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Breaking the Ring of Encirclement

The Sino-Soviet Rift and Chinese Policy toward Vietnam, 1964–1968

❖ Nicholas Khoo

Introduction

The “secret speech” delivered by Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), at the CPSU’s Twentieth Congress in February 1956 was viewed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a serious error.¹ The disagreements that emerged between Moscow and Beijing on this issue ushered in an extended period in which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union actively competed for influence both inside and outside the Communist world.² Perhaps the most significant consequence of their rivalry was the de facto termination of the Sino-Soviet alliance, a development that altered global and regional power relations.³

How did the failure of the Sino-Soviet alliance affect the triangular relationship between the Chinese, Soviet, and Vietnamese Communist parties

1. A discussion of Mao’s immediate reaction to Khrushchev’s speech can be found in Yang Kuisong, *Mao Zedong yu Mosike de enen yuanyuan* (Jiangxi, China: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 371–400. See also, Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 1, *Contradictions among the People 1956–57* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 39–56. For an analysis of the escalating Sino-Soviet conflict before the de facto termination of the alliance, see Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956–61* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962).

2. For contemporary analysis of the escalating Sino-Soviet conflict after the de facto termination of the alliance, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 397–432. For a relatively recent analysis by Chinese analysts, see Li Danhui, ed. *Beijing yu Mosike: Cong lianmeng zouxiang duikang* (Guilin, China: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2002). See also Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

3. Kenneth Waltz takes a different view. He argues that “the defection of China from the WTO (Warsaw Treaty Organization) failed even to tilt the central balance” during the Cold War. See Kenneth Waltz, “Intimations of Multipolarity,” in Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin, eds., *The New World Order* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 2000), p. 4. See also Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Poli-*

during the initial years of the Vietnam War, from 1964 to 1968? Drawing mainly on Chinese sources and to a lesser extent on translated Russian and Vietnamese sources, this article reconstructs and explains the dynamics of Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese relations. I argue that the failure of the Sino-Soviet alliance and escalation of Sino-Soviet conflict had ripple effects on Beijing's and Moscow's relations with Hanoi. A significant consequence of the escalating Sino-Soviet conflict was an increase in Soviet–North Vietnamese cooperation, which then led to an increase in Sino–North Vietnamese conflict.⁴

This article investigates the period from October 1964 to May 1968, which coincided roughly with the escalation of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam and the increasingly aggressive Sino-Soviet competition for influence in North Vietnam. After the failure of Zhou Enlai's trip to Moscow in November 1964, the Sino-Soviet conflict intensified.⁵ Zhou and Mao Zedong sought to prevent North Vietnam from becoming another component in what they perceived to be the U.S. and Soviet encirclement of the PRC.⁶ Soviet leaders, for their part, felt compelled to make up ground lost to Beijing during the last few years under Khrushchev, who was replaced as leader of the CPSU by Leonid Brezhnev in October 1964.⁷ As the Vietnam War progressed, Soviet–North Vietnamese economic, diplomatic, and military cooperation increased. The PRC's dissatisfaction with close Soviet–North Vietnamese relations led to an increase in Sino–North Vietnamese conflict.

The article provides a detailed analysis showing that the Sino-Soviet rift in 1964–1968 was the fundamental cause of cracks in the Sino–North Viet-

tics (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 169. China was only an observer in the Warsaw Pact, never a full member as Waltz asserts.

4. Conversely, when Sino-Soviet conflict decreased in the mid-1980s, the twin result was a decrease in Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation and a decrease in Sino-Vietnamese conflict.

5. Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu waijiaoshi yanjiushe, *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949–1975* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 427–429.

6. The United States had an extensive alliance network in Asia throughout this period. In addition to the regional Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the U.S. triangular defense agreement with Australia and New Zealand known as ANZUS, the United States maintained numerous bilateral alliances with such states as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Pakistan, South Korea, South Vietnam, Taiwan, and Thailand. The Soviet Union began to develop a close relationship with India in the late 1950s and signed a mutual assistance treaty with New Delhi in 1971. The USSR also tightened its military relationship with North Vietnam after Khrushchev's fall, maintained a bilateral arrangement with North Korea, and signed an alliance treaty with Mongolia in January 1966, stationing Soviet troops on the Sino-Mongolian border. These troops represented a threat to China's industrial northeastern region. See Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

7. Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 200–201, 205–211; King Chen, "North Vietnam in the Sino-Soviet Dispute," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (1964), pp. 1023–1036; and Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–75* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 122–128.

namese alliance—cracks that manifested themselves more fully in the period right after the Vietnam War. By focusing on this issue, the article differs from other recent works on Beijing's relations with Moscow and Hanoi. These studies acknowledge the role of the Soviet Union in China's relations with North Vietnam but do not give it sufficient weight.⁸ The authors argue either that the Soviet Union's role should be seen as only one of many factors affecting Sino–North Vietnamese relations⁹ or that Mao's commitment to promoting continuous revolution in China was the core issue influencing the trajectory of Sino–North Vietnamese relations.¹⁰

In highlighting the Soviet Union's role, I examine a number of alternative explanations for Sino–North Vietnamese conflict during this period, including the possibility that it resulted from differences over bilateral issues such as military strategy,¹¹ negotiations with Washington,¹² and competition over Laos.¹³ Differences on these matters certainly did exist, but explanations that focus on bilateral Sino–North Vietnamese issues minimize the critical influence of the Beijing-Hanoi-Moscow triangle. Focusing on the Soviet Union allows us to understand why Hanoi was able to adopt positions that diverged from Chinese preferences from 1964 to 1968, leading to an increase in Sino–North Vietnamese conflict. An analysis of the role of the Laos issue in Sino–North Vietnamese relations from 1961 to 1968 shows that the critical variable explaining Sino–North Vietnamese conflict was not bilateral concerns but Sino-Soviet relations.

This article is not specifically concerned with the admittedly important question of how the PRC and the Soviet Union viewed the U.S. role in Vietnam. Nor does it deal with the efforts by Chinese and Soviet leaders to use the Vietnam War to establish their revolutionary credentials with Third World governments. Instead, the article discusses how the Sino-Soviet conflict affected Beijing's and Moscow's relations with Hanoi from 1964 to 1968 and how this led to increasing Sino–North Vietnamese conflict.

8. Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 211, 236; and Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 146–151.

9. Qiang Zhai lists four factors as important in explaining China's decision to aid the North Vietnamese: "Mao's decision to aid Hanoi is closely linked to his perception of the U.S. threats to China's security, his commitment to national liberation movements, his criticism of Soviet revisionist foreign policy and his domestic needs to transform Chinese state and society." See Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 139–140.

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

11. Eugene Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict* (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 79–111.

12. Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, pp. 200–216; and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 155–175.

13. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 120–122, 180–181.

Primary Adversaries in the PRC's Foreign Policy

Events in the late 1960s and early 1970s that led to the Sino-American rapprochement are rightly seen as a watershed in PRC foreign policy.¹⁴ But an equally important turning point came in the mid-1960s when the Soviet Union replaced the United States as China's primary adversary. In mid-June 1965, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai commented that the main threat to the PRC was posed by the Americans, who, he said, were continuing their attempt, which began with the Korean War, to encircle China. According to Zhou, "they [the Americans] now come back again from Vietnam. Our assistance to Vietnam is to break the ring of encirclement and defend the country."¹⁵ Just a year later, however, the state deemed as the greatest threat to China had begun to change from the United States to the Soviet Union. To the north of China, the signing of the Soviet-Mongolian treaty in January 1966 was followed by the deployment of Soviet troops along the Sino-Mongolian border.¹⁶ Meanwhile, to the south of China, the Soviet Union was beginning to increase its influence in Hanoi following the change in Soviet policy toward North Vietnam that occurred with the escalation of conflict between the United States and the Vietnamese Communists in late 1964.¹⁷

China's identification of the Soviet Union as its "primary adversary" created serious fissures in Chinese relations with the Vietnamese Communists.¹⁸ In the short term, specifically during the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1964–1968, the main "winner" from the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations was the Vietnamese Communists. In the longer term, however, the North Vietnamese paid for these gains via the structural damage inflicted on the Sino–North Vietnamese alliance. The alliance eventually collapsed in 1978, an act that precipitated the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979.¹⁹

14. John W. Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968–1971* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982). For a more recent examination of this topic, see Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961–74* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Nicholas Khoo, "Realism Redux: Investigating the Causes and Effects of Sino-U.S. Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (November 2005), pp. 531–551.

15. Wang Xiangen, *Zhongguo bimi dafabing: Yuan Yue kang Mei shilu* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1990), p. 161

16. Sergey Radchenko, "The Soviets' Best Friend in Asia: The Mongolian Dimension of the Sino-Soviet Split," CWIHP Working Paper No. 42, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 2003.

17. Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 17–21.

18. For a useful discussion of China's conception of the Soviet Union as the "primary adversary," see Robert Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China's Vietnam Policy 1975–1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 9.

19. For a recent reassessment of the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979, see Zhang Xiaoming,

Other scholars have also asserted that the Sino-Soviet rivalry is the key to understanding developments in the Beijing-Hanoi alliance during the Vietnam War era and beyond. In 1970, Peter Van Ness argued that Chinese policy toward any particular state during the Cold War was a function of that state's relationship with what the PRC regarded as its "major enemy."²⁰ Douglas Pike has observed that "the touchstone for Chinese policy throughout [the Vietnam War] was the Sino-Soviet dispute. If forced to choose between the war and its own interests in the dispute, it invariably chose the latter."²¹ Similarly, Robert Ross's study of Sino-Vietnamese relations in the post-1975 period focuses on "the role of the primary adversary in Chinese bilateral relations with third parties."²² The analysis presented here draws on newly released Chinese sources to advance a theory of Chinese foreign policy under the structural condition of Cold War bipolarity.²³ The article aims to refine and add depth to the existing literature on primary adversaries in PRC foreign policy by systematically showing, with the use of new empirical evidence, how this concept can be applied to China's relations with the Soviet Union and Vietnam in 1964–1968. The article shows that the explanation used here, emphasizing shifts in Chinese perceptions of the primary adversary, is superior to explanations that focus only on bilateral relations between Beijing and Hanoi.

A number of recent studies of Chinese foreign policy in general, and of triangular Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese relations in particular, have made significant empirical contributions. Scholars such as Chen Jian and Qiang Zhai have produced books and articles that greatly illuminate Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War. Their thorough use of primary Chinese-language materials is particularly valuable. However, these scholars have not been as convincing when dealing with theoretical issues. For example, Zhai posits that the deterioration of Sino–North Vietnamese alliance relations during the Vietnam War can be characterized as an instance of Glenn Snyder's theory of an alliance security dilemma.²⁴ However, he limits his discussion of this theory to just two pages in the concluding chapter, giving him insufficient space

"China's 1979 War with Vietnam: A Reassessment," *China Quarterly*, No. 184 (December 2005), pp. 851–874.

20. Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 63.

21. Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 88.

22. Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, p. 9.

23. For further discussion of the approach to causality adopted in this article, see E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 113–143; and Steven Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 7–48.

24. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 218–219.

to amplify the workings of the alliance security dilemma. Moreover, Zhai's account posits multiple hypotheses at various levels of analysis to explain Beijing's relations with the Vietnamese Communists. In the conclusion to his study of Sino–North Vietnamese relations from 1950 to 1975, Zhai argues that variables at the individual, domestic, and international levels help to explain Chinese foreign policy. In this account, factors at all levels appear to be of approximately equal importance. Zhai stresses “the centrality of Mao's ideas, visions and aspirations” but also emphasizes “Mao's preoccupation with the Soviet factor in the making of China's foreign policy” and the “close linkage between Mao's domestic politics and international policy.”²⁵ The discussion here attempts to distinguish between these levels in order to highlight the main explanatory variable in Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Chen Jian's account of the dynamics of the Sino–North Vietnamese alliance also does not deal clearly with theoretical questions. When explaining why the Sino–North Vietnamese alliance collapsed, Chen argues, “one may refer to the escalating Sino-Soviet confrontation, which made the maintenance of solidarity between Beijing and Hanoi extremely difficult.”²⁶ However, he finds another factor more convincing as an explanation for changes in Sino–North Vietnamese relations:

A more fundamental reason can be found in the logic of China's foreign policy and security strategy. . . . China's foreign policy was always an integral part of Mao's continuous revolution, which aimed to promote the revolutionary transformation of China's “old” state and society and to pursue new China's central (not dominant) position in the international community. Beijing's support of Hanoi had a critical connection to Mao's desire to use the tensions caused by the crisis in Vietnam to stimulate the mass mobilization that was essential for the Cultural Revolution and to establish revolutionary China's influence and reputation in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. When Beijing tried to carry out a Vietnam policy designed with these goals in mind, it immediately encountered a paradox.²⁷

In contrast to Chen's explanation, the evidence presented here suggests that once Beijing identified Moscow as its primary adversary, developments in Sino-Soviet relations became the most critical factor shaping Sino–North Vietnamese relations. Regardless of Mao's domestic goals, the deterioration of Sino–North Vietnamese relations would have been kept in check had it not been for the Soviet factor. Although Chen does note the impact of the Sino-

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 221–222.

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

27. *Ibid.*

Soviet factor in Sino–North Vietnamese relations, his “continuous revolution” thesis minimizes the importance of this alternative explanation for the breakdown of the Sino–North Vietnamese alliance.

Thus, invaluable as Zhai’s and Chen’s studies may be as empirical investigations, they are not as illuminating on theoretical issues. This article seeks to add to our understanding of China’s Cold War relationships with the Soviet Union and North Vietnam by using empirical evidence to develop a distinct causal explanation involving triangular relations between China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam.

Khrushchev’s Removal, the New Soviet Leaders, and China’s Bomb

The U.S. assumption of a more active military role in Vietnam put the spotlight on the Communist camp. A unified response was far from assured. The PRC was engaged in a bitter rhetorical dispute with the Soviet Union, issuing a string of nine polemics from 6 September 1963 to 14 July 1964.²⁸ Far from serving as a stimulus for greater Sino-Soviet cooperation, the escalating war in Vietnam spurred Beijing and Moscow to compete for Hanoi’s loyalty throughout the 1964–1968 period. Two events occurred in mid-October 1964 that set the stage for an escalation of Sino-Soviet conflict during Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai’s trip to Moscow the following month. The first, on 14 October, was the sudden ouster of Khrushchev, whose successor, Leonid Brezhnev, tried briefly to smooth over relations with China. When that effort failed, the new Soviet leaders stepped up the conflict with the PRC. The second key event, on 16 October, was the successful Chinese test of a nuclear bomb.

Scholars have reached different conclusions about the role of the Sino-Soviet conflict in Khrushchev’s fall. In an extensive study of Soviet domestic and foreign policy written in 1974, Adam Ulam observed that although domestic political factors were cited by Khrushchev’s successors as the reasons for his removal, foreign policy failures, including the split with China, probably played some role in the move against Khrushchev.²⁹ A 1991 study that makes use of Russian sources, including some memoirs of Soviet officials in-

28. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 127; and Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 3, *The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961–1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 360–364.

29. Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–73* (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 630, 693–694.

volved in the plot to overthrow Khrushchev, reaches a similar conclusion.³⁰ In contrast, scholars who have written about this topic more recently, using archival documents from a crucial meeting of the CPSU Presidium on 13 October 1964, argue that although some criticism was voiced about Khrushchev's policy toward China, the rift with Beijing was not explicitly mentioned as a reason for his ouster.³¹

Whatever the specific reasons for Khrushchev's forced resignation and the role of the China issue in it, his ouster provided an opportunity to review Sino-Soviet relations.³² On this issue, the evidence suggests that high-level opinion in Moscow varied. Some Soviet officials, such as Yurii Andropov, the head of the CPSU department overseeing ties with Communist countries, were skeptical about improving relations. Others were initially interested in at least a limited rapprochement with Beijing.³³ Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin was among those who hoped to rectify the Sino-Soviet split, noting: "We are Communists and they are Communists. It is hard to believe we will not be able to reach an agreement if we meet face to face."³⁴ Others, such as Brezhnev, did not take an immediate stance.³⁵

Mao had a radically different perspective on bilateral relations. He sought either a total Soviet surrender in the Sino-Soviet dispute or, failing that, a cessation of ties between the CPSU and CCP.³⁶ Essentially, Mao wanted leadership of the Communist bloc. If he could not achieve that goal, he would wreck the Sino-Soviet relationship.³⁷ In this respect, his perspective was consistent with the idea that institutions are a power resource that generates benefits for those who control them.³⁸

Chinese sources that were released in the 1990s allow us to reconstruct in greater detail Beijing's response to Khrushchev's fall. On the night of 14 Octo-

30. William J. Tompson "The Fall of Nikita Khrushchev," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 6. (1991), pp. 1101–1121.

31. Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 285–286.

32. See also William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason eds., *Nikita Khrushchev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

33. Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, pp. 288–296. For discussion of other Soviet elites who favored an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, see Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 197.

34. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 195.

35. Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, p. 288.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 285, 352.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

38. Edward Mansfield, "International Institutions and Economic Sanctions," *World Politics*, Vol. 47 No. 4 (July 1995), p. 600.

ber, the Soviet ambassador in Beijing, Stepan Chervonenko, contacted the CCP General Office. Yang Shangkun, director of the Sino-Soviet department, ordered Wu Xiuquan, a Soviet expert who was fluent in Russian and was serving as deputy head of the International Liaison Department, to meet the Soviet ambassador.³⁹ Ambassador Chervonenko informed Wu that a triumvirate consisting of Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Nikolai Podgornyi had taken over from Khrushchev.⁴⁰

From 15 October through 4 November, high-level Chinese meetings were convened daily to discuss the appropriate Chinese response to Khrushchev's fall, which was described by one of the participants in these discussions as an "earth-shaking" event.⁴¹ Although we do not know precisely when Mao summed up the discussion, we know that he did so by proposing three possible interpretations of the new Soviet leaders.⁴² The first was that they had abandoned revisionism and returned to Marxism-Leninism. In Mao's view, this was unlikely. Second, the new Soviet leaders might turn out to be even worse than Khrushchev. This he also deemed unlikely. Sino-Soviet relations, Mao argued, were already so bad that it was difficult to envision a further deterioration. He noted that the Soviet Union had already declared its intention to convene a conference of Communist states in December 1964 that would expel China from the socialist camp. Mao also believed that numerous other possible Soviet actions—the termination of state-to-state relations with China, the abolition of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty, or a war between the two states—were unlikely. In his view, a worsening of Sino-Soviet relations was not impossible (*bushi meiyou keneng*) but was unlikely (*zai muqian qingkuangxia, zhezhong kenengxing bijiao xiao*).⁴³ The third possibility was that Soviet leaders would stick with revisionism but would change their tactics somewhat. Of the three possibilities, Mao felt that the third was the most likely. He proposed that Zhou Enlai lead a delegation to Moscow for the 47th anniversary of the October Revolution to assess the new Soviet leaders.⁴⁴ On 28 October, Zhou formally conveyed Mao's idea to Ambassador Chervo-

39. Wu Xiuquan, *Huiyi yu huainian* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1991), pp. 374–376.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

41. Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan, 1956–1966*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), Vol. 2, pp. 833, 839; and Sun Qimin, *Zhong Su guanxi shimo* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1998), p. 536.

42. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, Vol. 2, p. 838.

43. *Ibid.*

44. On Chinese deliberations after Khrushchev's fall and Mao's proposal regarding the trip, see *ibid.*, pp. 833–840; and Xu Xiaotian et al., *Xin Zhongguo yu Sulian de gaoceng wanglai* (Xia) (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 2001), pp. 696–706.

nenko.⁴⁵ The CPSU Presidium was enthusiastic about a Chinese visit, which was interpreted as “a show of support for the post-Khrushchev leadership” and a way “to use Khrushchev as a scapegoat for past conflicts.”⁴⁶ Subsequently, on 31 October, Chervonenko was given instructions to extend an official invitation to the CCP.⁴⁷

As these events unfolded, a significant development occurred in China’s strategic nuclear weapons program. On 16 October 1964, the Chinese successfully tested a nuclear bomb. The test heralded a more confident China that would compete with its former ally not just in the ideological realm but also in the military sphere. The acquisition of nuclear weapons was a long-standing PRC goal.⁴⁸ In April 1956, two months after Khrushchev’s denunciation of Iosif Stalin at the Twentieth CPSU Congress, Mao reaffirmed a January 1955 decision to develop nuclear weapons,⁴⁹ pointing out that “if we are not to be bullied in the present-day world, we cannot do without the bomb.”⁵⁰ Mao’s concerns were both confirmed and heightened by the signing on 25 July 1963 of the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) by the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom.⁵¹ If Mao had signed the treaty, it would have effectively stymied China’s quest for nuclear capabilities. According to Wu Xiuquan, then deputy director of the CCP International Liaison department, the Chinese believed the treaty was intended for this purpose.⁵²

Mao’s aversion to the LTBT made a successful nuclear test a strategic ne-

45. Lüthi., *Sino-Soviet Split*, p. 287.

46. This view is expressed by Oleg Troyanovskii, the final Soviet ambassador to the PRC. See *ibid.*, p. 288.

47. *Ibid.*

48. See William Harris, “Chinese Nuclear Doctrine: The Decade Prior to Weapons Development, 1945–55,” *China Quarterly*, No. 21 (January–March 1965), pp. 87–95; Jonathan Pollack, “Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons, 1964–9,” *China Quarterly*, No. 50 (April–June 1972), pp. 244–271; and Zhang Shuguang, “Between ‘Paper’ and Real Tigers: Mao’s View of Nuclear Weapons,” in John Lewis Gaddis et al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 194–215.

49. John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 38–39.

50. “On the Ten Major Relationships,” 25 April 1956, in Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), Vol. 5, p. 288. Speaking in 1983, Deng Xiaoping commented that China’s possession of a nuclear deterrent “had forced the superpowers not to use nuclear weapons against China.” He further noted that “China only wants to adhere to [this] principle: we [must] have what others have, and anyone who wants to destroy us must be subject to retaliation.” See John Lewis and Xue Litai, *China’s Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization in the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 233.

51. On 20 July 1963, the same day a tentative agreement was reached on the LTBT, the Sino-Soviet negotiations in Moscow, which had started on 6 July 1963, were terminated. See Gordon Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948–1972* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 246; and MacFarquhar, *Origins*, Vol. 3, pp. 357–358.

52. Wu, *Huiyi yu huainian*, p. 372.

cessity.⁵³ He regarded nuclear weapons as the offensive component of Chinese defense policy and the so-called Third Line (*san xian*) or Third Front as the defensive component.⁵⁴ The Third Front was approved by Mao on 12 August 1964, just days after the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁵⁵ China's development of nuclear weapons deepened the Sino-Soviet rift. The nuclear issue had been a point of contention even when China and the Soviet Union were allies. Chinese scholar Shen Zhihua has emphasized disputes over the transfer of nuclear technology as the most important cause of the split.⁵⁶ A retired Soviet military officer Victor Gobarev has argued that "one of the principal causes of the [Sino-Soviet] split was China's insistence on pursuing their nuclear weapons program at any cost."⁵⁷ Soviet leaders became progressively nervous about what a nuclear-armed China might do with such a capability. According to Mikhail Kapitsa, a former Soviet deputy foreign minister and expert on China, Mao's seemingly blasé attitude toward possible American use of nuclear weapons against China during the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958 greatly disturbed Moscow. Kapitsa reports that Soviet leaders viewed Mao as someone who was "too irresponsible for the possession of the ultimate weapon."⁵⁸ This conclusion spurred Moscow to terminate its October 1957 nuclear technology-sharing agreement in June 1959.⁵⁹

The PRC's acquisition of nuclear weapons after the breakdown of the al-

53. Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, ch. 8. On Hanoi's positive response to the Chinese test, see Guo Ming et al., eds., *Xiandai Zhong Yue guanxi ziliao xuanbian: 1949–1978* (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 1986), pp. 664–667.

54. The Third Front was an attempt from 1964 to 1971 to develop a self-sufficient industrial base in the remote southwest and western regions of China. See Lorenz Lüthi, "The Vietnam War and China's Third-Line Defense Planning before the Cultural Revolution, 1964–1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter 2008), pp. 26–51. Li Danhui and Barry Naughton emphasize the superpower condominium as a reason for the Third Line but differ about the relative weight that China assigned to each state in the construction of the Third Line. Li argues that as early as June 1964 the threat from the USSR was greater than from the United States. See Li Danhui, "Zhong Guo guanxi yu Zhongguo de yuan Yue kang Mei," *Dangdai zhongguo shi yanjiu*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (1998), p. 115. Naughton avers that the perceived threat from each superpower was about equal until the signing of the Soviet-Mongolian treaty in 1966, when the Soviet threat was seen as more serious. Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *China Quarterly*, No. 115 (September 1988), pp. 351–386.

55. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 132, 141–142.

56. Lyle Goldstein, "Do Nascent WMD Arsenals Deter? The Sino-Soviet Crisis of 1969," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 53–79, esp. 57.

57. Victor Gobarev, "Soviet Policy toward China: Developing Nuclear Weapons 1949–1969," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 1999), pp. 1–53, esp. 31.

58. Mikhail S. Kapitsa, *Na raznykh paralelyakh-zapisi diplomatov* (Moscow: Kniga i Biznes, 1996), p. 63; quoted in Goldstein, "Do Nascent WMD Arsenals Deter?" p. 57.

59. William E. Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964), p. 18. The nuclear technology-sharing agreement was signed just weeks before the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in November 1957. Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 2, *The Great Leap Forward 1958–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 11–15.

liance appears to have given Chinese policymakers greater confidence that they could engage in provocations at the conventional level.⁶⁰ A relatively recent Chinese study of the Sino-Soviet Cold War relationship points out that the state of Sino-Soviet border ties reflected trends in the general relationship.⁶¹ As the Sino-Soviet split intensified, the number of border clashes increased from 1,000 in the January 1960–October 1964 period, to 4,189 from October 1964 through March 1969.⁶² Indeed, Beijing initiated the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict even though (or perhaps because) both sides were confirmed nuclear states.⁶³

Zhou's Moscow Trip

From 5 to 13 November 1964, Zhou Enlai, accompanied by Marshal He Long, Kang Sheng, and Wu Xiuquan, visited Moscow with a delegation of 50–60 people.⁶⁴ The Chinese chose to send representatives who had not played a particularly controversial role in the dispute. Thus, Foreign Minister Chen Yi did not make the trip.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, in a not-so-subtle message to Moscow, on the same day that Zhou arrived in Moscow, pictures of the 16 October Chinese nuclear bomb detonation were printed in *People's Daily* and other Chinese newspapers. Soviet officials duly noted this signal.⁶⁶

The visit began on a bad note when, on 6 November, Brezhnev delivered a speech reiterating Moscow's peaceful coexistence policy toward the West, endorsing the 1963 test ban treaty, and listing Yugoslavia as a socialist country.⁶⁷ Worse was to come. According to the Chinese, at a reception in the Kremlin on 7 November, Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovskii told Marshal He Long that “we have already gotten rid of Khrushchev; you ought

60. Lyle Goldstein, “Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why It Matters,” *China Quarterly*, No. 168 (2001), pp. 985–997; and Goldstein, “Do Nascent WMD Arsenal Deter?” pp. 53–79.

61. Xu et al., *Xin Zhongguo yu Sulian*, p. 765.

62. See “Statement by the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Sino-Soviet Border Issue,” *Renmin Ribao*, 25 May 1969; quoted in Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 2001), pp. 21, 38.

63. Goldstein, “Return to Zhenbao Island,” pp. 987–988.

64. For Wu's recollections of the Moscow trip, see Wu, *Huiyi yu huainian*, pp. 374–381.

65. *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji*, p. 427; and MacFarquhar, *Origins*, Vol. 3, pp. 364–366.

66. Oleg Borisov and Boris Koloskov, *Sino-Soviet Relations* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 260.

67. William E. Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964–65* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), pp. 62–63.

to follow our example and get rid of Mao Zedong. That way we will get along better.”⁶⁸ He Long immediately reported this to Zhou Enlai, who protested to Brezhnev. In a meeting with Zhou on 11 November, Anastas Mikoyan made clear that the new leaders shared Khrushchev’s view of the basic causes of the Sino-Soviet dispute.⁶⁹ During talks between the two sides, the Soviet leaders requested a cessation of public denunciations, if only for a short while.⁷⁰ The Chinese replied that because the Soviet Union was steadfastly continuing the Khrushchev line, the Chinese could not halt their criticism.⁷¹ The Soviet proposal on 9 November for an improvement of state-to-state relations was a dead letter from the start.⁷² The Chinese arrived back in Beijing on 14 November and were greeted by Mao at the airport.

On 21 November the Chinese published a lengthy editorial in *Red Flag* discussing Khrushchev’s shortcomings and predicting further tensions.⁷³ The editorial stated,

Khrushchev has fallen and the revisionist line he enthusiastically pursued is discredited. . . . Nevertheless, the course of history will continue to be torturous. Although Khrushchev has fallen, his supporters—the U.S. imperialists, the reactionaries, and the modern revisionists—will not resign themselves to this failure. These hobgoblins are continuing to pray for Khrushchev and are trying to “resurrect” him with their incantations, vociferously proclaiming his “contributions” and “meritorious deeds” in the hope that events will develop along the lines prescribed by Khrushchev, so that “Khrushchevism without Khrushchev” may prevail. It can be asserted categorically that theirs is a blind alley.⁷⁴

The slogan of “Khrushchevism without Khrushchev” reflected Mao’s view that the new Soviet leaders were not prepared to change any fundamental policies. Although the new leaders were not singled out by name for condemnation, the *Red Flag* editorial set the stage for an escalation of conflict. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the escalating war in Vietnam provided an additional venue for China and the Soviet Union to pursue their burgeoning conflict.

68. Xu et al., *Xin Zhongguo yu Sulian*, p. 700. A similar quote can be found in MacFarquhar, *Origins*, Vol. 3, p. 365.

69. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, 875; and Wang Taiping, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi, 1957–1969 (Dierjuan)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998), p. 259.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

72. Pei Jianzhang, ed., *Xin Zhongguo waijiao fengyun (dierji)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996), p. 259.

73. “Why Khrushchev Fell,” *Hongqi*, No. 21–22 (21 November 1964), reproduced in Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964–65*, pp. 387–392.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

Kosygin's Visits to Beijing, February 1965

Even as the United States stepped up preparations for the introduction of significant numbers of troops into South Vietnam, Chinese and Soviet officials were unable to put aside their differences.⁷⁵ In early February 1965, Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin visited Beijing twice.⁷⁶ He wanted to gauge the PRC's position on three issues: coordination of aid to the Vietnamese Communists via the concept of "united action," an agreement to limit Sino-Soviet polemics, and Chinese participation in a conference of Communist parties.⁷⁷ He partly succeeded on the first objective but failed on the others.

Kosygin's first visit was on 5–6 February when he stopped in Beijing en route to Hanoi and met with Zhou Enlai. Zhou told Kosygin that he had previously called on Moscow to discard Khrushchevism so that the two sides could find common ground.⁷⁸ Zhou added that the Soviet decision to pursue Khrushchev's idea of convening an international conference of socialist states would inevitably mean a complete rupture in CCP-CPSU relations. On 6 February, Zhou reiterated his request that the Soviet Union not convene an international conference. That same day, a member of the Soviet delegation, Yuri Andropov, told Chen Yi that in a concession to Chinese sensitivities, the Soviet Union would compromise on the content as well as the date of the upcoming conference. Chen Yi replied that Chinese participation in the conference would amount to capitulation (*touxiang*).⁷⁹

On 10–11 February, after visiting Hanoi, Kosygin stopped again in Beijing before returning to Moscow. In a meeting with Mao, Kosygin again urged a cessation of polemics, but the Chinese leader bluntly rejected the request: "As for the proposal to halt open polemics, we are opposed. Heaven knows when there can be a cessation! Anything less than ten thousand years of open polemics is unacceptable."⁸⁰ Referring to Moscow's plan for an international Communist conference, Mao taunted Kosygin by encouraging him to go ahead with the conference, saying that the Chinese fully approved.⁸¹ Mao also reportedly asked Kosygin whether any future attack on China would be

75. Robert Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 154–181.

76. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, p. 265; and Sun Qimin, *Zhong Su guanxi shimo* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 548–550.

77. Sun, *Zhong Su guanxi shimo*, p. 548.

78. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, pp. 261, 264–265.

79. Xu, *Xinzhongguo yu Sulian*, pp. 742–743.

80. Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 914.

81. Mao said: "We are in complete agreement. However, we will not participate" (Women wanquan zancheng. Danshi, women bu canjia jiu shi liao). *Ibid.*, p. 917.

treated by the USSR as an attack on the Soviet Union, but Kosygin did not reply.⁸² Mao understood that an affirmative answer would mean a substantive restoration of the Sino-Soviet alliance of 1950, which by virtue of the Sino-Soviet conflict of the early 1960s was effectively defunct. Given the tensions that arose as a result of Zhou's Moscow trip the previous November, such a restoration was premature, as Mao surely knew.

An agreement to coordinate the transportation of Soviet aid via China to North Vietnam was the only positive result of Kosygin's trip.⁸³ Mao was fully aware that obstructing the passage of Soviet aid through China would severely damage Sino-North Vietnamese relations. Accordingly, he agreed to allow the transport of Soviet economic and military aid by train through China.⁸⁴ Even so, he rejected a Soviet proposal for an air corridor to ship weaponry to North Vietnam.⁸⁵ On 30 March 1965, the Soviet Union and China signed an agreement allowing Soviet economic and military aid to be transported by land through China to North Vietnam.⁸⁶ This was the main avenue for the flow of Soviet supplies to Hanoi.⁸⁷ The simultaneous acceptance of a rail corridor and rejection of an air corridor suggests that Beijing was at once interested in controlling the supply of Soviet shipments to Vietnam and minimizing the opportunities for Soviet espionage.

The Chinese were intent on avoiding any other concessions. Mao regarded the USSR as an ideological *and* potential strategic threat to China—a country with which fundamental compromise was impossible. Documents released in 1996 show that Mao carefully edited statements that appeared in *Renmin ribao* and other newspapers opposing the Soviet Union's convening of an international Communist conference on the Vietnam War.⁸⁸ Moscow then made a number of public proposals that had already been rejected in bilateral meetings with the Chinese. On 3 April, the Soviet Union sent a letter to Beijing requesting that a conference be convened with their North Vietnam-

82. See K. S. Karol's account of a 9 November 1966 interview with Zhou Enlai cited in Ross Terrill, "The Siege Mentality," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (March–April 1967), p. 3.

83. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, p. 265.

84. Yang Kuisong, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude toward the Indochina War," CWHIP Working Paper No. 34, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 2002, p. 31.

85. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 150

86. On the total amount of Soviet materials transported by rail via China to North Vietnam from 1965 to 1975, see Li Ke and Hao Shenzhang, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao, 1989), pp. 413–414.

87. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, p. 267; and Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), p. 334.

88. *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shibian, 1996), Vol. 11, pp. 346–350, 394–395; and Xie Yixian, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai waijiaoshi, 1949–2001* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2002), pp. 241–242.

ese counterparts. The avowed purpose was to discuss trilateral Hanoi-Beijing-Moscow cooperation. A fortnight later, Moscow made a specific request for Chinese cooperation in assisting Hanoi's war effort by allowing the transit of 4,000 Soviet troops through China, the use of Chinese airfields by Soviet planes to defend North Vietnam, and access to an air corridor over Chinese territory. In a letter drafted on 10 July and approved by Mao the next day, the Chinese rejected the Soviet requests and accused Moscow of using this issue to exert control over China.⁸⁹ Cooperation, the letter stressed, would be on Chinese terms. To underscore the point, on 11 November the Chinese published an extensive commentary criticizing Moscow's "united action" proposals.⁹⁰ The Chinese cited Soviet collusion with the United States to dominate the world as the basis for rejecting these proposals.⁹¹ Throughout the entire period of the transport of Soviet equipment, squabbling occurred over claims of Chinese looting and obstruction of the shipments.⁹²

Increasing Cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi

The increasing Sino-Soviet conflict had a significant impact on Soviet–North Vietnamese relations. The new Soviet leaders took a more nuanced and ultimately more effective approach to undermining Chinese influence in North Vietnam.⁹³ Rather than making Hanoi choose between Beijing and Moscow as Khrushchev did, Brezhnev and his aides worked to increase cooperation with their North Vietnamese counterparts.⁹⁴ Given the urgent requirement for assistance in the face of a rising U.S. threat, this change in Soviet policy was welcomed by Hanoi. Soviet diplomatic, economic, and military aid to North Vietnam increased sharply for a prolonged period.

Khrushchev's basic approach to the North Vietnamese from 1962 until October 1964 was to insist that Hanoi take a firm stand with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Ilya Gaiduk sums up Khrushchev's approach:

89. *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, Vol. 11, pp. 394–395.

90. "Refutation of the New Leaders of the CPSU on 'United Action,'" *Peking Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 46 (11 November 1965), pp. 10–21, reproduced in Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations*, pp. 455–470.

91. Xie, *Zhongguo dangdai waijiaoshi*, p. 241.

92. Xie Yixian, *Zhongguo waijiaoshi, 1949–1979*, 3rd ed. (Henan, China: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1996), pp. 346–348.

93. This is the Chinese understanding as well. See Xie, *Zhongguo waijiaoshi*, p. 343.

94. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, p. 9; and W. R. Smyser, *The Independent Vietnamese: Vietnamese Communism between Russia and China, 1956–1969* (Athens: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1980), pp. 76–78.

As the Sino-Soviet dispute sharpened, Khrushchev increasingly viewed the outside world through the lens of his quarrel with Mao Zedong. A follower of the traditions of the Bolsheviks, he categorized other communist leaders according to their readiness to align with either Moscow or Beijing, and the ambiguous and ambivalent position of the North Vietnamese communists in the Sino-Soviet dispute accordingly led to Khrushchev's growing suspicion about their real intentions. He regarded with disdain Ho Chi Minh's efforts to find a compromise and openly derided them. Khrushchev had a "litmus test of loyalty" for North Vietnam as well as for other countries: "If the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] could not be counted as an ally against China, then the relationship should be downgraded."⁹⁵

The new Soviet leaders, rather than insisting on North Vietnamese fealty in the Sino-Soviet dispute, eschewed overt pressure on Hanoi to choose sides, even while increasing assistance to North Vietnam. Moscow thus deftly exploited Chinese intransigence. The "united action" proposals were designed to put Beijing in the position of rejecting cooperation and impeding Hanoi's war efforts. This "aid as a wedge" strategy proved highly effective in stoking tensions between China and North Vietnam.⁹⁶ At two sessions in November and December 1964, the CPSU Presidium discussed Soviet military aid to North Vietnam.⁹⁷ A more active Soviet policy emerged soon afterward in the form of Kosygin's February 1965 visit to Hanoi. A harbinger of this more active policy came on 24 December 1964, when the Soviet Union invited the North Vietnamese-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam (otherwise known as the Vietcong) to open a permanent mission in Moscow.⁹⁸ This move restored some symmetry to the Soviet-North Vietnamese relationship. Unlike the USSR, the Chinese had recognized the NLF immediately after its establishment in December 1960.⁹⁹

Soviet-North Vietnamese relations received a fillip from Kosygin's visit in February 1965, which proved to be a turning point.¹⁰⁰ Events during and immediately after the trip signaled an expansion of military conflict in Vietnam. Kosygin's visit coincided with a 7 February NLF raid on a U.S. air base at

95. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 210. Mao had a similar view of the Vietnamese Communists. See Yang, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude," pp. 24–25.

96. For an excellent discussion of wedge strategies, see Timothy Crawford, "Wedge Strategy, Balancing, and the Deviant Case of Spain," *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 1–38.

97. Zhang Xiaoming, "Communist Powers Divided," in Lloyd Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), p. 86.

98. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, p. 20.

99. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 83.

100. For a Chinese account of Kosygin's visits to Beijing, see Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, pp. 913–921.

Pleiku that killed eight Americans and wounded 120.¹⁰¹ That same day, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, who was in South Vietnam, set forth “a program of measured and limited air action” against North Vietnam called Operation Rolling Thunder.¹⁰² The NLF raids provided the basis for U.S. and South Vietnamese retaliatory attacks on territory north of the seventeenth parallel that divided Vietnam, spurring North Vietnamese and NLF counterattacks.¹⁰³

Kosygin’s visit resulted in a new level of Soviet interest and commitment to North Vietnam. In addition to Andropov, Soviet officials accompanying Kosygin included Vasilii Kuznetsov, the first deputy foreign minister and former ambassador to China; Konstantin Vershinin, the commander-in-chief of Soviet Air Forces; Colonel-General Evgenii Loginov, the minister of civil aviation; and Colonel-General Grigorii Sidorovich, deputy chairman of the State Committee on Foreign Economic Relations, whose responsibilities included foreign aid issues. Kosygin’s entourage also included a team of Soviet missile experts.¹⁰⁴ A missile agreement was subsequently concluded during North Vietnamese leader Le Duan’s mid-April 1965 trip to Moscow. The official agenda during the Kosygin visit dealt with Soviet military and economic aid to Hanoi, as well as the Sino-Soviet dispute. On 10 February, Kosygin and North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong signed a nine-point communiqué stating, among other things, that the Soviet Union could “not remain indifferent to ensuring the security of a fraternal socialist country” and would give the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) necessary aid and support.¹⁰⁵ In a clear reference to Beijing, both sides also declared in the communiqué that “the unity of the socialist camp and the international Communist movement is an imperative condition for the victory of the working class in the struggle against imperialism and for peace, national independence, democracy, and socialism.”¹⁰⁶ Following the start of Operation Rolling Thunder on 2 March and the first large-scale introduction of U.S. troops in South

101. Kosygin was personally offended that the U.S. attacks occurred while he was in Hanoi, as he indicated during a meeting with U.S. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey eleven months later, in January 1966. See D. J. Sagar, *Major Political Events in Indo-China 1945–1990* (Oxford, UK: Facts on File Ltd., 1991), p. 70.

102. This program, approved by President Johnson on 13 February, began on 2 March, and the first of two U.S. battalions subsequently arrived in Danang on 8 March. See *ibid.*, p. 71.

103. Ralph Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War: The Making of a Limited War, 1965–66*, Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 31.

104. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 57.

105. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, p. 30.

106. Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 78.

Vietnam in Danang on 8 March, the joint communiqué was approved by the CPSU Central Committee on 26 March 1965 and reportedly was seen by Moscow as a serious military commitment to Hanoi.¹⁰⁷ In July 1965, the DRV and the USSR signed an agreement to boost economic and military ties.¹⁰⁸ North Vietnamese strategic requirements increasingly tilted toward a preference for the type of military aid offered by Moscow (rather than by Beijing). Hanoi was interested in adopting a more aggressive strategy against the United States that at once relied on more-advanced and heavier weaponry and deemphasized the Chinese-style “people’s war” approach, which relied on light arms. The Soviet Union responded positively to these requests, a point reaffirmed by recently released documents from the Russian archives.¹⁰⁹ Following the rapid deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, Moscow was keen to capitalize on this opportunity to increase cooperation with Hanoi. The impetus for closer Soviet–North Vietnamese cooperation existed on both sides. Soviet diplomatic, economic, and military assistance to the DRV increased continually from April 1965 through the summer of 1968 and beyond.

Moscow’s “United Action” Proposals and Aid to Hanoi

In the first half of 1965, the CPSU repeatedly attempted to arrange a multilateral conference with other Communist countries and issued statements emphasizing solidarity with the North Vietnamese. The Chinese invariably opposed these attempts. Kosygin had tried in early February 1965, both before and after a trip to Hanoi, to obtain a joint Sino-Soviet agreement to assist the DRV.¹¹⁰ On 16 February, after Kosygin returned to Moscow, the Soviet Union proposed holding an international conference on the situation in Vietnam.¹¹¹ The PRC abandoned any support for the idea of an international conference once the USSR backed it.¹¹² Recent research has revealed that as late

107. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), pp. 414–415; and Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, pp. 77–78.

108. Guo Ming, ed., *Zhong Yue guanxi yanbian sishinian* (Nanning, China: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1992), p. 103.

109. See Document No. 11, “Unofficial Translation of the Letter of the CPSU Central Committee to the SED Central Committee,” in Lorenz Lüthi, “Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents on Vietnam and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1964–1966,” *CWHP Bulletin*, Issue 16 (Spring 2008), pp. 381–384.

110. Borisov and Koloskov, *Sino-Soviet Relations*, pp. 266–267.

111. Yang, “Changes in Mao Zedong’s Attitude,” p. 32.

112. Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, pp. 315–316.

as 13 February the Chinese were pushing for a negotiated solution to the conflict in Vietnam. On 18 February, two days after the Soviet proposal, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi expressed categorical opposition to the idea of negotiations as a means to resolving the conflict.¹¹³ On 1 March, the Soviet Union convened a consultative meeting attended by nineteen Communist parties against the wishes of the CCP.¹¹⁴ (The Vietnamese Communists did not attend.) A communiqué released by the participants in a meeting on 10 March urged unity and support for the DRV.¹¹⁵ The document also called for preparations for an international conference of Communist parties at a “suitable time.” On 3 April a Soviet proposal for a trilateral Sino-Soviet–North Vietnamese meeting to discuss cooperation was turned down by Beijing, a point later publicly noted by Hanoi.¹¹⁶ Two weeks later, Soviet proposals for joint action on activities such as the airlifting of supplies to North Vietnam were rejected.¹¹⁷ A perceptible shift in Hanoi’s stance toward Moscow occurred during this period. On 10 April 1965, Le Duan and General Vo Nguyen Giap, while on a visit to Moscow, endorsed the Soviet proposal for a Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese conference to coordinate weapons shipments.¹¹⁸ The Soviet Union viewed its closer relations with the DRV with some satisfaction.¹¹⁹ At a meeting on 19 April in honor of a delegation from Mongolia, Kosygin noted that the Soviet–North Vietnamese negotiations “achieved positive results and helped to work out coordinated positions on the forms and means of the struggle against the aggressive policy of American imperialism, on further strengthening the defensive capacity of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and on a settlement of the problems of Indochina on the basis of the Geneva accords.”¹²⁰

Newly released documents from the Soviet embassy in Hanoi indicate that the Soviet Union attributed the improvement in relations to increases in the quality and quantity of Soviet aid to the DRV.¹²¹ On 9 July 1966 a Soviet diplomat in Hanoi noted that “the great and constantly increasing aid from the Soviet Union has contributed to changes in the DRV’s attitude.” This

113. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

114. Donald Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle: Moscow, Peking, Hanoi* (New York: Pegasus, 1967), p. 140.

115. See translated version of document in Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations*, pp. 393–395.

116. Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle*, pp. 140–141. For Hanoi’s reaction, see Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Truth about Vietnam-Chinese Relations over the Past Thirty Years* (Hanoi: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1979), pp. 37–38.

117. Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle*, p. 141.

118. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, pp. 38–39; and Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle*, p. 50.

119. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, p. 39.

120. *Ibid.*

121. Document No. 21 in Lüthi, “Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents,” p. 393.

comment reflected the surge of Soviet assistance once the USSR decided to compete with China for North Vietnam's loyalty.¹²²

Although estimates of the magnitude of aid must be treated with caution, they provide a broad idea of the trend of Soviet assistance to the DRV.¹²³ According to figures calculated by Douglas Pike, from 1960 to 1964, before the USSR and China began competing for influence in North Vietnam, Moscow gave Hanoi roughly \$400 million worth of economic aid and \$125–190 million in military aid. The level of Soviet economic assistance rose by nearly 250 percent in the 1965–1968 period (after Moscow decided to compete with Beijing for Hanoi's allegiance), reaching \$918–988 million. Soviet military aid in 1965–1968 increased even more precipitously, soaring to \$1.4–1.8 billion, an increase of more than 1,000 percent.¹²⁴ By 1966 Moscow provided Hanoi with the majority of its military aid, and by 1968 North Vietnam was receiving two-thirds of its military supplies from the USSR.¹²⁵

Soviet specialists advised the DRV on the use of military equipment. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimated in September 1965 that 1,500 to 2,500 Soviet military specialists were based in North Vietnam. The CIA posited that the majority of the Soviet personnel were either pilots or experts in the use of air defense missiles. Additionally, North Vietnamese were sent to the Soviet Union for military training. Some estimates put the number of DRV officers undergoing training in Soviet military colleges in the thousands. Some of these officers were sent to South Vietnam upon completion of their Soviet training stint, a fact Moscow was aware of.¹²⁶

It is important to note the significance of the changing role of the Soviet Union as a military supplier to the DRV. Although Moscow had been providing military assistance to Hanoi since 1953, the total amounts were relatively small.¹²⁷ The PRC had been the dominant military supplier—a situation dating back to Liu Shaoqi's 1949 visit to Moscow.¹²⁸ Shi Zhe, a translator for Liu, has recounted a 27 July 1949 meeting in Moscow with Stalin, who asked the

122. From 1965 to the beginning of 1967, Hanoi received the equivalent of approximately \$1.5 billion from the socialist bloc. Of this, Moscow contributed 36.8 percent and China contributed 44.8 percent. Over the course of 1967, the Soviet contribution exceeded 50 per cent of all aid from the socialist bloc (including China as part of the bloc). Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, 58, 264, fn. 4.

123. See also Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 118, 190.

124. Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, pp. 138–139. See also Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam*, 190.

125. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, pp. 59, 79.

126. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–61.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 5; and Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, p. 33.

128. Sergei Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin: Mao and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 61–75.

Chinese to oversee the promotion of revolutionary activities in Asia while the USSR assumed responsibility for promoting revolution in the West.¹²⁹ Stalin regarded North Vietnam as falling within China's sphere of influence. By 1965, the situation had drastically changed. The Sino-Soviet conflict had clearly affected China's relationship with the DRV. Although North Vietnamese leaders resisted Soviet pressure to issue public rebuttals of China's anti-Soviet polemics, no longer did Mao have a free hand in Vietnam and South-east Asia.¹³⁰ He would have to compete with the Soviet Union.

Cooperation and Conflict in Sino-North Vietnamese Relations

The expanding cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi was closely monitored in Beijing. China's response was twofold. First, to compete with the USSR, the PRC increased cooperation with North Vietnam. The Chinese provided large amounts of economic and military assistance to the DRV. In addition, the threat of Chinese military intervention also served as a critical deterrent to a U.S. ground invasion of North Vietnam. By Hanoi's own admission, Chinese aid made a critical contribution to the DRV's victory over the South.¹³¹ China's dismay over Soviet-North Vietnamese cooperation sparked conflict between Hanoi and Beijing. As Chen Jian notes, by 1966 "sharp differences had emerged . . . between Beijing and Hanoi as the result of Hanoi's improving relations with Moscow."¹³²

Chinese aid to the DRV took two forms: material aid and the threat of intervention against a possible U.S. invasion. Chinese aid to North Vietnam was channeled through two coordinating committees.¹³³ The Leading Group on Vietnamese Affairs, consisting of seven senior officials, oversaw implementation of Chinese policy toward Vietnam. Until December 1965, General Luo Ruiqing headed the group.¹³⁴ After Luo's ouster, Li Xiannian was in

129. Shi Zhe, *Zai lishi juwen shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991), p. 412. See also Bo Yibo, "The Making of the 'Leaning to One Side' Decision," *Chinese Historians*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 57–62.

130. Document No. 22 in Lüthi, "Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents," p. 397.

131. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Truth about Vietnam-Chinese Relations*, p. 81.

132. Chen, *Mao's China*, p. 232.

133. *Ibid.*, p. 220

134. Other members of the committee included Li Xiannian, a CCP Politburo member and vice premier responsible for economic affairs; Bo Yibo, a CCP Politburo member and vice premier in charge of economic planning; Liu Xiao, deputy foreign minister; Yang Chengwu, deputy chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA); Li Qiang, the minister of foreign trade; and Li Tianyou, also a deputy chief of staff of the PLA.

charge.¹³⁵ Assisting the Leading Group was the Group in Charge of Supporting Vietnam, headed by Yang Chengwu, deputy chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and General Li Tianyou acting as his deputy.¹³⁶ Both Yang and Li were also in the Leading Group. In early April 1965, en route to Moscow, Le Duan and Vo Nguyen Giap visited Beijing with a request for assistance.¹³⁷ In a meeting with Liu Shaoqi on 8 April, they requested Chinese pilots, troops, and combat engineers.¹³⁸ Acting on Mao's instructions, Liu told the North Vietnamese: "It is our policy that we will do our best to support you. We will offer whatever you are in need of and we are in a position to offer."¹³⁹ The official Chinese Foreign Ministry account of this period indicates that from 1964 to 1969 China's total aid to North Vietnam amounted to \$180 million.¹⁴⁰

Chinese sources reveal that during an approximately four-year stint in North Vietnam, PLA personnel operating anti-aircraft weapons shot down 1,707 airplanes, damaged 1,608, and captured 42 U.S. pilots.¹⁴¹ More than 1,100 Chinese soldiers died in Vietnam and 4,300 were wounded.¹⁴² From August 1964 to November 1968, according to PRC data, 383 sorties of American warplanes flying in 155 groups violated Chinese airspace. The Chinese responded by flying 2,138 sorties. Throughout the Vietnam War, the Chinese air force was not directly engaged in combat in North Vietnam, although some Chinese aircraft engaged in hot pursuit into the North.¹⁴³ China's military aid to the DRV is summarized in Table 1. Chinese economic aid to North Vietnam was also extensive and of great value, as shown in Table 2. Chinese deterrence of an all-out U.S. ground offensive into North Vietnam was another tangible and invaluable form of assistance to Hanoi. The

135. Chen, *Mao's China*, p. 357.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

137. The North Vietnamese delegation also visited Beijing on the way back from Moscow. See Smith, *Vietnam War*, Vol. 3, pp. 92–97.

138. Li and Hao, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun*, p. 415; and Odd Arne Westad, ed., *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1977* (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 1998), p. 85. That same day, Hanoi released its four-point response to the U.S. appeal for "unconditional discussions." See Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo wajiaoshi*, pp. 37–38.

139. Li and Hao, *Wenhua dageming*, p. 415.

140. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo wajiaoshi*, p. 35. Another Chinese estimate places the total value of PRC economic and military aid to Hanoi during the Vietnam War period at \$200 million. See Deng Lifeng, "Huan Yue kang Mei shilue," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2002), p. 92.

141. Deng Liqun, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo jundui gongzuo* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1988), p. 759.

142. Zhang Xiaoming, "The Vietnam War: A Chinese Perspective," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (1996), p. 759.

143. Zhang, "The Vietnam War: A Chinese Perspective," pp. 744–745.

Table 1. China's Military Aid to North Vietnam, 1964–1968

	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
1. Guns	80,500	220,767	141,531	146,600	219,899
2. Artillery Pieces	1,250	4,439	3,362	3,984	7,087
3. Bullets (<i>thousands</i>)	25,240	114,010	178,120	147,000	247,920
4. Artillery Shells (<i>thousands</i>)	335	1,800	1,066	1,363	2,082
5. Radio Transmitters	426	2,779	1,568	2,464	1,854
6. Telephones	2,941	9,502	2,235	2,289	3,313
7. Tanks	16	—	—	26	18
8. Ships	—	7	14	25	18
9. Aircraft	18	2	—	70	—
10. Vehicles	25	114	96	435	454
11. Uniforms (<i>thousands</i>)	—	—	400	800	1,000

Source: Li Ke and Hao Shenzhang, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao, 1989), p. 415.

Sino-American relationship during the Vietnam War met the requirements of a pure deterrence situation.¹⁴⁴ Chinese officials made determined efforts to convey deterrent signals to the United States.¹⁴⁵ In response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, the Chinese promised increased assistance to the DRV. On 6 August 1964 the Chinese government declared that “America’s aggression against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is also aggression against China, and China will never fail to come to the aid of the Vietnamese.”¹⁴⁶ To bolster the credibility of Chinese intervention, Beijing signed a military assistance agreement with Hanoi in December 1964. The agreement

144. Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983), p. 38. The four conditions of a pure deterrence situation exist when: (1) in a relationship between two hostile states the officials in at least one of them are seriously considering attacking the other or attacking some area of the world the other deems important; (2) key officials of the other state realize this; (3) realizing that an attack is a distinct possibility, these officials threaten the use of force in retaliation to try to deter any attack; (4) leaders of the state planning the attack decide to desist primarily because of the retaliatory threats.

145. James Hershberg and Chen Jian, “Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China’s Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965,” *International History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 47–84.

146. Xie Yixian, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai wajiaoshi, 1949–2001* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2002), p. 229.

Table 2. China's Economic Aid to North Vietnam, 1965–1970

	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Total Amount</i>
1. Remittances	U.S.\$	254,620,000
2. Food	Tons	24,366,000
3. Cotton	Tons	26,000
4. Cotton Yarn	Tons	30,600
5. Cotton Cloth	Meters	75,000,000
6. Cotton Blanket	Pieces	1,900,000
7. Chemical Fertilizer	Tons	70,600
8. Steel	Tons	185,100
9. Coal	Tons	100,000
10. Asphalt	Tons	40,000
11. Natural Oils	Tons	41,000
12. Paper	Tons	95,500
13. Automobiles	Unit	4,200
14. Boats	Unit	334
15. Tractors	Unit	2,430
16. Construction Machines	Unit	1,238
17. Railway Cars	Unit	107
18. Railway Passenger Carriages	Unit	2,200
19. Bicycles	Unit	477,000

Source: Shi Lin ed., *Dangdai zhongguo de duiwai jingjijhezuo* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), p. 58.

called for China to station infantry and artillery personnel in the DRV, allowing North Vietnamese troops to be deployed against the Americans in South Vietnam.¹⁴⁷ According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry's official history of PRC diplomacy, Zhou Enlai attempted to convey China's deterrent threats to the United States through Pakistani President Ayub Khan.¹⁴⁸ On 2 April

147. Ilya Gaiduk, "Vietnam War and Soviet-American Relations, 1964–73," *CWIHP Bulletin*, Vol. 6–7 (Winter 1995/1996), p. 250.

148. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, p. 36; and *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji*, p. 445.

1965, Zhou transmitted an oral message to President Khan affirming that China would not provoke a war with the United States; that the Chinese would, however, honor international obligations they had undertaken; and that China was fully prepared for any contingency. In a 31 May meeting with the British chargé d'affaires, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi delivered a similar message, noting that China would not provoke a war against the United States; that China meant what it said; that China was prepared; and that if the United States bombed China it would provoke a war without limits. Chen noted that Khan's scheduled visit to Washington had been canceled and requested that the British deliver the message to the U.S. government.¹⁴⁹ Zhou Enlai also openly discussed China's four points during a trip to Indonesia on 16–26 April.¹⁵⁰ At a conference in Bogor, Indonesia, Zhou stated that China's intervention in "the Korean War can be taken as evidence" that it would intervene in Vietnam if the situation demanded it.¹⁵¹ China sent an estimated 320,000 PLA personnel to North Vietnam from 1 August 1965 to 20 March 1969.¹⁵² The maximum number of Chinese at any one time during this period was 170,000.¹⁵³ The Chinese scholar Xie Yixian maintains that the troop deployments were intended to deter the United States from attacking North Vietnam.¹⁵⁴ In effect, the Chinese viewed North Vietnam as a buffer zone in which they were prepared to defend by force.

The threat of possible Chinese intervention was one of the factors that forestalled a large-scale U.S. ground invasion of North Vietnam.¹⁵⁵ This comes out clearly in a conversation between U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and National Security Adviser Walt Rostow in May 1967. Rostow said he did not "believe communist China would fight us if we invaded the northern part of North Vietnam," prompting McNamara to reply that in the event of "U.S. ground actions in North Vietnam, we would expect China to

149. Chen, *Mao's China*, p. 217.

150. Zhou Enlai *waijiao huodong dashiji*, pp. 446–450. For specific comments that were reiterated in a meeting between Zhou and First Vice-Prime Minister Subandrio of Indonesia on 28 May in Guangzhou, China, see Westad et al. eds., *77 Conversations*, p. 88.

151. Zhou Enlai *waijiao huodong dashiji*, pp. 446–450. On China's involvement in the Korean War, see Allen Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960); Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Zhang Shu Guang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950–53* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1995).

152. Li Cheng et al., *Jianguo yilai junshi baizhuang dashi* (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1992), p. 222.

153. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, pp. 37–38.

154. Xie, *Zhongguo waijiaoshi 1949–79*, p. 337.

155. Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*; Allen Whiting, "China's Role in the Vietnam War," in Jayne Werner and Davis Hunt, eds., *The American War in Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993), pp. 71–76; and John Garver, "The Chinese Threat in the Vietnam War," *Parameters*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1992), pp. 73–85.

respond by entering the war with both ground and air forces.”¹⁵⁶ Senior North Vietnamese officials have stressed China’s role in preventing a U.S. ground invasion. In a discussion with Allen Whiting in 1993, Luu Doan Huynh observed that during the Vietnam War Chinese anti-aircraft units in North Vietnam “served to demonstrate to Chinese and Vietnamese that China would support the Vietnamese war of resistance and to act as deterrence against attempts by U.S. troops to invade North Vietnam.”¹⁵⁷

The Soviet Factor in Sino–North Vietnamese Conflict

From 1964 to 1968, even as Mao vehemently opposed what he saw as a joint Soviet-American attempt to dominate world politics,¹⁵⁸ Mao increasingly focused on the Soviet Union rather than the United States as the main threat. Chinese author Li Danhui points out that “from the mid-1960s on, in their deliberations about the main threat facing China, the [Chinese] leaders determined that the relative threat posed by the Americans had decreased, and that defending [China] against the Soviet Union had become the primary objective.”¹⁵⁹ This shift in Chinese threat perceptions allowed Beijing to reach an informal understanding with Washington whereby the PRC would not send combat troops to North Vietnam so long as U.S. and South Vietnamese troops did not cross the seventeenth parallel.¹⁶⁰

As China’s perception of its primary adversary increasingly focused on the Soviet Union, the burgeoning Soviet–North Vietnamese cooperation led to increasing Sino–North Vietnamese conflict. The available evidence of direct conversations between Chinese and DRV officials shows a relationship increasingly under strain because of Chinese anger at North Vietnam’s growing dependence on and cooperation with the Soviet Union. Less evidence is available about DRV leaders’ sentiments toward the PRC. This is not surprising because the North Vietnamese did not want to jeopardize the aid they were receiving from China by voicing complaints. Still, some contemporaneous ev-

156. Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, p. 194.

157. Whiting, “China’s Role in the Vietnam War,” p. 73.

158. Xie, *Zhongguo waijiaoshi 1949–79*, p. 343.

159. Li Danhui, “Zhong Su guanxi yu Zhongguo de yuan Yue kang Mei,” *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1998), p. 116.

160. William Duiker, *China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1986), p. 49. For further evidence that China reached an understanding with the United States, see Frank E. Rogers, “Sino-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1964–66,” *China Quarterly*, No. 66 (June 1976), pp. 293–314.

idence of North Vietnamese dissatisfaction in 1964–1968 is available. Beijing and Hanoi came into conflict over the issue of Soviet material aid to North Vietnam and over the extent of Soviet influence on Hanoi's war strategy, including both military strategy and negotiations.

Sino–North Vietnamese conflict over Soviet material aid had its origins early in the Vietnam War. Some time in the last four months of 1964, Deng Xiaoping made a secret visit to Hanoi.¹⁶¹ A DRV source claims that Deng offered a substantial increase in Chinese aid, on the condition that North Vietnam stop accepting Soviet aid.¹⁶² After the North Vietnamese rejected this offer, the Chinese closely watched Soviet–North Vietnamese ties develop. The surge of Soviet aid to North Vietnam spurred Chinese warnings about the USSR. On 1 March 1965, Zhou Enlai, citing previous instances of Soviet espionage in countries that received Soviet assistance, warned Ho Chi Minh of such dangers. Zhou even suggested that relations between China and North Vietnam could suffer as a result of increased Soviet assistance in North Vietnam. Zhou told Ho:

The new Soviet leaders are following nothing but Khrushchevism. It is absolutely impossible for them to change. . . . We oppose [Soviet] military activities that include an airlift using 45 planes for weapon transportation. We also have to be wary of the military instructors. . . . We have had experience in the past with their subversive activities in China, Korea, and Cuba. We therefore should keep an eye on their activities, namely their transportation of weapons and military training. Otherwise, relations between our two countries [China and North Vietnam] may turn from good to bad, thus affecting cooperation between our two countries.¹⁶³

The Chinese persisted in their anti-Soviet line. In a meeting in Beijing on 9 October 1965 with Pham Van Dong, Zhou criticized the Soviet Union and recommended that Hanoi not accept Soviet aid:

During the time Khrushchev was in power, the Soviets could not divide us because Khrushchev did not help you very much. The Soviets are now assisting you. But their help is not sincere. The USA likes this very much. I want to tell you my opinion. It will be better without Soviet aid. . . . I do not support the idea of Soviet volunteers going to Vietnam, nor [do I support] Soviet aid to Vietnam. I think it will be better without it. . . . [As to Vietnam] we always want

161. Ralph Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War: The Struggle for South-East Asia*, Vol. 2 (London: MacMillan Press, 1985), p. 349.

162. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Truth about Vietnam-Chinese Relations*, p. 33.

163. Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations*, p. 78.

to help. In our mind, our thoughts, we never think of selling out Vietnam. But we are always afraid of the revisionists standing between us.¹⁶⁴

Although one might argue that Zhou was simply highlighting Moscow's hope of splitting the Sino–North Vietnamese alliance, the fact remains that the DRV had to rely on the USSR for aid against the United States. The North Vietnamese might well have interpreted Zhou's advice as detrimental to their cause of unifying Vietnam under Communist auspices.

The Chinese were relentless in their criticism of the USSR. In a meeting with Ho Chi Minh in Guangdong province on 8 November 1965, Zhou Enlai suggested that “the purpose of Soviet aid to Vietnam [is] to isolate China, to improve Soviet-U.S. relations, to conduct subversive activities as well as acts of sabotage, and to make problems in China, and maybe also in Vietnam.”¹⁶⁵ On 23 March 1966, Zhou told Le Duan:

After Kosygin returned from Hanoi [in February 1965] the Soviets used their support to Vietnam to win your trust in a deceitful way. Their purpose is to cast a shadow over the relationship between Vietnam and China, to split Vietnam and China with a view to further controlling Vietnam to improve their relations with the USA and obstructing the struggle and revolution of the Vietnamese people.¹⁶⁶

As Chinese leaders monitored Hanoi's increasing alignment with Moscow, an incident in late March-early April 1966 caught Beijing's attention. When leading a North Vietnamese delegation to the 23rd CPSU Congress in Moscow from 29 March to 8 April 1966 (a meeting boycotted by the CCP), Le Duan referred to the Soviet Union as his “second motherland.”¹⁶⁷ Although Le Duan's words were arguably taken out of context by the Chinese, the comment struck a raw nerve in Beijing. Recently released documents from the Soviet embassy in Hanoi note the PRC's swift retaliation. China reportedly reduced its aid to North Vietnam during the Soviet congress. A Soviet diplomat in Hanoi reported that “the Vietnamese Communists hinted to Soviet representatives that they consider the Chinese attitude a reprisal for their political flirtation with the Soviet Union.”¹⁶⁸ Chinese hostility toward the Soviet Union continued to grow and caused a further increase in conflict with the DRV.

164. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

166. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

167. Wang Xianggen, *Yuan Yue kang Mei shilu* (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubun gongshi, 1990), p. 225; and Chen, *Mao's China*, p. 232.

168. Document No. 21 in Lüthi, “Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents,” p. 393.

In a meeting in Beijing on 13 April 1966 involving Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Le Duan, the tensions that had emerged over the Soviet Union boiled over:

Deng Xiaoping: You have spoken about truth as well as mentioned fairness. So what are you still afraid of? Why are you afraid of displeasing the Soviets? I want to tell you frankly what I now feel: The Vietnamese comrades have some other thoughts about our methods of assistance, but you have not yet told us.¹⁶⁹

Later in the conversation, Le Duan acknowledged that Chinese and North Vietnamese leaders were divided over their assessments of the Soviet Union.

Le Duan: We don't speak publicly about the different opinions between us. We hold that Soviet assistance is partly sincere, so neither do we ask whether the Soviets [will] sell Vietnam out nor [do we] say the Soviets slander China in the matter of transportation of Soviet aid. Because we know that if we say this, the problem will become more complicated. It is due to our circumstances. The main problem is how to judge the Soviet Union. You are saying that the Soviets are selling out Vietnam, but we don't say so.¹⁷⁰

Even after Beijing and Hanoi laid out their respective positions, Chinese officials continued to stress Soviet malevolence. On 10 April 1967, Zhou Enlai told Pham Van Dong, "the Soviets want to have access to China's ports not only for shipments of aid to Vietnam but also for other ulterior motives." On 13 May 1967, Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua remarked to DRV Ambassador Ngo Minh Loan that "the Soviet proposal for air transport is ill-intentioned and is a conspiracy."¹⁷¹

The basic problem for China was that North Vietnam did not share its hostility toward the Soviet Union. The strident Chinese response to the Soviet role in Vietnam increasingly drew Hanoi's attention to China's obstructionist actions. Although post hoc views expressed by the Vietnamese government must be treated with caution, the Vietnamese did claim that they were outraged by Beijing's efforts to "sabotage united action" between Moscow, Beijing, and Hanoi.¹⁷² A 1979 Vietnamese publication on the history of PRC-DRV relations argued that:

To make Vietnam dependent on China, the Chinese rulers did their utmost to prevent every united action. . . . On 28 February 1965, they rejected the Viet-

169. Westad et al. eds., *77 Conversations*, p. 94

170. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

171. *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 123. Furthermore, according to Qiao, "They [the Soviets] make use of their aid to Vietnam in order to control the situation and cooperate with the United States to force Vietnam to accept peace negotiations." *Ibid.*, p. 122.

172. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Truth about Vietnam-Chinese Relations*, p. 38.

name draft of 22 February 1965 for a joint statement by the socialist countries condemning the United States for intensifying its war of aggression in South Vietnam and for unleashing war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1965, they rejected the Soviet proposal that the Communist parties of the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam meet to discuss joint action to support the Vietnamese people's struggle against the U.S. aggressors.

In April 1965, on two occasions, they rejected the Soviet proposal for United Action to ensure the security of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This explained why they rejected the Soviet proposal to set up an airlift via China and build airfields on Chinese territory to defend the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

In February 1966, Chairman Mao Zedong rejected the idea of creating a united international front in support of Vietnam as suggested in high-level Sino-Vietnamese talks.

In March 1966, Chairman Mao Zedong again rejected the suggestion to form a united international front in support of Vietnam against the U.S. imperialists made by the Japanese Communist Party at high-level talks with the Chinese Communist Party. . . . Instead, the Chinese authorities wanted to set [up] what they called the World People's Front under their control.¹⁷³

Sino–North Vietnamese differences also emerged over Soviet influence on Hanoi's strategy in the war. From the DRV's perspective, Soviet aid was critical for stepped-up efforts on the battlefield. The influx of heavy military equipment after 1965 allowed for a shift in DRV strategy from a predominantly defensive guerilla war to an offensive big-unit regular force strategy.¹⁷⁴ As the USSR's role in Hanoi's strategy increased, the Chinese voiced increasingly harsh criticism of the way the war was fought. The publication of Chinese Defense Minister Lin Biao's *Long Live People's War* on 3 September 1965 represented an important divergence in Beijing's and Hanoi's views of military strategy.¹⁷⁵ Lin Biao called on the North Vietnamese to practice self-reliance and adopt a defensive strategy of protracted war in the South.¹⁷⁶

China's views on the conduct of the war met with disfavor in North Vietnam. DRV leaders increasingly believed that an offensive strategy imposing heavy casualties on U.S. forces would steadily erode domestic support for the war in the United States and compel a withdrawal.¹⁷⁷ North Vietnamese strat-

173. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

174. Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, p. 65.

175. Lin Biao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War!" *Peking Review*, Vol. 8, No. 36 (3 September 1965), pp. 9–30. For an excellent analysis of this document, see David Mazingo and Thomas Robinson, *Lin Piao on "People's War": China Takes a Second Look at Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, November 1965), pp. 1–22.

176. For Mao's classic statement on protracted war, see Mao Zedong, *Selected Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), pp. 187–267.

177. For further discussion, see David P. Elliot, "Hanoi's Strategy in the Second Indochina War," in

egists viewed Lin Biao's advice as of little direct relevance to the Vietnamese situation. In recounting the CCP's success against the Japanese in World War Two, Lin omitted the role of the Soviet Union and the United States in crushing the Japanese. Because neither Moscow nor Beijing was able to play an analogous role in the Vietnam War, Lin's treatise offered misleading advice. Hanoi's view of the recommendation for a protracted war strategy was outlined in a speech by Le Duan a few months later, in May 1966. At an army conference, he declared,

It is fortunate that in the history of our country, each time we rose to oppose foreign aggression, we took the offensive and not the defensive. . . . Taking the offensive is a strategy, while taking the defensive is only a stratagem. Since the day the South Vietnamese rose up, they have continually taken the offensive.¹⁷⁸

Hanoi's choice of battle strategy had implications for the balance of its dependence on its two allies. An offensive strategy that relied on heavy weaponry and large-unit forces implied greater reliance on the Soviet Union than on China. The DRV was willing to increase its dependence on the USSR if that was the best way to defeat the United States. From Beijing's perspective, however, the North Vietnamese were committing serious theoretical and tactical errors. Chinese leaders argued that an offensive strategy at an early stage in the conflict was deficient because it deviated in important ways from Mao's doctrine of protracted people's war.¹⁷⁹ Hanoi's reliance on Soviet heavy weaponry and large-unit mobile tactics compounded this error in Chinese eyes.¹⁸⁰

The dispute over war strategy reached its apotheosis with the launching of the Tet Offensive on 30–31 January 1968. The offensive was the culmination of nearly a year of meticulous planning and involved an attack on 64 of the largest population centers in South Vietnam on a single night. In all, 200 separate attacks occurred in the first 48 hours.¹⁸¹ According to the *Official History of the Vietnamese People's Army (Lich Su Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam)*, preparations for the Tet Offensive included an extensive analysis of the

Luu Doan Huynh and Jane Werner, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 70–71.

178. Duiker, *China and Vietnam*, p. 50. In 1979, after the Sino-Vietnamese border war, Le Duan commented that “[W]e have never had a defensive strategy.” “Document: Comrade B on the Plot of the Reactionary Chinese Clique Against Vietnam,” trans. by Christopher E. Goscha, *Cold War History Project Bulletin*, No. 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001), p. 283.

179. On this point see John Garver, “The Tet Offensive and Sino-Vietnamese Relations,” in Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head, eds., *The Tet Offensive* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), pp. 47–48; and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 177–178.

180. Eugene Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. 86.

181. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

war. In May 1967, the Communist Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) held its fifth conference and affirmed the need for a “General Offensive–General Uprising” otherwise known as the Tet Offensive. The North Vietnamese Political Bureau reviewed the COSVN report in June 1967. Preparations for the Tet Offensive were set in motion in late July, and in October the Political Bureau met and made a final decision to launch it. Not until December, however, did the Political Bureau consider a resolution calling for the war to enter the stage of “decisive victory.” In early January 1968, the resolution was passed.¹⁸²

The Chinese view was that the Tet Offensive was a failure.¹⁸³ The DRV lost an estimated 85,000 troops out of 195,000 that participated in the five waves of attacks over a seventeen-month period.¹⁸⁴ A dip in bilateral relations occurred after Tet. From the launch of the offensive in late January 1968 to Ho Chi Minh’s funeral in September 1969, North Vietnam continued to send delegations to Beijing, but China did not reciprocate. No Chinese delegation, either official or unofficial, went to Hanoi during this period.¹⁸⁵

Sino–North Vietnamese conflict also arose over the issue of negotiations with the United States. In private discussions, Chinese officials disapproved of negotiations. An internal circular of 19 August 1965 noted: “The North Vietnamese practice on peace talks is different from ours. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam has never completely closed the door on peace negotiations. This is creating an opportunity for the imperialists, the revisionists, and the reactionaries and increasing their illusions about pressing the DRV into peace talks.”¹⁸⁶ The decision to enter negotiations reflected Hanoi’s belief, which converged with Moscow’s view, that by 1967 military methods had to be supplemented by diplomacy. In the DRV vernacular, a strategy of “talking while fighting” was necessary. The Chinese felt strongly that negotiations were of little value. When Pham Van Dong visited Beijing in April 1968, Mao emphasized that “what could not be achieved on the battlefield would not be achieved at the negotiation table.”¹⁸⁷ Yet, Mao failed to see the logic behind Hanoi’s integration of battlefield and negotiating strategy. The main objective

182. Ang Cheng Guan, “Decision-Making Leading to the Tet Offensive, 1968: The Vietnamese Communist Perspective,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (July 1998), pp. 344–345, 350–351.

183. For an assessment of the general Chinese view of DRV military strategy during the Vietnam War, see Lawson, *Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, pp. 108–111.

184. Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 126–135.

185. Lawson, *Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, p. 109.

186. Qiang Zhai, “Opposing Negotiations: China and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965–1968,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (1999), pp. 38–39.

187. *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji*, p. 524.

of the Tet Offensive had been to force the Americans to the negotiating table.¹⁸⁸ Moscow had been supportive of negotiations but had met resistance from Hanoi, which felt that the time was not right for talks.¹⁸⁹ After the Tet Offensive, Hanoi seized the opportunity offered by President Lyndon Johnson's announcement on 31 March 1968 of a partial ending of U.S. bombing and his concomitant call for a peace settlement based on the 1954 Geneva Agreements. On 3 April, Hanoi accepted the offer of negotiations. Talks began in Paris on 13 May 1968.¹⁹⁰ The Chinese were furious and refused even to mention the negotiations in the Chinese press.

Eventually, after a heated exchange on 17 October 1968 between Chen Yi and the DRV's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, the Chinese realized they could not prevent the North Vietnamese from pursuing peace talks.¹⁹¹ On 19 October the Xinhua news agency finally acknowledged the negotiations. Nearly a month passed before Mao, in a conversation with Pham Van Dong on 17 November, expressed approval of Hanoi's pursuit of negotiations even as it continued fighting.¹⁹² Taken at face value, the Chinese and North Vietnamese would appear to have had a fundamental difference of opinion. Yet, on closer inspection, their two positions were not that far apart. Even as the DRV prepared for negotiations after the Tet offensive, Ngyuen Van Linh maintained that "the decisive factor lies in the battlefield."¹⁹³ That position could easily have been articulated by any prominent CCP official.

The sources of Chinese opposition to the talks were twofold. First, this stance also reflected China's concern that North Vietnam would be negotiating (rather than achieving decisive results on the battlefield) at a time of U.S. weakness. Consider the following exchange between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong:

Zhou Enlai: According to us, at present, your acceptance of Johnson's proposal for a limited cessation of U.S. bombing of the North is not good timing and is not advantageous. We are insistent on that judgment. . . . So, when Johnson was facing the most difficult moment . . . you accepted his proposal. This act disappointed the world. Pro-American circles were happy. . . . You accepted a partial cessation of bombing and then accepted a site for talks that was not Phnom

188. Robert Brigham, "Vietnam at the Center," in Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam*, p. 107.

189. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, pp. 73–107.

190. North Vietnam selected as its chief negotiator Xuan Thuy, who had previously been head of the Vietnam-Chinese Friendship Association. See *ibid.*, pp. 156–157.

191. Westad et al., eds., *77 Conversations*, pp. 138–140.

192. Mao's comments to Pham can be found in *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994), pp. 580–583.

193. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, p. 145

Penh. You thus compromised twice. You are not initiating, but to the contrary, are losing the posture for initiating. . . . The key factor is the war itself. Victory is decided by the war. But, so far as negotiation is concerned, we are still holding to our view, namely that you have lost your initiative and fallen into a passive position.

Pham Van Dong: You have stated your opinion in a constructive way, and we should pay more attention to it. Because, after all, we are the ones fighting the USA and defeating them. We should be responsible for both military and diplomatic activities. Thank you very much for your opinion. We will consider it for our better performance, for our victory over the USA.¹⁹⁴

Chinese opposition to negotiations also stemmed from the simple fact that the USSR and the United States supported talks. The PRC was at loggerheads with both superpowers and feared collusion against China. In April 1968, as Zhou reviewed Beijing's strategic situation, he saw a qualitative deterioration, as both the Soviet Union and the United States created a "ring of encirclement" around China. Zhou noted that, "for a long time the USA has been half-encircling China. Now the Soviet Union is also encircling China. The circle is getting complete, except [the part of] Vietnam."¹⁹⁵ The fact that both Moscow and Washington supported peace negotiations in Vietnam raised Chinese fears of collusion and the specter of double encirclement of China. On 3 April 1968, when the Vietnamese responded to the U.S. offer of negotiations, Sino-DRV tensions became more evident. The North Vietnamese, still dependent on Chinese aid, had to restrain themselves as the PRC bluntly criticized a policy that in Beijing's view reflected Moscow's increasing influence on Hanoi. On 29 June 1968, Chinese anger at Hanoi's decision to participate in the peace talks became apparent. Zhou Enlai told a DRV delegation led by Pham Hung that Hanoi had been deceived by Moscow into pursuing negotiations:

Your acceptance of talks with the USA put you in a passive position. You have been trapped by the Soviets. Now, Johnson has the initiative. . . . Your acceptance of [the Americans'] partial bombing [proposals] and willingness to talk to them has improved their current position compared with where they were in 1966 and 1967. . . . It is the fault of the Soviets. The Soviets have long been henchmen of the USA and lent them a helping hand to oppose the world's revolutionary people. . . . We have made a list of mistakes committed by the Soviets. We would like to convey it to President Ho Chi Minh for his consideration.¹⁹⁶

194. Westad et al. eds., *77 Conversations*, 126–129.

195. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

196. *Ibid.*, 138.

The Laos Factor in Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1961–1968

This article highlights the Sino-Soviet conflict as the basic cause of Sino-North Vietnamese conflict. An alternative explanation is that the conflict was caused principally by bilateral issues rather than trilateral dynamics. To test the relative cogency of the bilateral thesis, a number of issues in Sino-Vietnamese relations can be used, including disagreements over the DRV's military strategy, Chinese opposition to negotiations with Washington, and Sino-Vietnamese competition for influence over Laos.¹⁹⁷ On methodological grounds, the role of Laos in Sino-Vietnamese relations is a particularly good test case. Being contiguous with both China and Vietnam, Laos is a natural area of competition between Beijing and Hanoi. In this sense, Sino-Vietnamese conflict over Laos is an “easy” test for the bilateral thesis to pass. Conversely, for the primary adversary thesis, Laos is a “hard” test to pass.¹⁹⁸ What we find, however, is that the timing of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict over Laos strongly suggests that Mao's concern about the Soviet Union was the main cause of Sino-Vietnamese conflict.

As the bilateral thesis would lead us to expect, the PRC had concerns about Vietnamese Communist influence in Laos stretching back to the early 1950s when the concept of an “Indochina Federation” comprising Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam was broached by Hanoi.¹⁹⁹ Laos was the subject of a special conference in Geneva from May 1961 to July 1962, in which thirteen countries including the United States, China, and the Soviet Union participated.²⁰⁰ The Chinese were aware of the strong North Vietnamese influence in Laos and were suspicious about Hanoi's influence with the pro-Vietnamese Pathet Lao.²⁰¹ However, the preponderance of the evidence is consistent with the thesis advanced throughout this article. Because the Soviet Union in the

197. On Sino-Soviet disagreements over DRV military strategy, see Lawson, *Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, pp. 79–116. On the latter two points, see Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 120–122, 155–175, 180–181.

198. Harry Eckstein, “Case Study and the Theory of Political Science,” in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, 9 vols. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), Vol. 7, pp. 79–137.

199. MacAlister Brown, “The Indochinese Federation Idea,” in Joseph J. Zasloff ed., *Postwar Indochina: Old Enemies and New Allies* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, 1988), pp. 77–102; and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 109.

200. Two documents were signed at the end of the Geneva conference. The first declared Laos a neutral state. The second, a protocol to the first, obliged the thirteen signatories to respect Laos's neutrality and to withdraw all foreign military personnel. See Sagar, *Major Political Events in Indo-China 1954–1990*, pp. 54, 59.

201. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 109.

1950s and early 1960s was not yet competing for influence with the Chinese, Sino–North Vietnamese relations concerning Laos were cooperative, even good. During the Geneva negotiations, Beijing cooperated closely with Hanoi to preserve the Pathet Lao’s interests.²⁰² The PRC also actively supported changes on the ground that affected the outcome of negotiations in Hanoi’s favor. For example, when the negotiations were deadlocked, the Chinese provided critical logistical support to the Pathet Lao in their capture of Nam Tha on 6 May 1962 from rightist forces led by General Phoumi Nosavan, some fifteen miles south of the Chinese border. The fall of Nam Tha weakened Nosavan’s position in the negotiations and enabled the Pathet Lao to increase the number of cabinet positions they held in the new tripartite government formed with rightists and neutralists (under Prince Souvanna Phouma).

Despite the long-standing rivalry between China and Vietnam in pursuing their interests in neighboring Laos, Beijing’s concerns about North Vietnamese influence in Laos did not reach a crisis point until September 1968, after Soviet–North Vietnamese cooperation grew rapidly. In October 1963 the Pathet Lao leader, Kaysone Phomvihane, visited Beijing and suggested that China assist the Pathet Lao’s party and army work and the development of its base area in Xam Neua. Cooperation on these matters lasted from October 1963 until September 1968. Despite the strong DRV presence in Laos and influence over the Pathet Lao, no substantive disagreements occurred between China and North Vietnam early on. But in September 1968, after Sino–North Vietnamese conflict emerged over the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, the repercussions were felt in Laos. As a result of pressure from Hanoi, Kaysone Phomvihane asked Li Wenzheng, the Chinese representative in Xam Neua, to return to China.²⁰³ Beijing construed this move as a signal that its presence in Laos was no longer desired by Hanoi, and tensions between the PRC and DRV increased.²⁰⁴

No one would deny that some of the conflict between Beijing and Hanoi in 1964–1968 was caused by specifically bilateral issues. The intensity of PRC-DRV interaction during this period provided opportunity for conflict. On 8 April 1965, during a visit to Beijing, Le Duan met Liu Shaoqi. Liu made a broad commitment to provide military and economic aid to Hanoi.²⁰⁵ Le Duan noted that Chinese pilots were needed for four specific purposes: “to

202. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

203. *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 180–181.

204. Quan Yanshi and Du Weidong, *Gongheguo mishi* (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1990), pp. 250–251.

205. Chen, *Mao’s China*, pp. 218–219.

restrict American bombing to areas south of the 20th or 19th parallels; to defend the safety of Hanoi; to defend several main transportation lines; and to raise the morale of the Vietnamese people.”²⁰⁶ Liu’s commitment was further fleshed out on 21–22 April 1965, when North Vietnamese Defense Minister General Vo Ngyuen Giap, met with PLA Chief of Staff General Luo Ruiqing and his first deputy chief of staff, General Yang Chengwu, to discuss military assistance.²⁰⁷ In early June, Luo Ruiqing explained to North Vietnamese Chief of Staff Van Tien Dung the scope of Chinese military assistance to North Vietnam.²⁰⁸ As part of this agreement, Chinese pilots were to be sent to assist DRV personnel. The following month, however, according to Hanoi, the Chinese abruptly decided that they would not send pilots to North Vietnam, declaring that the time was not right for such a step.²⁰⁹ This volte-face caused significant dissatisfaction in Hanoi and spurred the DRV to rely more on the USSR for air defense.²¹⁰ Ironically, during the Korean War, the issue of Moscow’s renegeing on the promise of immediate air support to the Chinese had sparked anger in Beijing. (The USSR eventually provided air support in January 1951, two-and-a-half months after China entered the Korean War.)²¹¹

Conclusion

John Lewis Gaddis has observed, “the roots of the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 lie in what we can now see to have been the fragmentation of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s.”²¹² The evidence presented in this article allows us to locate the origins of the Sino-Vietnamese war at an earlier period than Gaddis suggests. The roots of the Sino-Vietnam-

206. Westad et al. eds., *77 Conversations*, p. 85.

207. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 133–134.

208. Chen, *Mao’s China*, pp. 219–220; and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 134–135.

209. This charge was repeated in the late 1980s by a Vietnamese official. See Allen Whiting, “China’s Role in the Vietnam War,” in Jayne Werner and Davis Hunt, eds., *The American War in Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993), p. 73. See also Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Truth about Vietnam-Chinese Relations*, p. 37. PRC scholars who write about this period of Sino-Vietnamese relations stress that the agreement between Hanoi and Beijing called for air support only in case of a large-scale ground invasion by either U.S. or South Vietnamese forces. Because this did not occur, they claim the PRC did not renege on the agreement. See Li and Hao, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun*, p. 417.

210. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 135

211. Chen, *Mao’s China*, pp. 58, 60.

212. John Lewis Gaddis, Foreword to Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. x.

ese war of 1979 can be traced to the 1964–1968 period. A critical change in Chinese threat perceptions occurred during this period. In mid-June 1965, Chinese leader Zhou Enlai identified the main threat to China as coming from the United States, which he claimed was continuing its attempt, first begun with the Korean War, to encircle China.²¹³ However, by 1966 the primary threat to China increasingly seemed to come from the Soviet Union. From 1964 to 1968, North Vietnam became an important arena in which the Sino-Soviet conflict was played out. The Soviet Union's push for closer ties with North Vietnam after the ouster of Khrushchev increased Moscow's relative influence in Hanoi. Previous characterizations of Soviet-Vietnamese relations during this period as "basically stable and superficial" need to be revised.²¹⁴ The relationship during this period was at once deeper and more cooperative than such a characterization allows.

The switch in Soviet policy following Khrushchev's ouster also heightened Chinese anxieties about the North Vietnamese, who in the short run benefited greatly from the Sino-Soviet conflict because it led to increased aid.²¹⁵ Nonetheless, Hanoi did not have an easy time in its diplomacy with Beijing and Moscow. DRV leaders had to navigate the shoals of the Sino-Soviet conflict.²¹⁶ Eventually, a choice had to be made, and the North Vietnamese chose the USSR over the PRC.²¹⁷ Moscow had turned the strategic tables on Beijing. The Soviet Union bolstered its influence in the DRV, and the North Vietnamese were no longer as dependent on the Chinese.²¹⁸ The specter of Soviet-American encirclement posed a real threat to China. The Sino-American rapprochement of 1972 enabled China to eliminate one important component of this encirclement.²¹⁹ However, Zhou Enlai's fears concerning Soviet encirclement were to be posthumously realized. The USSR eventually signed a formal alliance treaty with the DRV in 1978. This act completed Ha-

213. Wang, *Zhongguo bimi dafabing*, p. 161.

214. Lawson, *Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, p. 158.

215. Thomas Christensen, "Worse than a Monolith: Disorganization and Rivalry within Asian Communist Alliances and U.S. Containment Challenges, 1949–69," *Asian Security*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005), pp. 80–127.

216. Reflecting on Hanoi's diplomacy vis-à-vis Beijing and Moscow during the Vietnam War years, Luu Doan Huynh, a former North Vietnamese diplomat noted in 1997, "We had problems with our allies. We needed Soviet and Chinese support as a deterrent against further U.S. aggression, but we never wanted to depend on Moscow or Beijing." Brigham, "Vietnam at the Center," p. 98.

217. Robert Brigham observed, "It was not until 1968, and the opening of peace talks (in May 1968), that Hanoi finally took the decisive step toward the Kremlin." Ibid.

218. The Vietnamese alignment with the Soviet Union did not preclude suspicion on both sides. See Gaiduk, *Soviet Union*, pp. 215–216.

219. Nicholas Khoo, "Realism Redux: Investigating the Causes and Effects of Sino-U.S. Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (November 2005), pp. 531–551.

noi's transformation from a close Chinese ally into a regional adversary, a designation confirmed by the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979.²²⁰

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220. For a recent reassessment of the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979, see Edward C. O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (New York: Routledge, 2007).