

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Vietnam War and Sino-American Relations, 1966

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

MAY 1998

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0-612-34917-9

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Abstract

This thesis argues that China would probably have intervened militarily in the Vietnamese conflict had the U.S. not restrained its military actions during the mid-1960s. During this period, U.S. decision-makers believed that to escalate the conflict through ground incursions into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or more aggressive air actions against the Hanoi and Haiphong area would provoke a direct Sino-U.S. confrontation in Indochina. This factor caused the U.S. to moderate its response to North Vietnamese forces into South Vietnam. This seriously affected the U.S. strategy toward the Communist aggression in Vietnam.

The Johnson administration believed that its military power could overwhelm the Vietnamese Communist forces in a short period of time. In fact, the administration had underestimated the Vietnamese tenacity to resist and did not anticipate the tremendous difficulties which would entail once the U.S. forces were driven into a military stalemate in Vietnam.

Acknowledgments

I first wish to thank Dr. Stephen J. Randall, my supervisor, and Dr. John R. Ferris for their guidance, support, and patience. I benefited as well from the constructive comments of Drs. Ronald C. Keith and Timothy H.E. Travers. I owe a debt of thanks to the administrative staff in the Department of History, Inter-Library Loan Service at the University of Calgary, and the U.S. National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents and to my eldest sister, Anne Tang, for their great encouragement, moral and financial support. Special thanks should also be given to my best friends, Mike Ngo, Alexandria Flynn, Alvin Choong, Alfred Yip, and Hon-Wei Chia.

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Introduction

After the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954, Vietnam was divided on the 17th parallel between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the North) and the Republic of Vietnam (the South). Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh party (the coalition of the Vietnamese Nationalist parties) wished to unify Vietnam at once into one country. In the latter half of the 1950s, however, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the DRV) concentrated its efforts on nation-building, leaving aside its national unification goal as secondary importance. By this stage, the Viet Minh had been transformed into the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP), which was headed by Chairman Ho Chi Minh. In the South, Viet Minh cadres were almost entirely rounded up by the autocratic, anti-Communist regime of Premier Ngo Dinh Diem.

Under the dictatorship of the Diem government, a great cleavage emerged between the South Vietnamese state and society. This development, along with the brutal suppression of political activists and the remaining Viet Minh cadres in the South, gave rise to the formation of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF). The NLF did not get strong support from the North until the early 1960s. At that time, the Hanoi leadership decided to resume its "armed resistance" tactics, which Washington perceived as a threat to the security of Southeast Asia. Therefore, the U.S. government stepped up its military advisory role in Laos and South Vietnam.¹

With the downfall of Ngo Dinh Diem, in late 1963, the dominant group within the Vietnamese Workers' Party sent its PAVN [People's Army of (North) Vietnam] regular units to assist the NLF, preparing for a general offensive to destroy the regime in Saigon. This concerned the Johnson administration.² By mid-June 1964, President Johnson decided to take a

tougher stand in Southeast Asia by expanding the role of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. His administration informed the North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong (through a Canadian diplomat) that the U.S. would exert heavy military pressure on the DRV if the infiltration of PAVN forces continued. Hanoi refused to bow to U.S. demand. This unyielding attitude brought about a U.S. military provocative action against the DRV's naval patrols in the Tonkin Gulf (August 1964). That incident enabled President Johnson to obtain a U.S. congressional resolution to "repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" in South Vietnam.³

Soon after the Johnson administration demonstrated its determination to deal with the Communist forces in Southeast Asia, its ideological rivals in Moscow and Peking decided that they too must play a role in the Vietnamese conflict. For the Chinese Communists, especially for Chairman Mao, Vietnam had been a testing ground to roll back U.S. containment policy toward Communist China since the 1950s. Chinese support to North Vietnam was intended not only to undermine U.S. credibility in Southeast Asia but also to refute Khrushchev's revisionist doctrine of peaceful coexistence in the world.⁴

The Vietnamese war gave the Soviets a good opportunity to force Communist China back to the Soviet camp and to re-consolidate its leadership in the Communist world. Given the triangular relationship (between Moscow, Peking, and Washington) in Vietnam, conflicts between two states could allow the third to achieve its objectives. By early 1966, the United States deployed nearly 300,000 U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam and by that summer had escalated its air war to the periphery of two major North Vietnamese cities (Hanoi and Haiphong). Under these circumstances, the prospect of a Sino-U.S. confrontation loomed large in the minds of Washington's policy-makers and Peking's rulers.

Throughout the mid-1960s, U.S. decision-makers frequently referred to the danger that Communist China would intervene militarily in the conflict should the U.S. cross some line or another. They asserted that so long as the U.S. military did not violate the demarcation line on the 17th Parallel of Vietnam or threaten the existence of the North Vietnamese regime and the security of China, Peking would not intervene directly in the Vietnamese war. This had obvious consequences for U.S. military strategy.

Historians and scholars too have noticed how this issue affected U.S. decisions in Vietnam. As historian John W. Garver pointed out in his article ***The Chinese Threat in the Vietnam War:***

In 1965-67 China provided Hanoi with political-military support ... figured prominently in shaping Washington's strategy of graduated escalation. In essence Beijing threatened to enter the war on Hanoi's side if the United States carried the war too far. Its purpose was to deter, limit, and defeat American attacks against its North Vietnamese ally.⁵

Garver argues that it was the threat of Chinese intervention which induced the U.S. decision-makers to wage a restricted war against armed aggression from the North in the mid-1960s. Similarly, in ***America's Longest War***, George C. Herring wrote that President Johnson "did not approve the all-out bombing campaign urged by Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs. He and his civilian advisers continued to fear that a direct, full-scale attack on North Vietnam might provoke Chinese intervention".⁶ It is generally agreed that fear of being embroiled in Sino-U.S. hostilities prevented the Johnson administration from launching an all-out war to

deal with the North Vietnamese armed intrusion into the South.

This restraint has been criticized by revisionist writers, who reject the policy of gradual escalation in the mid-1960s. They assert that only an all-out military strategy could have stopped Communist aggression in South Vietnam, that fear of Chinese Communist entry into the conflict was a major cause for U.S. unwillingness to adopt such an approach, and that this fear was groundless. This approach was most notably advocated by Harry G. Summers, who contended that the U.S. should have applied sufficient military force to force the North Vietnamese to surrender and that the likelihood of Chinese intervention was very small.⁷ All historians treat the issue of the possibility of Chinese intervention in the Vietnam War as important, but none of them, revisionists or otherwise, have thoroughly examined the evidence on this issue.

My thesis examines the question of whether there was a real danger of Chinese Communist intervention in the Vietnamese war had the U.S. government not restrained its military actions. I will demonstrate to what degree the Johnson administration took the danger of Chinese intervention into account, and define the situations under which the Chinese Communists would consider a direct involvement in the Vietnamese conflict. I will also address the nature of the tacit Sino-U.S. understanding of 1966 which ended the danger of Chinese military intervention in Indochina.

Notes

1. R.B. Smith, ***An International History of the Vietnam War, Vol.III: The Making of a Limited War*** (London: MacMillan, 1991), p. 17; Chen

- Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 142 (June 1995), pp. 356-357. See also, William J. Duiker, *China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict* (Berkeley, Cali.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986), pp. 42-43.
2. Duiker, *China and Vietnam*, p. 45.
 3. ***Cold War International History Project Bulletin***, Issues 6-7 (Winter 1995/96), p. 235; Min Chen, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts: Lessons from the Indochina Wars* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), p. 30. See also, ***U.S. Department of State Bulletin***, Vol. 51, No. 1313 (August 24, 1964), p. 268.
 4. John W. Garver, "The Chinese Threat in the Vietnam War", *Parameters* (Spring 1992), p. 75.
 5. Ibid., p. 77.
 6. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p. 139.
 7. Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy, A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Cali.: Presidio Press, 1982), pp. 115-23. Summer's critique is discussed in William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, Cali.: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 371-76.

Chapter 1: The Chinese War Threat of early 1966

In assessing Chinese Communist views about Southeast Asia, in mid-January 1966, the **U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency** told the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "Peiping apparently fears that frustration over the war may cause the U.S. 'imperialists' to invade North Vietnam or even China itself." In public, Peking's leaders voiced similar views. In late December 1965, the Chinese Communist Premier Chou En-lai warned that the United States, failing to force the South Vietnamese people to abandon their "just struggle" of national liberation, was preparing to enlarge the Indochinese conflict "both within and outside Vietnam", spreading the war "possibly to North Vietnam and China". If Washington expanded a "war of aggression" into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or Mainland China's territories, the Chinese people were "prepared for this contingency".¹

The danger of Chinese intervention was not perceived solely by the American Intelligence Community, but also by different quarters of the U.S. government. In a recommendation to the U.S. President concerning the U.S. military build-up in South Vietnam in late January 1966, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara pointed out that "even with the recommended deployments, we will be faced in early 1967 with a military stand-off at a much higher level, with pacification still stalled, and with any prospect of military success marred by the chances of an active Chinese intervention."² In early 1966, a report presented by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senators Mike Mansfield, George D. Aiken, Edmund S. Muskie, J. Caleb Boggs, and Daniel K. Inouye argued that even though Communist China had not yet committed combat troops, that danger would grow if the war in Vietnam continued to expand. The Committee indicated that Peking's leaders were quite aware that "the war may impinge upon China herself at some point and have begun to make preliminary preparations for that eventuality."³ In questioning the depth of

U.S. involvement in South Vietnam, Congressman Bennett, in mid-January 1966, told U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance that the U.S. "should not become involved in a land war with the Chinese". Mr. Bennett feared that the chances of risking a wider war with Communist China "were rapidly increasing every day".⁴

These concerns were supported by much evidence about the expressed views of the Chinese Communist leadership. A survey of Communist Bloc nations' views toward the U.S. peace moves in late January 1966 by State Department intelligence showed that the Peking leadership regarded the American military presence in South Vietnam as a threat to their security and emphasized 'the need for defense preparation'. The Chinese People's Daily and the Leftist newspaper (Ta Kung Pao) in Hong Kong also pointed out that Senator Mansfield's remarks on "the danger of an expanded conflict in Vietnam" in early January 1966 disclosed a U.S. intention to extend the Indochinese conflict to "the whole of Southeast Asia and to China."⁵ According to the broadcast of Radio Peking in January 1966, a conference of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in Peking favored "strengthened combat readiness" for China's defence and a "heightened vigilance" for the entire country. The PLA conference noted that Washington had shifted its main strategy from Europe to Asia and aimed at enlarging the fighting in Vietnam and was "attempting to forcibly impose war" upon the people of Communist China. In another radio address, Chinese Communist official Liao Cheng-chih warned U.S. policy-makers not to plot a broader war against the Chinese people because of their failure in the South, and noted that China was making all the necessary preparations to meet the U.S. threats.⁶

Even more, the fears of U.S. decision-makers about the Chinese sensitivity toward a possible U.S. military threat against China were mainly derived from parallels with the Korean War. When the People's

Republic of China was founded in 1949, Chairman Mao regarded Korea, Taiwan (the renegade province of China), and Vietnam as the three central areas of strategic menace.⁷ As the war broke out in Korea in 1950 and the U.S. forces under General MacArthur crossed the Yalu River, Peking's leaders perceived the U.S. moves as an aggressive act to topple the North Korean Communist government, and they found an imperative need to ward off the U.S. military threat in North Korea, owing to its proximity to the Chinese Mainland.

In January 1966, Secretary McNamara was skeptical about the deployment of more ground troops. He advised the President:

[Deployments of the kind we have recommended will not guarantee success]. If the U.S. were willing to commit enough forces -- perhaps 600,000 men or more -- we could probably ultimately prevent the DRV/VC from sustaining the conflict at a significant level. When this point was reached, however, the question of Chinese intervention would become critical. (We are generally agreed that the Chinese Communists will intervene with combat forces to prevent destruction of the Communist regime in North Vietnam; it is less clear that they would intervene to prevent a DRV/VC defeat in the South). The intelligence estimate is that the chances are a little better than even that, at this stage, Hanoi and Peiping would choose to reduce their effort in the South and try to salvage their resources for another day.⁸

Certainly, the possibility of Chinese intervention was important in guiding the conduct of U.S. military actions in the Vietnam war. Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote in As I Saw It that he consistently

opposed any U.S. ground operations into North Vietnam, because the China specialists from the U.S. State Department held that such action would likely trigger a Chinese response. Under the mutual security pact with Peking, the Hanoi leadership would only ask for 'direct Chinese military intervention' if the existence of the DRV regime was being threatened. Since the Tonkin Gulf Incident in August 1964, Peking had assured the DRV's leaders that China would aid North Vietnam in the event of a U.S. land invasion. According to Dean Rusk, the Johnson administration sought to avoid threatening Communist China or taking action which might lead the Chinese to misread the U.S. intentions.⁹

Confronted with the possibility of Chinese intervention, President Johnson outlined U.S. intentions in the Vietnamese war at a Freedom House Dinner speech in late February 1966. He proclaimed that U.S. military measures in the Vietnamese conflict were not designed to impose a broader war upon the Chinese people in Mainland China, but rather to prevent North Vietnam from seizing political control of South Vietnam by force:

Some people ask if we are caught in a blind escalation of force that is pulling us headlong toward a wider war that no one wants. The answer, again, is a simple 'no'.

Some ask about the risks of a wider war, perhaps against the vast land armies of Red China. And again the answer is 'no', never by any act of ours -- and not if there is any reason left behind the wild words from Peking.¹⁰

President Johnson spelt out clearly U.S. intentions in order to avoid drawing Communist China into a direct military confrontation with the United States. The prospect of direct Chinese intervention in early 1966

caused the U.S. government to be cautious in its policy of deploying more U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam, as well as in the intensification of U.S. air strikes against the North.

In late December 1965, the Johnson administration decided to halt the bombing campaign against North Vietnam for 37 days (from 24 December 1965 to 31 January 1966) in order to give the North Vietnamese sufficient time to reconsider their options in South Vietnam. These options were not very attractive ones, at least in the eyes of U.S. officials. McNamara summarized these options in a memorandum to the President in late November 1965:

It is my belief that there should be a three- or four-week pause [note that McNamara himself no longer held to the six-to-eight week duration] in the program of bombing the North before we either greatly increase our troop deployments to Vietnam or intensify our strikes against the North. The reasons for this belief are, first, that we must lay a foundation in the mind of the American public and in world opinion for such an enlarged phase of the war and, second, we should give North Vietnam a face-saving chance to stop the aggression.¹¹

During the bombing pause the DRV government got a warning notice either to terminate its "side of the war" in the South or risk a greater U.S. military action. Having serious doubts about U.S. sincerity, the Hanoi leadership used the bombing pause to increase the flow of military personnel and materiel into South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese government, with strong support from Peking, showed no sign of giving up fighting in the South or engaging in serious negotiations. Hence, the

Hawkish element in the Johnson administration urged the U.S. President to resume bombing immediately, asking to shorten the bombing pause duration that had been set by Secretary of Defense McNamara.¹²

The U.S. President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy contended that "the targetting in any resumption of bombing should be more carefully justified and planned much more carefully in advance than it was in the last year." This view was shared by McNamara, though his selected targets of bombing in North Vietnam were "much more extensive than" the ones that the President's Special Assistant had in mind.¹³ The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff's position on their proposals of resuming bombing in North Vietnam was stronger still. They argued that the U.S. government should resume bombing the DRV in order to show the Chinese Communists that the U.S. was fully prepared for a larger scale of involvement. In other words, the Joint Chiefs believed that the probability of Chinese Communist entry into the fighting in Vietnam would only occur through Peking's miscalculation.¹⁴ In mid-January 1966, the JCS pointed out to Secretary of Defense McNamara that:

... continued U.S. restraint may serve to increase rather than decrease the likelihood of such intervention [Chinese] by encouraging gradual responses on the part of the Chinese Communists. This is in addition to the probable interpretation of such restraint as U.S. vacillation by both the Communist and Free World leadership.¹⁵

To counter these arguments, Under Secretary of State George Ball strongly urged the President not to resume bombing. He contended that "there are undoubtedly thresholds over which the Communist powers [i.e., Communist China and the Soviet Union] will not permit us to go in

destroying the economy of North Vietnam without intervening themselves in a manner that could lead to major war." 16 McNaughton outlined clearly the options and limitations in the resumption of bombing against North Vietnam:

Nature of resumed program against the North:

d. Resume where we left off, but with fast escalation.

A fast (as compared with a slow) escalation ... promises quickly to interdict effectively. The objections to the 'fast' escalation are ... that it runs serious risks of 'flashing' the Chinese and Soviets.¹⁷

In another memorandum to Bundy, McNaughton elaborated his views more clearly:

It is doubtful that a meaningful ceiling can be put on infiltration (short of extreme action threatening the continued existence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as an organized society and almost certainly involving direct involvement of China and the Soviet Union).¹⁸

Essentially, McNaughton supported a gradual resumption and 'only a slow escalation' following the renewal of bombing against North Vietnam. But Ball opposed any resumption of bombing. In a long, analytical paper to the American President, he emphasized that:

I recognize the difficulty and complexity of the problem and I do not wish to add to your burdens. But before a final decision is made on this critical issue, I feel an obligation to

amplify and document my strong conviction: that sustained bombing of North Vietnam will more than likely lead us into war with Red China -- probably in six to nine months. And it may well involve at least a limited war with the Soviet Union.¹⁹

Ball believed that escalatory air strikes would have a definite, mounting pressure on the North only when North Vietnamese sensitive targets were being hit. This would so escalate the Vietnam war that "sooner or later, we will almost certainly collide with Chinese interests in such a way as to bring about a Chinese involvement." Noting how the Truman administration misread the Chinese Communist intentions in the Korean War, Ball argued that:

Quite clearly there is a threshold which we cannot pass over without precipitating a major Chinese involvement. We do not know -- even within wide margins of error -- where that threshold is. Unhappily we will not find out until after the catastrophe.²⁰

Ball's judgement coincided with the arguments circulated by the two pro-Communist newspapers (Ta Kung Pao and Wen Hui Pao) in Hong Kong in a series of articles between 24 and 30 January, emphasizing that the Chinese Communist leadership was foreseeing a confrontation with U.S. imperialism sooner or later. Simultaneously, the U.S. Consul General Edward E. Rice in Hong Kong, one of the leading "China watchers" in the U.S. government, recommended the White House not to undertake "any resumption of bombing in North Vietnam", fearing that such a dramatic act would precipitate a greater Chinese involvement in the Vietnamese

conflict. He believed that "the risk that we [i.e., the U.S.] will get into a war with Communist China would be substantially increased by our extending intensified attacks to the Hanoi- Haiphong area", due to the danger of involving "heavy civilian casualties".²¹

In spite of Ball's and Rice's comments and his own concern with the danger of war with Red China, Johnson held it necessary to resume bombing. McNamara also supported the military's request to resume bombing with reservations about its effectiveness in reducing the Viet-Cong infiltration. McNamara adopted this view mainly to wear down criticism that the bombing pause was letting the DRV regime step up infiltration into South Vietnam, and to avoid giving the wrong signal (of receding U.S. involvement in Vietnam) to Hanoi, Peking, and the American public.²²

In an effort to seek a broader consensus before making his final decision, Johnson called in a group of senior advisers (known as the "Wise Men") for further consultation in late January 1966. This advisory group (including Clark Clifford, Arthur Dean, Allen Dulles, and John McCloy) suggested resuming bombing against North Vietnam and reinforcing the size of U.S. forces in the South. In a private conversation, Clifford told Bundy that "the French experience is overwhelmingly important to the thinking in Hanoi" in regard to the U.S. bombing pause. Clifford favoured a prompt resumption 'with carefully measured' air strikes at the beginning and urged the U.S. administration to 'keep up the pressure' on the DRV regime, so that Hanoi would believe that the Americans were not as weary as the French had been to back down.²³

By this time, President Johnson had to admit that the bombing pause had been a failure. On 30 January 1966, he held a discussion on terminating the pause with prominent leaders in Congress, and then with the National Security Council. Since the DRV regime gave no response to

the U.S. bombing pause, on 31 January 1966, he decided to recommence bombing and approved the Rolling Thunder programme to be carried out in the following month. But for the time being, the President did not support any extension of air attacks on North Vietnamese industrial targets, though this was desired by the U.S. military. The main opposition came from Dean Rusk and McNamara, who apprehended that to expand bombing targets near the China border as the Joint Chiefs requested would trigger a Chinese entry into the war, as had occurred in the Korean War. McNamara mentioned in his memoirs that he and Dean Rusk urged the U.S. President to have a tight control over the bombing program in the North, which had to be "more limited than the Chiefs wished --to minimize the risk of Chinese intervention."²⁴

Having failed to bring Communist China and the DRV to the negotiating table during the bombing pause, the Johnson administration once again adopted drastic measures. In February 1966, Johnson held a conference with South Vietnamese leaders in order to send a clear signal to Peking, Hanoi, and the American public that the U.S. government would maintain its pledge to the Republic of Vietnam. Upon the arrival of South Vietnamese leaders at the Honolulu International Airport, the U.S. President proclaimed:

Our stand must be as firm as ever. If we allow the Communists to win in Vietnam, it will become easier and more appetizing for them to take over other countries in other parts of the world. We will have to fight again someplace else - - at what cost no one knows. And that is why it is vitally important to every American that we stop the Communists in South Vietnam.²⁵

Johnson's view was influenced by John T. McNaughton, who believed that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was not simply aimed to prevent the Hanoi government from taking control of South Vietnam, but part of a broader strategy to contain Red China and defend Southeast Asia as a whole. As McNaughton argued:

Our war in Vietnam is but a part of our broader involvement in Asia. Our policy there is to contain China which -- like Germany prior to the two World Wars, Japan in the late 30s, and the USSR in 1947 -- looms as a major power threatening to undercut our importance and effectiveness in the world. ... Until China's zeal wanes, she must be contained on three fronts (in addition to the northern and northwestern fronts, where she abuts the Soviet Union) -- the Japan-Korea front, the India-Pakistan front and the Southeast Asia front. The requirement for U.S. effort in the area will continue for some time to come. It should be realized in this connection that any 'settlement' in Vietnam will be just another step in the give-and-take in Asia, which can be expected to keep U.S. forces and funds busy for the next 20 years.²⁶

At this time, many U.S. officials perceived North Vietnamese aggression with Chinese backing as a threat to all of Southeast Asia. Given the colonial past in this region, each newly-independent Southeast Asian state was confronting a tremendously difficult task of nation-building. Southeast Asia seemed easily susceptible to Communist intrusion, owing to the lack of national will among the area's nations.

In particular, William P. Bundy, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, held that the practice of the historic Chinese

tributary system would lead Communist China to dominate its Southeast Asian neighbors. He asserted that throughout Chinese history, once a strong central power was established it exerted maximum political influence over its neighbors. To this pattern, however, was now added a desire to impose total political and ideological domination over its Southeast Asian neighbors. As Bundy told the Associated Students of Pomona College (California) in mid-February 1966:

And yet we must recognize, I think, because of the communist element in the thinking and practice of the leaders of Peiping today, that there is another factor that raises strong doubts whether their ambitions are in fact this modest. We have seen, for example, in the contrast between what the Soviets have done in Eastern Europe and the behaviour of predecessor Russian regimes, that there is a Communist logic that does insist on total control, that will not tolerate anything other than the imposition of the full Communist totalitarian system. The experience of Soviet control in Eastern Europe suggests that this same kind of Communist logic does and would apply to the behaviour of Communist China.²⁷

Fearing such dangers, the U.S. government found it imperative to help Southeast Asian nations withstand any Communist aggression. The U.S. commitment to the Vietnamese conflict was part of a broader strategy to wear down the ambitions of Communist China and prevent Southeast Asia falling under Chinese Communist domination. In a statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in mid-February 1966, Rusk outlined clearly the basis of American involvement in Vietnam:

We are in Vietnam because the issues posed there are deeply intertwined with our own security and because the outcome of the struggle can profoundly affect the nature of the world in which we and our children will live. Our commitments to South Vietnam were not taken in isolation but are a part of a systematic effort in the postwar period to assure a stable peace.²⁸

The three principal Bloc countries [Communist China, the DRV, and the U.S.S.R.] publicly claimed that the US-GVN meeting in Honolulu indicated that Washington intended to enlarge the Vietnamese conflict in the Indochinese region. The DRV's Worker Party editorial (Nhan Dan) in early February 1966 charged that the Honolulu conference was an "added proof" of U.S. intention to intensify the fighting in Vietnam. Radio broadcasts from Peking and Moscow made identical charges.²⁹ These three Communist powers emphasized that the Honolulu meeting was "a strategy conference" to impose a broader war upon the Vietnamese people.³⁰

Washington paid particular attention to Peking's reaction when the U.S. resumed bombing the DRV at the end of January 1966. The propaganda line was alarming. The People's Daily claimed that the United States was attempting to encircle Mainland China militarily. In a series of articles regarding the Chinese Communist views on war with the United States, the Hong Kong Communist press (Ta Kung Pao and Wen-hui Pao) stressed that the clash between China and the U.S. imperialists "appears to be inevitable".³¹

By mid-February 1966, the deputy editor-in-chief of the Wen-hui Pao (Chin Yao-Yu) asserted that a Sino-American confrontation "finally cannot be averted", owing to the aggressive nature of "ruling circles" of the U.S.

imperialism and the issue was only a matter of time. Later, however, the same editor appeared less certain about the inevitability of war and claimed that U.S. provocations would be arrested by "a broad front" of strong Chinese Communist resistance.³² Other Chinese Mainland press alleged that U.S. imperialists were in league with the Soviet Union, India, Japan, and the U.K. to form "an anti-China Holy Alliance" to threaten the territorial integrity of China. All this indicated that in the minds of Chinese Communist leadership, China was being encircled by the "imperialists, reactionaries, and revisionists" and that they were predisposed to see U.S. actions in Vietnam as a direct threat to China.³³ As the People's Daily noted in mid-February 1966, "the U.S. is tightening its military encirclement round China and preparing to launch an armed attack against it."³⁴

In order to address such concerns and to avoid provoking China into direct military involvement in Vietnam, the U.S. President proclaimed:

We have threatened no one, and we will not. We seek the end of no regime, and we will not. Our purpose is solely to defend against aggression. To any armed attack, we will reply. We have measured the strength and the weakness of others, and we think we know our own. We observe in ourselves, and we applaud in others, a careful restraint in action. We can live with anger in word as long as it is matched by caution in deed.³⁵

Johnson also gave a firm assurance to Peking that the United States had no intention to threaten the Communist regime in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or Mainland China. The U.S. objective was neither to overthrow the Hanoi regime nor launch an armed attack on the Chinese

Mainland, but rather to help free the South Vietnamese people from external armed aggression. More broadly, in order to defuse Sino-American tension, the U.S. government sought to reconcile its hostile attitude toward Red China. In early March 1966, a series of public hearings about Sino-U.S. relations were held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, while the Johnson administration agreed to allow American journalists and scholars to travel to Mainland China.³⁶

Through these conciliatory gestures, Washington tried to signal Peking and the American public that it was thinking of changes in U.S. policy toward Communist China. Alongside this, strong voices within the American government and U.S. academia called for the end of China's isolation. This sentiment was expressed in the China's specialists testimony to the Far East Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. As Senator J.W. Fulbright stated at the Committee on Foreign Relations:

Our ultimate objective must of course be political: the prevention of war between China and America. At present there appears to be a growing expectation of war in both countries and, as Professor Allport points out, "what people expect determines their behavior." Perhaps a concerted effort to increase our understanding of China and the Chinese would alter that fatal expectancy, and perhaps if our expectations were altered theirs too would change. It is anything but a sure thing but, considering the stakes and considering the alternative, it seems worth a try.³⁷

In a congressional speech, in mid-March 1966, Vice-President Humphrey spoke publicly in support of lessening Sino-American tensions

by arguing for "containment without isolation". Dean Rusk also noted in the House hearings on U.S. policy toward Communist China that the strained relations between People's Republic of China and the United States could be overcome:

We must keep firmly in our minds that there is nothing eternal about the policies and attitudes of Communist China.

We must avoid assuming the existence of an unending and inevitable state of hostility between ourselves and the rulers of mainland China.³⁸

Rusk's comments marked a significant shift in U.S. attitude toward Communist China. Although Washington did not indicate that it would cease to oppose Chinese Communist membership in the United Nations, factions of the U.S. administration offered hints in support of such a move. Humphrey's graduation speech (June 1966) at West Point also mentioned the U.S. intention to build a better relationship with Mainland China.³⁹

In the first half of 1966, the Chinese press and its Communist leadership repeatedly played on the themes of U.S. military "encirclement of China" and of U.S.-Soviet collusion against the Chinese people and national liberation movements in the Third World. In late January 1966, a Peking Radio broadcast described a probable U.S. attack on China's periphery (consisting of three fronts of invasion into North, Central, and South China) as the first strategic plan to dismantle China's defense.⁴⁰

The People's Daily in early February 1966 accused the U.S. of "shifting the focus of its global strategy from Europe to Asia", aiming to point "its spearhead of aggression mainly at China, which it considers its main enemy."⁴¹ What was the reality behind this veil of propaganda? Some Chinese Communist leaders (notably the Maoist group --including

Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai and Lin Piao) at Peking argued that U.S. imperialists were acting in direct collusion with Soviet revisionists, who advocated detente with the United States and Western Europe and endorsed the resurgence of Japanese militarism in Asia. The Maoist group asserted that U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism would pose the same level of strategic threat to Communist China.

In early 1966, the other faction of the Chinese Communist leadership (the pro-Soviet group or the Liu-Lo or Liu-Teng faction), which was led by Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping, ceased to compete with its opponents on the battleground of foreign policy.⁴² The pro-Soviet group was forced to abandon its position on foreign policy matters during the inner-party debate in the "socialist unity" issue over Vietnam (in the winter of 1965), because it failed to persuade the U.S.S.R. to give up its leading role in the "united action" against the U.S. escalation of the Vietnam war. Throughout the intense inner-party political debates in the spring and summer of 1965, the pro-Soviet group had held that U.S. imperialism was a more immediate security threat than the U.S.S.R. It had insisted that improving Sino-Soviet relations was needed to counter the U.S. military threat of nuclear retaliation against China as well as to reconstruct the shattered Chinese economy after the Great Leap Forward movement. Against this, the Maoist group advocated "self-reliance" as an independent path of socio-economic development for China and "People's War" as a strategy to counter the U.S. military threat. Thus, China needed not subordinate its independent role to a domineering neighbour. This policy allowed the Maoist group to defeat its pro-Soviet opponents in the CCP debate regarding "socialist unity".

As the Liu-Teng faction lost its ground on issues of foreign policy, its leaders devoted their efforts to the domestic power struggle. This group still held important posts within the Chinese Communist party politburo,

enabling it to wield bureaucratic influence over the Maoist leaders. However, the Maoists struck in this sphere too with the removal of Army Chief of Staff Lo Jui-ching and Mayor Peng Chen at Peking, two important figures of the Liu-Teng faction, in April-May 1966.⁴³ Apart from the two main factions of Chinese Communist leadership, a considerable number of high-ranking Chinese Communist bureaucrats, the "rationalists" spoke in favour of a reconciliation with the Soviet Union. They regarded an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations as the only way to solicit aid from Moscow for China's rapid industrialization. On this point, the "rationalists" were in line with the Liu-Teng group.⁴⁴ But what the "rationalists" pursued regarding Sino-Soviet relations was not a military alliance, which had been advocated by the pro-Soviet faction since the summer of 1965, but rather a normalization of relations with Moscow to lessen the threat to China posed by the U.S.S.R and the U.S. Such a reconciliation would let the Chinese Communist leadership direct itself to industrial modernization.⁴⁵

Due to the defeat of Lo Jui-ching and other pro-Soviet military professionals (the Hawkish line of the Liu-Teng faction) in the winter of 1965, the Chinese leadership continued with a policy of restraint in Vietnam. The People's Daily, in early 1966, warned that "If the U.S. aggressors should dare to invade our country, we shall wipe them out resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely."⁴⁶ This warning statement implied that Peking would only intervene directly in the Vietnamese conflict if China was attacked by the United States. Such a policy of Chinese deterrence served to reduce the risk of colliding with the U.S.

In turn, this attitude reflected the concept of "People's War" advocated by the Maoist group since September 1965. This was an alternative to "direct military intervention", which had been hotly pursued by the military element of the Liu-Lo faction (Lo Jui-ching and the pro-

Soviet army group) in July-August 1965. The strategy of "People's War" did not completely rule out the possibility of direct Chinese intervention in North Vietnam, for Chinese leaders visualized that at some time in the future the Hanoi leadership, reluctant to abandon its national liberation movement in the South to U.S. military superiority, might request Chinese "volunteers" or combat troops into the Vietnamese War. Moreover, although Peking showed its unwillingness to provoke a larger war with the United States in early 1966, the Maoist group also persistently pressured the North Vietnamese government not to respond to any of the American peace initiatives.⁴⁷

Peking's stance on peace talks was more rigid than the one in Hanoi, arguing that suspension of U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam was insufficient reason for the U.S. government to hold talks with the DRV regime. In mid-January 1966, the People's Daily argued that the U.S. peace offensive and the second bombing pause were just a "smoke-screen" to cover further U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War. The "key to settlement" to the Vietnamese conflict was a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops in Vietnam: "if the Americans do not get out, the Vietnamese people will drive them out by force".⁴⁸

Communist China's hard line in urging the North Vietnamese to regard the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam as offering the only basis for negotiation, a position obviously unacceptable to the Johnson administration, showed that the Peking leadership was interested in prolonging the war in Vietnam rather than in helping the North Vietnamese to end it by reaching a negotiated settlement with the U.S. This was one source of Sino-Vietnamese discord, leading to an estrangement between the two socialist countries in the 1970s.⁴⁹

Mao's policy toward the Vietnamese conflict was part of his strategy toward Third World liberation movements. Mao perceived the armed

struggle in South Vietnam as a model to rally all revolutionary forces in Asia, Africa, and Latin America behind Peking in order to defeat the U.S. imperialist world domination and redirect the socialist camp into the orthodox road of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist doctrine. To Mao, Peking's involvement in the Vietnam War was also a way to force back the U.S. containment of China in Asia. The CPR's support to North Vietnamese struggle was a strategy to break through the U.S. policy of isolating Communist China. Dr. Mostafa Kamel, the Ambassador of the United Arab Republic at Cairo, conveyed his analysis of the war situation in Vietnam to U.S. official Harrison M. Symmes. Symmes summarized that conversation:

- (1) The heart of the matter is not Vietcong versus South Vietnam, but U.S. versus China;
- (2) The Chinese are using the Vietnam situation as a stage to show the U.S. and the rest of the world that China is not happy with the way she is being treated;
- (3) North Vietnam will not negotiate without permission of China, and the latter will press its policy of having North Vietnam fight to the end;
- (4) China is not prepared to fight the U.S. and if there was a real threat of carrying the war to Red China, the latter would back off.⁵⁰

Kamel's analysis depicted what the Maoist leaders had in mind. Peking's objective in assisting the DRV in liberating South Vietnam was prompted by Mao's belief in forming "a broad international united front" to mount a two-pronged attack on U.S. imperialism and Moscow's revisionist doctrine.⁵¹

To Mao, China had a great stake in influencing the Vietnamese war

situation. Victory for the Chinese liberation-war strategy in South Vietnam would cripple the U.S.-supported treaty organization for the defense of Southeast Asia and also disrupt the American strategy of isolating Communist China in Asia. Conversely, an American triumph in stabilising South Vietnam would further the U.S. imperialist plan to strangle Mainland China by moving U.S. ground forces closer to the Chinese southern border, severely undermining CPR's national security interests.⁵² Again, a North Vietnamese victory would show that Peking was a reliable ally for Third World liberation movements, and it would certify "Mao's more militant strategy" as the true revolutionary path to cope with U.S. imperialism. Ideologically, Mao Tse-tung's political correctness would overcome Khrushchev's revisionist doctrine of peaceful coexistence with the U.S.-dominated capitalist world. Once this occurred, Third World liberation movements would adopt a more militant stance against U.S. imperialism. In other words, North Vietnam's war of national liberation was a test case for the Maoist strategy of world revolution against the American imperialist global domination as well as the battleground for "true Communism".⁵³

In a sense, the Maoist strategy of world revolution was intended to break up Soviet-American alignment by forming "a broad international united front" among the revolutionary forces in the Third World. The Chinese presence in the Vietnamese conflict would prevent Moscow from spreading its political and ideological influences over the revolutionary movements in Asia. As a political strategist, Mao tended to use his liberation-war strategy in Vietnam and other underdeveloped countries of the Southeast Asian region in order to sap American power in Asia and strengthen China's sphere of ideological and political influences in this area and in the developing world.⁵⁴

Mao's firm support to North Vietnam's war of national liberation in

the South was not primarily intended to help the Vietnamese fulfill their goal of national unification, but rather to weaken U.S. prestige and power in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia. Indeed, from the Maoist perspective, it was useful to have the Americans locked in a bloody stalemate in Vietnam, so weakening their will and power at Vietnamese expense, instead of remaining free to use that full power elsewhere, perhaps even directly against China.

By November 1965, the Maoist group concluded that China could not reconcile with the U.S.S.R. and together assist the DRV against the U.S. Mao's rejection of the Soviet call for "unity of action" on Vietnam stemmed not only from his criticism of Soviet revisionism but his apprehension of losing China's leadership role in the international struggle against U.S. imperialism, and from fear that a reconciliation with Moscow would bolster the position of the revisionist element within the Chinese Communist Party and ultimately cause China to succumb to Moscow's hegemonic domination. Instead, the Maoist group chose a policy of restraint in Vietnam rather than the "hot-line pursuit" policy of 'pro-Soviet' Army Chief Lo Jui-ching (referring to a "Korean-type war"). The Maoist leaders realized that such an action would heighten the risk of war with the United States and make China dependent upon Moscow.⁵⁵

The purge of the PLA's Army Chief Lo Jui-ching (late 1965) stemmed from the sharp difference between the Maoists and the military professionals of the Liu-Lo faction over the issue of China's war preparedness in the face of U.S. military threat from the war in Vietnam. By early September 1965, the Chinese Communist Defense Minister Lin Piao, in his article on People's War, reaffirmed Mao's views on a protracted struggle against the U.S. imperialist forces in the Third World. This article not only called on the Vietnamese Communists "to execute a strategic retreat and prepare for a longer-range struggle" against the U.S.

aggressors in Vietnam, but also signalled Communist China's ideological awareness of the prospect of Sino-U.S. War from the Vietnamese conflict.⁵⁶

To the Maoist leaders, China's ideological preparations were far more important than the implementation of defense measures, which were aimed exclusively at thwarting the U.S. military threat. What they tried to emphasize was ideological mobilization of the Chinese masses if the war came. To the Maoists, the best deterrence against the U.S. military threat and the most reliable components of CPR's national defense were the potentialities of PLA, militia forces, and the Chinese masses. It would be foolish to prepare Communist China for "active defense", as advocated by Marshal Lo Jui-ching. Chairman Mao, in particular, refused to build up additional anti-aircraft sites and air units in Southern China or provide Chinese Communist air defense for the DRV, which he believed would heighten the chance of Sino-U.S. confrontation. The State Department intelligence also detected that:

It seems clear that Peking's preparations center on the possibility of U.S. attacks growing out of the Vietnam war and China's relationship thereto. If Peking feared U.S. attacks in general, so heavy a concentration of airfield construction and aircraft deployment in the South would be highly irrational, if not hazardous, in view of our wide arc of bases and aircraft carrier mobility in the Western Pacific. Yet so far as is known, no comparable efforts have occurred elsewhere on the mainland. On the contrary, in placing so many of its advanced aircraft relatively distant from China's centers of population and industry, the regime appears confident that the most likely attacks will occur in the territory adjoining North

Vietnam. Moreover, it may even calculate that it can limit the scope of warfare so as to reduce, if not exclude altogether, the risk to the rest of China.⁵⁷

Instead, a large contingent of PLA regular forces (approximately 50,000 men) was sent across the Sino-Vietnamese border. Their task was to construct communication lines linking North Vietnam and China. Their presence also signalled to the U.S. that the Chinese PLA regular units would fight in Vietnam if U.S. escalatory actions endangered the existence of the DRV. Edward Rice in Hong Kong also indicated that:

The ChiComs [i.e. Chinese Communists] have been working hard in Southeast China to extend its transport net, to set up logistic facilities, and to build airfields. As a minimum these efforts are designed to enable the ChiComs to fulfill their obligation to support the DRV directly, and to aid the Viet Cong indirectly. In large part these and other measures (such as evacuation from Chinese cities of excess population, psychological preparation of the populace for possible war, and the step-up in militia training) would also serve to improve China's capability to defend itself. Finally, those efforts would enable the ChiComs more effectively to intervene with their own forces provided they decide to do so.⁵⁸

In order to meet China's defense needs and strategy, Lo Jui-ching and his supporters advocated the upgrading of China's air defense system and the modernization of its conventional armed forces. This would require massive re-allocation of national resources from economic sectors and it challenged the political strategy of the Maoist group. This was the main

reason leading to the purge of Lo Jui-ching.⁵⁹

The Maoist leaders were very suspicious of Lo's motives. The heavy emphasis on military efficiency would significantly play down the importance of political training of the PLA. As Melvin Gurtov pointed out in ***China Under Threat*** that Lo's proposed military preparations could have "a crippling effect on the crucial immediate political functions of the General Political Department and on the roles planned for the army in the future." Lo's proposals would undermine the political role of the PLA, which the Maoist group perceived as the most reliable instrument in its "Socialist Education" campaign. Lo's possession of power in the PLA and CCP did challenge the political campaign against Chinese Communist revisionism.⁶⁰

However, U.S. escalation in Vietnam aggravated the internal divergences within the Chinese Communist leadership, eventually leading to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. In its key policy statement entitled "Refutation of the New Leaders of the Soviet Union on 'United Action'", in mid-November 1965, the Maoist leadership rejected Moscow's call for "United Action" on Vietnam. They refused to stop their polemics against Moscow's revisionism or give up their independent role in the international Communist movement, and they claimed that anti-revisionist struggle in China was an irresistible trend. As they stated:

It is the inevitable outcome of the struggle between the Marxist-Leninists and the revisionists in those countries and of the regrouping of revolutionary forces under conditions of deepening class struggle both internationally and domestically.⁶¹

By late 1965, the Maoist group had formulated its policies distinctly

from its internal rivalries. Its reasoning line was that the reduction of Sino-U.S. tensions in Vietnam would facilitate a purification against Chinese Communist revisionists.⁶²

Beyond this, Mao was genuinely concerned over the derailment of Communism in the Soviet Union -- Khrushchev's revisionism in the late 1950s. Mao feared that this disease was catching. Mao perceived a new generation of Red bureaucrats and technocrats in the Chinese Communist leadership who rarely shared Mao's revolutionary belief and were mostly concerned with productivity and profitability. Mao's greatest anxiety was that revisionists within the Chinese Communist leadership would sell out the Chinese revolution after his death. These revisionist leaders were willing to sacrifice the revolutionary struggle at home and abroad and stop open polemics against Moscow's revisionists in order to receive Soviet aid for China's rapid economic development. To Mao and his supporters, the purification of China's revisionists must take priority over the anti-imperialist struggle against the American world domination.⁶³

In order to eradicate the revisionists, Mao formed a five-man "Cultural Revolution Group," seeking to open up the "class struggle" discussion in cultural and ideological fields. By mid-October 1965, Mao's supporters launched their "Socialist Education" campaign on the cultural front, by stressing the need to carry on the struggle between "the capitalist and socialist roads" in order to reach the ultimate goal of China's Communism. As the "cultural revolution" gained momentum, Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping and other prominent party members of the pro-Soviet faction were identified as the "capitalist roaders".⁶⁴

Mao relied upon "cultural revolution" committees and, later, the "Red Guards" as the power instruments to counteract the Chinese bureaucracy, which was controlled by the Liu-Teng faction. By using such non-bureaucratic organizations to undermine state and provincial

governments, Mao tried to establish a firm and long-lasting basis for China's revolution, so ensuring that his successors would uphold his "class-struggle" belief and not become "a new class, a privileged stratum of Red bureaucrats." Meanwhile, Mao used 'direct political attacks' to remove all the revisionist leaders within the Chinese Communist Party. Seizing upon the defeat of Army Chief of Staff Lo Jui-ching on the "unity" issue over Vietnam, Mao charged Lo of building up power for personal use and forming an anti-party group in the military. Mao also criticized Peng Chen, the Mayor of Peking, for giving rise to bourgeois intellectuals in the capital city.⁶⁵

Despite the purge of Lo Jui-ching and the rise to power of Lin Piao as the minister of defense in late 1965, Liu Shao-chi (the Party's Supreme Leader of the CCP) and Peng Chen (the dominant figure in Peking) could still resist Mao's political and ideological attacks. By supporting the creation of the "Cultural Revolution Group", the Liu-Teng faction managed to control it. Their aim was to minimize the impact of the "Cultural Revolution" campaign upon Chinese state and society, preventing an outburst of Maoist radicalization in China.⁶⁶

Taking charge of the "Cultural Revolution Group", Peng Chen convened a meeting (in early February 1966) which attempted to limit the scope of "class-struggle" activities and restrict the "socialist education" movement strictly to academic circles. Peng's "Outline Report" in the meeting was adopted, and circulated throughout the Chinese Communist Party. As the Communist bureaucracies were still under the influence of the Liu-Teng faction, Mao was determined to remove his inner-party opponents from the Chinese Communist leadership.⁶⁷

At the same time, the purge of Chinese revisionists caused Mao to regard the Brezhnev leadership in Moscow as his immediate external enemy, owing to its heavy-handed policy toward China. Throughout the

spring of 1966, Maoist propaganda came increasingly to depict "unity" over Vietnam as a Soviet trap to lure China into Moscow's revisionist hegemonic domination. In a formal letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in late March 1966, the Chinese Communist Party not only declined to send its delegation to the 23rd Soviet Party Congress but condemned Moscow as "the center of modern revisionism". The letter charged that:

Since Khrushchev's downfall ... the new leaders of the CPSU have gone farther and farther down the road of revisionism, splittism and great-power chauvinism. Your clamor for "united action," especially on the Vietnam question, is nothing but a trap for the purpose of deceiving the Soviet people and the revolutionary people of the world. You have all along been acting in coordination with the United States in its plot for peace talks, vainly attempting to sell out the struggle of the Vietnamese people against U.S. aggression and for national salvation and to drag the Vietnam question into the orbit of Soviet-U.S. collaboration.⁶⁸

The CCP's criticism of Moscow's collaboration with the U.S. in the Vietnamese conflict also revealed Chinese fears about Soviet-American collusion against China. Throughout the early months of 1966, Peking's propaganda stepped up its criticism of Moscow that the new Soviet leaders were working with Washington to reach a "relaxation of tension" in Western Europe, helping the U.S. to transfer its troops to Vietnam and point "its spearhead of aggression mainly at China". In a tricontinental conference at Havana, Peking's delegate publicly denounced Moscow's leaders for appeasing the U.S. imperialists "on the Western and other

fronts so that U.S. troops can be shifted from West Germany to South Vietnam."69

China's anti-Soviet propaganda focused upon Soviet-American coordination in luring the Vietnamese people into "the U.S. peace talks fraud". The Maoist group was particularly sensitive to the danger of a peace "sellout" in the Vietnamese struggle against the Americans, for a negotiated settlement of the war would cripple Peking's strategy of world revolution. By emphasizing Soviet-American collaboration at the expense of Vietnam, the Maoist group sought to isolate Moscow's influence from the Third World liberation movements. As the CCP's letter for boycotting the meeting of the Twenty-Third Soviet Party Congress stated:

Not only have you [i.e. the Soviets] excluded yourselves from the international united front of all the peoples against U.S. imperialism and its lackeys, you have even aligned yourselves with U.S. imperialism, the main enemy of the people of the world.70

All this suggested that Chinese foreign policy was determined by the "dominance of the Chinese ideological national role." As the **Central Intelligence Agency** tried to analyse the real cause of breaking up the Sino-Soviet solidarity:

The absence of the Chinese from the Soviet party congress was a measure of Peking's determination to steer a dogmatic, uncompromising course. China's aging leaders apparently felt compelled to demonstrate in this manner their scornful and total rejection of Soviet policies.71

The mainstream of the Chinese Communist leadership believed that unity with the CPSU was possible only if the Brezhnev leadership made concessions to China, treating Peking as an equal partner in handling the affairs of the Third World liberation movements (including the issue of Vietnam) and other Communist parties in the revolutionary world. Instead of accomodating these demands, the new Kremlin leadership reiterated its patriarchal role over China, which was totally "unacceptable even to the 'old' Chinese leadership of Liu Shao-chi and Peng Chen."⁷²

Between mid-February and late March 1966, Miyamoto Kenji, the general secretary of the Japanese Communist Party, led a delegation to China and the DRV, on a mission to unify all the Communist forces in Asia into an international united front against U.S. aggression. During his talks with Peng Chen in Shanghai, in mid-February 1966, Miyamoto appealed for a 'joint action' between China and the U.S.S.R. Chinese leaders such as Chou En-lai, Liu Shao-chi, Teng Hsiao-ping, and Peng Chen in Peking agreed to work out a communique regarding this proposal. The draft communique (which had been agreed upon by the two sides during the first round of talks) was presented to Mao by the Japanese delegation, accompanied by Teng Hsiao-ping in late March 1966 -- a week after the CCP's decision to boycott the Twenty-Third Congress of CPSU. Mao refused to sign the communique, and burst into angry speech. As the Japanese Communist delegation refused to put U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism on the same level of public denunciation, its plea for a broad 'united front' was doomed. Mao's actions indicated that he wanted to seek a final diplomatic break with the Soviet Union.⁷³

By this stage, Mao directly linked his criticism on 'Khrushchev's revisionism without Khrushchev' with the purge of China's revisionist leaders. They were accused of involving anti-Party and anti-Socialist activities (by manipulating the party and state apparatus and national

press in Mainland China) but also with allying themselves with the revisionists in Moscow and thus to the U.S. imperialists. In an editorial article, "Never Forget the Class Struggle," published by the *Liberation Army Daily*, in early May 1966, Mao told his supporters to keep a close watch on those anti-Party Chinese officials:

Those who ... wave the red flag to oppose the red flag ... Taking advantage of the functions and powers given them by the Party and Government, they have put under their absolute control some departments and units, refusing the leadership of the Party and carrying out anti-Party, anti-Socialist criminal activities through instruments in their hands. The people are mostly so-called "authorities" and they are well-known in society [i.e., Liu and Teng]. Their anti-Party, anti-Socialist activities are not isolated, accidental phenomena. They are in tune with the international anti-China chorus raised by ... modern revisionists [i.e., Soviets].⁷⁴

By mid-March 1966, Lo Jui-ching was arrested for committing anti-party activities, being forced to admit his mistakes in the PLA leadership. In mid-April 1966, Mao dissolved Peng Chen's 'Group of Five' and nullified Peng's "Outline Report" of February. With Lo Jui-ching and Peng Chen removed from the central command and the editorial departments in the Chinese national media purged in May 1966 Mao was ready to launch a greater campaign against the revisionist faction.⁷⁵

As Mao's domestic anti-revisionist struggle neared victory, his anti-Soviet line rose. In a statement to Nordic journalists regarding the CCP's decision to boycott the CPSU Twenty Third Congress, the Chinese

Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi indicated that the new Soviet leaders, since Khrushchev's downfall, "have degenerated into the irreconcilable enemies of Marxism-Leninism and have become incorrigible renegades from the international Communist Movement, saboteurs of the revolutionary movement of all peoples and accessories to American imperialism." As Chen Yi indicated, China would not depend upon Soviet aid in case of war with the United States. The "purpose of everything" the Soviets "do is to cooperate with the U.S. with the object of mastering the world. If we had built on the hope of Soviet aid, where would we have been today?" Chen Yi spelled out the Maoist strategy of 'self-reliance' for Communist China:

Many people have argued that it is fatal to have such bad relations with the United States, especially in view of the fact that our relations with the Soviet Union are not good either. In any case it is more certain and proper for us to rely on ourselves. Khrushchev ... offered us assistance in order to achieve control over us. There are many differences between the United States and the Soviet Union, but on one issue they are alike -- they wish ... to achieve control over China, but we have fended them off.⁷⁶

What the Maoist group tried to achieve in the internal power struggle was to carve out an independent road for China's economic development without the need to subordinate itself to Moscow's hegemonic domination. This faction believed that a strategy of 'self-reliance' would be the only way to maintain 'socialist construction' as well as 'socialist revolution' for the well-being of the Chinese people.

Prior to the formal dismissal of Peng Chen, the Chinese Communist

premier Chou En-lai did call upon the Soviets to regard 'bilateral equality' as a basis to restore Sino-Soviet relations. He contended that all nations "should have an equal say in international affairs" during his interview with Ejaz Hussain (the Dawn's Newspaper correspondent) in late April 1966. To Chou, a Sino-Soviet co-operation over Vietnam was still possible if the new Kremlin leaders could treat Peking as an equal partner.⁷⁷

But since the Soviets insisted on restoring ideological unity with China without meeting Chinese demands, the Twenty-Third CPSU Congress precipitated a new campaign of anti-Soviet criticism. During his visit to Albania, in late June 1966, Premier Chou En-lai mounted a new protest against the Soviet leaders, by elevating the struggle against Moscow's modern revisionism to a par with the struggle against U.S. imperialism. A main cause for the break-up of Sino-Soviet relations was Moscow's incomprehension about China's centric view toward the outside world, which the Chinese Communist leaders chose to isolate themselves through their own choice.⁷⁸

The Chinese Communists' mentality, up to the mid-1960s, was still pre-occupied with the "Middle Kingdom" concept in which the Chinese Communist ruling power believed that China possessed the highest position in the world. Any foreigners who wanted to deal with the Chinese and maintain good diplomatic relations with Peking would have to take this antiquated Chinese concept into consideration. In his conversation with U.S. official John H. Holdridge in Hong Kong, in early April 1966, the Swedish Ambassador to Peking, Lennart Petri, indicated that one of the reasons for the Chinese Communists to break ties with the Soviet Union was Moscow's failure in acknowledging the Chinese view of the 'Middle Kingdom' concept:

He [i.e. the Swedish Ambassador] ... remarked upon the high

degree of chauvinism which seemed to mark Chinese Communists' attitude -- the 'middle kingdom' concept which had to be taken into consideration by any foreigners dealing with the Chinese if they wanted to get along with Peking at all. The Russians, even in the heyday of their relationship with Communist China, had failed to appreciate this point, and had, in fact, talked down to the Chinese.⁷⁹

Having an ascendancy in the Army and Party, in mid-May 1966, the Maoist group was in full swing to launch the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' throughout China, giving the anti-revisionist struggle at home and abroad priority over the one against U.S. imperialism. However, this did not mean that there would be no Sino-American confrontation if the U.S. extended its air-strike operations against North Vietnam to China's southern border and threatened the political existence of the Hanoi regime. The danger of Chinese intervention remained. The U.S. government believed that this was the case, and it was right to do so.

Notes

1. **Johnson Library**, National Security File (NSF) , D.I.A Special Intelligence Supplement: The Big Picture in Southeast Asia, January 13, 1966, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, Volume IX, Top Secret.
2. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, January 24, 1966, was cited in ***The Pentagon Papers: The Department of Defense History of United States Decision-making on Vietnam***, The Senator Gravel Edition, Volume IV (Boston: Beacon Press,

1971), pp. 50-51, 309, 624-25.

3. **National Archives**, Record Group 200, Box 49, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Report of the Senators to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate: "The Vietnam Conflict -- The Substance and The Shadow", January 06, 1966, 89th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 11.

4. **National Archives**, RG 200, Box 49, Memorandum for The Record drafted by U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance, January 13, 1966.

5. **Johnson Library, NSF**, Bloc Survey, "Southeast Asia -- Vietnam: Decision of U.S. Peace Moves, Signs of Bloc Discord", January 20, 1966, Southeast Asia, Cables and Memos, Volume V, Confidential.

6. Ibid.; "PLA Conference on Political Work", Peking Review, No. 4 (January 21, 1966), pp. 5-6. See also, People's Daily, January 19, 1966.

7. Qiang Zhai, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954", The China Quarterly, No. 129 (March 1992), p. 104.

8. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, January 24, 1966, was cited in ***The Pentagon Papers*** (Gravel ed.), p. 50.

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Chapter 2: The POL Debate

Although the Johnson administration decided to resume bombing in late January 1966, in itself this decision did not constitute a great escalation of the air war against North Vietnam. Neither the White House nor the Office of the Secretary of Defense were imprudent enough to start a bombing campaign which would alienate allies or risk a wider war with Communist China and the Soviet Union. Not until the middle of March 1966 did the Johnson administration feel a greater need to exert more military pressures upon the DRV regime.¹

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had constantly urged the implementation of POL [Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants] attacks, they did not give decision-makers their appraisals of the effect of bombing on the North Vietnamese petroleum storage and installations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area until the latter half of March 1966. The JCS's plea for carrying out the POL bombing coincided with the recommendation of General Westmoreland, the highest U.S. military commander in Saigon. Westmoreland held that U.S. air forces should concentrate their efforts against the Northeast supply lines, so to slow "the forward movement of enemy personnel from North Vietnam" during the upcoming dry season. This recommendation deviated from Westmoreland's previous bombing strategy, when he had believed that the most effective means to block the flow of men and equipment from the North were air strikes at infiltration routes rather than industrial facilities.²

In his letter to President Johnson, General Maxwell Taylor indicated that "the time has come to raise significantly the level of pressure on North Vietnam by attacking POL stocks, interdicting effectively the two railways linking Hanoi with China and mining Haiphong and the two secondary ports in the area." Taylor emphasized that this pressure could hamper "the will of the leaders in North Vietnam" to continue their aggression in the South. Taylor's viewpoints were similar to the JCS's POL bombing

proposals. These recommendations, however, did not receive serious consideration from the higher echelon of the Johnson administration, because of disapproval from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the U.S. State Department. These officials believed that the POL attacks would produce sizable civilian casualties, which would in turn "create a counter-productive wave of revulsion abroad and at home" and increase the chance of a wider war.³

In particular, Secretary McNamara doubted the effect of an air war against North Vietnam. He publicly admitted that the Hanoi leadership could still maintain "some level of operations in the South" even if the U.S. knocked out North Vietnam's power systems, oil, harbors, and dams.⁴ Despite such skepticism, the Johnson administration endorsed a harder line in its air war against North Vietnam, so to make the war so costly that the Hanoi regime would end its support for the military conflict in the South.

While the decision on POL attacks was pending, however, a South Vietnamese crisis erupted, which impeded any major U.S. military operations against North Vietnam. The Southern Vietnamese political turmoil originally stemmed from the removal of General Nguyen Chanh Thi as Commander of the I Corps Area. He was dismissed because of his misconduct in the military. Thi constantly refused to work "with other Vietnamese military units and sometimes even disobeyed instructions of the Government" in Saigon. He was also rumoured to be plotting to overthrow the existing government in Saigon, due to his personal ties with some exiled-generals of the Diem regime and Buddhist militants. Hence, Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky and the Military Directory in Saigon removed General Thi from power.⁵

This sparked a wave of anti-Ky regime demonstrations in Danang and Hue, and widespread public opposition toward American involvement

in Vietnam. The dissenters, primarily Buddhists and the intelligentsia, demanded the end of the American presence and the formation of a constitutional government. The political disturbance in South Vietnam caught the American media's attention and revealed the fragility of the U.S.-supported South Vietnamese regime. William Bundy regarded the Buddhist crisis in the spring of 1966 as "a terrific setback, a very, very negative development in every possible way", a view which he thought represented "more or less the general government feeling" in Washington.⁶

Similarly, Secretary Rusk expressed the distress of the U.S. government about South Vietnam in these terms:

It is becoming increasingly difficult for us to understand or to explain to the Congress and to our own people why the Hue Radio can spew forth such vitriolic anti-American propaganda in the center of an area being defended by American forces. We are deeply distressed by the seeming unwillingness or inability of the South Vietnamese to put aside their lesser quarrels in the interest of meeting the threat from the Viet Cong. Unless that succeeds, they will have no country to quarrel about... We face the fact that we ourselves cannot succeed except in support of the South Vietnamese. Unless they are able to mobilize reasonable solidarity, the prospects are very grim.⁷

The Johnson administration was reluctant to give in to the Buddhist demands, fearing that the establishment of civilian rule in Saigon would only pave the way for a Communist takeover. Most U.S. officials concluded that only "a new military combine in place of the present military Directorate" could survive the internal crisis, providing that

"neutralist/end-the-war sentiment was not reflected in its leadership."⁸

While the Buddhist crisis halted a decision on the POL issue, the Hawkish element of the Johnson administration still advocated an aggressive air war against the DRV. Others had different views. President Johnson reacted to this incident by postponing any escalatory actions against North Vietnam, disapproving the crucial portion of the POL bombing recommendations (including ten important targets: seven POL storage areas, one bridge, one cement plant, and the Kep early-warning ground control radar). He believed that to attack POL would have serious repercussions at home and abroad regarding the overall U.S. involvement in Vietnam.⁹

The authors of the Pentagon Papers mentioned that a key reason why the President postponed the POL strikes in April 1966 was the stiff opposition of the State Department, and they were right. State Department officials felt immense pressure from the American public regarding stepped-up air war against North Vietnam and military provocations toward Communist China, such as the possibility of air strikes upon the Chinese nuclear facilities. U.S. academics and civilians publicly queried whether their government was aimed at "deliberately provoking China into war" or holding back Communist China's ambitions in Southeast Asia. In response, the administration officials replied with letters, seeking to assure the American public that the U.S. government was only pursuing a limited goal in Vietnam, which was to protect other independent nations from Red China's ambitions.

The State Department also feared that an unrestrained air campaign against North Vietnam would provoke a full-blown war with Communist China. In a conversation with the U.S. officials at the Hong Kong Consulate Office, Lennart Petri, the Swedish Ambassador to Peking, indicated that "the most likely cause for a Sino-U.S. clash would be an

extension of the U.S. operations in Vietnam to the China Mainland."10 The fear of war with Communist China was further reinforced by the intrusion of U.S. aircraft into Chinese airspace in mid-April 1966. The New China News Agency (NCNA) termed the incident a "military provocation" and a "serious step taken by U.S. imperialism in its attempt to impose war on the Chinese people while intensifying expansion of its war of aggression in Vietnam." Alongside this fierce propaganda, Peking launched a series of accusations about U.S. military establishments in the Asian continent.

In his speech to the Civic Reception at Dacca, in mid-April 1966, Chinese Communist Vice-Premier Chen Yi condemned the U.S. for trying to "bring the countries on China's periphery under its control" in order to hasten its preparations for attacking Communist China. The Chinese Premier Chou En-lai told Ejaz Hussain (the Dawn's newspaper correspondent) that Sino-American relations could not be normalized unless the U.S. government altered its hostile policy toward China, removed its troops from Taiwan, and ceased its military activities at the Taiwan Straits. Premier Chou also claimed that the U.S. intended to establish a chain of military bases around China, to have its planes and warships intrude into Chinese territorial waters and air space, while the ruling circle in Washington was actively preparing to carry the Vietnam War to China.11

Confronted with these charges from the Chinese Communists, State Department officials did not take the POL proposal lightly. Hence, the POL question instigated a major policy dispute within the Johnson administration. Some senior American officials feared that the overall bombing campaign against North Vietnam would provoke China and the Soviet Union into a broader conflict in Vietnam, and seized upon this opportunity "as perhaps the last occasion" to voice their opposition to further aerial actions. Other U.S. officials saw the POL strikes as essential

to obstruct the influx of men and war materiel of the PAVN [People's Army of (North) Vietnam] forces into the South.¹²

As Walt W. Rostow, the Presidential Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, indicated to the U.S. President, "it is not, Mr. President, that I'm bloody-minded or a hawk". Rostow insisted that the failure to strike the DRV's oil prevented a weakening of the main PAVN units, placing "almost intolerable burdens on the political life" in the U.S. and "on the war-weary South Vietnamese". He also added that the U.S. government needed "to try to shorten the war without doing the unwise or desperate things (such as committing more men and national resources to the Vietnam war)". For the first time, in the spring of 1966, a U.S. high-ranking official had to admit that the intensification of ground fighting in the South had produced a heavy toll on American lives and will power.¹³

Most civilian officials from the Defense and State Departments were opposed to the POL strikes, for they were affected by the Chinese "war threat" propaganda. This was reported widely in the month of April (1966), Frank Tuohy, a British author, gave The Associated Press his account of a long journey across Mainland China. Tuohy described the sense of war-readiness throughout the Chinese cities. Though only few civil defense shelters were in Peking, "a militaristic mood" was clearly seen in the Chinese capital city. "In some ways the face of China already is the face of a country at war. Trains and public places are crowded with soldiers."¹⁴

Though Chinese Communist authorities tried to convince foreigners as well as Chinese nationals that China was in a state of military readiness for war, the ruling hierarchy in Peking did not desire a confrontation with the U.S. However, they had to bolster their 'war threat' propaganda by disseminating statements of warning such as "There isn't a single Chinese soldier outside China, but if the United States imperialists attack us, we shall bury them in the China sea." They were uncertain of

U.S. intentions in Vietnam vis-a-vis Communist China and feared that the Pentagon would escalate its military actions into their home land.¹⁵

Simultaneously, in mid-April 1966, the air war in North Vietnam intensified, which heightened anxiety among State Department officials. By the end of April 1966, the CIA Weekly Intelligence Report recorded seven aerial engagements between U.S. aircraft and North Vietnamese MIGs. Although the U.S. air force prevailed over the North Vietnamese MIGs in the air-to-air missiles' engagements, the loss of U.S. air-craft was immensely high (15 U.S. aircraft compared to two MIG-21s and two MIG-17s shot down). As the Intelligence Report indicated, the main objective of DRV's "vigorous fighter reaction" was to "restrict U.S. air incursions in the Hanoi-Haiphong area." Undoubtedly, these events supported the group of U.S. officials who opposed the implementation of the POL strikes.¹⁶ At the same time, in hindsight it is clear that these officials exaggerated the scale of the danger which they described. These officials believed that once "vital" North Vietnamese industrial targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong circle were hit, the DRV regime would consider its economic life at risk and would "request use of Chinese air bases North of the border for the basing of North Vietnamese planes" as well as limited assistance from the Chinese air forces to protect NVN's targets. Such a possibility would heighten the chance of "a full-scale collision with China." In addition, they feared that Chinese leaders would perceive the bombing of the "vital" targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuaries as Vietnamese equivalent of "the march to the Yalu", an attempt to obliterate the DRV regime.¹⁷ Since the implementation of the POL attacks had many strategic implications (such as the Chinese intervention in the Vietnamese conflict), it required detailed studies and careful appraisals before the proposed strikes could be approved. These strategic considerations, which were brought up by Defense and State Department officials, were influenced by American

public and mass media.

In particular, James Reston, the New York Times columnist, criticized the U.S. government for spreading the air war against North Vietnam near the Chinese border. U.S. bombers were "now free to attack the bases of any planes that intercept our fliers even if those bases are inside Communist China." Senator Robert F. Kennedy denounced the Johnson administration for carrying out a "hot pursuit" policy across the Chinese border and expressed deep concern about Chinese intervention in Vietnam, on the pretext that U.S. planes "will pursue hostile aircraft to wherever they go -- even over the border of China -- and that there is no sanctuary for the Chinese bases."¹⁸ These denunciations prompted Secretary of State Rusk to specify that:

I haven't heard anyone, senior or junior [administration official], say to me they consider war inevitable. Certainly from our point of view we have no interest in a war with Mainland China.¹⁹

Rusk also praised the prudence of Chinese leaders in Peking, indicating that such caution would "help prevent spread of the war in Southeast Asia". On this occasion, he pointed out that the escalation of the Vietnamese conflict was "a responsibility of Hanoi encouraged and backed by Peking." It was not 'United States military action' but rather the 'primitive view of the world' by the Chinese Communist leaders which would determine the scope of the Vietnamese conflict. Again, the U.S. administration wanted to signal that it was not seeking a wider confrontation with China, while its military action in Vietnam simply aimed at thwarting the North Vietnamese armed infiltration into the South.²⁰

Concurrently, analysts in Hong Kong detected a strained relationship between China and the DRV, after the North Vietnamese refused to line up with Peking and boycott the 23rd Soviet Party Congress at Moscow. Still, they held that this deterioration of cordiality would not give the U.S. a free hand in executing its bombing programme. These analysts estimated that Communist China would still "intervene with its fighter planes if Hanoi was bombed" or "send an army of 'volunteers' into North Vietnam if that country was invaded by United States troops", though the Chinese government was moving away from its active commitment toward the Vietnamese people's war of liberation against the U.S. aggressors. Accordingly, Chinese Communist propaganda tended to put the emphasis on the "victory in South Vietnam through protracted struggle rather than, as before, on the readiness of Peking to become directly involved if summoned." With the purge of Army Chief Lo Jui-ching, in mid-January 1966, the PLA General Political Department Work Conference in Peking insisted on "keeping politics in force" and regarded 'Chinese combat readiness' as a "long-term strategic measure rather than a temporary expedient".²¹

Officials from the Defense and State Departments could not rule out the possibility of Chinese intervention if the POL strikes inflicted heavy losses upon the population of NVN or posed a security threat to the Chinese southern border. Because of this perceived danger, the POL proposal was not approved until the end of June 1966. The significance of the Chinese Communist factor in this process can be determined by examining two separate incidents which reflected the possibility of Chinese action.

The first incident was related to the limited use of Chinese Nationalist naval personnel in South Vietnamese territorial waters in early April 1966. Chinese Nationalist naval crews were hired by the U.S. government to

assist the RVN's coastal cargo shipping. Though these Taiwanese naval crews were dressed in civilian uniforms and instructed not to engage in any military operations (such as movement of troops), their employment caused the U.S. President's Press Secretary (Bill Moyers) to query "potential mainland China reaction" to the incident.²²

This incident caught senior officials' attention in Washington because the Peking government had just issued its 400th "serious warning" against "U.S./ Chinese National incursions into Mainland areas", which it linked to other "belligerent" acts of the Johnson administration. White House officials were anxious about Taiwanese naval personnel, questioning "what would Mainland China do" if it learned that the Chiang Kai-shek government in Taiwan was "manning" vessels of the South Vietnamese government.²³

With the approval of William Bundy, a message from the Department of Defense was despatched to the **MACV** (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam), specifying that Chinese Nationalist naval servicemen should "not be involved in military operations without prior Washington clearance". In fact, U.S. officials in Washington over-reacted to the incident. The China "watchers" in the Johnson administration doubted that Peking would use the employment of GRC's naval crews by the U.S. as a "pretext for new Chicom (Chinese Communist) actions in the Vietnam conflict", though there would be "a possible propaganda tirade". This official over-reaction to the status of GRC's naval crews clearly revealed that the U.S. administration was sensitive to the Chinese factor in the Vietnamese conflict.²⁴

The second incident regarded North Vietnam's attendance at the 23rd CPSU Congress. The sudden shift of North Vietnam in the Sino-Soviet split caused the Department of State to consider whether Peking would intervene in the Vietnamese conflict in order to recover political

influence in Hanoi. Ambassador Lodge wondered whether Le Duan's (the First Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party) visit to Moscow could have "any effect on possible Chicom (Chinese Communist) plans for intervention in Vietnam", though he also held that Chinese Communist actions would be "determined by the estimate of China's national interests rather than by the estimate of Hanoi's immediate position in Sino-Soviet split." Ironically, however, the dominant Maoist group in the Chinese leadership regarded its anti-revisionist struggle against the Kremlin leaders as having greater importance than revolutionary support for the Vietnamese war of national liberation.²⁵

These two incidents in April 1966 show that the U.S. administration was particularly sensitive to the possibility of Chinese Communist intervention in Vietnam. If such minor incidents could concern decision-makers in Washington, an important question such as the destruction of NVN's oil facilities would definitely require long deliberation.

Moreover, the political crisis in South Vietnam delayed the POL decision. Despite the survival of the Military Directorate in Saigon, the strong anti-American sentiment in South Vietnam during the first half of April 1966 shook the Johnson administration. This prompted administration officials to revise American objectives toward South Vietnam rather than the Vietnam War. When the Buddhist disturbances began in Danang and Hue, President Johnson and his inner circle even contemplated "a fall-back position" in South Vietnam in case the situation collapsed. Both McNamara and his Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs (John T. McNaughton) suggested that the American government should use the Buddhist disturbances to begin a U.S. military disengagement from Vietnam. They doubted that the U.S. could win in 'an increasingly costly' and prolonged war: "While the military situation is not going badly, the political situation is in 'terminal sickness' and even the

military prognosis is of an escalating stalemate."²⁶

In two presidential meetings of early April 1966, the U.S. President faced two basic means to handle the Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam. The first was to preserve Nguyen Cao Ky and his Directorate by every possible means. The second was to retreat to 'a fall-back position', involving concessions to Buddhist demands and the removal of U.S. Marine forces "out of I Corps area and even Vietnam". However, President Johnson opposed the second option. He was convinced that the DRV's Communist agents had 'deeply penetrated' the Buddhist uprisings in South Vietnam.²⁷

Despite this pessimism Washington was determined to deal with the political crisis in South Vietnam. Most administration officials contended that the U.S. should continue its commitment to RVN, regardless of the political fragility of the South Vietnamese government, for abandoning U.S. efforts in Vietnam would have an adverse strategic impact on Southeast Asia. As Maxwell Taylor indicated to the U.S. President: "the acceptance of the risks and uncertainties of continuing our support to South Vietnam seems to me not only tolerable but inevitable."²⁸

These Washington officials believed that the continuing strong American commitment to South Vietnam was necessary to defend Southeast Asia from the Chinese Communists' intrusion. President Johnson decided too to stand firm on this policy, despite the prevailing political uncertainties of the South Vietnamese government. As he said in a White House speech at the end of April 1966:

There are times when Viet-Nam must seem to many a thousand contradictions, and the pursuit of freedom there an almost unrealizable dream. But there are also times -- and for me this is one of them -- when the mist of confusion lifts and

the basic principles emerge: -- that South Viet-Nam, however young and frail, has the right to develop as a nation, *free from the interference of any other power, no matter how mighty or strong.*²⁹

The U.S. President intended to defend South Vietnam, despite the looming political chaos in Saigon. Most of his advisers agreed that "over-reaction in Washington" to the Buddhist disturbances in South Vietnam "should be avoided and military pressure increased." So far, the Buddhist crisis had not prevented the U.S. from deploying additional U.S. ground troops into South Vietnam. In mid-April 1966, President Johnson agreed to McNamara's troop deployment plan to raise U.S. forces in Vietnam "from 260,000 to 325,000 men" by the end of 1966, without the need of calling up some U.S. reserve units.³⁰ The issue of the reserve call-up, like the proposed POL strikes, required careful study before it would be approved at the higher levels of the Johnson administration. As the authors of the Pentagon Papers put it:

A compromise explanation of the origins of the numbers is that the military may have had a visceral feeling that a large (somewhere above 500,000) number of troops would be needed to win the war, but were unable to justify their requirements in terms clear or strong enough to persuade the President, who had an interest in keeping the domestic effects of war as small as possible.³¹

The Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam coincided with "a new upsurge of criticism" against the Johnson administration among U.S. Democrats, who feared that far-reaching U.S. goals in Vietnam would

eventually drag Communist China into the Vietnamese conflict. The U.S. Senate Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield, urged self-determination for the South Vietnamese to be accomplished through a peace settlement between the United States, Communist China, North Vietnam, and 'essential elements' in South Vietnam. Failure to pursue this path would risk "turning the war in Vietnam into one which is, at best, irrelevant to the people of Vietnam and, at worse, one in which their hostility may readily be enlisted against us."³² Such domestic criticism no doubt also delayed the POL attacks in April and May 1966.

In order to quell the domestic opposition toward U.S. "escalation" in Vietnam, Robert E. Kintner, a White House official, suggested to the President that it would be useful to let Ambassador Lodge talk to Congressmen and U.S. newspaper columnists, in order to reassure them about basic U.S. objectives in South Vietnam. Kintner indicated that Lodge should be given the task of disseminating the following comments:

The war may well be long and arduous, due to the strength of North Vietnam, Soviet Union and China; but the President, while committed to a policy of restraint, is taking and will take all appropriate means to obtain a military control that will induce the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong to negotiate. This may mean some step-up in the war to hit the source of supply of military equipment. The President is acting very conservatively in a restrained manner to avoid conflict with Communist China, but he must face up the fact that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam are being supplied from bases in Laos, Cambodia, and near Hanoi. Until this build-up of military supplies is drastically decreased or stopped, not only are the American forces in

danger but also all of South Vietnam.³³

These excerpts show how the Johnson administration was constrained in carrying out more military actions against the North Vietnamese forces. Although a few top advisers of the Johnson administration agreed with the implementation of the POL attacks, the President was reluctant to endorse this programme until the beginning of May, fearing that this would be dangerous in face of the Buddhist revolt.

Apart from this domestic criticism, the Johnson administration faced a wave of international pressure favouring peace negotiations in Vietnam. In late March 1966, a retired Canadian diplomat (Chester A. Ronning) told the U.S. State Department that the DRV would be willing "to have talks with the United States if the latter declared an unconditional and permanent halt to its bombing of North Vietnam." The State Department reacted only by probing for further information. At this stage, many U.S. officials doubted the North Vietnamese premier's words, which were full of 'deliberate ambiguities'. To these officials, the use of the word "talks" rather than "negotiations" by Premier Pham Van Dong appeared to indicate that the DRV would be interested only in 'preliminary contacts' but not 'substantive negotiations'.³⁴

In late April 1966, the U.S. State Department conveyed to the Canadian Government that "the U.S. Government could not accept a unilateral cessation" of its bombing against North Vietnam "without some reciprocal action of the North Vietnamese side involving its infiltration of men and equipment into the South and perhaps also the overall level of military activity in the South."³⁵

The State Department and administration officials held that the U.S. should not trade away the bombing of North Vietnam for the mere willingness to talk, because 'a permanent and unconditional' bombing halt

in the North would jeopardize American interests and its involvement in Vietnam. As Maxwell Taylor told the U.S. President: "if we gave up bombing in order to start discussions, we would not have the coins necessary to pay for all the concessions required for a satisfactory terminal settlement." The Ronning mission led Washington officials to put more emphasis on peace, but not to consider another bombing pause toward the North.³⁶

During a special visit to the Vatican in early May 1966, Ambassador Lodge told Pope Paul VI that "the problem is not lack of channels to Hanoi but simply Hanoi's lack of desire for peace." Lodge also indicated that "one form of a cease-fire would be to abandon the bombing in North Vietnam in return for a cessation of ground aggression in the South." With such a negotiating posture, Washington could only accept mutual de-escalation as a basis for talks.³⁷

Despite American frustration over the negotiations, moderates in the Johnson administration advocated 'a five-power meeting' (U.S., U.K., France, U.S.S.R., and Communist China) in order to reduce the intensity of the fighting in Vietnam. This concept was brought up by the American Ambassador to the United Nations (Arthur J. Goldberg) in order to fend off an unfavourable international response to the POL strikes. Goldberg's proposal was rejected by the dominant group in the U.S. administration, for a 'five-power' meeting would raise the issue of Chinese representation in the United Nations, "including the question of ultimate Security Council representation." As William Bundy indicated to Secretary of State Rusk:

Nonetheless, I share Ambassador Goldberg's concern that it is time we looked at our whole negotiating posture, particularly as we consider early action against the Haiphong POL. I do not myself believe that this action will set off a drastic shock

wave and demand for negotiations, but it certainly calls for some accompanying diplomatic action, if only to again assure the Chinese Communists that this extension of our bombing actions does not change our objectives.³⁸

Although Bundy rejected a 'five-power' peace conference, he still wished to retain a private negotiating track such as the Ronning mission. For the Assistant-Secretary of State, any stepped-up U.S. military actions against North Vietnam must be coordinated with diplomatic efforts in order to minimize the 'adverse reactions' from the international community. It is not hard to understand why the U.S. State Department still looked upon the Ronning operation as a way to convey the American message to Hanoi and "to know what Hanoi proposed to do" if the U.S. ceased its bombing in the North.³⁹

Most administration officials believed that such a peace initiative was essential in order to justify the U.S. military actions against the NVN's POL storage facilities. William J. Jorden, a member of the National Security Council Staff, recommended to Walt Rostow, that POL strikes should be "accompanied or quickly followed by initiative on the political/diplomatic front", so to verify the American willingness to peace. This, Jorden believed, would help the U.S. to apply additional military pressures against North Vietnam:

A favorable Hanoi/NLF response would speak for itself and we would be in new ballgame. Rejection and early release of our proposal would help tremendously to balance expected unfavorable response to POL strike.⁴⁰

For such reasons, the Johnson administration gave more support to

'a second Ronning mission to Hanoi' which was scheduled in mid-June 1966.

Rusk had another reason to oppose the implementation of the POL attacks, for he feared that it would harm relations between the United States and its principal allies. Throughout the spring of 1966, the Johnson administration was confronted with the decision of the French Government to "request the withdrawal of all NATO forces from French soil."⁴¹ In late March 1966, the American ambassador to Paris (Bohlen) was informed by French source that France's decision was derived from the "genuine concern" of President de Gaulle over "the possibility of U.S.-Chinese hostilities." At this time, the French newspaper, La Nation, indicated that the French decision to withdraw from NATO was because of the fear that this would draw France into "involvement in Vietnam and eventual war with China."

Due to an upcoming NATO summit meeting in Brussels, Rusk wanted to postpone an escalation in the air war against North Vietnam. Although the withdrawal of France from NATO was not a major factor in delaying the POL bombing, it did affect the thinking of the U.S. administration, for Washington realized that the United States could not enjoy substantial support from its Western allies as it had in the Korean War. As a result, Rusk wanted to postpone the POL campaign in order to build up solidarity among the members of the NATO alliance:

Moreover, the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, informed the U.S. President of Britain's strong dislike for such air attacks, despite the U.S. assurance to keep the civilian casualties to a minimum:

However ... I am bound to say that, as seen from here, the possible military benefits that may result from this bombing do not appear to outweigh the political disadvantages that

would seem the inevitable consequence. But since you have made it abundantly clear -- and you know how much we have welcomed and supported this -- that your purpose is to achieve a negotiated settlement, and that you are not striving for total military victory in the field, I remain convinced that the bombing of these targets, without producing decisive military advantage, may only increase the difficulty of reaching an eventual settlement...42

Wilson did not believe that further air attacks against the DRV could achieve U.S. aims of bringing the North Vietnamese to the conference table.

For all those above reasons, the Johnson administration was prohibited from carrying out an all-out bombing campaign against the NVN's oil facilities, and the POL debate was not finally settled until the end of June 1966.

Despite the assurance from Washington in April 1966 that the U.S. desired no war with Mainland China, the Chinese Communists still feared the possibility of a U.S. attack on their southern frontiers. At this time, Anna Louise Strong wrote an article entitled "War and China: When and How Will It Be Carried Out", republished in the Chinese Communist press in Hong Kong (Wen Wei Pao). Strong's article described the Chinese Communists' views on 'a possible conflict between Communist China and the United States':

The way Peking sees it is that China has no intention to start a war but she predicts that war may befall her. China has not sent one single soldier to places outside of her borders and she has never attacked another country. But China has made

preparations to defend her territories in case she is attacked. She also supports the Vietnamese people in their 'patriotic and just struggle against U.S. aggression'. The U.S. is at present conducting a war of 'escalation' in Vietnam which may lead her into collision with China. If China's support of the Vietnamese people's opposition against the U.S. will bring about a U.S. attack against China, she is prepared to make it a war which the U.S. will not be able to win.⁴³

Strong's article first appeared in the mid-April edition of the National Guardian newspaper, coinciding with the Pentagon's decision to raise the number of U.S. forces in Vietnam 'from 260,000 to 325,000 men'. In referring to a 'possible U.S.-Sino War', Strong raised an interesting point, to what extent the Chinese Communists would send their combat troops into the Vietnamese conflict. She held that "If the U.S. continues to send troops to SVN, Chinese troops will be there when the Vietnamese feel there is a need for them." She also identified two important conditions under which Peking would commit to 'troop intervention' in Vietnam: (1) a significant change in present situation and, (2) invitation by the Vietnamese.⁴⁴

To U.S. officials at the American Consulate in Hong Kong, Anna Louise Strong emphasized that American actions alone could produce a war with Communist China. Peking's fear of a possible confrontation was derived from the massive build-up of U.S. ground forces in South Vietnam in the spring of 1966. Strong's editorial comments were accompanied by Premier Chou En-lai's official warning statement to the United States. In his 'Four-Point' statement to Washington, the Chinese Premier proclaimed that:

(1) China will not take the initiative to provoke a war with the United States. China has not sent any troops to Hawaii; it is the United States that has occupied China's territory of Taiwan Province....

(2) The Chinese mean what they say. In other words, if any country in Asia, Africa or elsewhere meets with aggression by the imperialists headed by the United States, the Chinese Government and people definitely will give it support and help. Should such just action bring on U.S. aggression against China, we will unhesitatingly rise in resistance and fight to the end.

(3) China is prepared. Should the United States impose a war on China, it can be said with certainty that, once in China, the United States will not be able to pull out, however many men it may send over and whatever weapons it may use, nuclear weapons included. Since the 14 million people of southern Vietnam can cope with over 200,000 U.S. troops, the 650 million people of China can undoubtedly cope with 10 million of them. No matter how many U.S. aggressor troops may come, they will certainly be annihilated in China.

(4) Once the war breaks out, it will have no boundaries. Some U.S. strategists want to bombard China by relying on their air and naval superiority and avoid a ground war. This is wishful thinking. Once the war gets started with air or sea action, it will not be for the United States alone to decide how the war will continue. If you can come from the sky, why can't we fight back on the ground? That is why we say the war will have no boundaries once it breaks out.

This official statement was originally made in an 'April Peking interview', given by Premier Chou En-lai to a Pakistani journalist of the Dawn newspaper (Ejaz Husain), and repeated again by the New China News Agency a month later. The text was republished so to set the record straight, for the Chinese Communist leadership suspected that Washington did not grasp the full meaning of the four-point statement.⁴⁵

To many observers in Washington, Chou's four-point statement was a serious warning. They clearly pointed out that China's national interests were mainly related to the problem of Taiwan Province, not Vietnam, but they also indicated that China would not leave North Vietnam to stand alone in case of a U.S. large-scale armed onslaught. However, Chou's four-point statement was further complicated by the air war over northern Vietnam and the intrusion of U.S. fighters into the Chinese territory.

On 8 May 1966, Chinese Communist fighters were sent across North Vietnamese air space to intercept a U.S. aircraft which was engaged in a strike against "a railway bridge in North Vietnam about 30 miles south of the Chinese border". Due to a malfunction of the equipment, the Chinese MIGs did not open fire on the U.S. aircraft. Accordingly, Peking did not make wide publicity out of this air incident and it was speculated by the **CIA** that Communist China was carrying out an experiment to find out "how far it was safe to go in extending a Chinese air defense umbrella" beyond its frontier.⁴⁶

The May 8th incident was subsequently followed by an intrusion of five U.S. fighter planes into Yunnan Province in Southwest China. In response, Chinese MIGs were sent up and one was shot down by a U.S. fighter. The Chinese Defense Ministry termed the MIG shootdown in mid-May an "extremely grave incident, a deliberate, systematic act of war provocation" and warned that the "debt in blood owed by U.S. imperialism to the Chinese people must be cleared." Its spokesman also said that

Washington should keep "Chou En-lai's Four-Point statement clearly in mind."⁴⁷

Despite this 'verbal toughness', the American Consulate in Hong Kong did not believe that the incident would provoke a military response from Peking. They read the Chinese Communist Defense Ministry's statement as intending a deterrent against the United States through the use of 'strong language', and thought the Peking government was "avoiding advance commitment to the course of action which could result in dangerous and unpredictable consequences."⁴⁸ Yet, Washington's reaction to the intrusion of U.S. aircraft into the Chinese Mainland was cautious. The top level of the Johnson administration filed a special investigation on the incident of downing a Chinese MIG in mid-May. In his report to the U.S. President, Secretary of Defense McNamara noted:

Based on the CIA analysis, I am convinced that our aircraft penetrated Chinese airspace before they were attacked by MIGs. I have asked the Joint Chiefs to consider what additional instructions we can issue to insure against a repetition of this incident.⁴⁹

This incident again shows that Washington was extremely sensitive to a possible Chinese military response in Southeast Asia. In order to defuse the Sino-U.S. tension, Secretary McNamara urged "breaching the isolation of great nations like Red China, even when that isolation is largely of its own making." He contended that this would reduce "the danger of potentially catastrophic misunderstandings", and give a great "incentive on both sides to resolve disputes by reason rather than by force." The U.S. Defense Secretary stressed the need for "building bridges of understanding between the great ideological rivals, notably the United

States and Communist China".⁵⁰

Despite McNamara's call, the Johnson administration did not show any sign of weakness in dealing with Communists in Southeast Asia. In a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, in late May 1966, Rusk reiterated the U.S. stand in assisting the South Vietnamese people as well as other independent peoples in Southeast Asia against so-called 'wars of liberation', which involved "moving masses of conventional forces" and were widely encouraged and "supported by Moscow as well as Peiping". To Rusk, these liberation forces posed "grave risks" to the security of Southeast Asia, and South Vietnam was a testing ground for this 'technique of aggression' by the Communists. Rusk also held that "it is as important to defeat this type of aggression in Southeast Asia now as it was to defeat it in Greece 19 years ago."⁵¹

This analogy between the U.S. commitment in Southeast Asia by the Johnson administration and President Harry S. Truman's commitment to Europe nearly two decades earlier was intended to justify a hard line against the Communist advance in South Vietnam. Rusk's remarks were in sharp contrast to McNamara's views on 'building bridges of understanding' with Communist China. This contrast might indicate that the U.S. administration held two contradictory policies toward Communist China. But in fact both Washington and Peking wanted to convince each other at this time that they did not want to start a war, but intended to firmly defend their ideological beliefs. As the U.S. President pointed out at a Democratic Party Dinner: "We do not seek to enlarge this war, but we shall not run out of it."⁵²

Nor did the Peking government show any sign of weakening its militant stand against U.S. imperialism, though Premier Chou's four-point statement expressed the wish to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States, while the Maoist group of the Chinese leadership elevated

its struggle against the 'Soviet modern revisionism' on a par with its struggle against 'U.S. imperialism and its lackeys'. Nonetheless, Premier Chou stated in a joint statement with the Albanian Premier (Mehmet Shehu) in early May, "the fight against imperialism headed by the United States and its lackeys and the fight against modern revisionism with the leading group of the C.P.S.U. as its centre are two inseparable tasks."

Rusk's remarks on the desire of not provoking a war with Mainland China (in late April 1966) and Chou's remarks on his four-point statement (in early May) did verify that Peking and Washington were trying to establish a tacit mutual understanding 'of the boundaries of the Vietnamese War.'⁵³

After the downing of a Chinese MIG in mid-May, the U.S. administration instructed U.S. pilots to do "all possible to avoid overflights of China." In the 130th Sino-U.S. ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, U.S. Ambassador (Gronouski) told the Chinese Communist Ambassador to Poland (Wang Kuo-chuan) that the public "misinterpretation" by Peking "of the motives behind these incidents by either side could lead to a further increase in tensions." In order to pacify the Chinese apprehension, Gronouski stated that:

I should like to repeat what I said at our last meeting. We have no hostile intent towards your government and your people. President Johnson has said that we seek the end of no regime and our Secretary of State has recently said we do not intend to provoke war. We have acted with restraint and care in the past and we are doing so today.⁵⁴

The U.S. government was trying to ward off a possible Chinese Communist response in Vietnam, even if it launched strikes against North

Vietnamese POL targets. Without the establishment of a tacit Sino-U.S. understanding in Vietnam, Washington and Peking could misjudge one another's intentions, consequently plunge their nations into a total war, owing to the escalating nature of the Vietnamese conflict.

Although Premier Nguyen Cao Ky promised to hold elections for a South Vietnamese constituent assembly in mid-April 1966, the Buddhist disturbance in South Vietnam did not end until June 1966. The Pentagon Papers' analysts regarded "the continuing South Vietnamese political crisis" as a factor in postponing the decision on the POL strikes. In an attempt to regain government control over the cities in the South Vietnamese central highlands, in early May Premier Ky despatched government troops to Da Nang to put down the Buddhist movement which had persisted for nearly two consecutive months. Ky's decision caused great dissatisfaction among U.S. government officials; nor did he consult with them. In a telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, in mid-May, Rusk noted that "It is intolerable that Ky should take such far reaching move as that against Danang without consultation with us."⁵⁵

The U.S. administration did not want to see non-Communist South Vietnamese elements fighting each other, for "disarray among the South Vietnamese leaders" could only strengthen the Communist forces in the South. The broadcasts of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front called for the "consolidation of the struggle of dissidents in Danang, Hue and Saigon against the Government" of the Republic of Vietnam and encouraged "the South Vietnamese armed forces and administration to follow the example set by dissidents in those cities." In addition, the Liberation Front also offered arms support to 'the Buddhist Struggle Committee forces'. In view of these politics, Washington opposed the use of force to quell the internal dissidents in South Vietnam.⁵⁶

Contrarily, the U.S. administration was anxious to have the

Buddhist crisis end. After a battle with heavy exchanges of fire between GVN and resistance force troops, the Ky government restored civil order in Danang and forced the Buddhist movement to surrender. Despite the annoyance over Premier Ky, the Johnson administration could not ask for anything more than the outcome. William Bundy later recalled that President Johnson "categorically thrust aside the withdrawal option" and his administration officials were "all relaxed".⁵⁷

By early June, President Johnson could not delay the POL decision any longer. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland all viewed it as 'an urgent military necessity'. General Earle G. Wheeler, the Chairman of the JCS, indicated to Westmoreland that "It is quite clear authority to attack the POL system was within our grasp when the political turmoil in SVN rose to a height which caused many people here to take a second look."⁵⁸ But a considerable number of mid-level civilian officials in the Defense and State Departments still opposed such military measures against the DRV on the grounds that "they are not worth the risk of provoking a greater Chinese Communist role in the war or the direct involvement of Soviet ships that are in the harbor."⁵⁹

Despite urging from U.S. high-ranking military officials to carry out these new air attacks at the "earliest" possible moment, the POL decision was once again withheld in early June for 'another international diplomatic effort'. In order to pave the way for a second Ronning trip to Hanoi, Rusk cabled the U.S. President to delay the strikes at the NVN's oil targets:

Regarding special operation in Vietnam we have had under consideration, I sincerely hope that timing can be postponed until my return. A major question in my mind is Ronning mission to Hanoi occurring June 14 through 18. This is not

merely political question involving a mission with which we have fully concurred. It also involves importance of our knowing whether there is any change in the thus far harsh and unyielding attitude of Hanoi.⁶⁰

Against this, the U.S. Secretary of Defense wanted "to go on the POL targets immediately". Though McNamara had been skeptical of the U.S. air war against NVN since the beginning of 1966, he believed that the POL strikes would have to be carried out at "the 'earliest possible' moment" before the DRV regime could disperse its oil tanks storage into the small scattered sites. McNamara now saw the POL campaign strictly from a technical point of view.⁶¹ President Johnson thought it imperative to accept "a two-week postponement", for to sap the Canadian diplomatic mediation would be interpreted as an act of 'rebuking the peace efforts' by the international community. As Rostow suggested to the U.S. President:

In short, if we are to accept Secretary Rusk's request for postponement until his return, we must also accept postponement for about two weeks. I regard this as unfortunate, but not necessarily a disaster.⁶²

Upon Ronning's return in late June, the Johnson administration found that there was no sign of a change in the DRV's position. The North Vietnamese government still demanded a unilateral cessation of bombing in the North and rejected the mutual de-escalation proposal. When the news of "no sign of 'give' in Hanoi's position" reached Washington, U.S. policy-makers proceeded to initiate the POL bombing. To Ronning, this was a disappointment. He later felt that he had been used by the U.S. government in order to justify its further air actions against North

Vietnam. George C. Herring expressed that "Such a charge seems unduly severe, but here, as in other instances, the failure of a peace mission did mark yet another expansion of the war."⁶³

In fact, before Ronning's return, President Johnson was 'still uncertain' whether he would agree to such POL attacks. In a meeting of the National Security Council, in mid-June 1966, the President indicated that "A decision on bombing is not being made now and one is not imminent." When the President was asked at a news conference whether he meant "to raise the cost of aggression at its source" as equivalent to "a step-up in air strikes was in the offing", he balked at answering. This demonstrated a high degree of uncertainty by the U.S. President about the forthcoming air-strike operations against North Vietnam. According to Mark Clodfelter, the author of The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam, it took five days for the President to reach the final decision after his meeting with the NSC.⁶⁴

The U.S. President was caught in the dilemma whether it was desirable to escalate the air war against North Vietnam and thus risk a wider conflict with Red China and the U.S.S.R. Certainly, such a military move against NVN must involve a calculated risk. Not only were the China "watchers" in the U.S. government keeping an eye on the POL question, but Washington also held a thorough discussion concerning these new air attacks with those foreign diplomats and government officials from its Western European allies and Japan.

In a telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen to Washington, in mid-June 1966, the Danish Foreign Office transmitted a message (from an Eastern European diplomat in Peking) regarding the U.S. bombing policy toward North Vietnam: "China 'must be expected' to take active part in the Vietnam war if U.S. should bomb Hanoi or Haiphong." The Minister of International Trade and Industry of Japan, Takeo Miki, also transmitted

an important message, which "summarizes" the Chinese Communist views through the impression of Kenzo Matsumura (the leader of **Japanese Liberal Democratic Party**) during his visit in Peking (from May 12 to 24, 1966), to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Miki conveyed Matsumura's impression on the relations between Communist China and the United States as follows:

- (1) With respect to the Vietnam war, China does not have either the intention or qualification to have its influence felt for its cessation.
- (2) Unless the United States directly infringes upon China's territory, China will not intend to intervene in the Vietnam war.
- (3) In the final analysis, the Sino-U.S. confrontation centers on the Taiwan problem and, short of the settlement of this issue, reconciliation with the United States will not become a reality. Also, China does not conceive of an early settlement of the Taiwan problem and is willing and ready to wait even more than a decade for its ultimate settlement.⁶⁵

This message from high-ranking Japanese officials, along with the one from the Danish Foreign Office, were taken seriously by Washington. In order to determine how these messages influenced the thinking of U.S. officials, one must look at a detailed conversation between Chester Ronning and U.S. Assistant-Secretary of State William Bundy during his stay in Ottawa in late June 1966. While Bundy's main concern was whether there was any change in Hanoi's attitude for talks, he also touched upon important points (relating to U.S. bombing policy against the DRV) with Ronning. As the attachment to Memorandum for the Record

pointed out that:

Points Related to Bombing Policy

At no point did Mr. Bundy refer specifically to any forthcoming operations. However, the course of the discussion permitted several related points to be made and discussed, as follows:

- A. Possibility of Chinese Intervention. Bundy and Ronning had a long exchange on this, in which virtually total agreement emerged that the Chicoms would be highly sensitive to any threat to their own territory and might well react if they concluded that it had become our objective to destroy North Vietnam or eliminate the Communist regime there....
- B. Mr. Bundy specifically said that we had no intention of bombing the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong, or mining the Haiphong harbor. Ronning had given an interesting account of the air raid shelters constructed in Hanoi, and Mr. Bundy said flatly that they would not need these shelters. Ronning also expressed grave concern over any US action that tended to throw the North Vietnamese into the arms of the Chicoms, which he thought would be disastrous both in stiffening the North Vietnamese position and in bringing about heavy Chicom influence and eventual control in North Vietnam. Mr. Bundy said that we saw the same danger, and that it was a major element in our not contemplating the mining of Haiphong.⁶⁶

These comments demonstrate that the Johnson administration was extremely cautious in launching military actions which would provoke Chinese intervention in North Vietnam. In public, in the month of June (1966), the Chinese Communist authorities seldom made any explicit "reference to the war in Vietnam", except to indicate that "Should U.S. imperialism dare to unleash a war against China, it will suffer a devastating counter-blow." A sharp reduction of Peking's belligerent tone in Vietnam was caused by the on-going purge against the 'bourgeois' elements in Mainland China. As Max Frankel, a journalist of the New York Times, pointed out at this time, "the fears of Chinese involvement in the war have diminished considerably here in recent weeks as Peking has given increasing evidence of its preoccupation with domestic issues."⁶⁷

However, the nationwide purge against 'bourgeois elements' in Mainland China did not prevent Peking from watching closely the war in Vietnam. During a visit of British Charge (Hopson) in Peking, in early June, Communist Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi stated that Peking "firmly believed U.S. intended attack China, but would be happy be proved wrong". However, Chen Yi made such comments in connection with the danger of "escalation war" in Vietnam. From his impression, the British Charge recaptured Chen Yi's words concerning the Sino-American relations as follows:

U.S. had no intention of withdrawing from Vietnam... On the contrary, the Americans were expanding the war and in the final stage would escalate it to China. Some people thought that events would not develop in this way but China had to be prepared. Judging from their dealings with the U.S. since 1945, the Chinese could not assume that U.S. adventurous

policy had 'no' limit. Nothing was unlimited, but the fact was that U.S. would not withdraw from Vietnam and last stage would be U.S. escalation of war to China.⁶⁸

These remarks were correlated with what the Chinese Communist Foreign Minister said during an interview which he gave a group of Scandinavian journalists in late May 1966. Chen Yi indicated that:

We do not wish for war... In our opinion real peace is possible only when imperialism has been eradicated. A serious showdown, therefore, seems unavoidable. We do not wish to start a war, but we are prepared for it because the American imperialists are to an ever increasing extent preparing for an attack on China.⁶⁹

Washington could hardly ignore these Chinese Communist messages. Chen Yi's remark to the Scandinavian journalists and the British Charge (Hopson) caused special concern in the U.S. administration over Chinese views on "Imminence or Inevitability of War with the U.S.", which had been raised by the Chinese Communist newspapers in Hong Kong in early February 1966 and also by Chairman Mao during his discussion with the head of the Japanese Communist Party in March. The administration's apprehension prompted the U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong (Edward Rice) to clarify the Chinese Communist dictum of an inevitable war between Communist China and the United States. As Rice explained:

It is doubtful all within the Chinese leadership believe such an attack inevitable or that efforts to avoid it should not be

made: Chen Yi on June 9 conveyed to British Charge Hopson the impression he did not totally share Mao's apparent conviction. And even if the leadership were agreed that an early war with us were inevitable it does not follow they would be careless about precipitating it on the theory that how it comes does not greatly matter. They will greatly prefer the external and internal advantages of being the party to conflict which is the apparent victim of aggression. This undoubtedly contributes to the apparent Chinese Communist intention not to become directly embroiled with the U.S. in Vietnam provided we do not precipitate such embroilment.⁷⁰

The Johnson administration took great precaution in planning out its air campaign against the NVN's POL targets. In a draft operational order to **CINCPAC** (Commander in Chief, Pacific), in mid-June 1966, Washington not only instructed the American pilots to take all possible measures to avoid striking at the NVN's populated areas but minimize civilian casualties. These restricted measures were demanded by the U.S. civilian officials to impose upon the JCS's requested POL targets. Here, we can see the influence which civilian caution had upon the operational instructions. The cause for taking such measures was to contain adverse reactions from the international community as well as the risk of a wider war with the Communist world (notably Communist China and the Soviet Union). As the U.S. Defense Secretary told **CINCPAC** that "Final decision for or against [the POL strikes] will be influenced by extent they can be carried out without significant civilian casualties."⁷¹

For McNamara, the amount of civilian casualties was a significant factor which could influence the U.S. President and his inner-circle advisers to give their final consent to the POL bombing. In particular, at

this time, Walt Rostow told Arthur J. Goldberg that Washington expected to have low civilian losses from the POL campaign and also worked out how to mitigate a possible diplomatic tension between the United States and U.S.S.R. once the new aerial strikes against NVN would be implemented. Some Washington officials worried that the POL bombing would further damage the Soviet-American relations if a Soviet ship nearby in the Haiphong harbour was being hit. This view was shared by the U.S. Vice-President (Hubert H. Humphrey) and Ambassador at Large Harriman. Humphrey used the word "catastrophe" to describe such an eventuality. In addition, the Johnson administration was planning to send Ambassador Harriman on a diplomatic tour to Moscow to solicit the Soviet helps in mediating the Vietnamese conflict.⁷²

Accordingly, Harriman was "extremely anxious to be sent on a mission to Moscow" in the upcoming summer (1966), for he doubted that he was sufficiently persuasive to pass on the message of "good will" to the Russian leaders, while the United States was being intensively engaged in an another escalation of air war against NVN. As Rostow recaptured his conversation with Harriman at this time to the U.S. President: "His only anxiety" to the POL bombing "is that if we hit a Soviet ship we would make things more difficult for them in pressing Hanoi to negotiate." Although Moscow was reluctant to offer help to any kind of international diplomatic initiatives (since its abortive move at the U.S. second bombing pause toward NVN in early 1966), it still wanted to use its diplomatic leverage on Hanoi to wean the North Vietnamese from the Chinese Communist influence. The Kremlin leadership did not want to see the Vietnam War turn into a general conflagration which would only force the DRV into the Chinese Communists' arms on their terms. By counting upon this fact, Washington still wanted to hold diplomatic contacts with the Soviets 'through unofficial channels'.⁷³

After the failure of the Ronning mission, President Johnson convened another NSC meeting in late June 1966 to decide whether it was ripe for the POL attacks against the DRV. During this meeting, General Wheeler, the chairman of the JCS, spoke in favour of the POL strikes, for he believed these aerial operations would put a ceiling on the infiltration of the PAVN forces. As Wheeler clearly pointed out to the President at this meeting:

Wheeler: A POL strike will not stop infiltration, but it will establish another ceiling on what they can support. There are three divisions there with another ready to move.

The President: Suppose your dreams are fulfilled. What are the results?

Wheeler: Over the next 60 to 90 days, this will start to affect the total infiltration effort. It will cost them more. In a very real sense, this is a war of attrition.

The President: You have no qualification, no doubt that this is in the national interest?

Wheeler: None whatsoever.

The President: People tell me what not to do, what I do wrong. I don't get any alternatives. What might I be asked next? Destroy industry, disregard human life? Suppose I say no, what else would you recommend?

Wheeler: Mining Haiphong.

The President: Do you think this will involve the Chinese Communists and the Soviets?

Wheeler: No sir.

The President: Are you more sure than MacArthur was?

Wheeler's argument for imposing a ceiling on the North Vietnamese infiltration effort, along with the consensus of the administration top advisers (regarding the oil attacks as a military necessity), finally persuaded the President to give his approval to the POL campaign, though he continued to reject the plea of mining Haiphong harbour which was advocated by the high-ranking U.S. military officials in Washington.⁷⁴

The air raids on the North Vietnamese oil installations in the suburbs of Hanoi and Haiphong in late June (1966) caused only the usual denunciations from Peking. The Chinese Communist leadership reiterated its "standard pledge of 'firm support' for the Vietnamese". An article by People's Daily in early July indicated that the Chinese people would not succumb to "U.S. threats" of escalation war in Vietnam and also would not be swayed to give up their fraternal support to "the Vietnamese people's struggle" against U.S. aggressors "no matter how the U.S. may extend or escalate the conflict". To many China observers, Peking's low-key response to the POL strikes suggested that China at this time had "clearly been reluctant to involve itself in the risk of direct military confrontation with the United States in Indochina."⁷⁵

In addition, some other Asian analysts explained that Communist China's failure to act was because "current political purge on Mainland may be preoccupying and immobilizing Chicom leadership." The Thai newspaper (Phim Thai) in Bangkok attributed the "political chaos inside China" as the determining factor in "preventing ChiComs (Chinese Communists) from taking any action other than 'intimidation and shouting itself hoarse'". Thus, Ambassador Lodge reported to Washington that he was fascinated by the "most favorable" public reactions in Saigon "to the Hanoi-Haiphong bombings". Lodge also noted that "there is little belief that they [the POL strikes] will provoke Chinese intervention".⁷⁶

The U.S. State Department was more cautious in assessing the

Chinese Communist reaction. Indeed, it did not share the general speculation that Communist China's internal convulsion hindered its military mobility to safeguard NVN's territorial integrity. In an attempt to dissuade the U.S. officers from this belief, the State Department informed the American embassies abroad that:

Dept [the U.S. Department of State] is not anxious to see this particular line of reasoning become generally accepted. However, significant Peng Chen's downfall and continuing purge of mid-level Party officials may be, we believe reasons for Chinese Communist restraint in **SEA** (Southeast Asia) thus far may be sought in number unrelated and more basic factors, including schism with Soviets, reluctance confront US forces unless Chinese territory actually attacked, logistic difficulties in conducting war against US in Vietnam, and difficulties in handling relations with DRV in event of more open ChiCom intervention beyond support personnel already stationed in North Vietnam. In fact, it could be argued that Chinese leadership's willingness to engage in this kind of public cleansing of apparatus reflects confidence that Party will emerge strengthened and meantime will suffer little diminution of capacity to execute essential tasks of national defense and mobilization. In any event, ChiCom military readiness remains unimpaired and if anything is improving. We detect no problems of Party's control over military which could significantly affect PLA's ability to act.⁷⁷

In other words, the Johnson administration was still convinced that U.S. restrictive measures in the POL campaign were the most effective

means to contain the risk of direct Chinese involvement in the Vietnam war. The administration's belief was clearly reflected in its official announcement of the POL strikes against the Hanoi-Haiphong area. In a press conference in Saigon, in late June 1966, the **MACV** (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) spokesman reaffirmed the U.S. 'policy of exercising military restraint' by emphasizing that the POL strikes "continued the policy of hitting only military targets in North Vietnam". The spokesman also asserted that "the petroleum facilities in Hanoi and Haiphong have become vital to the mounting North Vietnamese aggression against the South and, therefore, are prime military targets in North Vietnam".⁷⁸

When Secretary McNamara was asked by reporters how he assessed "Communist China's intentions", given Peking's non-active response after the latest U.S. air raids on the suburbs of Hanoi and Haiphong, he replied that:

Well, I can't speculate on the intentions of Red China. I can only tell you that it has been our policy to follow a program of military restraint, to limit our action to military targets and we will continue to follow that policy. I want to emphasize what I said before, our objectives in South Vietnam are limited. Our objectives are not to destroy the Communist Government of North Vietnam. They are not to destroy or damage the people of North Vietnam. They are limited solely to permitting the South Vietnamese people to have an opportunity to shape their own destiny, so they can select and choose the political and economic institutions under which they propose to live.⁷⁹

These official comments show that Washington took account of its

own political/military constraints rather than gambling upon the speculation that the convulsion in China would make it much easier to carry out the POL bombing.

To many U.S. principal allies, the American message of air strikes at strictly military targets at the surroundings of Hanoi and Haiphong was well received. In a special meeting in the Canadian House of Commons, in late June 1966, Prime Minister Lester Pearson was questioned by the NDP (New Democratic Party) opposition leader (Douglas) whether the Canadian Government was "going to take any action" in view of the latest U.S. air raids on Hanoi and Haiphong, for Douglas contended that the "acceleration" of U.S. air war against NVN would "affect peace of the world" (what Douglas particularly referred to was the complete failure of the mid-June Ronning mission). Pearson replied that "Our efforts for peace will not be nullified by any action. It is my understanding on the basis of preliminary reports that U.S. Government does not regard bombing of oil facilities as any change in U.S. position of bombing military targets."⁸⁰

The Japanese Government regarded the POL bombing against the DRV as an "inevitable step" to forestall further infiltration of PAVN forces into South Vietnam, but insisted that its support to the U.S. bombing in the North was merely confined to those North Vietnamese military targets which had a lot to do with the intensification of fighting in the South.⁸¹

The vigorous protests against the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong were mainly from the Socialist or leftist elements in the Japanese society and from the Indian Government. Both Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Foreign Minister Swaran Singh "publicly expressed deep concern and distress" about the destruction of NVN's oil system and called for an "immediate" end to all bombings of North Vietnam, for they feared that these American bombing raids would heighten "the danger of an escalation of hostilities" in the entire Asian continent.⁸²

In Japan, the leftist, labour and pacifist groups held nationwide mass demonstrations against the new U.S. aerial actions. The Central Committee of Japanese Communist Party, in particular, sent a letter of protest to the U.S. President. The Committee not only voiced outrage of the bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong but also warned that these actions would jeopardize "the peace of Asia and the world." It demanded that "the bombings against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as well as the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong be stopped immediately and that all United States troops in South Vietnam be withdrawn."⁸³

These protests did not have a great impact on President Johnson. He still believed that the new raids would force the North Vietnamese regime to come to terms with the United States. "I thought that if we could seriously affect their POL supplies, and we could make it much more difficult for this infiltration to succeed, that they'd look at their whole card and say, well, what's the use, maybe we ought to try to work out some agreement." To its great disappointment, the U.S. administration discovered that Ho Chi Minh seized upon the POL strikes to extract more aid from Red China, the Soviet Union, and other Eastern European countries, crippling the impact of the new U.S. bombing campaign.⁸⁴

The POL bombing failed to accomplish its military objectives, for the U.S. military had greatly overestimated NVN's dependence on the POL facilities at its major port (Haiphong) and large oil storage tanks in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The POL strikes could inflict heavy damages on NVN's POL storage capacity, but these actions did not disrupt NVN's efforts in dispersing its POL supplies into small scattered sites. As the U.S. air attacks failed to destroy the DRV's logistical system, further doubts arose regarding the Johnson administration's ability to interdict the infiltrated-PAVN forces into the South. During the first half of 1966, the Johnson administration assessed Chinese policy judiciously, and

incorporated that factor into their own policy with effect -- but still the stalemate continued in Vietnam.⁸⁵

NOTES

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77. Ibid., Outgoing Telegram (July 7, 1966).

78. **LBJ Library**, the transcript of the press conference (held by **MACV's** spokesmen in Saigon) was attached to a memorandum to Walt Rostow on June 29, 1966, NSF, WHCF.

79. **LBJ Library**, text of Secretary McNamara's press conference on POL bombing was drafted in a telegram and was sent to American embassy in Canberra, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, June 29, 1966.

80. **LBJ Library**, Incoming Telegram from Ottawa (re Pearson's response to the U.S. bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in the House of Commons), NSF, Country File, Vietnam, June 29, 1966.

81. **LBJ Library**, CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "World Reaction to The U.S. Bombing of Hanoi-Haiphong Petroleum Installations on 29 and 30 June", NSF, Country File, Vietnam, June 30, 1966; Ibid., July 1, 1966.

82. Ibid.

83. **LBJ Library**, Memorandum For Mr. Rostow, "Telegram to The President from the Central Committee of the Japan Communist Party Protesting the Bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong", NSF, Country File, Vietnam, July 1, 1966.

84. Quoted in Mark Clodfelter, The Limits of Air Power, p. 97; **The Pentagon Papers** (Gravel ed.), Vol. IV, p. 110.

85. **The Pentagon Papers** (Gravel ed.), Vol. IV, pp. 109-111.

Chapter 3: The July Crisis

In July 1966, the Soviet leadership seized upon the U.S. air strikes against the Hanoi-Haiphong oil depots to sharpen its propaganda line in Vietnam. In a joint declaration in Bucharest, in early July, the Warsaw Pact countries pledged to augment aid to North Vietnam and expressed their readiness to send "volunteers" if Hanoi requested.¹ The Soviet leaders intended this communique to show the world that Communist countries were united in a common front against U.S. imperialist aggression in Vietnam, and also to force the Chinese Communists to abide by "united actions" in Vietnam, and so abandon its independent role in the international Communist movement.

Despite its sharpening propaganda line, Moscow did not intend to provoke a war with the U.S. over the bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong. In a speech in front of graduates of the Soviet military schools, the Soviet Supreme leader Leonid Brezhnev only said that "We are drawing the proper conclusions from the latest crimes of American imperialism. Our assistance to Vietnam will keep growing." Except for promising more aid in the aftermath of the POL attacks, the Kremlin leadership did not show a greater involvement in North Vietnam (such as the assistance of Soviet air forces to the DRV).²

Prior to the POL bombings, Moscow had conducted an important meeting with all the Warsaw Pact countries in order to make a concerted effort to deliver more efficient aid to North Vietnam. In particular, Brezhnev insisted that the U.S.S.R. would "undertake 'new steps' and 'new measures' to hasten victory for the Vietnamese Communists." After the U.S. bombings, Soviet leaders found it opportune to link the Bucharest communique (focussing upon the Pact's willingness to offer "volunteers" to the DRV if needed) with the agreement by Pact members to work out "ever-increasing aid" for North Vietnam against U.S. imperialist aggression. Washington did not view the Warsaw Pact declaration as a major change

in Soviet policies.³

Since the U.S. administration believed that any Soviet moves to step up aid for North Vietnam would show the "long-range planning" of the Soviet leadership, it did not regard Moscow's promises of "new measures" of assistance to the DRV as a sudden response to the POL bombings. An official intelligence memorandum at this time indicated to the Secretary of State (Rusk) that:

We accept as credible the recent report from an Eastern European source that the details of the July 6 Warsaw Pact declaration on Vietnam were worked out at the prolonged foreign ministers' meeting in Moscow in June -- i.e., before the POL bombings. Though the phrase on taking into account the new situation was presumably inserted at the Bucharest summit meeting of the Pact, it seems fairly clear that the language on ever- increasing aid, on volunteers, and on 'united actions' -- the latter being of more significance as a gain for Moscow in its running battle with Peking -- was the result of a long negotiating process and not a sudden response.⁴

Undoubtedly, the Bucharest communique served as a propaganda tool for Moscow, but it did not succeed in forcing the Chinese Communist leadership to submit to Soviet domination. Instead, it marked a further deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations.

Despite the offers of "volunteers" by the Warsaw Pact and North Korean, Peking and Hanoi were extremely reluctant to touch on the issue. A State Department memorandum cited Ho Chi Minh's statement to a group of *International Organization of Journalists* that "Hanoi was grateful

for the offer of volunteers but 'the proposed help is not needed at present. But it still remains to be seen whether we shall require this aid in the future'." The North Vietnamese leadership was particularly sensitive about the issue of "volunteers", for it feared that acceptance of these offers would complicate the politics of the entire Vietnamese conflict, further jeopardizing the DRV's national independence.⁵

Since Hanoi understood that the main goal of the July Warsaw Pact declaration was to demonstrate the solidarity of Communist countries toward the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, it chose not to play up the issue of "volunteers". Instead, President Ho called for a partial mobilization in North Vietnam and made a special appeal in reference to the latest bombing raids to the Peking government in mid-July 1966. In response, the Chinese Communist Chairman (Liu Shao-chi) declared that the Chinese people were not only "ready to undertake the greatest national sacrifices" in support of the Vietnamese people but also willing "to take such actions at any time and in any place as the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples deem necessary for dealing joint blows at the U.S. aggressor."⁶

By focussing upon the fraternal relationship between China and North Vietnam, the Chinese Communist leadership sought to demonstrate its socialist support to the DRV. This view was reflected in Chairman Liu's statement: "China's 700 million people provide backing for Vietnam and the vast expanse of China's territory is Vietnam's rear area." To many analysts in Washington, Liu's statement in late July represented a "new" and more "determined effort" from Peking to deter further U.S. escalation in Vietnam.⁷

The U.S. not only undertook an intensive bombing campaign against NVN in July-August 1966 (which the Pentagon officials termed the strangulation of DRV's POL system) but launched a "27-day search and destroy operation" to mop up enemy units of the 324B PAVN Division

south of the DMZ. This raised particular concern in Peking and Hanoi as to whether the U.S. would cross the demarcation line on the 17th parallel of Vietnam in order to achieve its military objectives.⁸

This fighting was named Operation Hastings and involved intensive combat along the southern part of the 17th parallel (between the U.S. Marines and PAVN forces). It produced significant casualties on both sides. Operation Hastings did not mean much to the Chinese Communist authorities in itself, but its timing coincided with the reinforcement of additional U.S. armed forces units in South Vietnam and the use of B-52 bombers and naval guns. This was alarming enough to make the Peking leadership believe that the U.S. had embarked on a more intensive war in Vietnam.⁹ In fact, Peking's leaders feared that a Sino-U.S. war might be precipitated by the Johnson administration. Particularly, they feared that U.S. air raids would spread to the population centers of Hanoi and Haiphong. In view of this possibility, they tried to forewarn the U.S. authorities that the Chinese leadership might consider a direct intervention in Vietnam at some point in the future. In his speech at the Peking mass rally, in late July, Chairman Liu warned that: "If you think you can unscrupulously 'escalate' the war of aggression without meeting due punishment, then you will find it too late to repent".¹⁰

If anyone had analysed carefully the remarks of Peking's leaders on Vietnam in late July 1966, they would have detected a great difference in expressions about Communist China's pledges of support to the DRV between the two rival political groups in the Chinese Communist leadership. Both commented on the possibility of direct military intervention in Vietnam at some point if the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples deemed it necessary, but they expressed different ideas of how to help the Vietnamese. The Liu-Teng group spoke of "joint blows" by the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples "at the U.S. aggressor", while the Maoist

faction pledged to "give resolute support" to the Vietnamese people in their fight against U.S. aggression "until final victory". The former offered a firm assurance to the DRV that the Chinese people would join forces with the fraternal Vietnamese people to annihilate the U.S. aggressors if needed.¹¹ The Maoist group expressed its views with some reservations. They tended to be more cautious in expressing its threat of armed intervention in North Vietnam, for they did not want to become embroiled in the Sino-U.S. hostilities.

Due to its purge of "bourgeois elements" in China, the Maoist propaganda line had focused upon the policy of "self-reliance". However, the Vietnamese war situation required some outward attention from Peking's leaders, when the U.S. carried out the POL bombing. The Maoist group of Chinese leaders urged the Vietnamese people to carry on their war of resistance against U.S. aggressors with their own strength.¹² The People's Daily commented that Communist China had given the utmost "support" to the Vietnamese national liberation movement against U.S. aggressors. Now, the Vietnamese people must "rely on themselves to make revolution and wage people's war in their own country, since these are their own affairs." The editorial also noted that "No outside aid can replace their struggle. Whatever its amount, it is only auxiliary." To many China observers, this message implied that "China would not be prepared, at this stage, to send troops to Vietnam."¹³

What really caused the two rival groups in the Chinese Communist leadership to outmatch each other in their 'war threat' propaganda in Vietnam was the Warsaw Pact's declaration in July. As Edward Rice in Hong Kong reported to Washington: "We recognize that Peking may be feeling compulsion to match public pledges of support, including volunteers already made by Warsaw Pact countries and North Korea."¹⁴ When Chairman Liu Shao-chi called on the North Vietnamese to view

China's territory as their rear reliable area, his statement was interpreted by British authorities and reported by The Associated Press in London as meaning that Hanoi was being offered the chance to use the Chinese Communist air-fields to free its air force units from U.S. attacks. Observers in Washington and at the American consulate office in Hong Kong believed that once North Vietnamese air bases were raided by U.S. bombers, the DRV's air force units would automatically seek refuge from Chinese Communist air-fields and set up a logistics base inside Mainland China. As Edward Rice indicated:

We here are speculating whether this [re Liu's comments on Hanoi's rear-area use] could not mean, for instance, that Chicom airfields would be used by DRV's air force if U.S. heavily bombed its fields such as Phuc Yen. The Chinese Communist statement that their territory constitutes the rear of the Vietnamese people would at least make it hard for them [Peking's leaders] to deny the use of Chicom bases if the relevant need emerged.¹⁵

One might wonder why the Chinese Communist authorities ran such a high risk of bringing military danger to their homeland. One possible explanation is that the Liu-Teng group in the Chinese Communist Party tried to devise a new formula to deter U.S. escalation in Vietnam, while scoring a point against the Maoist leadership by refuting Mao's doctrine of "self-reliance" as a proper way to aid the Vietnamese Communists to defeat U.S. aggressors. Liu Shao-chi pointed out in his warning statement that "the militant friendship and solid unity between the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples are the surest guarantee for defeating the U.S. aggressor."¹⁶ By inserting solid pledges into its new formulation in Vietnam, the Liu-Teng group hoped to outdo its rival group in the

Chinese Communist leadership.

Rice speculated that Liu's warning statement, particularly the idea of a joint action by the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples against U.S. aggressors, indicated new Chinese efforts to provide substantial material support to North Vietnam.

We cannot be sure that this is so, or know what additional support may have been promised, but some indication of Chinese pledges had to be made public -- as it was by Liu -- if they were either to be fully credible to the DRV or of deterrent or warning value vis-a-vis ourselves [the United States].¹⁷

Rice did not view Liu's statement as a simply token of support to North Vietnam. To Rice, this meant "additional important support" to Ho Chi Minh after the Hanoi-Haiphong attacks, so that his government could carry on with its struggle against U.S. aggression. Peking might even reach an agreement with North Vietnam for "closer DRV-Chicom coordination on the Vietnam war situation", with "China serving as the 'rear area' for 'the Vietnamese people's struggle'."¹⁸

Although the Maoist group did not devise any new formula regarding further U.S. escalation in Vietnam, it succeeded in securing an assurance from President Ho that the Hanoi government would fight "a protracted war of resistance" against the U.S. until final victory. Jean Sainteny, a former French colonial official in Indochina, told U.S. Ambassador Bohlen in Paris that "Ho Chi Minh had twice been to Peking" in July 1966 and his mission was "to discuss with the Chinese either a search for settlement or an increase in Chinese aid." Sainteny "believed that the Chinese had refused the first and had agreed to the second." The Maoist propaganda line remained that "it is our firm conviction that, in the sea of flames of

people's war, U.S. imperialism will surely be destroyed and the Vietnamese people emerge victorious."19

By praising the strong determination of the Vietnamese people in their struggle against U.S. aggression, the Maoist leaders still expected the North Vietnamese government to "carry on a prolonged war". Communist Chinese Vice-Premier (Tao Chu), a principal spokesman of the Maoist group, criticized "some revolutionaries" (referring to the Hanoi leadership) for being deceived by the "phenomenon of outward strength but inner weakness" of the United States and for "failing to grasp the essential fact that the enemy is nearing extinction while they themselves (the revolutionaries) are approaching victory."20

The Maoist group also discouraged Hanoi from taking any peace offers into consideration. When the POL campaign took place, the Peking government charged that U.S. bombings were "attempting to coerce the Vietnamese people into submission and into accepting the 'peace talks' swindle." This aim of forcing "peace talks through bombing" was "doomed to failure".21

Conversely, Hanoi's broadcasting statement did not "specifically characterize" the POL bombings as a scheme to accelerate peace talks, merely that these disclosed the "deceitfulness" of U.S. in peace negotiations. The U.S. government noticed a difference in the treatment of the U.S. air attacks by the DRV regime and the Peking government. The Hanoi leadership was willing to talk if bombing ended, even if U.S. forces remained in South Vietnam. As a U.S. intelligence note pointed out:

Although the Hanoi statement is belligerent and unyielding, it does not, like Peking's, place the issue of bombing and cessation of bombing outside the courses of action that could lead to some sort of peace settlement. This approach is

consistent with Hanoi's previous public statements on ways to terminate the Vietnam fighting, which generally have listed an end to bombing as one condition for peace.²²

For this reason, the Maoist group continued to exert pressures on the DRV government. In mid-July 1966, Ho Chi Minh assured Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi that the Hanoi leadership would fight the U.S. through the end.²³

The Maoist group seized upon Hanoi's partial mobilization to reaffirm its hard-line stand toward a peace settlement in Vietnam. Its spokesman (Tao Chu) declared that:

The core of the Vietnam question at present is absolutely not a matter of merely stopping the bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. To lay one-sided stress on the stopping of bombing is precisely to cater to the needs of the U.S. imperialist policy of blackmail. The purpose of the U.S. bombing of northern Vietnam is to make people beg the United States to show mercy, beg it to stop the bombing, and accept its terms for surrender. One is trying to 'force peace talks through bombing,' while the other [i.e. the USSR] is saying that peace talks can be held once bombing is stopped. This is a public performance of a duet with U.S. imperialism.²⁴

The Maoist group opposed talks and feared a peace sell-out in the Vietnamese war, for that would be a defeat for the Maoist doctrine of People's War against U.S. imperialism. Indeed, by the summer of 1966, Peking even apprehended that "Hanoi would make concessions on the

basis of U.S. cessation of bombing of the DRV."25

The Maoist group also sought to link the U.S. scheme of "forcing peace talks through bombing" with the Soviets. In a People's Daily editorial in early July the Peking government ascribed the Hanoi-Haiphong area bombing raids to "the filthy political deal concluded between the U.S. and the Soviet Union." By mid-July, Chen Yi again publicly charged that these new bombing attacks were "entirely the result of US-Soviet collusion", and that the Soviet leading clique was "making military deployments along the Chinese border in coordination with United States imperialist encirclement of China."26

The Maoist group again completely rejected Moscow's call for "united action" in Vietnam. As its spokesman (Liu Ning-I) noted:

The revisionist leading clique of the Soviet Union has never stopped trying to subordinate the question of Vietnam to U.S.-Soviet collaboration and has been working consistently in the interest of U.S. imperialism. All this invariably makes it a target of struggle by the anti-U.S. international united front. As facts have shown us, we will never take any "united action" with the accomplice of U.S. imperialism.27

Despite the July Warsaw Pact Declaration and the internal challenge within the Chinese Communist leadership, the Maoist group obtained secure influence over the Hanoi leadership, making the North Vietnamese intransigent in peace negotiations. However, the Pact's pressures did not cause the Maoist group to change their basic commitment to Vietnam, which remained material support but not intervention of armed forces. For that matter, even the Liu-Teng group hedged carefully on any commitment to direct action in Vietnam. Although

Liu Shao-chi promised "joint blows" by the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples, if necessary, he still tied the "Chinese intervention to a future invitation from Hanoi." Edward Rice held that Peking's leaders did not "go beyond bounds of existing Chicom commitments" to DRV, and therefore, they still "would like to avoid provoking a showdown with the U.S."²⁸

Although the two rival groups were reluctant to involve themselves directly in the war in Vietnam, still they felt the need to signal their determination to safeguard North Vietnam. As a U.S. **Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE)** pointed out:

It seems probable ... that the current Chinese line on Vietnam is designed mainly to serve a number of political purposes. Peking wants to provide a dramatic reassurance to North Vietnam, now that Hanoi has again rejected any negotiations and reaffirmed its intention to fight a long war. Since Chinese actions have been cautious, Peking also probably feels some verbal escalation is called for in order to augment concern in the U.S. and elsewhere that China's intervention is becoming more imminent. They would hope thus to deter a still further increase in the scale of attack on NVN. We conclude that the Chinese have not changed their basic policy because of the recent air strikes [i.e. the POL bombing in the North]. We have estimated that Peking would almost certainly intervene if North Vietnam were invaded or if the collapse of the Communist regime seemed likely. But short of these extremes we continue to believe that China will not commit its ground or air forces to sustained combat against the U.S.²⁹

Even more, the Chinese Communists believed that if further U.S.

bombings failed to achieve their military objectives, this frustration, combined with the tremendous difficulties of U.S. forces in the South, would automatically prompt the Johnson administration to launch a ground invasion into DRV and even Mainland China. This view was conveyed to the British Charge (Hopson) in early June 1966 and again reflected in the Chinese Communist government statement regarding the U.S. bombing attacks on Hanoi-Haiphong fuel installations.³⁰

In a private conversation with French politicians Pierre Mendes-France and Charles Gombault, the Chinese Communist Ambassador at Paris reported that "China was determined to fight to the bitter end 'in the event of American aggression'" against the North (referring to U.S. landing in the northern part of Vietnam after a wave of massive air attacks). The outbreak of such a Sino-U.S. war "would not be confined merely to air/naval action but would embrace all forms of military activity and would end in the 'total destruction' of the U.S."³¹

Although Edward Rice in Hong Kong did not accept "the inevitability" of this Chinese Communist view, he held that Peking would enter the war in Vietnam if the U.S. air actions forced the North Vietnamese government into submission:

I am convinced that efforts to bring victory by air attacks on the North would not only prove indecisive but would also involve us in a vicious circle of frustration and escalation which would be highly likely to result in Sino-U.S. hostilities. It would be dangerous to assume we could carry measures against the DRV to the point where we could break the will of its regime without Communist China's intervening as it might deem necessary to support the regime -- just as a far weaker China intervened to save that of North Korea.³²

Those facts challenge the arguments of North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap in early 1980. According to Giap, Communist China used the war in Vietnam to collaborate with the United States at the expense of Vietnamese national interests. As a Vietnamese patriot, Giap concluded:

The Chinese Government told the U.S. that if the latter did not threaten or touch China, then China would do nothing to prevent the attacks (on Vietnam). It was really like telling the United States that it could bomb Vietnam at will, as long as there was no threat to the Chinese border... We felt that we had been stabbed in the back...

We had to resolve the situation in a way which would not affect our war of resistance against the Americans. For this reason we could not publicly denounce the Chinese.³³

Giap's remarks were far from the historical truth. If the political existence of the DRV regime was in jeopardy, the Chinese Communist authorities most likely would have intervened.

However, President Johnson's strategic goals were not to "wipe out" the Communist regime in North Vietnam but rather to prevent it from seizing the southern part of Vietnam. As the U.S. President proclaimed in his speech in late July 1966:

We were very careful not to get out of the target area, in order not to affect civilian populations. But we are going, with our allies, to continue to do everything that we can to deter the aggressor [i.e. PAVN forces] and to go to the peace table at the earliest possible date.³⁴

Such a U.S. presidential statement was extremely important in regard to the bombing of North Vietnam. This kind of assurance from Washington at least eased Chinese Communist anxieties about the U.S. air strikes. Johnson also expressed further U.S. willingness to have a peaceful relationship with Communist China by urging the "reconciliation between nations that now call themselves enemies." The desire of the U.S. administration for an amelioration of Sino-American relations helped to deter an adverse reaction from Peking.³⁵

Despite the hard-line of its propaganda, Peking noticed that Washington did not want Sino-U.S. hostilities. This helped to moderate its hostile attitude toward U.S. escalation against North Vietnam throughout the summer of 1966. In particular, the Maoist group hinted that Peking also desired improved relations with the U.S. By lowering the intensity of Sino-U.S. tensions in Vietnam, Chairman Mao attempted to concentrate his efforts on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

At a closing ceremony at the Peking Physics Colloquium in the summer of 1966, Mao's spokesman (Kuo Mo-Jo) spoke of Communist China's desire to improve Sino-U.S. relations:

In recent years they [i.e. the American] have ceaselessly raised the hue and cry that the Chinese people are 'isolated'. Are the Chinese people really 'isolated'? Again they have laughed too soon! Likewise, our ... meetings have given firm answers in the negative. No, *the Chinese people are by no means 'isolated'.* *They have friends all over the world.*³⁶

Kuo's remarks were an affirmative answer to President Johnson's address on United States Asian Policy in mid-July 1966. The American

President called on the Chinese Communist government to work "toward policies of peaceful cooperation" with the U.S., for "a peaceful mainland China is central to a peaceful Asia." He also noted that "For lasting peace can never come to Asia as long as the 700 million people of mainland China are isolated by their rulers from the outside world."³⁷

Both Peking and Washington at this stage desired better relations. Meanwhile, since early 1966 the Johnson administration had relented its hostile policy against Communist China and kept on preaching the theme "containment without isolation" toward it. Also, the U.S. President, Secretary of State Rusk, and Vice-President Humphrey constantly urged the Chinese leaders to break the curtain of Communist isolation so that contact with the outside world could be arranged. As one member of the National Security Council Staff James C. Thomson told his superior (Mr. Jenkins):

You will note that we have made some significant moves in this direction since early March -- notably through the Senate's China hearings, Rusk's Zablocki testimony, statements by the Vice President, further modifications of the travel ban, and now the President's July 12th speech. The new rhetoric has moved towards "containment without isolation" and now 'reconciliation' -- or a policy of 'firmness and flexibility' (a phrase the President likes).³⁸

U.S. success in signalling to Peking its intentions in North Vietnam vis-a-vis Communist China was fundamental to stabilizing the crisis in the latter half of 1966.

Throughout the period of intensification of the Vietnam war, the Johnson administration still intended to fight a limited war. The

annihilation of the Communist regime in North Vietnam was not a U.S. goal. Moreover, the use of U.S. military force, in President Johnson's mind, was to induce the North Vietnamese ruling group to abandon hopes of victory and negotiate. As General Westmoreland recalled nearly twenty-five years later in the New York Times:

President Johnson's strategic objective was not to unify North and South Vietnam by the use of military force. Rather, it was to bring the Communist government in Hanoi to the conference table by military and diplomatic pressure.³⁹

Throughout his presidency, Johnson constantly restricted his war against Asian Communism. The U.S. bombing programme against North Vietnam never went beyond certain geo-political constraints, in order to avoid a direct clash with the Chinese Communists and Soviets in the sphere of Southeast Asia.

This approach was evident in the U.S. air operation Rolling Thunder (52) during the summer of 1966. This operation was strictly limited by civilian officials from the State and Defense Departments and White House, in order to keep civilian casualties to a minimum in North Vietnam. In a memorandum to Gen. Wheeler, in mid-August 1966, the Department of Defense specified as follows:

Expand area for armed recce throughout North Vietnam (NVN), except within:

- (a). 10 NM radius racetrack pattern around Hanoi-Phuc Yen AF [i.e. air field].
- (b). 4 NM radius of Haiphong.
- (c). 30/25 NM of Communist China border.⁴⁰

The U.S. military was not free to bomb the DRV at will throughout the Vietnam war, as General Giap claimed. The U.S. military was not only constrained from carrying out an 'all-out' air campaign but also from launching a ground invasion into North Vietnam.

In an interview with the **U.S. News & World Report** in Saigon (in late July 1966), Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky argued that "Sooner or later we, as free men, have to face the Chinese Communists. I think it is better to face them right now than in 5 or 10 years." The South Vietnamese leader's statement was "widely interpreted" by the U.S. press as sign of his willingness to invade North Vietnam in order to crush Hanoi's armed aggression, even at the risk of provoking Chinese Communist intervention. Although the State Department's spokesman (Robert J. McCloskey) made "no official comment" on Ky's statement, reliable U.S. government sources indicated that Washington would remain in its policies of "prudent firmness" and "non-aggression" toward Communist China.⁴¹

Concurrently, U.S. B-52 bombers assisted the "Operation Hastings" south of the demilitarized zone but also "for the first time" fired at "targets within the DMZ (south of the demarcation line)". The purpose was to prevent North Vietnamese forces from using "the six-mile-wide buffer strip as an avenue of infiltration and as a sanctuary." This military operation in the DMZ was sensitive enough to cause the State Department to say that such a move "did not necessarily portend extension of the ground war into the zone." Secretary of State Rusk later reaffirmed that a move to topple the Communist regime in the North was not a U.S. goal.⁴²

By mid-July 1966, the Soviet leadership was also concerned with the prospect of a U.S. ground invasion of North Vietnam. Although the Kremlin was not as sensitive as the Chinese Communists, it still wanted to

show that a crossing of the 17th Parallel by U.S. forces from South Vietnam would inevitably precipitate a direct involvement from the U.S.S.R.⁴³

Moscow and its Communist allies in Eastern Europe anticipated an enlargement of U.S. air strikes on other targets such as dikes and dams or the mining of Haiphong harbour. The July Warsaw Pact's declaration was intended to deter such U.S. escalation. By mid-July, Communist propaganda in Eastern Europe also made a minor reference to "a possible ground invasion" by U.S. armed forces into the DRV. A Hungarian editorial at this time criticised Washington's "brink of war" policies in Indochina, and predicted that the next U.S. escalatory step would be mounting an "attack with land forces against the DRV". So too did Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin. When Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi arrived in Moscow in mid-July, Kosygin told her that "if American troops crossed the 17th parallel it would mean world war." The State Department thought that the Soviet Premier was so interested in this topic because Moscow believed the U.S. would launch a punitive action to "retaliate in kind for Hanoi's own recent crossing of the DMZ."⁴⁴

Other reliable sources indicated that Kosygin's apprehension "stemmed from his assessment of the Chinese reaction to a land invasion - - an assessment which seems to be shared by at least some North Vietnamese officials." No matter his motivations, Kosygin's prediction was intended to deter further U.S. escalation against North Vietnam. As a State Department memorandum pointed out:

As for Kosygin's prediction that a ground invasion would mean world war, some of the Indian reports suggest it was meant as a warning of what Moscow's own response would be - - and indeed, any move which might reasonably appear to

jeopardize the existence of a Communist regime in Hanoi would be likely to precipitate a considerably heavier Soviet involvement in the conflict. Thus, whatever Kosygin's estimate may be as to the likelihood of a 17th parallel crossing by the U.S., he obviously thought it worthwhile to broach the subject, apparently in the hope that his warning would deter any such action.⁴⁵

Throughout the precarious summer of 1966 erupted an intense purge against Communist officials in Mainland China. The two rival groups in the Chinese Communist leadership bolstered their pledges of support to the DRV. Neither could afford to be "soft" on U.S. imperialism. This increased the likelihood of Chinese intervention if Washington applied military pressures (such as the bombing of North Vietnam) exceeding the level that the North Vietnamese government could sustain. As Alfred Jenkins, a White House official, indicated to Rostow that "military containment of China is elementary; but military victory in Vietnam is unattainable short of large holocaust."⁴⁶

During this summer, neither Peking nor Moscow could permit the U.S. to destroy the Communist regime in North Vietnam, though they could not agree on the issue of "united action". However, no such action was really needed. The U.S. bombing raids on NVN's oil facilities failed to coerce the Hanoi leadership as long as the principal Communist powers were willing to fill the losses of POL supplies. Nor did the POL strikes significantly disrupt the flow of NVN's supplies and men into the South.

The U.S. was being dragged into a heavy commitment of combat troops in RVN, while Hanoi's leaders had changed their political tactics to adapt to a long drawn-out war. All this, in turn, suited Peking's objectives. The Maoist leadership did not feel that the Vietnam war situation was

running out of control during the summer of 1966. As its propaganda line indicated that the movement of the Vietnamese people's national liberation against U.S. aggression was "the zenith of the present struggle of the world's peoples against imperialism". It also noted that Communist China had done "the lofty duty" in fulfilling the revolutionary spirit of the peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America by giving resolute support to "the just struggle of the Vietnamese people." In other words, the Vietnamese people should be responsible for their own struggle "till final victory". As the Sino-U.S. tension in Vietnam reduced significantly in early August, the Maoist group shifted its attention toward the boiling crisis in China. By mid-August, the Maoist group had succeeded to dominate the CCP Politburo and consolidated its position in the PLA. In its communique of the Eleventh Plenum of the CCP Central Committee, the Maoist group in the Chinese Communist leadership officially declared that:

The Plenary Session maintains that to oppose imperialism, it is imperative to oppose modern revisionism. There is no middle road whatsoever in the struggle between Marxism-Leninism and modern revisionism. A clear line of demarcation must be drawn in dealing with the modern revisionist groups with the leadership of the C.P.S.U. as the centre, and it is imperative resolutely to expose their true features as scabs. It is impossible to have 'united action' with them.⁴⁷

This directive meant not only that the Maoist leaders wanted to break up ties with the Soviet Union but also that they were resolved on launching a "Cultural Revolution" campaign to eradicate all bourgeois, revisionist (or pro-Soviet), and anti-Communist elements in Mainland China. Their main enemy was no longer the U.S.

Notes

1. **LBJ Library**, Research Memorandum (from the U.S. State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research -- **INR**), "Volunteers for Vietnam -- A Status Report", NSF, **Southeast Asia -- Special Intelligence Material** (Jun. 1966-Feb. 1967), July 27, 1966.
2. **LBJ Library**, Research Memorandum (**INR**), "Moscow's Middle Course On Vietnam: The Dilemma Continues", **Part III: Possibilities of Greater Soviet Involvement**, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, July 25, 1966.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
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**Chapter 4: The Marigold Peace Efforts in latter half of
1966.**

Despite its vigorous efforts at the July Warsaw Pact's Declaration, Moscow failed to force the Peking leadership to comply with the concept of "united action" in Vietnam. Then, the pro-Soviet faction within the Chinese Communist Party was defeated by the Maoist group at the 11th Plenum. To some extent, the Chinese "Cultural Revolution" was launched to wipe out those CCP members "favorably disposed to closer ties with the Soviet Union", though, of course, Chairman Mao had other reasons at home to mount such a violent "Socialist Education" campaign.¹

In Vietnam, the United States had escalated its air war to the edges of the two NVN major cities (Hanoi and Haiphong) and built up its armed forces to nearly 300,000 men in the South, without seriously endangering China's national security. This broke Moscow's efforts to force Communist China into "united action" against U.S. aggression in Asia. In fact, the Peking leadership had deterred U.S. escalation without taking an active involvement in Vietnam.

With the removal of Army Chief Lo Jui-ching and Peng Chen in the CCP, the Maoist group (by mid-July) was able to dominate all the policies at home and abroad. If the pro-Soviet group wanted to reconcile China's relationship with the Soviet Union, it would have no chance to pursue its plan. As Walt Rostow told President Johnson:

Mao is now in effective control of the Chinese Communist Party and of the policies of the Peking regime. It is highly unlikely that Peking will soften its anti-Soviet line, which has now reached the pitch of accusing the USSR of 'collusion' with us [i.e. the United States] regarding Vietnam.²

By July 1966, Mao wanted to have a final diplomatic break with the U.S.S.R. In fact, he was compelled to do so by Soviet pressure. By

increasing aid to the DRV, Moscow's strategists expected that the war in the South would become more violent and U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam more intense. This would slow the pace of U.S. military success, draining off a considerable amount of American manpower and national resources and exerting pressure on Peking to reconcile with Moscow.³

Mao had anticipated that the concept of "united action" was a Soviet trap. He not only rejected this call, but signalled to the Americans that Communist China desired to improve its relationship with the U.S. This shocked Soviet leaders, who never expected things to develop in this way. They also feared that this development would eventually evolve into some form of Sino-American diplomatic/military cooperation in the Far East, posing a grave strategic threat to the U.S.S.R.⁴

From early August 1966, the Soviets started to "sound out" the Americans regarding their desire to improve diplomatic relations with Mainland China. They let Washington know that the Kremlin would read any move to reconciling Sino-American relations as an "anti-Soviet act". In fact, the Soviets had been monitoring the conversations between these two countries for a while, for they anticipated that one day the U.S. government "might seek to exploit the opportunity" by normalizing its own relationship with Red China.⁵

Soon, the Soviet leadership took a much harder propaganda line toward Vietnam. At a closing session of the Supreme Soviet, Premier Kosygin declared the Soviets would be firmly behind the North Vietnamese to "drive the American occupiers from Vietnamese soil". The Americans began to wonder what the Kremlin was trying to imply in this message. The Soviet Tass News Agency had already accused Peking's leaders of "rendering service to the United States imperialism" in Vietnam. The U.S. was much slower to grasp the meaning of this sensitive matter. As Charles Parker IV pointed out, "the Soviets had detected Mao's signals -- even

before the United States understood them -- China desired improved Sino-American relations."⁶

It was not until early August that the U.S. had a better understanding of this desire. The State Department intelligence noticed that the Kremlin had "significantly" hardened its attitude toward Washington. It estimated that the Soviet leaders could be anxious over the prospect of a Sino-U.S. collusion in Asia.⁷

Soviet strategy in the Vietnam war was contradictory. By adding fuel to the flames in Vietnam, Moscow intended not to provoke Chinese Communist intervention but to exacerbate the Vietnamese war situation so that it could force the Chinese Communists to return to the Soviet orbit. On the other hand, the increase of Soviet aid to the DRV was not aimed to drive the U.S. forces out of South Vietnam but to turn the fighting into a war of attrition, continuously draining American resources. Moscow's leaders did not want the escalation in Vietnam to produce a general conflagration in Indochina which would only invite the Chinese PLA into the North, making "a Peking-Hanoi alliance" possible, and destroying Soviet leverage on Hanoi.⁸

The Kremlin now turned to diplomacy to square the circle of its policy in Vietnam through Operation Marigold. Although this operation appeared to be the Polish peace initiative in Vietnam, it got strong patronage from Moscow. In late June 1966, Janusz Lewandowski, a Polish diplomat, told the Italian Ambassador (Giovanni Orlandi) to South Vietnam that he had a "very specific peace offer" to transmit to the U.S. government. Lewandowski indicated that he was doing it on behalf of the Hanoi government. What made Washington interested in this initiative was that Hanoi had dropped its demand for the "immediate reunification" of North and South Vietnam after the withdrawal of U.S. from the South.⁹

Operation Marigold did not accomplish anything until November

1966. Until then, the U.S. probed to see whether Lewandowski was a broker or an intermediary, and whether the Hanoi leadership would cease its activities in the South in an exchange for a U.S. bombing halt. The Soviets treated this operation as a low-key peace effort. They did not want to seem involved in any peace proposals in Vietnam. When the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union urged the Soviets to "assist" the United States search for peace in Vietnam "by exercising their responsibilities as co-chairman" of the 1954 Geneva conference in Indochina, an "ill-tempered" Soviet Foreign Minister (Gromyko) replied: "We are not your assistants." Moscow's reluctance to reconvene a Geneva conference revealed that the Soviet leadership played down a peaceful settlement and tried to force the United States to end the bombing of the North, making more favourable conditions for the DRV to enter into peace negotiations.¹⁰

This change of tactics by the Kremlin was aimed to counteract Peking's intransigent opposition to any peaceful settlement in Vietnam which did not produce complete U.S. withdrawal from the South. Hanoi's leaders did not view the withdrawal of U.S. forces as a preliminary basis for talks, as the Indian charge d'affairs (P.K. Banerjee) in Washington told the U.S. government. In order to avoid providing evidence for Peking's charges that the U.S.S.R. was selling out Vietnam, the Soviet leaders were extremely reluctant to comment on the conditions for a negotiated settlement possible in Vietnam. The State Department detected this attitude. As U.S. officials noted:

Moscow seems to eschew public discussion of peaceful settlement both because the topic is too academic at present and because it feeds Peking's charges of Soviet efforts to arrange negotiations to undercut the Vietnamese Communists.¹¹

Moscow's position on talks was reflected in a parliamentary speech in late July 1966 by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, after her state visit to Moscow. Mrs. Gandhi indicated that "it would be 'unrealistic to expect a conference until the bombing of North Vietnam had stopped'."12 During her stay in Moscow, Mrs. Gandhi and Premier Kosygin made a joint Soviet-Indian communique which called for "a unilateral cessation" of the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam. But the Soviet Premier was silent when Mrs. Gandhi proposed peace talks by reconvening a Geneva-type of conference. Kosygin's silence caused the State Department officials to conclude:

The fact that Kosygin did not bother to spell out conditions for settlement of the Vietnamese conflict in either of his speeches during Mrs. Gandhi's visit seems in keeping with such a view and is also consistent with a trend, noticeable since the Soviet Party Congress in March, toward increasing emphasis by Soviet leaders on a demand for a unilateral American withdrawal and a corresponding down-playing of terms for a settlement. Kosygin's avoidance of the subject, like that of Brezhnev in his July 1 speech, is more in keeping with the trend. We would be less inclined to conclude that Kosygin's silence might have signified a desire to avoid a public rejection of Mrs. Gandhi's call for peace talks.13

In fact, what the Soviet leadership was trying to tell Washington was that: if the U.S. wanted Soviet assistance in the peace efforts, it needed to offer incentives, such as the cessation of bombing in the North.

In addition, the Soviets wanted to convey that it would be necessary

to take one step at a time. This is why Operation Marigold became so important at the later stage of the negotiating process, for this effort could be developed into a Phase A--Phase B formulation. Under this plan, the United States would agree to a unilateral cessation of bombing in the North (Phase A) in order to reach the next stage of mutual de-escalation of the war in the South (Phase B).¹⁴

In the summer of 1966 the United States was inflexibly opposed to such a plan. In his speech on the bombing campaign, President Johnson stated: "Both publicly and privately we have let the leaders of the North know that if they will stop sending troops into South Vietnam, we will immediately stop bombing military targets in their country." However, this reflected the moderate part of his administration.¹⁵

Some of his advisers did not think that it was wise to trade a bombing halt in the North for a cessation of infiltration into South Vietnam "as an initial bargaining position", for this would undermine the U.S. negotiating position later on.¹⁶ In fact, the Johnson administration thought that once northern infiltration into South Vietnam ceased, the U.S. could finish off the remaining Communist forces in the South. The Kremlin was having serious doubts about U.S. sincerity on peace. When President de Gaulle was received by Kosygin in late June 1966, the Soviet Premier indicated that "Washington was not at all interested in a peaceful settlement" in view of the Hanoi and Haiphong bombing raids. Therefore, in the latter half of 1966, Moscow adopted a "more militant" stand behind Hanoi. The Kremlin hoped that this could convince the North Vietnamese leaders to seek a negotiated settlement.¹⁷ But Soviet peace efforts in the summer of 1966 were not convincing. In a conversation with Soviet Charge Privalov, General Nguyen Van Vinh, head of the Vietnamese Workers' Party committee on unification, indicated:

It is clear for us whether to continue the struggle or not. We certainly have to continue the struggle against the aggressor. To answer the question whether to go to negotiations is much more difficult. The present situation is not favorable for the beginning of negotiations. Had we been defeated by the Americans, we would have had no choice but to agree to hold talks. But we constantly dealing blows to the enemy and winning decisive victories. What would it mean for us to hold talks now? It would mean losing everything, first of all, friendship with China which is utterly opposed to negotiations.¹⁸

Actually, Hanoi maintained autonomy over its policies regarding war or negotiation and its leaders were sensitive to any foreign advice. This stemmed from past experience at Geneva, where they had little influence over the fate of their country. The Hanoi leadership had to present their readiness to negotiate as not "a result of U.S. pressure" (such as the bombing of North Vietnam), but rather as "a product of their own will". This reasoning was detected by the U.S. government.¹⁹

When the POL bombings took place in late June 1966, a Czech journalist had a private interview with Van Ba Kiem, an officer of the North Vietnamese embassy in Prague. Kiem indicated that the DRV "considered it very important that bombings not be considered an escalation of the war" and requested this Czech newspaperman "to bring out that point carefully." In other words, the North Vietnamese government wanted to tell that it did not feel any psychological pressure at the new U.S. bombing campaign against NVN's POL targets.²⁰

Hanoi did not want a negotiated settlement because it thought it could still win the battle of South Vietnam. Hanoi's leaders were receptive

to the Chinese Communist advice on the fighting strategy: America was in an election year and it was better to wait and delay negotiation until after the result of U.S. Congressional elections in November 1966. NVN's intransigence was not caused by Peking's obstruction, however, but rather by the decision of its own government.²¹ As Min Chen, the author of The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts: Lessons from the Indochina Wars, pointed out that:

Apparently, Hanoi did not like the idea of having to wage a war indefinitely and resented Beijing's theory of 'protracted war.' But, as Le Duan's speech revealed, the North Vietnamese leaders themselves were convinced that they should hold out for a while for more bargaining chips. It was this conclusion of their own rather than Chinese opposition that kept Hanoi out of talks. Therefore, as far as the issue of negotiations was concerned, Hanoi was not pushed around by either the Soviet Union or China.²²

Le Duan, the First Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (**Lao Dong**), in April 1966 delivered a secret speech to NVN's Communist cadres that the war of national liberation in the South should be fought along the strategy of "fighting while negotiating." Although Le Duan stressed that negotiation was a crucial part of **Lao Dong's** political strategy, he maintained that this was not an appropriate time for peace talks with the U.S. A similar view was presented in a letter to Viet Cong cadres in the South, which was seized by U.S. forces in early January 1967. U.S. embassy officials in Saigon summarized the text as follows:

In discussing the possibility of peace talks, Le Duan stated

that "he (the U.S.) is also trying to bring us to the conference table for negotiations disadvantageous to us. As for us, we must always gain the initiative over them. Therefore, peace talks must be favorable to us and to our specific political missions." He (i.e. Le Duan) also related that many, though unnamed, nations supporting the Hanoi cause have urged North Vietnam to go to the conference table. Le Duan replied that these nations 'do not understand the situation in our country because of differences in our foreign policies and theirs'.²³

Despite substantial aid and pressure from Soviet Bloc nations, the DRV did not agree to early peace talks. Hanoi's leaders tried to maintain a balance of Communist support between Communist China and the Soviet Union combining with its satellite countries in Eastern Europe, indeed, to preserve a common front of all Communist forces around the world.²⁴

Although the Hanoi leadership turned down the plea for early negotiations in the summer of 1966, it still wanted to keep it as an option for future use. Hanoi had to take the Chinese Communist factor into account when time was ripe for entering into negotiations, especially the possibility that Chairman Mao might oppose this development, provoking a Chinese Communist intervention into the Vietnamese conflict, significantly undermining the political independence of North Vietnam. As a CIA Intelligence Memorandum in early August indicated:

However, should the Vietnamese at some point decide to move toward negotiations or a de-escalation of the war, Peking's political pressure would not be sufficient to force them to keep up the fighting. The Chinese could, of course, decide to

denounce Hanoi and might take such a step if they thought it could create fissures in the Hanoi party leadership. However, the Chinese would have little option but to accept Hanoi's decision. Its only alternative would be direct intervention, and all available evidence suggests that the Chinese desire to avoid this prospect. This estimate of North Vietnamese independence in the conflict would have to be reviewed, however, if at any time there should be a massive influx of Chinese combat troops into the DRV presumably to guard against the possibility of U.S. ground invasion of North Vietnam.²⁵

Having an interest in isolating the Chinese Communists, the Soviet leaders did not give up their efforts to encourage the DRV's leaders to go for diplomatic solutions. When the pro-Soviet group in the Chinese Communist Party was routed in mid-August 1966, the Soviets were more determined than ever to launch an armed encirclement around China. Not only did they try to maintain a continuing U.S. threat to China's southern border by stepping up additional aid to North Vietnam but they also started to exert military pressure along the Chinese frontier in the North with the heavy build-up of Soviet armed forces.²⁶

In October 1966, the Soviets reached a new arms agreement with the DRV and embarked upon a diplomatic offensive to obtain a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam war as a strategic gain against Red China. Due to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the Soviet leaders rallied all Communist countries to deplore the Maoist radicalization of Communist China. This strengthened Moscow's leadership role in the international Communist movement. Moscow tried to demonstrate that the Communist world could have forced the U.S. imperialists from their aggression in

Vietnam, had it not been obstructed by divisive actions from radical Communist China. At the Ninth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party, with the attendance of Brezhnev, Chairman Todor Zhivkov stated:

Disagreements within the international Communist movement can benefit only our class enemies, only the forces of imperialism and world reaction. Evidence of this is the criminal aggression of the U.S.A. in Vietnam. Everyone who soberly evaluates events in that part of the world cannot help seeing that disagreements encourage the aggressive actions of the U.S.A. The leaders of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese People's Republic have unfortunately rejected all the proposals by the C.P.S.U. and other fraternal parties on joint action to defend the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the freedom and independence of the entire Vietnamese people. By its rejection of collective action, its schismatic activities and attacks on the C.P.S.U. and the Soviet Union and on the other fraternal parties and Socialist countries, the Chinese leadership has assumed a heavy responsibility before the international revolutionary movement and before history.²⁷

Moscow's spokesman (Chairman Zhivkov of Bulgaria) contended that the Soviet Union could no longer tolerate Peking's divisive actions in Vietnam and that Soviet Communists must take the lead to consolidate "solidarity and unified action of the entire revolutionary forces" against U.S. imperialist aggression in Vietnam.²⁸

The Soviet leaders believed that they had obtained a mandate to launch a diplomatic/political campaign to resolve the Vietnam War. Indeed, Moscow wanted to convey to its Socialist ally in Hanoi that not just

the U.S.S.R. but the entire Communist Commonwealth's wished a peace accord in Vietnam. In order to realize this goal, the Soviets used economic leverage on Hanoi, encouraging their Socialist allies to voice their difficulties to the DRV's emissaries while arranging economic aid to it.²⁹

Moscow's leaders knew that the Hanoi government was not satisfied with the aid which it derived from the Soviet Bloc nations. By combining its pressure with that of the Eastern European Socialist countries, the Kremlin hoped to force the DRV to the conference table. These Socialist countries were given greater freedom (by the Soviets) to present their role as "peacemakers" in the Vietnamese conflict.³⁰

The U.S.S.R. and its Eastern European Socialist allies, unlike Red China, believed that in any effective Communist strategy, the political struggle should go hand in hand with the diplomatic struggle (i.e. negotiations). As Rostow pointed out:

Just as Hanoi is unwilling to take the ideological and political decision of cutting off the VC in the South, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are unwilling to take the decision to cut off military and economic aid to Hanoi. This is true despite the fact that the costs of economic aid to Hanoi are rising rapidly and are an awkward marginal burden on economies where resource allocation is, in any case, a difficult matter. In part, this reluctance is due to the ideological competition with Communist China and the fear that Chinese Communist influence might become decisive in Hanoi if the Soviet Union were to cut off economic aid. Nevertheless, the net influence of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe on Hanoi is probably towards a negotiated end to the war: to counter Chinese Communist influence; to remove a situation which is both a

demonstration of relative impotence and a threat of escalation; and to cut aid costs.³¹

From the United Nations to private contacts with the U.S. officials, Eastern European diplomats or leaders disclosed "a new set of Communist proposals" to end the war in Vietnam and widely transmitted that "there is no chance of getting Hanoi to negotiate until the United States ceases its bombing of North Vietnam." Surprisingly, these Communist spokesmen in Eastern Europe not only spoke of their peace proposals in the same format, but also adopted the same "war threat" tactics to induce the U.S. to come to the peace table. As a U.S. diplomatic official (John M. McSweeney) recalled his conversation with Chairman Zhivkov of Bulgaria:

On the subject of Vietnam, Chairman Zhivkov continued, the question is very complicated. US bombardment must be stopped and then both sides can proceed to negotiations. He stated that nobody told him to say this, but he wanted to say anyway that the US should stop bombing and that would be the way to bring about negotiations. If the Vietnam conflict were to grow it would be a terrible business, he continued. He had just returned from the Soviet Union where he had been shown the latest Soviet weapons and he had been told that US weapons and Soviet weapons were very similar in their characteristics and destructive capability. He said that he knew what US weapons could do and what Soviet weapons could do, and that if they were to come into contact with each other a catastrophe would result. He said that this is absurd and reiterated that US should stop its bombing whereafter talks could start.³²

In a similar way, the East German Party leader Walter Ulbricht also threatened the U.S. with a nuclear holocaust if "an early political settlement of the war in Vietnam" could not be arranged. Zhivkov's remarks were recorded in a U.S. memorandum. He had passed on an important message to Washington by revealing that the ending of bombing the North was a preliminary basis for Hanoi's entrance into talks. His comments, along with those of other Eastern European Communist diplomats, prompted the Johnson administration to devise the Phase A--Phase B new de-escalatory formula for the Marigold peace package. This plan was made by the U.S. administration in order to save face for the North Vietnamese, for Hanoi never admitted that it had committed a course of aggression by infiltrating its PAVN forces into the South. As the conversation between Chairman Zhivkov and Mr. McSweeney pointed out:

Chairman Zhivkov replied that US propaganda states that North Vietnam has sent troops to the South. 'It is nothing like this,' he insisted. Bulgaria had recently had a delegation in North Vietnam of which Mr. Grozev (the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) had been a member. No North Vietnamese troops have been sent to South Vietnam, he said. North Vietnam does give material assistance to the South Vietnamese guerrilla forces, but this is a guerrilla war.³³

Under the Phase A -- Phase B plan, the United States would suspend its bombing programme toward the North, and after a while, some mutual de-escalatory actions should be carried out by both the U.S. and North Vietnam, providing that "Hanoi cannot have the bombing suspension without also accepting Phase B." The British Foreign Secretary

(Mr. George Brown) agreed to convey this plan to Soviet leaders when he made his state visit to Moscow (late November 1966), though his ability to make it work was handicapped because he was not informed at all of the on-going "Operation Marigold". This time was also a rising climax of Operation Marigold peace initiative.³⁴

When Mr. Brown returned to London, he told reporters that the Soviets "showed no reluctance to discuss the Vietnam problem." By late November 1966, Operation Marigold entered a crucial stage. Upon his return from Hanoi, Lewandowski informed the United States that he returned with some good news: the North Vietnamese Premier (Pham Van Dong) would agree to send NVN's delegation to Warsaw to have contacts with U.S. officials if Washington unconditionally suspended its bombing in the North. U.S. authorities had serious doubts about this possibility. Prior to Lewandowski's trip to Hanoi, the **CIA Report** doubted that the DRV would respond accordingly to open talks with the U.S. once the bombing of North Vietnam was terminated. As this report noted: "Neither the USSR nor any of the Eastern European countries has indicated that it can assure the United States that Hanoi will make a positive move toward negotiations if US airstrikes cease."³⁵

The Soviets were not even sure whether Hanoi's leaders would come to the negotiation table if the U.S. ended its bombing of the North. What they were certain of was that an re-evaluation of the North Vietnamese fighting strategy in the South was taking place in Hanoi. In addition, the Soviet embassy in Hanoi had been monitoring the NLF activities for a while, and concluded that the Viet Cong would encounter further difficulties on the battlefield in the upcoming months.³⁶

With this knowledge, the Kremlin leaders were more confident in offering peace talks on Vietnam. As Niclolas Turner of the Far Eastern Economic Review wrote in his article at this time *On the Road to Peace?*

that:

In any case, the Russians have a juicy carrot to offer the North Vietnamese at a time when American resolve to use the whip grows stronger rather than weaker. Moscow no longer worries about Peking's diatribes concerning 'collusion' with the U.S., and it is possible that Russians have detected a change of tone on the Hanoi peace market.³⁷

As a matter of fact, the Soviets had relied upon a group of pragmatic politicians in the North Vietnamese Communist leadership whenever they wanted to wean Hanoi away from the Chinese Communist camp and pursue their plan of early negotiated settlement in Vietnam. These pragmatic leaders in Hanoi were represented by Premier Pham Van Dong and General Vo Nguyen Giap, whom rejected Peking's "protracted war" strategy in South Vietnam. They would opt for negotiations (at least for a short period of time) rather than carry the war in the South for another five, ten, or fifteen years, if the situation of the fighting started to turn unfavourable to them. This, combined with economic difficulties at home, prompted the Hanoi leadership to re-evaluate its fighting strategy in RVN and seek a diplomatic solution. Though the DRV regime was determined to pursue national unification, it realized that its diplomatic struggle was becoming as important as political struggle in the fighting against the U.S. in South Vietnam.³⁸ As Rostow noted:

It is a fact that Moscow and the Eastern European capitals have in recent months become more activist with respect to Hanoi and the ending of the war. We do not completely understand this shift. It may stem from some combination of

these three elements:

- A sense that the forces in Hanoi willing to end the war are gathering strength.
- A sense that Hanoi is more willing to listen to Moscow due to the troubles inside Communist China.
- Increased interest in peace (and increased leverage) due to the radical rise in aid to Hanoi required from the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe because of our bombing the North.³⁹

Despite Lewandowski's claim that Pham Van Dong got the "Presidium behind him" in Hanoi, the Johnson administration did not believe that the North Vietnamese government really wanted a negotiated settlement. Then, why was the U.S. administration still spending time on the Marigold peace initiative? Because Washington wanted to probe for an answer whether, once the U.S. military pulled out from Vietnam, an independent South Vietnam could be secured from foreign aggression.⁴⁰

Besides that, the diplomatic signals from Eastern Europe led President Johnson to think that the U.S.S.R. might help the U.S. end the Vietnam war in an honourable peace settlement. The Soviets had hinted that they really meant business. In a speech at the Polish-Soviet brotherhood rally, in mid-October 1966, Brezhnev declared that:

If the U.S.A. wants to develop mutually advantageous relations with the Soviet Union (and in principle we would like this too), then to do so it must remove the main obstacle in the way: It must stop the bandit raids against the Socialist country of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.... As for the Soviet Union, it favors, as it always has and always will, the

peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems on a basis of complete equality and noninterference.⁴¹

The Soviet leaders could push through peace proposals which might create an early negotiated settlement in Vietnam, due to Peking's isolation in the Communist world. They had also sent out an important signal that the Soviet Union could work with capitalist states under the principle of peaceful coexistence. U.S. authorities held that Moscow wanted closer U.S.--Soviet cooperation in order to maintain a more stable environment around the world, and that Vietnam would be the first item to tackle.⁴²

By early November 1966, Ambassador Averell Harriman, who had been assigned by President Johnson as a special assistant to find paths to negotiations in Vietnam, held that "the Soviet government too, wanted an end to hostilities, but would not admit it publicly." John P. Roche, the President's Special Consultant, recommended that the administration should "capitalize on the Sino-Soviet schism to get an honorable settlement in Vietnam." A direct deal with Moscow would "undermine Hanoi's will to fight far more than has the bombings", for Hanoi was heavily depending on the Soviet military supplies at this time. Despite this, Roche pointed out that "if Hanoi's options were to turn to the Chinese or negotiate, I suspect that they would abandon the NLF and sit down at the conference table."⁴³

At the height of Marigold, in November 1966, Le Duan visited Peking where he received advice from Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai. Chou advised the DRV to carry the fighting against the U.S. 'at least until 1968.' Although Le Duan did not make any promises to the Chinese Premier, he stated that the DRV would strive for "maximal advantages for itself". Simultaneously, Jerzy Michalowski (a senior official of the Polish Foreign Ministry) and Adam Rapacki (Poland's Foreign Minister) flew to Bulgaria to

inform Brezhnev regarding the new development of Operation Marigold (which Lewandowski drew up 10 points of U.S. stand to supplement the Phase A -- Phase B formula). Brezhnev encouraged them to proceed this peace plan.⁴⁴

During Lewandowski's visit in Hanoi, the clandestine Liberation Radio of the National Liberation Front broadcast a 48-hour cease-fire proposal for the upcoming holiday season. Despite this, the U.S. did not halt the bombing in the North as it had a year earlier, for neither Moscow nor Hanoi had assured the U.S. that a new bombing pause would bring about a reciprocal action in the South and a negotiated settlement afterward.⁴⁵

With the intensified U.S. air raids on Hanoi, the Soviet Charge d'affaires (Zinchuk) in Washington accused the American government of violating "international law as well as statements by U.S. leaders re desire for peaceful settlement in Vietnam." Despite Zinchuk's attempt to rescue Operation Marigold, the U.S. government would not trade a bombing halt just for Hanoi's willingness to enter talks. In replying to Zinchuk, Kohler reiterated that U.S. "bombing could stop immediately if Hanoi prepared to discuss peaceful settlement or if we [i.e. the U.S.] had some indication from any source including the Soviet Union of Hanoi's willingness to stop terrorism and other hostile activities in South Vietnam."⁴⁶

Some high-ranking U.S. officials in Washington worried about the intensified U.S. air strikes around Hanoi in conjunction with the Marigold Operation. They feared that if this peace plan failed, the Communists would seize this opportunity to accuse the U.S. of insincerity. As Rusk cabled President Johnson that "We are in danger of being trapped into a situation where the Poles or Soviets could cause us grievous harm by a charge that there was a serious effort by Hanoi toward peace and that we rejected it by intensified bombing." As the bombing raids spread, the North

Vietnamese government rejected contacts with U.S. officials in Warsaw and Operation Marigold came to an end.⁴⁷

Despite strenuous efforts to convince the North Vietnamese leaders to talk with the U.S., the Kremlin failed to wean the Hanoi leadership from Peking. As the Soviet Ambassador in Hanoi (Ilya Shcherbakov) noted in his political report (1966):

Just as before, the Embassy believes that the process of promotion of our relations with the WPV and the DRV will hardly be steady or rapid in view of the policy pursued by the Vietnamese comrades. This was, regrettably, confirmed in the past few years. Even the manifestation of a more serious discord between the WPV and the Communist Party of China will not probably mean automatic or proportionate Soviet-Vietnamese rapprochement. The year 1966 showed once more that we are obliged constantly to display initiative and unilaterally, as it were, drag the Vietnamese comrades to greater friendship and independence.⁴⁸

Although there was friction in the Sino-Vietnamese relations, their common goal of ending the U.S. military presence in Vietnam enabled them to compromise throughout the mid-1960s. Peking's opposition to any peace talks before the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam stemmed from its fears of a possible U.S.--Soviet collusion in encircling Communist China. The Soviets had failed to make a gain against Communist China by arranging a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. Indeed, Moscow's high-handed policies contributed to a break-up of Sino-Soviet relations and to the loss of a strategic ally in the Far East.

NOTES

1. Parker, Strategy for a Stalemate, p. 166.
2. **LBJ Library**, Rostow's Memorandum For The President, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, July 25, 1966.
3. Parker, Strategy for a Stalemate, p. 166.
4. Ibid.
5. Zagoria, Vietnam Triangle, p. 57.
6. New York Times, News Summary and Index, August 4, 1966; *ibid.*, "Peking Denies Aim Is Deal With U.S.," July 21, 1966; Parker, Strategy for a Stalemate, p. 166.
7. Ilya V. Gaiduk, "Wilted Flowers" in The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), p. 87.
8. Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, p. 211; **U.S. News & World Report** (November 07, 1966), p. 49.
9. Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, p. 237; Gaiduk, "Wilted Flowers", pp. 89-90.
10. Jerzy Michalowski, "Polish Secret Peace Initiatives In Vietnam," **Cold War International History Project Bulletin** Issues 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996), p. 258; **LBJ Library**, Research Memorandum, "Moscow's Middle Course on Vietnam: The Dilemma Continues", Part II: Efforts For a Peaceful Settlement, NSF, July 25, 1966; Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, p. 211.
11. **LBJ Library**, Memorandum to Mr. Rostow, "Banerjee's discussion of the Kannampilly Report from Hanoi," WHCF, NSF, July 12, 1966; Research Memorandum: "Moscow's Middle Course on Vietnam", Part II: Efforts For a Peaceful Settlement".

12. **LBJ Library**, CIA Intelligence Memorandum: The Effectiveness of the Air Campaign Against North Vietnam: January -- September 1966", Appendix C: Selected Third Country Attitudes Toward The Bombing of North Vietnam, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, December 1966.
13. NYT, "U.S. Protests View By India On War," July 22, 1966; Research Memorandum: "Moscow's Middle Course on Vietnam", Part II: Efforts For a Peaceful Settlement.
14. Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, p. 270.
15. **Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966**, Vol.II (August 20, 1966), p. 397.
16. **LBJ Library**, Memorandum From Ambassador at Large (Thompson) to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Unger), "Possible Sequence of Actions Toward a Settlement in South Vietnam," NSF, Country File, Vietnam, August 11, 1966.
17. CIA Intelligence Memo., Appendix C: Selected Third Country Attitudes Toward The Bombing of North Vietnam, December 1966; Research Memorandum: "Moscow's Middle Course on Vietnam", Part I: Profit from a Dilemma.
18. This quotation was cited in Gaiduk, "Wilted Flowers," p. 80.
19. **LBJ Library**, Incoming Telegram from Prague, NSF, July 7, 1966; Memorandum For Mr. Rostow, "Hanoi's Preparations to Negotiate?", WHCF, NSF, July 7, 1966.
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22. Min Chen, The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts, p. 54.
23. Ibid.; **LBJ Library**, Airgram From the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, "Captured Hanoi/VC Letter Drafted by Le Duan," NSF, Country File,

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24. Douglas Pike, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, p. 88.

25. **LBJ Library**, CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "The Chinese Position in North Vietnam", NSF, August 5, 1966.

26. NYT, "Soviet-Chinese Animosity Found Along the Frontier," August 17, 1966; Times (London), "Russia Builds Up Troops on Chinese Border," November 5, 1966; Christian Science Monitor, "Sino-Soviet Border Build-up Hinted", November 26, 1966.

27. Parker, Strategy for a Stalemate, p. 166; Zagoria, Vietnam Triangle, p. 58; The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XVIII, No. 46 (December 07, 1966), p. 3.

28. The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XVIII, No. 46, (December 07, 1966), p. 03.

29. Gaiduk, "Wilted Flowers," p. 79.

30. Ibid.

31. **LBJ Library**, Memorandum From Rostow to President Johnson, November 30, 1966, NSF, Rostow Files, Vietnam Strategy, cited in **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. IV, Vietnam (1966)**, pp. 873-875. See also, Christian Science Monitor, "Vietnam Neutrality Urged", November 09, 1966.

32. Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 54, No. 6 (November 10, 1966), p. 295; Washington Post, "Negotiation Symptoms", November 14, 1966; **LBJ Library**, CIA Report on the Effectiveness of the Rolling Thunder Program in NVN (January-September 1966), regarding Soviet and Eastern European Attitudes, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, November 1966. Memorandum of Conversation between McSweeney and Chairman Zhivkov was taken from the Department of State, Central Files (POL Bul-U.S.), November 02, 1966, printed in **Foreign Relations of the United States, Eastern Europe (Bulgaria), 1964-1968, Vol. XVII**, pp. 134-139.

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34. Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, pp. 270-271, 838.
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39. **LBJ Library**, Memorandum From Rostow to President Johnson, November 30, 1966, NSF, Rostow Files, Vietnam Strategy, cited in **FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. IV, Vietnam (1966)**, pp. 873-878.
40. Herring, The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War, p. 271.
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45. NYT, "Vietcong Offer Holiday Truces," November 27, 1966; Times (London), "America Doubles Bomber Force for Vietnam", November 28, 1966; Washington Post, "Rusk Hints of a Short Yule Truce-But Says Extension Hinges on Matching Action by Reds", November 19, 1966.

46. **LBJ Library**, Outgoing Telegram (re Zinchuk's oral demarche), NSF, Country File, Vietnam, December 10, 1966.

47. Quoted in Dean Rusk, as told to Richard Rusk, As I Saw It, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 468.

48. Quoted in **C.W.I.H.P. Bulletin**, p. 251.

Conclusion

U.S. aims in Vietnam were not to achieve a military victory over North Vietnam but rather to prevent armed aggression from the North from defeating South Vietnam and to keep other independent countries in the Southeast Asian region from falling under Communist political domination. My thesis indicates that the U.S. could not have forced the DRV into submission by air actions, without running the real risk of Chinese or Soviet intervention in Vietnam. Regarding the bombing of the North, the U.S. could not go beyond a set of self-imposed rules. After the failure of the POL bombing campaign, in mid-October 1966, Secretary McNamara had come to a conclusion that:

It is clear that, to bomb the North sufficiently to make a radical impact upon Hanoi's political, economic and social structure, would require an effort which we could make but which would not be stomached either by our own people or by world opinion; and it would involve a serious risk of drawing us into open war with China.¹

It was the prospect of Chinese Communist intervention which prevented U.S. decision-makers from the massive application of military force against North Vietnam. In late 1966, General Eisenhower recommended the U.S. 'employ the military strength necessary' to bring the war in Vietnam to an "honorable conclusion." He told President Johnson that once the U.S. was driven into this war, it was "necessary to win it as quickly as possible."² But, the Johnson administration could not take such an all-out approach, for it believed that this would only produce

a larger war. President Johnson insisted that:

Russia doesn't want war, China doesn't want to get into a war and you know damned well that we don't want to get into the big war. We can do this thing without bluster, without throwing our weight around. And we can do it, still making clear that you must win.³

When President Johnson was asked by a U.S. correspondent to express his views on Eisenhower's comments of using "whatever is necessary, not excluding nuclear weapons, to end the fighting in Vietnam," he replied that:

I would say it is the policy of this Government to exercise the best judgement of which we are capable in an attempt to provide the maximum deterrence with a minimum involvement. The easiest thing we could do is get in a larger war with other nations [i.e. China and the U.S.S.R.]. We are constantly concerned with the dangers of that. So it has been the policy of your present administration to provide the strength that General Westmoreland felt was necessary: to prevent the aggressor from succeeding without attempting to either conquer or to invade or to destroy North Vietnam. Our purpose is a limited one and that is to permit self-determination for the people of South Vietnam. We are going to be concerned with any effort that might take on more far-reaching objectives or implications.⁴

The American President had clearly stated that his administration

only wished to deter armed aggression from the North, not to overthrow the Communist regime in North Vietnam. This self-imposed limit on the use of force did have a significant political consequence. By the end of 1966, the Chinese Communist authorities were finally convinced that the Johnson administration would restrict its military presence to the ground war in the South and the air war in the northern and southern part of Vietnam. This was an important factor in stabilizing the war situation in Vietnam. To critics of the Vietnam war, however, this gain was too dearly bought. The Johnson administration forfeited a good chance of winning the Vietnam War through a "massive and quick application" of U.S. military force against North Vietnam, because it feared a chimera that such a strategy would likely invite the Chinese Communist intervention. As Harry G. Summers, a former U.S. officer in Vietnam, wrote in *On Strategy*, the United States "allowed [itself] to be bluffed by China throughout most of the war. Our error was not that we were fearful of the dangers of nuclear war and of Chinese or Russian intervention in Vietnam. The error was that we took counsel of these fears and in so doing paralyzed our strategic thinking."⁵

In order to discredit the policy of gradual escalation in Vietnam, some of these writers even dismiss the possibility of Chinese Communist intervention. Guenter Lewy, like Summers, concluded that "in the final analysis... Chinese deterrence was the main impediment to a more effective air campaign against North Vietnam. ... The decision for 'gradualism' was ... made primarily because of fear of Chinese intervention, and whether the likelihood of such an intervention was overrated will never be known."⁶

Such writers argue that a strategy of combining air, naval, and ground actions to threaten the North Vietnamese Communist regime with an imminent military invasion would have forced Hanoi to keep large

PAVN forces at home and thus to reduce its military activities in South Vietnam. Harry Summers contends that the U.S. should have done so through a limited U.S. ground incursion into the North or tactical offensives against enemy units along the infiltration routes into the South.⁷

General Bruce Palmer, Jr., another U.S. army officer in the Vietnam War, asserted that the United States should have despatched its armed forces to seal off those infiltration routes into the South while its naval forces blockaded the North Vietnamese coastal waters, threatening the DRV government with the possibility of a ground invasion into the North. In doing so, this approach would have compelled Hanoi to cease its fighting in the South.⁸

The truth is that President Johnson, throughout his office, tried to steer a middle course approach in Vietnam, which could deter the armed aggression from the North but was not too aggressive to provoke Chinese intervention into the conflict. He was right to do so. Had a more aggressive war strategy been pursued in mid-1960s, the U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia would not have been confined only to the battle of South Vietnam. The final nail in the coffin of the revisionist case is the firm evidence that the Chinese Communists would have perceived any U.S. trespassing move across the Laotian panhandle to deal with the PAVN forces into South Vietnam or naval actions to blockade the North Vietnamese coastal waters as proof of a U.S. hostile intention to topple the Communist regime in Hanoi or to launch a further attack against Mainland China. This could be seen in a meeting between the leaders of Pathet Lao, the DRV, and Communist China in July 1964, one month before the outbreak of Tonkin Gulf Incident. On this occasion, Chou En-lai pursued a tripartite coordination to meet with the U.S. threats if the war in South Vietnam expanded to the entire Indochinese region. In late 1965,

Special National Intelligence Estimate also confirmed that "so long as the U.S. forces had not crossed the Laotian frontier in strength, Peking probably would not for its part send Chinese combat forces in any strength into Laos."⁹

At the outbreak of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Peking's leaders were 'bogged down' in a tense internal power struggle. The Chinese leadership had to moderate its "threats of intervention in the war in Vietnam" in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States. When the Japanese Parliamentarians visited Peking in September 1966, Chen Yi told them that:

We don't believe U.S. will attack China at once, we don't believe that U.S. and China cannot escape from eventual military showdown and China does not want war with the U.S. China will not start a war, but if U.S. attacks China, we will wage an all-out war. (In that eventuality) we want to prevent betrayal such as that of Wang Ching-Wei and therefore are consolidating nation through Cultural Revolution. Cultural Revolution will not bring about any changes in China's foreign policy.¹⁰

However, Peking's moderation did not mean that it would abandon the DRV if U.S. threats were imminent. Chen Yi told the Japanese Parliamentary delegation that "current attacks on bourgeois elements" were not merely intended "to introduce the austerity" at home but "appropriate" to the nation in war-readiness. This view was reaffirmed by **People's Daily** in mid-September 1966 that the Chinese "Great Cultural Revolution is part of preparation for war." Moreover, the Johnson administration did not take this development in Mainland China lightly in

view of the war in Vietnam.¹¹ As the former director of the U.S. Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Thomas L. Hughes, recalled at a Vietnam round-table conference nearly three decades later:

By 1966, the Chinese had marginally increased their involvement in North Vietnam, all right, but they hadn't done anything as spectacular as we had thought they might. They had built Ningming airfield just over the border, but nothing much was happening. Then suddenly China became convulsed in the Cultural Revolution. This internal Chinese self-absorption could have relieved some of the fixation in Washington about China's intervention, but by that time the psyches of the President and the Secretary of State were so deeply fixed on this question of Chinese intervention, that the fact that China was now convulsed in an internal quarrel only seemed to make the Chinese factor more ominous than ever. Apprehensions in Washington and realities in China were out of sync.¹²

There were good reasons for President Johnson and Secretary Rusk to be frightened of the China convulsion. At this time, a string of U.S. air intrusions into Chinese Communist territory involved an engagement of MIGs in the Kwangsi-Chuang Autonomous Region (of Southwest China). The Chinese Communist press reported that the U.S. aircraft opened fire at the peasants in a village, though the National Military Command Center in Vietnam denied such an accusation.¹³

These incidents caused great concern to the top level of the Johnson administration. As Rostow told the U.S. President, "Secretary Rusk mentioned to me his uneasiness at the incidents [i.e. air intrusions] of this

kind at this time." Regardless of the internal political strife at home, the PLA forces were able to defend China's national security and come to the North Vietnamese aid if the DRV regime was in jeopardy. As the U.S. **National Intelligence Estimate** noted that "the significance of the current political turmoil in China is not clear, but we believe that, once the decision to intervene in Southeast Asia was made, domestic political problems would not significantly impair Chinese military capabilities."¹⁴

The formal dismissal of Army Chief Lo Jui-ching did not undermine the task of the PLA in defending Communist China and supporting Vietnam. Mao believed that the best means of defense was preparation for a people's war. In his directive to the military, Mao called on the PLA to become a great school in which Chinese soldiers should learn "politics, military affairs, and culture". The New China News Agency in mid-August defined the Chinese Liberation Army as an "armed group or the implementation of the political mission" of the on-going Cultural Revolution, and its duties were "to organize and arm the masses." Thus, the PLA should undertake "combat, mass work, and production".¹⁵

Mao interwove his "visionary society" struggle and military preparations into one single national task in Communist China. As the Liberation Army Daily editorial pointed out:

The directive recently given by Chairman Mao constitutes the most recent summing up of our army's experience in previous decades and represents a development of Chairman Mao's consistent thinking on army building in the new historical conditions. This directive is of great historic and strategic significance for enabling our army to preserve for ever its distinctive character as a people's army, for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, for pushing forward China's

socialist revolution and socialist construction, strengthening national defense, bringing the mighty force of people's war into full play.¹⁶

Though the PLA had designated as the guarantor of internal security at the outbreak of Cultural Revolution, it still retained an important role in national defense. Some PLA units in inland areas were diverted into non-military functions, but military commanders in the border provinces still focused on the security threat from the Vietnam War. The People's Daily editorial in mid- September 1966 emphasized:

The cadres and fighters of the People's Liberation Army should stand firm at their fighting posts, vigorously give prominence to politics, carry forward the 'three to eight' working style*, and strengthen political and military training. They should maintain a state of high vigilance and combat-readiness so as to be prepared at all times to meet head on and smash any sudden attack that might be launched by U.S. imperialism and its accomplices.¹⁷

Though the Mao-Lin faction gave prominence to politics over military preparedness, the Chinese Communist Central Command still coordinated the regional army units in strengthening China's national defense. A former Japanese Foreign Minister Zentaro Kosaka told The United Press after his Peking visit that Communist China's political turmoil was "part of a massive preparation 'for the worst eventuality -- world war'." William Bundy at this time held that:

The real convulsion in Communist China still defies

assessment, but at the very least it means that any escalatory action on our part might be construed in Peking and Hanoi as a sign that we thought we could get away with something because of the political confusion in Communist China. This could trigger irrational action by one or both of these capitals. In other words, while I think an unsettled Chinese leadership will not take any initiatives, this is the time to be very careful in not appearing to take advantage of their troubles.¹⁸

The Johnson administration followed this prudent advice, while Peking hardened its propaganda by warning that the U.S. would commit "a grave historical blunder" if it underestimated the Chinese determination to support the DRV. The vigorous Chinese reactions (in mid-September 1966) to U.S. aerial intrusions and the straffings of the Chinese vessels in China Sea were a warning signal to Washington that Communist China would not "flinch" from carrying out international proletarian duty "in the face of danger war with the U.S. over Vietnam". Peking's propaganda related Communist China's revolutionary support to the DRV thru frequent references to the diary of a dramatic, heroic figure (Tsai Yung-hsiang):

Standing on the bridge, I think of the whole world. On one occasion, walking shoulder to shoulder with Comrade Hsia Ying-min on the Chientang River Bridge, he said: 'This bridge leads to Peking and Vietnam. By asking us to defend this bridge, Chairman Mao asks us to defend the proletarian regime of the motherland and to support the world revolution.' The things he had in mind were always the important affairs of the Party, of the country and of the world.¹⁹

By characterizing Sino-Vietnamese relations as a bridge, Peking wanted to convey that Chinese combat forces would rescue their fraternal comrades if U.S. forces threatened the DRV and warned that:

Tsai Yung-hsiang was resolved to dedicate his whole self to the just struggle of the world people. Because of this, he studied Chairman Mao's writings even more diligently to raise his proletarian consciousness. He made redoubled efforts in practising hand-grenade throwing and beyonet fencing in order to acquire skills for destroying the enemy. On a number of occasions he asked his superiors to let him help Vietnam resist the United States. He said: "If my application is approved, I'll attack the enemy mercilessly, and if my application is not approved, I'll heighten my vigilance a hundred-fold to make sure that the bridge is well defended."²⁰

The Chinese Communist authorities not only expressed their combat readiness and referred to the PLA as the reliable defender of the revolutionary cause in Vietnam. By late 1966, some Red Guard units in the Chinese Southern frontiers were provocative enough to vow to "rush to the front and join the Vietnamese people in knocking out the U.S. aggressors" in Vietnam. Despite this, Chinese Communist propaganda still emphasized that the Chinese masses and militia men must "carry out instructions" from Chairman Mao and his close comrade-in-arms Lin Piao, and insisted on People's war fighting strategy if war came. In countering the threat of U.S. invasion into North Vietnam, Chinese Communist Charge (Yen Fu) in Oslo (November 1966) warned that "China is prepared to help its brothers, but so far we have not been asked to provide military

help; if it is asked by Hanoi or the Viet Cong it will be forthcoming." Such statements were frequently made by Chinese officials during this period. Concurrently, Peking's official line propagated that "Once the Vietnamese people need us" and should Chairman Mao and Comrade Lin Piao give the order, the Chinese people would come shoulder to shoulder to resist the U.S. in Vietnam, despite the greatest national sacrifice.²¹ The U.S. administration believed that Peking would safeguard the existence of the North Vietnamese regime, regardless of Chinese internal political strife. Rostow gave his views:

Hanoi has already permitted a substantial number of Chinese Communist engineering and anti-aircraft forces to enter North Vietnam. It wishes, for purposes of its own long-run future to maintain a relationship with Communist China which is supportive but not dominating. It does not feel free, probably because of geographical and logistical circumstances, to move toward the kind of independence of Communist China which North Korea felt free to assert because of the proximity of the Soviet Union and the credibility of Moscow's security as well as economic guarantees. Nor does it now appear credible to Hanoi to seek greater independence of Communist China by an understanding with the other major power which might offer that guarantee... Communist China has thus far thrown its weight in Hanoi towards continuing the war. It is probably true that Hanoi can make peace without risking a Chinese Communist invasion; but Chinese Communist influence is evidently an inhibiting factor of some importance.²²

Though the Kremlin heavily built up the Soviet troops along the

Chinese northern frontiers by transferring its regular units from Europe to the Far East in late 1966, Peking's strategists still believed that the greatest military threat was coming from China's southern border because of the escalation war in Vietnam. As Thomas W. Robinson wrote in his article *The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict*, "the Vietnam War directed Chinese military attention primarily to its southern flank, instead of its northern and western ones. The Chinese were thus able to counter the Soviet buildup only marginally."²³

Although the Chinese Communist leaders showed their extreme reluctance to worsen Sino-U.S. hostilities, they did not reduce their commitment to the national liberation movement in Vietnam. The **New China News Agency**, in late November 1966, clearly indicated that any effort of compelling "the Vietnamese people to surrender" and "forcing peace through war" (including the bombing of North Vietnam) would not save the U.S. from a final defeat. The Chinese Communist leadership would respond accordingly in military action if the U.S. was aimed "to defeat the great cause of the Vietnamese people in their fight against U.S. aggression and for national salvation" in Vietnam.²⁴

China had closely identified its revolutionary support with the Vietnamese national liberation war against the U.S. in Vietnam. With the intensification of U.S. air raids around Hanoi, in mid-December 1966, Chinese Communist newspaper in Hong Kong (**Ta Kung Pao**) emphasized that Communist China had constantly paid close attention to the Vietnamese war situation, and viewed the Vietnamese people's struggle for national salvation as its own. If the U.S. military actions were to force the DRV to give up its liberation war, the Chinese Communists would inevitably intervene in the Vietnamese conflict. As John Gittings wrote in his article "*Will China Fight?*" that:

China's commitment to the Vietnamese war must therefore still be viewed with some scepticism, especially at a time of acute pre-occupation with the internal political struggle. This is not to say that China would not intervene if asked to. Strategic realities and the threat of a U.S. victory might compel her to intervene. Pentagon planners -- apart from any other considerations -- would be foolish to take a chance on it. In this sense the prospects of Chinese intervention depend on Washington and not on Peking. But there is no evidence that China is 'eagerly awaiting the call'.²⁵

Undoubtedly, the fear of Chinese intervention was the underlying reason behind the Johnson administration's decision to retain its policy of gradual escalation in Vietnam. The U.S. could not go beyond a limit to force the DRV into submission without facing the risk of a wider war with Red China and even the Soviet Union. This came at a cost to virtually all parties involved in the Vietnam War, except one. The U.S. failed to coerce the North Vietnamese to negotiate or to desist its military activities in the South, but made them pay a heavy price for their victory. The Soviets failed to force the restoration of solidarity with Communist China in Vietnam. The Americans had to moderate the Chinese Communists, preventing them to exert maximum force against North Vietnam to sue for peace. The Chinese Communists did accomplish some objectives without the need of intervening themselves in the Vietnam War. Only China won the Vietnam War.

Notes

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3. Quoted in Hugh Sidey, *A Very Personal Presidency: Lyndon Johnson in the White House*, (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 238.
4. Daniel S. Papp, *Vietnam: The View from Moscow, Peking, Washington*, p. 82; Min Chen, *The Strategic Triangle and Regional Conflicts*, p. 44; **Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966** (Vol. II), October 06, 1966, p. 1122.
5. Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy, A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Dell, 1984), pp. 94, 96. Quoted in Garver, "The Chinese Threat in the Vietnam War", *Parameters* (Spring 1992), p. 74.
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7. Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy, A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Cali.: Presidio Press, 1982), pp. 122-123; Norman B. Hannah, *The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War* (Lanham, M.D.: Madison Books, 1987), p. 215. Summers' critique and others toward U.S. policy of gradual escalation in Vietnam were also discussed in William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, Cali.: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 371- 372, 375-376.
8. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, p. 372.
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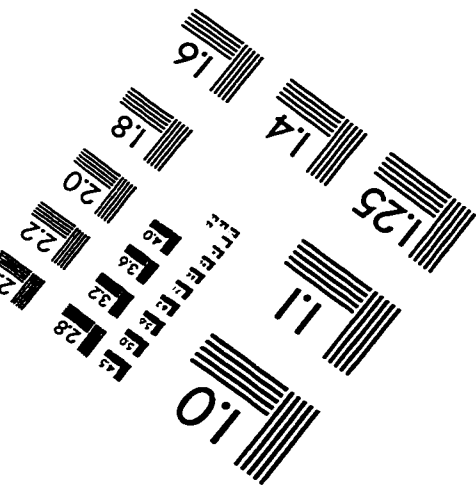
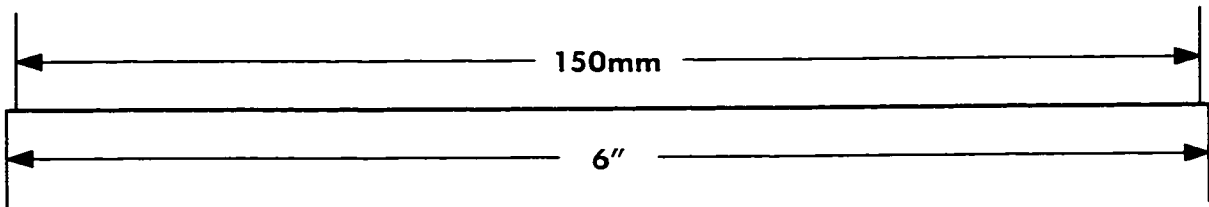
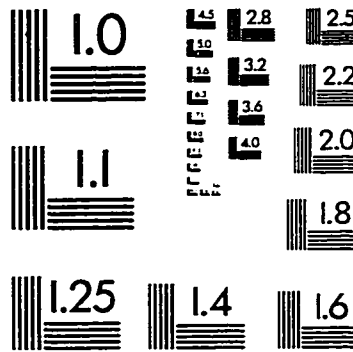
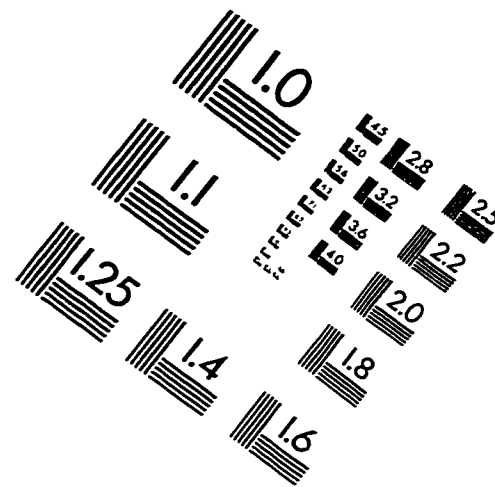
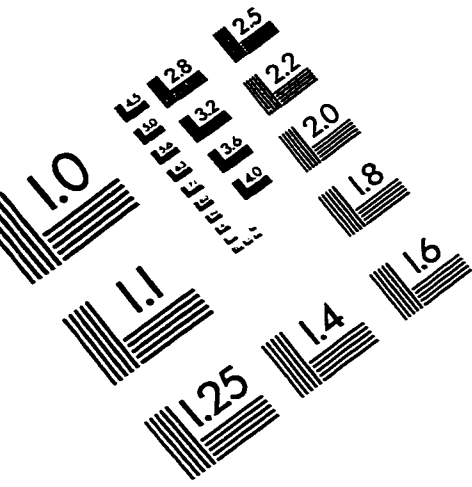
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