illusion" that negotiations, secret or otherwise, "will bring about any results" other than those imposed on Nixon through political pressure.[21] "I see that you can conduct the diplomatic struggle and you do it well," Mao said, responding in a conciliatory way to this display of independence. "Negotiations have been going on for two years. At first we were a little worried that you were trapped. We are no longer worried."[22] By the time Mao spoke these words, Beijing was not only acquiescing in Hanoi's talks with the United States but supporting its negotiating positions.[23] "In the end," as a Vietnamese history of these events concludes, Beijing "supported our *fighting-and-talking* stratagem."[24]

Diplomacy as an Instrument of Peace

Nixon's "Vietnamization" of the war eventually forced an important change in Hanoi's diplomatic strategy. By gradually turning the conflict in the South into a civil war between warring camps of Vietnamese, Vietnamization made it increasingly difficult to characterize the Communist struggle as a nationalist and anti-imperialist enterprise and thus to sustain support for it from Western, nonaligned, and even socialist countries and groups.[25] In this roundabout

21. "Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 17 September 1970," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 172.

22. "Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 23 September 1970," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 175.

23. *Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–2000* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2005), p. 244; Chen Jian, "China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968–1973," in Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds., *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–1979* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 47–48; and William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Concise Political and Military History,* 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), p. 184. According to Chen, Beijing adjusted its stance on U.S.-DRV negotiations after 1968 because the Soviet Union replaced the United States as China's foremost enemy. See Chen, "China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement," pp. 41–42.

24. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam hien dai: Vi su nghiep gianh doc lap, tu do, 1945–1975* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2001), p. 223; emphasis in original.

25. Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War,* Rev. Ed. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), pp. 113–115; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace,* pp. 21–22.

way, Vietnamization "limit[ed] the international assistance to the Vietnamese people's resistance against US aggression."[26] Vietnamization "was not the success Mr. Nixon and his ministers affirm," a Western observer noted at the time, but because of it "Hanoi could no longer hope to impose its way upon the South by force."[27] Parallels to Vietnamization in Cambodia and Laos caused further anxieties in Hanoi along the same lines, as did the invasion of Cambodia by U.S. forces in May 1970 (preceded by the overthrow of the neutralist regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk by the "reactionary" general Lon Nol) and of Laos by South Vietnamese forces in January 1971.[28]

In the face of these challenges, VWP leaders ceased viewing diplomacy as a function of revolutionary struggle subsumed under the imperative of victory. Now, for the first time, they recognized and accepted negotiations as an instrument of peace, a means to resolve conflict. That translated into an end to the policy of merely talking rather than negotiating.[29] Henceforth, Hanoi would negotiate substantively when the military, political, and diplomatic situations seemed unpromising, with a view to cutting their losses if necessary while preserving their gains if possible. If conditions improved, the DRV would revert to its original stance in both negotiations and the larger diplomatic struggle to further the aims of the resistance. "When . . . the balance of forces shifted in our favor," DRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh said of this approach, "we would . . . force the enemy . . . to accept his own defeat."[30]

On 13 July 1971, Zhou Enlai arrived in Hanoi with unsettling news: U.S. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, Le Duc Tho's counterpart in the secret Paris talks, had just made a secret visit to Beijing, and Chinese leaders had agreed to invite President Nixon to the PRC for wide-ranging political discussions.[31] The news shocked Hanoi. Pham Van Dong told Zhou that any dealings with Nixon were "against the interests of Vietnam and the other Indochinese countries," as well as those of "the world revolutionary pro-

26. Le Kinh Lich, ed., *The 30-Year War, 1945–1975,* Vol. II, *1954–1975* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2002), p. 192.

27. The comments by a British diplomat are reported in Tokyo to Paris, 23 April 1971, p. 2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

28. Van Tien Dung, *Cuoc khang chien chong My: Toan thang* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1991), pp. 47–48.

29. "Nghi quyet Hoi nghi lan thu 19 cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang, so 214-NQ/TW, ngay 1 thang 3 nam 1971," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 32: 1971* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2004), pp. 192–243; Le Mau Han, *Dang cong san Viet Nam: Cac Dai hoi va Hoi nghi Trung uong* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 1995), p. 92; and Cao Van Luong, "Thang loi cua cuoc khang chien chong My, cuu nuoc—Thanh qua tong hop suc manh cua ca nuoc cua doc lap dan toc va chu nghia xa hoi," *Nghien cuu Lich su,* No. 2 (1985), p. 6.

30. Nguyen Thanh Le, *Cuoc dam phan Pari ve Viet Nam, 1968–1973* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 1998), pp. 74–75.

31. Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," p. 67.

cess."[32] In the face of such bluntness, Zhou attempted to assure both Dong and First Secretary Le Duan, a "leading extremist," that "the PRC will always defend the interests of the Vietnamese and the other Indochinese nations." The assurances fell on deaf ears. Le Duan and Dong both reiterated their own and their party's "negative attitude toward the decision of the PRC to invite Nixon in the next year."[33] The North Vietnamese leaders were especially worried that Mao would agree with Nixon to link the settlement of the Taiwan issue to a resolution of the Vietnam War.[34] Hanoi was "disappointed and doesn't accept the steps carried on by the PRC for improvement of relations with the United States and by the decision to invite Nixon to Beijing," a report of the meeting with Zhou stated.[35] The invitation was tantamount to "a torpedo" aimed at the Anti-American Resistance and, by extension, to proletarian internationalism.[36] The recent Lin Biao affair and related changes in the Chinese leadership also worried VWP leaders, who "think that these changes . . . are related to changes in the policy toward the United States and the invitation of Nixon" and threaten "the future position of the PRC on Indochina."[37] The North Vietnamese had reason to be concerned about these circumstances, at least to some degree. After Kissinger's initial visit, the increasingly pragmatic Chinese saw the future of their relationship with the United States as inextricably linked to the situation in Vietnam and thus hoped for a prompt end to the war there. On 15 July, Nixon made public his intention to visit the PRC in early 1972. "According to Hanoi," Lien-Hang Nguyen writes of this announcement, "the mere declaration of President Nixon's visit to China hindered the Vietnamese diplomatic struggle."[38] French diplomats in the Chinese capital concluded similarly that "for reasons directly

32. "Memorandum by Aleksander Aleksandrov, First Secretary of the Embassy of the PRB in the City of Hanoi: Regarding Meeting with Bertold [Bergold], Advisor Chargé d'Affaires in the Embassy of the GDR," n.d., p. 165, in, Archivna Edinitsa [File] (AE) 33, Opis (Op.) 22p, Arkhiv na Ministerstvoto na Vunshnite Raboti [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Sofia (AMVR); translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

33. "Memorandum from Boris Stoichev, Attaché of the Embassy: Regarding Information Received on the Attitude of the DRV Toward the Impending Visit of Nixon in Beijing," n.d., p. 163, in AE 33, Op. 22p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski. The characterization of Le Duan as the VWP's leading extremist is in Quinn-Judge, "Ideological Debate in the DRV," p. 488.

34. Luu Doan Huynh, "The Paris Agreement of 1973 and Vietnam's Vision of the Future," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, eds., *Third Indochina War,* p. 89; and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* p. 196.

35. "Memorandum from Boris Stoichev," p. 163a.

36. "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," 5 December 1971, p. 303, in AE 90, Op. 22p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

37. Ibid., p. 304. General Lin Biao was Mao's designated successor. He died under mysterious circumstances after allegedly attempting to instigate a coup against Mao.

38. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese Split and the Indochina War, 1968–1975," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, eds., *Third Indochina War,* p. 22.

related to its security, China desires that a total and definitive settlement of the Indochinese conflict be found."[39] However, that desire did not generate any documented or even perceptible pressure on Hanoi to hasten the end of the war.

Despite these evident threats to the reliability of China as an ally and to the apparent limits of socialist internationalism, the VWP leadership swallowed its anger and refused to "allow its relations with the PRC to get worse."[40] The Vietnamese "have to fight a big imperialist country," Le Duc Tho explained to Cambodian allies. "It therefore cannot be beneficial if we take sides" in the Sino-Soviet dispute, which is what alienating Beijing in the autumn of 1971 would have amounted to.[41] Instead, Hanoi attempted to derail the Sino-American rapprochement by extolling the virtues of socialist unity. Chinese envoys who were sent to Hanoi to assuage Vietnamese anxieties received lectures on the DRV's commitment to that unity. "I hope that our Party will do all that depends on it in order to assist effectively the restoration of the unity of the fraternal parties on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism," Pham Van Dong told the envoys. "Our Vietnamese people with all their thoughts and their whole soul aim at strengthening the martial unity with the fraternal socialist countries, the international communist movement, the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the nations of the whole world."[42] Despite such boasts, North Vietnamese leaders remained dismayed by the Chinese actions, causing Hanoi to tilt toward Moscow. "Vietnamese leaders naturally are compelled to step toward closer cooperation with the USSR and the other socialist countries," Bulgarian diplomats in Hanoi reported at the time.[43] "The Vietnamese people will always be with the Soviet people," Pham Van Dong told the Soviet chargé in Hanoi on 24 November.[44] The North Vietnamese had to remain on their guard, however. Moscow, too, had agreed

39. Beijing to Paris, 18 September 1971, p. 1, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF. Beijing was particularly concerned about the Vietnamese becoming regional hegemons aligned with Moscow shortly after the achievement of their reunification, which would have completed the strategic "encirclement" of China by the Soviet Union, the PRC's foremost enemy at this point. For Beijing "the image of future Indochina is one of a region free of the presence of a great power but also of regional donation [by Vietnam]." Beijing to Paris, 17 February 1972, p. 4, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

40. "Memorandum from Boris Stoichev," p. 163a.

41. "Le Duc Tho and Ieng Sary, 7 September 1971," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 178.

42. "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," 5 December 1971, pp. 307–308, in AE 90, Op. 22p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

43. "Information: Regarding the Position of the Vietnamese Side on the Improvement of Sino-American Relations," n.d., p. 3, in AE 33, Op. 22p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

44. "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," p. 309.

to host Nixon in the spring of 1972, news made public by the U.S. president on 12 October.[45]

Although VWP leaders tried to mitigate the impact of the simultaneous decisions by Beijing and Moscow to engage the Nixon administration, these developments dealt a serious blow to the confidence they, the leaders, had in the conduct of the diplomatic struggle. As planned, Beijing hosted lengthy talks with Nixon in late February 1972. Leaders in Hanoi believed, plausibly, that the U.S. rapprochement with China was linked with the contemporaneous U.S.-Soviet détente, and they condemned both as ploys to "isolate the Vietnamese revolution" by enticing the socialist giants to reduce their assistance.[46] One North Vietnamese source called these ploys beguilement, "choking warfare" *(chien tranh bop nghet)*.[47] Another assessed them this way: "The American intent was to exploit the contradictions between the Soviet Union and China to bring about détente with both countries in the hope of using both countries to influence Vietnam in the [Paris] negotiations." Washington thus sought to "use the Soviet Union and China to pressure us into accepting" peace terms based not on Vietnamese interests but on the interests of the socialist giants.[48] The Americans, VWP leaders recognized, were now waging their own diplomatic struggle or offensive aimed at isolating Hanoi internationally. "The United States is the enemy number one not only to the Vietnamese people, but to the whole progressive humanity," a DRV official remarked. "Their maneuvers and attempts to look for solutions of the Vietnam problem in their favor through other means and countries will not help them."[49] Hanoi, however, could neither control these developments nor mitigate their impact on the spirit of proletarian internationalism that had boosted Hanoi's confidence in its ability to drive the Americans out of South Vietnam. "We did not," lamented a Vietnamese account, "discover early enough the [terms of the] compromise [reached] between Washington,

45. "Information by Aleksander Aleksandrov, First Secretary of the Embassy of the PRB in the City of Hanoi: Regarding Attitude of the DRV Leaders," n.d., p. 12, in AE 33, Op. 23p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

46. 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* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2004), p. 72; Nguyen Khac Huynh, "Nghe thuat dam phan va phuong cham gianh thang loi tung buoc," in Bo Ngoai giao, *Mat tran ngoai giao,* pp. 429, 436; and Ban Chi dao bien soan Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam, *Lich su Chinh phu Viet Nam,* p. 300.

47. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam hien dai,* p. 256.

48. Luu Van Loi, *Nam muoi nam ngoai giao Viet Nam,* pp. 249, 300.

49. "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 19 August 1971," p. 214, in AE 33, Op. 23p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

Beijing, and Moscow [and their implications] concerning the war of our people."[50]

VWP leaders considered the Sino-American rapprochement—and the concomitant "softening" of Beijing's position on their war—as especially detrimental to their interests, seeing in those developments the beginning of the end of the ideological alliance they had previously enjoyed with Beijing. "Principles of socialist internationalism were subject to inevitable erosion as Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese communists became ever more preoccupied with their own separate national liberation struggles," David Marr writes.[51] After Nixon's visit, Beijing no longer supported the strategic call for a "definitive victory of socialism" in Vietnam.[52] For VWP leaders, Nixon's visit to Beijing confirmed that Chinese aid was no longer—if it had ever been—a product of Beijing's commitment to proletarian internationalism but an expression of China's perceived national interest. The rapprochement with Nixon thus signaled the imminence of a Chinese "betrayal."[53] "The basis for all of China's actions is Chinese nationalism and chauvinism," a DRV official had already concluded.[54] Or, as Bulgarian diplomats in Hanoi put it in late 1971, "Vietnamese comrades see well that the Chinese leadership is far away from sacrificing its 'supreme national interest' in the struggle in Vietnam if for such a long time it refused to make one small sacrifice, to accept the unity of the socialist countries."[55] "China wanted us to fight for a long time," a recent Vietnamese study concludes of the developments of 1971–1972, and "used events in Indochina to pin down the Americans [while] striving to bring about Sino-American rapprochement and assemble world forces, especially developing countries [and] national liberation movements, to serve their [*sic*] strategy."[56] In that reckoning, Beijing had manipulated the North Vietnam-

50. Ban chi dao tong ket chien tranh truc thuoc Bo chinh tri, *Chien tranh cach mang Viet Nam, 1945–1975: Thang loi va bai hoc* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2000), p. 233.

51. David G. Marr, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs,* No. 6 (July 1981), p. 54.

52. Zhou Enlai privately told French diplomats that Beijing was prepared to accept a negotiated end to the war and "a delay of a few years" before Vietnamese reunification. See DAPAO, "Note: Entretients récents avec les dirigeants chinois," 10 February 1972, p. 1, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF. Chinese leaders maintained then as they had earlier that normalization of Sino-American relations necessitated solutions to pressing problems; namely, Taiwan and Vietnam. See Beijing to Paris, 28 June 1972, p. 2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

53. "Report by Apostol Kolchev, Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria in the DR Vietnam: Regarding the Visit of Ngo Diem, Head of Department 'Print and Information' in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of DR Vietnam," 19 August 1972, p. 22, in AE 33, Op. 23p, AMR; translated by Petia Draguieva. See also, Nguyen, "Sino-Vietnamese Split," p. 22.

54. "Memorandum by Verban Tsanev, Head of the Fifth Department," 13 September 1971, p. 157, in AE 33, Op. 22p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

55. "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," p. 304.

56. Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam hien dai,* p. 209.

ese, using them as pawns to increase its own influence in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Third World at the expense of world revolution.[57]

For Hanoi, Beijing's ideological deviation was more troubling than Moscow's because Beijing had been the louder and more consequential voice in promoting national liberation in the Third World.[58] Soviet détente was bad enough, but it amounted to no more than a continuation of Moscow's established policy of peaceful coexistence. Besides, Soviet leaders had promised to support Hanoi "until final victory" and had increased their military assistance quantitatively and qualitatively even as they pursued détente.[59] But Beijing's perceived abandonment of world revolution at so critical a juncture in the Vietnamese revolution was wholly unexpected and disorienting. "In Hanoi's eyes," Chen Jian writes, "Beijing's dubious behavior had formed a sharp contrast with the revolutionary discourse of anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism that Beijing's leaders had fashioned throughout the Vietnam War years."[60] In 1965 the British consul in Hanoi had reported: "The North Vietnamese have been comforted and sustained by the knowledge that their country is backed geographically and politically by China, the sole Communist country which, since 1949, has never for one moment 'disengaged', 'opted out' or otherwise given less than all-out support for the 'liberation war' being waged" in Indochina.[61] By 1972, experience had taught VWP leaders to abide Soviet "revisionists," but it was too much to ask that they also acquiesce in the perceived conceits of Chinese "hegemonists."[62] Reflecting later on the theoretical implications of the Sino-American rapprochement, a DRV official derisively told one of his European counterparts that in the thinking of Chinese sophisticates, "Marxist-Leninist thought is hard to understand and to apply" and "the proletarian revolution could not be led by the ideology of peasants and artisans."[63] So shocking was China's behavior that some in the DRV wondered aloud whether Beijing might sabotage national liberation movements and other progressive causes it had only recently encouraged. This concern was all the more alarming because of the looming enhancement of the PRC's

57. There may have been some truth to that contention. In June 1965, Zhou Enlai told Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, "the more America's strength is bogged down in Vietnam, the better for the movement for national independence and liberation." See "Zhou Enlai and Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, Dar es Salaam, 4 June 1965," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 86.

58. Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," p. 73.

59. DAPAO, "Note: L'URSS et le conflit indochinois," 15 February 1972, p. 2, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

60. Chen, "China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement," p. 59.

61. British Consulate-General, Hanoi (BCGH) to Southeast Asia Department, London (SEAD), 18 November 1965, p. 1, in FO 371/180528, TNAUK.

62. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 68.

63. "Memorandum by Verban Tsanev, Head of the Fifth Department," p. 157.

international stature. One of the things Nixon and Chinese officials had discussed in Beijing was the prospect that the PRC would occupy the China seat at the United Nations (UN), which would come with a permanent seat on the Security Council and veto power over all council decisions. "If the PRC is in the UN," the DRV official said of this prospect, then "for sure there will be one more voice against the position of Vietnam."[64]

Sino-American rapprochement also distressed Hanoi for historical and geographical reasons.[65] Vietnam and China were long-time neighbors and allies, as close as "lips and teeth," in an oft-repeated cliché. "If there is a special relationship in the history of Asian communism," Christopher Goscha writes of this circumstance, "it is the one linking Vietnamese Communists to their Chinese counterparts."[66] Both China and Vietnam were non-Western, Asian, Third World polities with closely entwined recent histories. "The basis for the close political, social and economic relationship between Peking and Hanoi is not hard to find," the British consul reported at the outset of the war. "It is compounded by proximity, ethnic affinity, admiration, fear and indebtedness. . . . There would have been no victory at Dien Bien Phu without the 105mm guns supplied by China."[67] As the smaller and more dependent of the two, the North Vietnamese expected more, especially of loyalty and political support, from their Chinese neighbors than from other socialist allies. "If Beijing and Hanoi had not been so close, they would have had fewer opportunities to experience the differences between them," Chen comments. "Too intimate a tie created more opportunities for conflict."[68] David Marr likewise says about Beijing's rapprochement with Washington that "more than any other factor, this contradiction served to revive primordial Vietnamese fears of a Han double-cross."[69] Given the weight of such considerations, a historian today may readily accept a second-hand report of Le Duan's assessment of this turn of events. The Soviet Communist Party, Le Duan reportedly said, "is a Marxist-Leninist leadership, devoted to the world revolution, loyal to the principles of proletarian internationalism." Yet, he continued, "the current Chinese leaders are not revolutionaries and indeed they act as traitors to the

64. Ibid.

65. In an official history of DRV diplomacy, Luu Van Loi writes that Hanoi experienced difficulties in the Paris negotiations because of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the "improvement of relations between China and the United States." He makes no mention of any adverse effects of U.S.-Soviet détente. See Luu Van Loi, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam,* p. 340.

66. Christopher E. Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War and the Meltdown of Asian Internationalism," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, eds., *Third Indochina War,* p. 157.

67. BCGH to SEAD, 18 November 1965, p. 1.

68. Chen, *Mao's China,* p. 236.

69. Marr, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," p. 57.

interests of the revolutionary forces of the world."[70] In the same vein, Pham Van Dong reportedly urged the Cuban ambassador to "tell Fidel that Chinese leaders are not revolutionaries, they are not Marxist-Leninist and are creating and will create many difficulties for the revolution in Indochina."[71]

Five days after Nixon left Beijing, Zhou Enlai traveled to Hanoi to "share opinions" on the Beijing summit.[72] Although Zhou assured them that Beijing had agreed to nothing that jeopardized their war effort and had no intention of involving itself in the Paris negotiations, the North Vietnamese were unmoved. They were livid that the Chinese had even discussed their war with Nixon.[73] "Vietnam is ours," the VWP Politburo insisted in reaction to Zhou's message. "You have no right to discuss the Vietnam problem with the United States. . . . You already interfered in 1954; now you need not meddle in our affairs anymore."[74] This reaction reflected erroneous assumptions that Beijing had not only changed its position on the war during the talks with Nixon but was also now prepared to abandon the DRV to curry favor with Washington.[75] These assumptions manifested the parochialism and dogmatism of VWP leaders, who focused only on their own circumstances and worldview, failing to see that in negotiating with Nixon Beijing had concerns of its own that had to do less with the war in Vietnam than with the PRC's own national security and the Sino-Soviet conflict—concerns that were not about to translate into abandonment of the DRV. "In 1954, China had negotiated with France to solve the Indochina war over the backs of the Indochinese countries," a senior DRV diplomat said later about Hanoi's own concerns on this point. In 1972 "we were not about to let it negotiate with the United States to solve the war in Vietnam again over the backs of the Indochinese countries."[76]

Beijing hoped that continuing the war would not jeopardize its rap-

70. "Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria to the DR Vietnam: Regarding Some Assessments and Points of View of the VWP on the Events and the Situation in Vietnam during the Last Two Months (since April 15 till June 10)," 22 June 1972, p. 27, in AE 33, Op. 23p, AMVR; translated by Simeon Mitropolitski.

71. Ibid.

72. Van Tien Dung, *Cuoc khang chien chong My,* p. 102.

73. Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949–1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 184–185; and Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," pp. 79–81. Zhou did, however, caution the North Vietnamese against prolongation of the war and pursuit of military victory.

74. *Su that ve quan he Viet Nam—Trung Quoc trong 30 nam qua* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1979), p. 62.

75. Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," 80–81. Hanoi rejected Beijing's claim that rapprochement with Washington was necessary to counter the growing Soviet threat to Chinese national security. See *Su that ve quan he Viet Nam,* pp. 57–58.

76. Nguyen Co Thach, *Vi hoa binh va an ninh o Dong Nam A va the gioi* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1984), p. 10.

prochement with Washington, but it was never willing to abandon the DRV or even pressure Hanoi to accept any agreement just to satisfy that hope. Despite the softening of China's stance on the war, Mao and Zhou remained convinced that "it was not in Peking that the solution to the [Vietnam] problem would negotiate itself," as French diplomats in Beijing concluded following private discussions on these issues with Chinese leaders. "The public and secret declarations of Mr. Chou En-lai on the issue have been too categorical for any doubt to subsist."[77] Zhou privately conceded that at Geneva in 1954 the Vietnamese Communists had been duped and the Chinese had made mistakes, but he hastened to add that "this would not recur."[78] The French Foreign Ministry surmised on the basis of such confidential statements that Nixon's visit to the PRC had "had no effect on the settlement of the Vietnamese problem." Beijing was in no position to "exercise pressures on Hanoi, and, even if it had wanted to, [it] would have been deterred by fear of seeing the Soviet Union benefit."[79]

As it turned out, both the PRC and the Soviet Union continued to support the DRV war effort materially and politically after Nixon's visits. In fact, the level of their material aid in 1972 exceeded that of any previous year.[80] But their continued contacts with Washington undercut the political weight of the material aid. Lien-Hang Nguyen concludes that Hanoi "read" the increases in material aid as "palliatives" to compensate for the political costs to itself of the U.S. rapprochements with both of the Communist great powers.[81] That may have been the case, but the rapprochements highlighted the limitations of Hanoi's diplomatic struggle, laying bare not only Hanoi's inability to prevent the continued deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations but also its failure to undermine the rapprochement between the socialist giants and Washington.

These failures of the diplomatic struggle—"the fear of seeing [the VWP's] interests neglected by the great powers"—solidified Hanoi's resolve to launch

77. Beijing to Paris, 17 February 1972, p. 2.

78. Beijing to Paris, 18 September 1971, p. 2.

79. DAPAO, "Note: Vietnam," 16 May 1972, p. 3, No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

80. Li Danhui, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute over Assistance for Vietnam's Anti-American War, 1965–1972," in Priscilla Roberts, ed., *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), pp. 304–305. According to Chen, "this was the Chinese way to convince the Vietnamese that Beijing would not abandon them in spite of the Sino-American rapprochement, while at the same time, maintaining China's international image as a revolutionary country." See Chen, "China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement," p. 56.

81. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "Cold War Contradictions: Toward an International History of the Second Indochina War, 1969–1973," in Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 235.

another major military offensive in the spring of 1972.[82] These circumstances and the resulting "diplomatic impasse" in the negotiations "brought [Hanoi] to this decision," the French Foreign Ministry concluded.[83] French diplomats in Beijing had earlier predicted that the DRV might resort to an offensive if its allies appeared to falter and VWP leaders came to realize that they might have to end the war sooner rather than later by means of a compromise agreement. "Considering the well-known [Vietnamese] rule that military confrontation accompanies the decisive stage of [negotiated] solutions (e.g., Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference of 1954)," the diplomats wrote, Hanoi would likely "seek to give itself the greatest advantage on the battlefield before the ultimate discussions."[84] The decision to do just that not only signaled renewed confidence in military struggle but underscored the aversion of political as well as military leaders to any compromise forged through negotiations rather than on the battlefield.[85] Deposed Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who met with VWP leaders in February, reported thereafter that Le Duan told him the DRV would "never allow itself to be duped a second time" into negotiating a compromise end to a war it could win: "The 1954 Geneva experience" offered a "sufficient" lesson. Hinting at the coming offensive, Le Duan told Sihanouk that "the time had come to lay all cards on the table" and to "sweep [away] the Saigon forces and regime" with a view to "formalizing in Paris . . . the victory [about to be] achieved on the battlefield."[86] The venture was risky, but Hanoi now had reason to gamble. Sino-American rapprochement had enhanced Nixon's position domestically and internationally. This in turn produced a "certain weakening of the struggle of the American people against the war in Vietnam," thus undercutting the factor on which Hanoi depended to constrain the White House. With that came a hardening of Nixon's stance in the Paris talks.[87] VWP leaders calculated that they could

82. Military Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975,* trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 283; Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," pp. 83, 88; Nguyen, "Between the Storms," pp. 108, 110; and DAPAO, "Note: Vietnam," 16 May 1972, p. 4. The new general offensive was first proposed in May 1971 to the VWP Politburo, which concluded that a "major strategic opportunity had arrived." See 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* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2005), p. 307. Shortly thereafter, the VWP Politburo directed military leaders to draw up plans for an "unprecedented" military effort against the South. See Hoc vien Quan su cao cap, *Cuoc khang chien chong My, cuu nuoc 1954–1975: Nhung su kien quan su* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Quan doi nhan dan, 1980), p. 239; and Bo Quoc phong—Vien lich su quan su Viet Nam, *Lich su quan su Viet Nam, Tap 11,* pp. 308–309.

83. DAPAO, "Note," 5 May 1972, p. 3, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

84. Beijing to Paris, 17 February 1972, p. 6.

85. Van Tien Dung, "Hai thang loi chien luoc 'danh cho My cut,'" *Lich su Quan su,* No. 5 (1992), p. 4.

86. Beijing to Paris, 16 June 1972, pp. 1–2, in AO:VC, ADF.

87. "Memorandum by Verban Tsanev, Head of the Fifth Department," p. 155; and Nguyen, "Between the Storms," p. 108.

again game the U.S. political calendar—the presidential election was upcoming—to blunt the effects of those trends, as they had done with the Tet Offensive in 1968.[88] Given these stakes, swift and decisive victory in the new military offensive was "of utmost importance."[89]

The resulting Easter Offensive began in late March 1972 when five People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) divisions of 120,000 men crossed into the South from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Their task was to "achieve a decisive victory" and thereby "compel the American imperialists to end the war through negotiations *on our terms.*"[90] According to contemporaneous Western assessments, Hanoi sought to achieve "decisive military results" and thereby discredit Vietnamization while improving its own "hand" at the bargaining table by conquering and occupying more territory in the South.[91] Hanoi expected Washington to respond with savage bombings, but hoped that condemnations of the bombings by Moscow and Beijing as well as antiwar activists in the United States and elsewhere would be sufficiently strong to compel Nixon to limit his response.[92] With the presidential election of 1972 coming up, the North Vietnamese gave exaggerated "importance" to "the evolution of American opinion."[93] According to Bulgarian diplomats in Hanoi, "the Vietnamese side thinks that . . . [u]ntil the decisive moment, the election, Nixon has not too much time." "That is why," the Bulgarians said of Hanoi's calculations, "the pressure must be strong, comprehensive, and well coordinated with the internal as well as external forces and factors." Because Nixon had already made significant reductions of U.S. forces in Vietnamizing the war, the Bulgarian diplomats thought Hanoi was certain "that before the presidential election in the United States Nixon will not dare to send land

88. Doan Huyen, "Thang My: Danh va dam," in Bo Ngoai giao, *Mat tran ngoai giao,* p. 137.

89. "Dien cua Dong chi Sau Mang, So 77, ngay 12 thang 1 nam 1972," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 33: 1972* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 2004), pp. 1–4; and Van Tien Dung, *Cuoc khang chien chong My,* p. 104. See also, Arnold R. Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 18. Isaacs quotes Tran Van Tra's observation that the aim of the offensive was a decisive military victory that would force Washington to sign a capitulatory peace agreement.

90. "Bo chinh tri Ban chap hanh Truong uong Dang hop Hoi nghi de lap nhiem vu nam 1972," in *Nhung su kien lich su Dang, Tap III: Ve khang chien chong My, cuu nuoc, 1954–1975* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1985), p. 584; emphasis added.

91. DAPAO, "Note: Situation au Vietnam," 11 April 1972, p. 3, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF; and Washington to Paris, 8 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 133, AO:VC, ADF. "The pursuit of Vietnamization . . . and the progress of pacification have convinced North Vietnamese leaders of the necessity to resort to great means [*grands moyens*] and without any delay," another French report noted. See DAPAO, "Note: Vietnam," 16 May 1972, pp. 4–5.

92. As part of the planning process for the offensive, Hanoi sent envoys to Moscow and Beijing to secure additional material assistance as well as pledges of political support for the attack, though its timing and magnitude were never divulged. See Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 231–232.

93. Beijing to Paris, 14 May 1971, p. 1, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

units back to South Vietnam." Thus, "the goal [of the offensive] is through coordination of the military and political activities in South Vietnam to provoke a political crisis in Saigon and compel the Americans at the Paris negotiations to accept the formation of a broad coalition government" excluding current South Vietnamese leaders and prefacing reunification under Hanoi's auspices. "The VWP and the revolutionary forces in the South," the Bulgarians concluded, appeared "determined to continue the struggle until . . . victory or until their disappearance as a nation."[94] Another Bulgarian diplomat affirmed that the North Vietnamese "now consider the military front more important [and believe] that they have enough forces and means and therefore will continue to be" on the offensive. Le Duan reportedly told this diplomat that "if the situation is favorable," PAVN forces "will destroy within 10–15 months the puppet regime in South Vietnam."[95] This destruction, he implied, would enable Hanoi to avoid messy negotiations with Washington over the composition of a coalition regime in Saigon and to achieve reunification almost at once.

Within days of the start of the Easter Offensive, the United States, as expected, commenced massive bombing of the DRV and its supply lines to the South. U.S. officials then raised the stakes in this desperate contest of wills by unexpectedly mining the North Vietnamese ports on which the DRV depended for a large portion of its supplies from the outside world.[96] Within weeks, those responses sharply reduced the flow of troops and supplies into the South, thus diminishing the effectiveness of PAVN units and stiffening the resistance of South Vietnamese forces.[97] A DRV official privately confided that "the test that North Vietnam currently is enduring is the toughest of the entire war," and he also noted that the resulting material and human losses and war weariness had "produced a certain lassitude, even among the troops."[98] The bombings caused aid deliveries to the DRV by train from China—on which Hanoi depended heavily—to become "particularly difficult" and then impossible. "Only transport by sea," one assessment noted, "could satisfy the needs of North Vietnam," and this mode of transport was

94. "Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria to the DR Vietnam: Regarding Some Assessments and Points of View of the VWP," pp. 19–20.

95. "Information by Aleksander Aleksandrov," p. 14.

96. "Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria to the DR Vietnam: Regarding Some Assessments and Points of View of the VWP," p. 23. For a comprehensive treatment of Washington's response to the campaign, see Stephen R. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Easter Offensive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

97. Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 780–783; and Donald J. Morzek, *Air Power and the Ground War in Vietnam: Ideas and Actions* (Washington, DC: Air University Press, 1988), pp. 144–145.

98. Beijing to Paris, 3 June 1972, p. 3, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

endangered by the mining of the harbors.[99] In a surprising confession, the Soviet military attaché in Beijing told his French counterpart in late May that the challenges facing the DRV were such that "the Vietnam War had henceforth been lost" and that Hanoi was "destined to [suffer] an irremediable defeat."[100] If the war continued, the North Vietnamese would soon find themselves in a state of "extreme weakness," the attaché added.[101] Although these assessments may have exaggerated Hanoi's plight, Soviet diplomats began expressing deep "pessimism" about "the issue of the struggle waged by the North Vietnamese."[102] "The political and especially military situation in Vietnam has very much deteriorated in recent months," the Bulgarian ambassador in Hanoi told his government on 22 June.[103] A DRV intelligence analyst, Luu Doan Huynh, later confirmed that estimate, observing that "the March 1972 offensive failed to achieve substantial results."[104]

Equally problematic for Hanoi were the public responses of Beijing and Moscow to recent U.S. initiatives. Neither country strongly protested Nixon's major escalation of the war. In fact, even as the bombing and mining crippled Hanoi's war effort and the DRV itself, Chinese and Soviet leaders continued unabated their policies of rapprochement and détente.[105] "We are far from the tense atmosphere and the very strong reactions that accompanied the invasion of lower Laos and eastern Cambodia by Saigon's forces in February 1971," Western diplomats in Beijing reported. "The way the [Chinese] press reports" events in Vietnam "reinforces the impression that Peking is keen to manifest a certain apathy toward those events."[106] This Chinese "reserve" was possibly attributable to a judgment that in opting for the new offensive Hanoi had gone from supporting a guerrilla conflict to waging a conventional war. Beijing ap-

99. Vientiane to Paris, 18 May 1972, pp. 1–2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF; Beijing to Paris, 30 May 1972, p. 2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF; and Beijing to Paris, 1 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF. Refusing to enter North Vietnamese ports, numerous foreign ships offloaded their cargo in China for eventual delivery to the DRV by train. That created a logistical nightmare for the Chinese because approximately thirty trains were needed to deliver the cargo of one average-size ship. See Beijing to Paris, 15 June 1972, p. 3, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

100. Beijing to Paris, 1 June 1972, pp. 1–2, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

101. DAPAO, "Note: URSS, Chine et Vietnam (déclaration de l'Attaché militaire soviétique à Pékin)," 2 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

102. Beijing to Paris, 2 June 1972, p. 3, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

103. "Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria to the DR Vietnam: Regarding Some Assessments and Points of View of the VWP," p. 19.

104. Luu Doan Huynh, "The Perspective of a Vietnamese Witness," in David L. Anderson and John Ernst, eds., *The War That Never Ends: New Perspectives on the Vietnam War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), p. 92.

105. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," p. 123. Nguyen claims that Hanoi's other allies "were able to condemn the U.S. bombing campaigns more vociferously and wholeheartedly than Moscow and Beijing" (p. 125).

106. Beijing to Paris, 18 April 1972, pp. 2–3, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

parently construed this transformation as a form of "adventurism," which in Chinese strategic thinking risked broadening the war at an inopportune time. According to a French estimate of the situation, Chinese leaders now "leaned in favor of the theses" of the PRG of 1 September 1967, which "supported the establishment of an 'independent, democratic, peaceful, neutral, and prosperous' South Vietnam to be followed, later [*à longue échéance*], by a reunification that will take place 'gradually, by peaceful means, on the basis of negotiations between the two zones'" without "foreign interference."[107] Increasingly fearful of Hanoi's domination of Indochina after the war on the one hand, and a Soviet-Vietnamese alliance that threatened a partial encirclement of the PRC on the other, Chinese leaders "had an interest in seeing Indochina fragmented in separate States," a step that would undermine Hanoi's "hegemonic ambitions."[108] Beijing's increasing willingness to accept a two-state solution and with it continued partition of Vietnam exacerbated Sino-Vietnamese tensions and fueled Hanoi's growing anxiety.

Moscow, meanwhile, observed "an official quasi-silence, and heightened prudence" in press commentaries on Vietnam and on U.S. bombing and mining of the DRV.[109] The Soviet Union refused to cancel Brezhnev's upcoming summit with Nixon, which had been one of the DRV's purposes in launching the offensive.[110] Even more disappointing for Hanoi was Moscow's refusal to de-mine North Vietnamese harbors, despite Hanoi's insistence. "They will not risk a confrontation with the Americans over the demining of Haiphong," a Western assessment noted when Soviet leaders rejected Hanoi's demand.[111] Off-the-cuff comments by the Soviet ambassador in Beijing during a private meeting spurred his French interlocutor to observe that "a great problem had emerged [in Soviet-DRV relations] with the Soviet decision not to take on the challenge of the blockade of Haiphong."[112] "If in Hanoi, we clearly do not hide that the Kremlin's attitude, following the mining of North Vietnamese ports, has disappointed," another French dispatch noted, "in Moscow we can hardly conceal the impatience that was felt owing to the independent behavior of the North Vietnamese."[113] "Despite the fact that [DRV leaders] were informed about the goals and necessity of Nixon's visit in Moscow," a Bulgarian diplomat reported, they had "decided to begin with [a] military offensive in

107. Beijing to Paris, 9 June 1972, pp. 3–4, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

108. "Object: Vietnam," report by Étienne Manac'h, French Ambassador to China, to Maurice Schumann, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 21 July 1972, pp. 7–8, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

109. DAPAO, "Note," 25 April 1972, p. 2, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

110. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 237–238.

111. DAPAO, "Note: URSS, Chine et Vietnam," p. 4.

112. Beijing to Paris, 15 June 1972, p. 2.

113. Moscow to Paris, 15 June 1972, p. 2, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

South Vietnam on 30 March of this year. That was perceived [in eastern European ruling circles] as a certain attempt to make the meeting between the Soviet leaders and Nixon fail, considering that no such activities occurred before his visit to Beijing."[114]

The French Foreign Ministry interpreted Soviet statements and actions as "incontestable" evidence that leaders in Moscow were seeking to "keep their distance vis-à-vis Hanoi." "At best," the ministry concluded, "the Americans can expect some Soviet support to prevail on Hanoi about the merits" of compromise; "at worst, the Americans will recognize that the Soviets acknowledge their temporary powerlessness to help North Vietnam."[115] Hoang Quoc Viet of the VWP Central Committee quipped in the aftermath of the Moscow summit: "We are sorry that Nixon had a chance to visit some capitals, to dupe the world that he is a peace-maker and defender of freedom." In hosting Nixon, Moscow, like Beijing before it, had enhanced the president's chances for reelection.[116] VWP leaders generally were more forgiving of Moscow's "betrayal" than of Beijing's. "The preliminary position of the Vietnamese leadership on the negotiations in Moscow between Nixon and the Soviet leaders," Bulgarian diplomats reported, "is that it is a form of struggle between the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces at the summit. The position of the Soviet Union is completely different from the position of China."[117] Some in Hanoi were nonetheless exceedingly vexed by Moscow's decision to proceed with the summit, inferring from it that "Soviet leaders overestimate U.S. forces" and "underestimate the forces of the revolutionary movement in Vietnam."[118] Some VWP officials even alleged that hosting Nixon "puts [Moscow] on the same level with . . . Beijing."[119] Confronted with failure on the battlefield and waning international support, both of which damaged Vietnamese "national dignity" at home and abroad, VWP leaders suspended large-scale military operations below the seventeenth parallel in favor of a diplomatic solution.[120]

114. "Information by Aleksander Aleksandrov," p. 12.

115. DAPAO, "Note: URSS, Chine et Vietnam," pp. 4–5.

116. "Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria to the DR Vietnam: Regarding Some Assessments and Points of View of the VWP," p. 26.

117. Ibid., pp. 27–28.

118. Ibid., p. 28.

119. "Information by Aleksander Aleksandrov," p. 12. According to Gaiduk, the Moscow summit "completed the destruction of the international environment in which North Vietnamese leaders had hoped to end the war on their conditions." Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 240.

120. David W. P. Elliott, "Hanoi's Strategy in the Second Indochina War," in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 91; and "Report by Vladislav Videnov, Ambassador of the PRB in the DRV: Regarding Talks with the Deputy Minister Hoang Van Tien," p. 215.

In addition to these political problems, the failed offensive inflicted debilitating losses on the PAVN that soon altered the balance of forces on the battlefield. This shift, as well as Hanoi's assessment of Washington's determination to continue supporting the regime in the South, was the barometer by which VWP leaders measured the state of the war. More than that, the bombing was having "disastrous effects" on the DRV's economy and infrastructure.[121] "The barbaric cruel bombardment hurts the Vietnamese economy, transportation and other sectors," the Bulgarian ambassador reported after a meeting with Pham Van Dong. Most gravely of all, "the blockade and mining of the Vietnamese docks obstruct the [delivery of] supplies" from abroad. The situation was suddenly so bad that in May the DRV Ministry of Public Security launched a "counter counterrevolutionary" movement in the North.[122]

Facing such grim realities, VWP leaders decided in June to "drive the United States into serious bargaining" and to "change [DRV] strategy: *from a strategy of war to a strategy of peace,*" as a Vietnamese history of the negotiations says.[123] "The Hanoi Politburo as a whole had to accept that its objective for the 1972 spring–summer offensive to alter the military balance of power on the ground and to thwart superpower obstruction from above failed," Lien-Hang Nguyen writes of these events.[124] The looming presidential election in the United States figured prominently in North Vietnamese strategic calculations. "We closely follow the 'Mac Govern' [*sic*] phenomenon," Mai Van Bo of the DRV Foreign Ministry told a French diplomat.[125] "His election was not a done deal," Bo added later, "but we can hope that the momentum that supports him might compel President Nixon, who worries above all about securing a second mandate, to soften at once his attitude [in the negotiations.]"[126]

Renewed Soviet calls for a negotiated end to the war also conditioned Hanoi's strategic calculations. A high-ranking Soviet official, Nikolai Podgornyi, arrived in Hanoi on 15 June for a "friendly unofficial visit."[127]

121. Uy ban dieu tra toi ac chien tranh cua de quoc My o Viet Nam, "Toi ac huy diet cua chinh quyen Nixon doi voi cac khu dong dan o mien Bac Viet Nam trong buoc leo thang chien tranh tu 4/1972 den nay," September 1972, p. 1, Ho so: Tai lieu cua Uy ban dieu tra toi ac cua de quoc My o Viet Nam ve toi ac cua My o Viet Nam, in VV, No. 101, Phong: Uy ban dieu tra toi ac cua de quoc My o Viet Nam, Vietnam National Archives Center 3, Hanoi (VNAC3).

122. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," pp. 130–131.

123. Khac Huynh, "Dam phan Pari va hiep dinh Pari ve Viet Nam voi phuong cham gianh thang loi tung buoc," *Nghien cuu Quoc te,* No. 11 (1996), p. 24; and Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Pari,* p. 222, emphasis in original.

124. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," p. 126.

125. Hanoi to Paris, 10 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 109, AO:VC, ADF. Campaigning on a peace platform, George McGovern had secured the nomination of the Democratic Party to run against Nixon.

126. Hanoi to Paris, 15 July 1972, p. 2, in No. 109, AO:VC, ADF.

127. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 240.

Podgornyi may have advised the North Vietnamese to drop their demand for the removal of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu as a condition for a diplomatic solution or to allow Thieu to participate in the coalition government Hanoi insisted be set up in Saigon after a ceasefire.[128] According to the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatolii Dobrynin, "we told . . . the North Vietnamese that there existed a possibility [for a prompt diplomatic settlement] that was worth exploring, but we exercise no pressure on them as only they can decide what decision to make."[129] The Chinese, always cynical about Soviet initiatives, deemed Podgornyi's visit a clear "attempt at persuasion."[130] According to the ambassador of an unnamed "orthodox" socialist country, the North Vietnamese shared Beijing's view of the visit, and as a result Soviet-DRV relations became "quite mediocre" for a period thereafter.[131]

The June 1972 decisions "marked a turning point in the direction of the [Vietnamese] revolution."[132] According to Luu Doan Huynh, this was the point when Hanoi committed itself to negotiating "in earnest."[133] From then on, the quest for a decent diplomatic settlement became the locus of the diplomatic struggle, and Hanoi's strategic priority shifted from achieving victory to preserving what it could of a problematic status quo and thereby safeguarding the long-term prospects of the revolution. This was a momentous decision for a regime acting "psychologically" as if it "feared peace more than the continuation of the war."[134] The erstwhile dogmatism of VWP foreign policymaking rapidly gave way to what can be described as an enlightened—or self-serving—pragmatism. "Under the strain of circumstances," a French assessment noted later, VWP leaders "had to restrain their ambitions."[135] "The DRV is realistic [*réaliste*]," a North Vietnamese diplomat confided in a French counterpart, reflecting the change. "The reunification [of Vietnam] can take place only in due time, when the necessary conditions will exist." The North Vietnamese diplomat "suggested that [such conditions] would not emerge in the near future."[136]

128. Moscow to Paris, 25 August 1972, p. 2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

129. Washington to Paris, 19 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 133, AO:VC, ADF.

130. Moscow to Paris, 22 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

131. Beijing to Paris, 30 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

132. Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Pari,* p. 222.

133. Luu Doan Huynh, "Paris Agreement," p. 90.

134. This comment attributed to one of Henry Kissinger's aides is reported in Moscow to Paris, 22 July 1972, p. 1, in No. 133, AO:VC, ADF.

135. "Le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire de la République du Sud-Vietnam vu de Hanoï," report submitted by Claude Chayet, French Ambassador to the DRV, to Michel Jobert, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 August 1973, p. 3, in No. 19, AO:VC, ADF.

136. Vientiane to Paris, 19 June 1972, p. 1, in No. 109, AO:VC, ADF.

In an effort of its own to facilitate the Paris negotiations, Beijing in July urged Hanoi to drop its demand that the United States remove Thieu from the Saigon government, echoing the "advice" that Podgornyi apparently gave in mid-June.[137] "We are asking the United States to remove Thieu," Zhou Enlai said in explaining to Le Duc Tho the DRV's demand then on the table in the peace talks. "However, if we hint that Thieu can be accepted, U.S. [officials] will be surprised because they do not expect that." Thieu, Zhou continued, "cannot be representative of a government," but "in negotiations, surprise is necessary."[138] This initiative betrayed the desire of Chinese leaders to see the war in Vietnam conclude sooner rather than later, even if this meant postponing Vietnamese reunification. By this stage, Chinese leaders were "clearly pronouncing themselves in favor of a negotiated solution," a Western assessment noted.[139] Because Thieu's removal had been a fundamental demand, Hanoi was stunned by Zhou's proposal and took it as conclusive evidence of the willingness of Beijing to sacrifice the DRV's interests for purposes of its own.[140] Meeting with his French counterpart on 22 July, the DRV ambassador in Beijing referred to Zhou's proposal and insisted that Washington would never obtain from his government "more honorable [terms] than those that provided for the formation of a 'non-Communist' coalition government in Saigon" to include Communists, members of the current regime (excluding Thieu), and assorted neutralists. "The Vietnamese," he added, "would never give up the legitimate compensation their struggle entitled them to."[141] But in light of domestic and international conditions, including the massive punitive bombing and mining of the North, the VWP had to acquiesce in the merits of the Chinese proposal.[142] "We swallowed our pride,"

137. "For the Chinese side," Lüthi surmises, "North Vietnam's inability to overthrow Nguyen Van Thieu was the primary reason to adopt the gradualist strategy of negotiating a U.S. military withdrawal before addressing the political issues. For the Vietnamese side, this was the ultimate motive to get more support." Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," p. 75.

138. "Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho, Beijing, 12 July 1972," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 180.

139. DAPAO, "Note: Vietnam," 18 July 1972, p. 1, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

140. Vien nghien cuu chu nghia Mac-Lenin va tu tuong Ho Chi Minh, *Lich su Dang cong san Viet Nam, Tap II: 1954–1975* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia, 1995), p. 524 n. 2. Beijing, as Nguyen argues, did exert some pressure on Hanoi to end the war, "albeit not enough to content Nixon" and not enough to constitute interference in VWP policymaking. See Nguyen, "Cold War Contradictions," p. 238. "The DRV saw Sino-American rapprochement as a sinister plot by both the PRC and the United States to end the war on terms unfavorable to Hanoi," Lüthi writes. "This development seemed to undermine North Vietnam's maximalist strategy of using military and diplomatic pressure on the United States. However, Hanoi's accusation that Beijing was guilty of duplicity was too severe." Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," p. 72.

141. Beijing to Paris, 24 July 1972, p. 2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

142. DAPAO, "Note: Vietnam," 18 July 1972, p. 1.

Nguyen Khac Huynh said of the decision to accept it.[143] By September, Western diplomats were noticing "a relatively softer approach to [the issue of] the removal of President Thieu." On 11 September 1972 the PRG officially acknowledged the impossibility of imposing, for the moment, a Communist regime on the South.[144] Instead, "the moment was particularly favorable for the negotiations to enter a decisive phase," a Soviet diplomat observed.[145] Less to encourage Hanoi to fight than to nudge it in the direction of a negotiated settlement, Moscow continued food and arms deliveries to the DRV. "The Soviet Union is doing all it can," a Soviet diplomat said of this stratagem, "to put the Vietnamese in a good negotiating position by giving them the means of *eventually* continuing the war."[146]

In Paris on 8 October, Le Duc Tho presented Kissinger with the draft of a complete agreement, the first submitted by either side in the negotiations. The draft, titled "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam," included important concessions. Most notably, Hanoi withdrew its demand that Thieu be removed from office as well as its insistence on the formation of a transitional coalition government in Saigon whose composition and duties would have to be approved by Hanoi. With these concessions the DRV signaled its willingness to accept a two-stage settlement, one separating military from political issues. In the first stage the two sides would resolve military issues, and in the second, which would follow implementation of a ceasefire, they would address political issues. This was a concession of the most fundamental sort. Government and party leaders had always insisted that they would never again, after the experience with the 1954 Geneva Accords, accept a diplomatic settlement that left fundamental political problems to be resolved *after* a ceasefire.[147] Hanoi's decision to give in on this point underscores its desperation to conclude the war as well as the ideological disarray in ruling circles stemming from the unprecedented crisis. As recently as August 1972, Deputy Foreign Minister Hoang Van Tien had stated that "all attempts by the USA to . . . preserve Thieu are doomed to failure and could serve only as reasons for continuing the war." Tien had also emphasized: "It is necessary [that] a government of national unity be established in southern Vietnam" before a ceasefire to avoid the complications that followed the 1954 Geneva

143. Nguyen Khac Huynh, interview, Paris, 14 May 2008.

144. Moscow to Paris, 28 September 1972, p. 2, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

145. Moscow to Paris, 29 September 1972, p. 1, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

146. Ibid., p. 2; emphasis added.

147. DAPAO, "Note: Projet de règlement au Vietnam et en Indochine," 14 November 1972, p. 2, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

Accords.[148] How things had changed in a month's time! On 5 October, during a private meeting in Beijing with the respected French historian Jean Lacouture, Pham Van Dong predicted that the Vietnam "problem" was "in effect ripening toward a solution" and that "all would be clear" for a diplomatic settlement between Washington and Hanoi around 20 October.[149]

On the basis of Le Duc Tho's draft agreement, North Vietnamese and U.S. negotiators reached a tentative settlement almost at once, in mid-October, as Dong had predicted. Washington conceded more than Hanoi had in achieving the breakthrough, but the terms of the tentative agreement fell far short of what the VWP had always insisted were the minimal aspirations of the resistance. Broadly speaking, the draft agreement obligated the United States to end its direct military involvement in Vietnam; to recognize the existence in the South of two political administrations (that of Thieu and that of the PRG) and of their respective zones of political and military control; to accept the presence of PAVN forces in the South; to acknowledge the right to self-determination of the South Vietnamese people; and to pay for postwar reconstruction. In return for these concessions, Hanoi agreed to return all U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and to acquiesce in the continued existence of Thieu's regime in Saigon, thus leaving political differences between the two Vietnams to a later and indeterminate resolution.

Thieu promptly and resolutely rejected these terms, forcing Washington to request another round of talks to make key provisions of the agreement palatable to Saigon. A DRV Foreign Ministry official referred to the evident discord between Washington and Saigon refelected in this sequence of events as a "comedy."[150] Hoping to capitalize on the discord on the eve of the U.S. presidential election, Hanoi chose to temporize.[151] After all, "time is not on the enemy's side," the VWP Politburo surmised as it decided to turn down the request for further talks.[152] Within days, Nixon won reelection by a lopsided margin over McGovern. This plus the evident inefficacy of the U.S. antiwar movement, its "diminishing strength," unnerved Hanoi, which, in a major misreading of American politics, had calculated that without a "resolution of the Vietnamese question" Nixon would at best narrowly win reelection.[153]

148. "Report by Apostol Kolchev, Ambassador of the PRB in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: Regarding Information Obtained about the Results of the Secret Talks in Paris," 28 August 1972, pp. 50–53, in AE 33, Op. 23p, AMVR; translated by Petia Draguieva.

149. Moscow to Paris, 9 October 1972, p. 3, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

150. Hanoi to Paris, 26 October 1972, p. 3, in No. 109, AO:VC, ADF.

151. See "Memorandum by Aleksander Aleksandrov, First Secretary of the Embassy of the PRB in the City of Hanoi: Regarding Meeting with Bertold [Bergold], Advisor Chargé d'Affaires in the Embassy of the GDR," pp. 165–169.

152. *Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945–2000,* p. 246.

153. Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World*

The landslide victory, many VWP officials feared, would surely embolden Nixon and encourage him to prolong the war and the status quo in the stalled negotiations, something that the DRV was desperate to avoid. As the resistance bled in both the North and the South and Saigon's army grew stronger, increasing numbers of Southerners were making their peace with the regime there, and Hanoi's socialist allies continued to behave disappointingly.[154]

At the conclusion of another futile round of talks in late November 1972, the two sides agreed to recess the negotiations.[155] Hanoi demurred for the time being, fearing that further concessions hastily made might betray its anxiousness to settle and bolster Nixon's recalcitrance. After the November talks, Le Duc Tho surmised that the Nixon administration preferred to continue the war rather than settle it. The DRV agreed. For strategic reasons having to do with the Cold War, VWP leaders now concluded, Nixon would never withdraw from Vietnam without his and his country's "honor" intact. This, they thought, required Washington to seek further concessions.[156] But they refused to go beyond what they had already conceded; to do so would compromise the future of the revolution. The cost of such a compromise thus outweighed the benefits of a prompt settlement. The only option was to remain intractable while Congress and U.S. public opinion pressured Nixon to end the war on whatever terms he could get. Soviet leaders, who for some time had wanted to see the war end as a necessary preliminary for themselves to "set up a sustained cooperation with the United States," were "discouraged" and "embarrassed" by the outcome of the November talks and by the attitude of their Vietnamese allies.[157]

When talks resumed on 4 December, Kissinger offered Washington's "utmost proposal," a return to the October agreement with six meaningful changes.[158] The two sides soon agreed on language addressing five of the changes, but Le Duc Tho balked at language Washington insisted on for the

War II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 168; and "Report by Apostol Kolchev, Ambassador of the PRB in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: Regarding the Presentation made by Hoang Van Tien on 23 August 1972," 28 August 1972, p. 48, in AE 33, Op. 23p, AMVR; translated by Petia Draguieva. See also Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," p. 65.

154. "Gui anh Bay Cuong dong gui anh Muoi Khang, anh Tu Nguyen, anh Nam Cong, anh Hai Manh, anh Hoang, anh Bay Tien," in Le Duan, *Thu vao Nam* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1985), pp. 311–312; and Nguyen, "Between the Storms," p. 144.

155. Kissinger Cable to Kennedy (for Nixon), 25 November 1972, p. 1, in Camp David—Sensitive Vol. XXI (2), For the President's Files—Winston Lord, Vietnam Negotiations, Box 4, POW/MIA Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project (NPMP), College Park, Maryland; and DAPAO, "Note: Négociation vietnamienne," 5 December 1972, pp. 1–2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

156. "Thong tri cua Ban Bi thu, So 287-TT/TW, ngay 27 thang 11 nam 1972," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap, Tap 33,* pp. 407–409.

157. Moscow to Paris, 28 November 1972, p. 1, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

158. Kissinger Memorandum for Nixon, 4 December 1972, in Miscellaneous 1972, Haldeman Notes, Box 48, Staff Member and Office Files: H. R. Haldeman, White House Central Files, NPMP.

sixth change, concerning the demilitarized zone (DMZ). The language Kissinger proposed, Le Duc Tho argued, would make rotating and resupplying PAVN forces in the South problematic.[159] The language might also be read to suggest that the DMZ was a permanent and not a provisional demarcation line, one that separated two distinct political entities and thus formalized "the sovereignty of the Thieu administration over all of South Vietnam."[160] Hanoi supported Le Duc Tho's position. "We categorically refuse inclusion of the clause on the demilitarized zone" which gave the impression that the seventeenth parallel was something other than a provisional demarcation line between two regroupment zones created at the end of the war with France as stipulated in the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, the substance of which the current draft agreement purportedly recognized. In thus blurring the status of the DMZ, "the inclusion of it will significantly complicate things thereafter," Hanoi informed Le Duc Tho. "We cannot abandon this principle to end the war at all cost."[161] What good was an agreement allowing the continued presence of PAVN forces below the seventeenth parallel if those forces could not be maintained readily? The December negotiations foundered over this dispute. Hanoi was prepared to suspend the Anti-American Resistance but not to give up the revolution.

VWP leaders thus rejected a final concession to end the war. Time, they believed, was still on their side. The revolution would lose less if they prolonged the negotiations than if they agreed to the proffered terms on the DMZ. Evidently, they wanted language on the DMZ consistent with that in the Geneva agreement and ambiguous enough to exploit to their advantage later. Holding out for that was worth continuing the war. Besides, the new U.S. Congress that would be taking office in January was widely rumored to be at the point of refusing to fund the war and thereby compelling Nixon to end it. If that were the case, Nixon would have to accept a settlement placing fewer restraints on Hanoi and its forces in the South than he was now willing to accept. Hanoi might secure the withdrawal of foreign troops from the South in return for no more than a pledge to release U.S. POWs and to tolerate the Thieu regime for the time being. Should the new Congress fail to force Nixon's hand, Hanoi could agree to a settlement in another round of talks, with or without further concessions. Such temporizing also risked no compromising of Soviet and Chinese assistance, for the moment at least.[162] As for

159. See Asselin, *Bitter Peace,* pp. 130–139.

160. DAPAO, "Note: Indochine," 21 December 1972, p. 2, in No. 320, AO:VC, ADF.

161. Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Pari,* p. 375.

162. A Soviet–North Vietnamese agreement dated 26 November 1972 "permitted the transshipment of Soviet goods and 400 military personnel—a novelty—to North Vietnam." Ibid., p. 102.

the possibility of renewed bombing, which Kissinger told DRV negotiators was likely without an agreement by mid-December, VWP leaders decided to take that risk.

According to documents cited by Nguyen Khac Huynh, when Le Duc Tho returned to Hanoi in December 1972, he met with the rest of the VWP Politburo to discuss the DMZ issue. "I returned to Hanoi to present my point of view more effectively" because "communications were so difficult," he states in the documents. He suggested that the party concede on the DMZ because the issue "meant nothing" at this point. Le Duc Tho, one of the VWP's most powerful figures and uncompromising ideologues, was tiring of the war. According to the documents, he said that by the end of the discussion he "had succeeded in convincing the Political Bureau," but "when the Political Bureau approved our position, the United States began the [December] bombings," presumably before the approval was, or could be, communicated to Washington. The new bombardment nullified the prospects for an immediate agreement.[163] This sequence of events is not impossible, not even implausible. Le Duc Tho was a member of the ruling elite in Hanoi and as such "actively guided policy rather than merely executed orders."[164]

Whatever the truth of the matter, U.S. planes on 17 December again mined North Vietnamese ports and the next afternoon resumed bombing of the DRV for the explicit purpose of compelling Hanoi to sign a peace agreement. The bombing was overwhelming, numbing to its victims because of its intensity and destructiveness. Beijing and Moscow duly denounced the bombing, but neither was willing to alter its policies toward Washington to get it stopped. In fact, in what Hanoi considered an insult added to injury, Chinese and Soviet leaders both encouraged the VWP to resume negotiations.[165] According to French documents, the United States initiated "contacts at the highest levels with the Soviets" after the bombing commenced to get Moscow to "incite" Hanoi to manifest "greater flexibility" at the bargaining table if talks resumed.[166] Equally disappointing for Hanoi was the limited public outcry in the United States. By one account the socialist camp "saw no serious [domestic] opposition to the [U.S.] President's recent initiatives," in-

163. Nguyen Khach Huynh, "Les pourparlers de Paris 40 ans après," pp. 6–7. Huynh cites "dossiers personnel de l'auteur" (author's personal files).

164. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," p. 58.

165. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 244; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* p. 206; "Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Truong Chinh, Beijing, 31 December 1972," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,*" p. 185; and "Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho, Beijing, 3 January 1973," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 186.

166. DAPAO, "Note: Indochine," p. 2.

cluding among members of his political opposition.[167] According to another account, "American opinion generally remained remarkably passive in the face of ongoing massive bombardments of North Vietnam."[168] This combination of elements proved unbearable for Hanoi, which notified Washington on 26 December of its willingness to resume the Paris negotiations.[169]

In response, Nixon ceased the bombings, which had destroyed enough of North Vietnam's remaining industry, transport, and infrastructure to undo most of the economic progress made since 1969.[170] According to a Soviet diplomat, Hanoi by then seemed "struck in a vise becoming [so] continually tighter" that soon the DRV "would be a wasteland."[171] The destruction was such that it threatened the revolution itself, crippling the DRV's vital organs and with them the regime's ability to survive, to say nothing of building socialism in the North or sustaining the war in the South.[172] VWP leaders were "prepared to accept a certain dose of 'punishment,' but not the total destruction of the country."[173]

In these desperate circumstances, negotiating anything Washington was unwilling to concede would have been difficult. The scenario of easing present hardships, safeguarding long-term prospects of the revolution, and placating allies by signing an agreement with the enemy was one the VWP had followed in 1954 after eight years of war with France. In the view of those controlling the party in 1973, the earlier course of events had been counterproductive, and the results might not differ this time. But desperation was forcing their hand.

Within days of the resumption of negotiations in January 1973 the two sides reached agreement. Hanoi's pragmatism and its eagerness to conclude the negotiations and end the hostilities were evident in its willingness to make new concessions, including on the language concerning the status of the DMZ after the ceasefire. Historians have treated this last concession as little

167. Moscow to Paris, 29 December 1972, p. 2, in No. 117, AO:VC, ADF.

168. Washington to Paris, 29 December 1972, p. 1, in No. 133, AO:VC, ADF.

169. Turley, *Second Indochina War,* p. 194.

170. Ban dieu tra toi ac chien tranh cua de quoc My o Hai Phong, "Bao cao tong ket cong tac dieu tra to cao toi ac chien tranh cua de quoc My o thanh pho Hai-phong," 5 May 1973, pp. 4–6, Ho so: Bao cao cua Ban dieu tra Hai Phong, in VV, No. 112, Phong: Uy ban dieu tra toi ac chien tranh cua de quoc My o Viet Nam, VNAC3.

171. Moscow to Paris, 29 December 1972, p. 1.

172. As of the mid-1960s, the industrial sector contributed only $1.6 billion of the DRV's gross national product (less than 10 percent of the total) and employed fewer than 10 percent of the population, which was estimated to be 18 million at the time. See "Systems Analysis Paper," in *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decision-Making in Vietnam—Senator Gravel Edition,* 5 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), Vol. 4, pp. 227–228.

173. DAPAO, "Note," 5 May 1972, p. 3.

more than a "cosmetic" change to the October draft agreement (and the issue behind it as more or less trivial).[174] But the concession was arguably one of the most significant Hanoi made in the Paris negotiations. The agreed-upon language, if it had been strictly enforced, would have risked impeding the DRV's ability to resupply and rotate PAVN forces in the South and would have slowed national reunification by intimating that the seventeenth parallel was a political boundary separating two sovereign states, a premise Hanoi had always rejected as inconsistent with the letter of the 1954 Geneva Accords. The goals of liberating the South and completing the revolution, neither of which Hanoi renounced in signing the Paris agreement, hinged on the ability of PAVN forces to resume armed struggle when conditions permitted. That largely explains the party's insistence on the issue. The VWP's stance was formulated in January 1973, before leaders in Hanoi had even begun to hope that Nixon would be forced to resign because of the Watergate scandal or that collapse of the Saigon regime would be as swift and total as it was in 1975.

Hanoi also now agreed to link the release of political prisoners in the South, a matter of importance to the PRG, to the reduction of PAVN forces there. Finally, the DRV agreed that U.S. advisers could remain in the South after the ceasefire. The presence of those advisers, though residual, symbolized the right of the United States to continue to support the Saigon regime. Hanoi's acceptance of this presence signaled its acquiescence in that right—another major substantive concession.[175] As recently as the preceding August, Deputy Foreign Minister Tien had declared that "the ceasefire can be guaranteed only with the total withdrawal of all American troops from South Vietnam and termination of all interference and participation in Vietnam from the side of the USA, as well as termination of all support whatsoever of the Saigon regime."[176] "Since the Hanoi Politburo's aim from the summer of 1972 had been to settle an agreement without further damage to their war effort," Nguyen writes, the events of December 1972 and January 1973 were "a horrendous testament to the failure of that goal."[177] In return for these and other, lesser concessions, Hanoi secured among other things the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from the South within 60 days and the end of attacks on the North. Once U.S. forces pulled out, Hanoi would lessen its dependency on

174. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975,* 4th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), p. 317; Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 159; and McMahon, *Limits of Empire,* p. 169.

175. On the January round of talks, see Asselin, *Bitter Peace,* 157–166.

176. "Report by Apostol Kolchev, Ambassador of the PRB in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: Regarding Information Obtained about the Results of the Secret Talks in Paris," p. 52.

177. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," pp. 149–150.

allies.[178] In light of the recent behavior of those allies, this marked an important diplomatic victory, albeit a pyrrhic one considering the aims of the diplomatic struggle originally outlined in the Anti-American Resistance.[179]

Epilogue

Hanoi publicly hailed the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam as a "great victory."[180] This declaration concealed a gloom so deep that Le Duan worried public celebration of the agreement (and thus of the end of the resistance) might "give rise to euphoria among the people" that would "cause them to forget about the difficulties [that lie ahead] and prevent them from fully grasping the situation."[181] During a private meeting with the editorial staff of the VWP newspaper *Nhan dan* on 24 February 1973, Le Duan remarked that "the end of the war [against the United States] and the great victory should have brought happiness, but that is not so for me" because the situation in both halves of Vietnam remained "very complicated." "There are vacillations among us," he added, alluding to the concern of some in the VWP who thought Hanoi should have rejected the negotiated solution and continued fighting instead. "If we fail to build on the potential of this victory," he argued, "the situation will be quite complicated," and "there will be no victory" because "the situation will evolve differently."[182] The First Secretary recognized that the peace agreement fell far short of the party's and his own aspirations and that its provisions, if fully implemented, would likely compromise the revolution. Pham Van Dong similarly acknowledged the shortcomings of the agreement and thus of the diplomatic struggle and the resistance generally, declaring before the National Assembly in late February that "the Paris Agreement is a confirmation of the real situation in South Vietnam with the existence of two administrations, two armed forces, two zones of control, and three political factions."[183] According to an assessment by the

178. As long as the war continued, the DRV "would find itself increasingly beholden to China for its material and food supplies," French diplomats in China reported in May 1972. See Beijing to Paris, 13 May 1972, p. 2, in No. 145, AO:VC, ADF.

179. Nguyen asserts that Hanoi signed the Paris agreement "because [it] believed that the Sino-Vietnamese alliance would no longer hold out." See Nguyen, "Sino-Vietnamese Split," p. 24.

180. Dang lao dong Viet Nam, *Loi goi cua Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang lao dong Viet Nam va Chinh phu* (Hanoi: Nha xuat ban Su that, 1973), pp. 10, 12, 14; *Nhan dan,* 28 January 1973; and Bo Ngoai giao nuoc Viet Nam Dan chu Cong hoa, *Hiep dinh ve cham dut chien tranh lap lai hoa binh o Viet Nam* (Hanoi: Vu thong tin bao chi, 1973), p. 5.

181. Le Duan is quoted in Luu Doan Huynh, "Perspective of a Vietnamese Witness," p. 92.

182. Excerpts from Le Duan's talk are quoted in Luu Doan Huynh, "Paris Agreement," pp. 93–94.

183. "Le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire de la République du Sud-Vietnam vu de Hanoï," p. 7.

French embassy, "all the efforts made on the ground by 'Revolutionary Forces' and elsewhere by DRV and PRG negotiators—fused in one camp—to eliminate President Thieu and dismantle the South Vietnamese apparatus have not been crowned with success." Thus, "an uneven struggle of more than fifteen years" had "ended for Hanoi" with "the withdrawal of American forces" and "the recognition of its protégé [the NLF/PRG] as a party to an international accord." "Relative to initial objectives," the assessment concluded, "this result can seem quite meager."[184]

The agreement was not just a piece of paper signed by Hanoi to get U.S. troops out of Vietnam; it was much more than that. Like the 1954 Geneva Accords, the 1973 agreement was a distasteful product of necessity mandated by the shortcomings of revolutionary struggle. The parallel imperatives to "preserve the fruits of the revolution" already won, to sustain relations with socialist allies, and to retain international support for the continuing revolution—all of these now seemed to be threatened.[185] To be sure, matters potentially could be rectified after U.S. troops left. The Vietnamese Communists had accepted and generally respected the 1954 Geneva Accords because they thought they could use them for their own purposes.[186] The same might be done with the Paris agreement. In the meantime, the agreement solved a range of immediate problems facing Hanoi. It also expedited the collapse of the Saigon regime and the reunification of the nation, in April 1975, by compelling South Vietnamese forces to fend for themselves and leaving them more vulnerable.

Nevertheless, the Paris agreement also created daunting challenges. Its provisions reflected the limitations of a revolutionary strategy dictated for too long by a narrow ideology. The agreement made a mockery of the leadership's self-assigned obligations to world revolution that had precluded dialogue and compromise from the onset of war. Once those obligations were discarded out of self-interest, party leaders were in a position to do what pragmatism demanded of them: take the best deal they could get under the circumstances to preserve existing gains and improve the long-term prospects of the revolution. According to one account, Le Duan was "intoxicated" throughout the war with his goal of prevailing in every mode of struggle and thus of meeting revolutionary objectives expeditiously.[187] Cumulative military, political, and diplomatic setbacks thwarted that goal, and the Paris agreement exploded it. The

184. Ibid., p. 6.

185. Editorial, *Nhan dan,* 28 January 1973, quoted in Luu Doan Huynh, "Paris Agreement," p. 93.

186. On this, see Pierre Asselin, "Choosing Peace: Hanoi and the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, 1954–1955," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 95–126.

187. McNamara, Blight, and Brigham, *Argument without End,* p. 183.

agreement attested to the merits of flexibility, of the art-of-the-possible—precisely what Le Duan and his acolytes had condemned and punished as "rightist deviationism" during the 1967–1968 Anti-Party Affair.

Accepting the Paris agreement thus undermined the leaders' credibility as well as their Marxist-Leninist dogma. National reunification could now come about only by working with the Saigon regime within the framework of the agreement or resuming armed struggle in defiance of it. Because the former option might well be futile and Saigon at once began its own violations of the ceasefire agreement, DRV leaders opted for the second. In the ensuing turmoil, the victory of Communist forces was swift and total. But the political cost of the victory, domestically and internationally, was unexpected—in Hanoi—and exorbitant. To achieve victory, Hanoi had to violate the Paris agreement, an internationally approved treaty for which Kissinger and Le Duc Tho jointly received the Nobel Peace Prize. The failure to honor the agreement, which Washington had done at least to the extent of not reengaging its forces in the conflict, invalidated the image the DRV had cultivated for more than a decade of itself as an embattled victim of foreign aggression seeking only national independence and peace. The premise on which Hanoi had publicly promoted the Vietnamese revolution and the Anti-American Resistance—to liberate the nation by defeating foreign aggression—was discredited by the resumption of large-scale hostilities in the new context.

The VWP lost sympathy within the country as the hostilities involved Vietnamese again killing Vietnamese in renewed civil war. Hanoi thus assumed the role of victimizer, implacably pursuing hegemonic goals—or, in the words of Sophie Quinn-Judge, of "an inherently expansionist power."[188] This posture antagonized Chinese leaders, who favored an extended lull before Hanoi tried to force Vietnamese reunification under its own aegis. "The world is now in a state of chaos," Zhou Enlai told VWP leaders in June 1973. "In the period after the Paris Agreement, the Indochinese countries should take time to relax and build their forces. During the next 5 to 10 years," he added, "South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia should build peace, independence, and neutrality. In short, we have to play for time and prepare for a protracted struggle."[189] Hanoi's decision to resume hostilities almost immediately,

188. Christopher E. Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War and the Meltdown of Asian Internationalism," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, eds., *Third Indochina War,* pp. 152–186; William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 197–198; and Sophie Quinn-Judge, "Victory on the Battlefield; Isolation in Asia: Vietnam's Cambodia Decade, 1979–1989," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, eds., *Third Indochina War,* p. 207.

189. "Zhou Enlai and Le Duan, Pham Van Dong and Le Thanh Nghi, Beijing, 5 June 1973," in Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations,* p. 185.

rather than heeding Zhou's timetable, contributed greatly to the precipitous deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations thereafter.

Vietnamese leaders later blamed Beijing for pressuring them into accepting the Paris agreement.[190] But the strategic and tactical limitations of Hanoi's military and diplomatic struggles, combined with unrealistic expectations about the potency of proletarian internationalism, played a larger role. Especially significant was the underestimation of the U.S. government's determination to achieve "peace with honor" and of the Chinese and Soviet authorities to subsume international interests under national concerns. Beijing's apparent perfidy during the final stages of the war was just that—apparent, existing largely in the minds of the Vietnamese. Even though Chinese leaders hoped by 1971–1972 that the war would end promptly, their support for Vietnam changed in no meaningful way. "Although the PRC secretly advised the DRV to aim for a realistic negotiated outcome in Paris," Lüthi observes, Beijing "stood publicly behind Hanoi's maximalist strategy and committed vast military and economic resources" to support that strategy.[191]

After launching the Anti-American Resistance, Hanoi used diplomacy in conjunction with military and political struggle to pursue unmitigated triumph. The unsatisfactory results of that strategy, predicated on the strength of socialist internationalism, prompted VWP leaders to abandon their dogmatic inflexibility and become more pragmatic in decision-making. Most notably, they agreed to broaden and diversify their diplomatic struggle by accepting peace talks, then substantive negotiations, and, finally, a compromise settlement with the United States. That settlement abrogated the triumph they had envisaged but preserved existing gains and created conditions for a swift, albeit problematic, victory later.

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190. *Su that ve quan he Viet Nam,* pp. 59–60.

191. Lüthi, "Beyond Betrayal," p. 73.