

Beyond Betrayal

Beijing, Moscow, and the Paris Negotiations,
1971–1973

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According to a North Vietnamese booklet published in 1979, “Chinese leaders . . . betrayed Viet Nam . . . in making a deal with the United States to prevent the total victory of the Vietnamese people.”¹ The wording suggests that Chinese perfidy alone foiled an otherwise certain Vietnamese victory. Was Chinese action really to blame, and would Vietnamese victory have been certain? In the wake of the Sino-Vietnamese war in early 1979, Hanoi’s negative assessment of the Sino-American rapprochement in 1971–1972 is understandable. In comparison, however, the North Vietnamese were not as critical in their appraisals of the much more far-reaching détente between Moscow and Washington in 1971–1975. Recently opened and published Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian/Soviet, East German, Bulgarian, British, Swiss, and American sources allow us to go beyond this politicized assessment by probing the Sino-Soviet-American–North Vietnamese quadrangular relationship in greater detail. Three basic questions arise about the two years from the Laos incursion in early 1971 to the Paris Accords two years later. First, what was the diplomatic and military strategy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, or North Vietnam) during these two years? Second, what were Beijing’s and Moscow’s roles and motivations in bringing about the Paris Accords? Finally, did U.S. attempts to forge the rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and détente with the USSR lead to concrete Chinese and Soviet actions in favor of the United States?

Although the English-language literature on the Vietnam War is vast, only a minute fraction of it explores the war’s international context on the ba-

1. Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations over the Last 30 Years* (Hanoi: SRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1979), pp. 7–8.

sis of sources from multiple countries. Pierre Asselin's book on the Paris negotiations focuses largely on U.S.–North Vietnamese relations, with China and the Soviet Union only on the margins.² Qiang Zhai's book on Sino-Vietnamese relations throughout the Indochina conflict provides important Chinese evidence, but the section on the final years of the war is relatively short.³ Ilya Gaiduk wrote a similar volume on Soviet–North Vietnamese relations.⁴ In recent years, various articles have helped to shed light on several issues. Chris Connolly has explored Chinese policies toward Vietnam during the 1968–1972 period.⁵ Lien-Hang Nguyen, Chen Jian, and Luu Doan Huynh have provided brief assessments of the impact of Sino-Soviet and Sino-American relations on the final years of the Paris negotiations.⁶ In a recent volume, two leading Chinese scholars, Li Danhui and Shen Zhihua, present some of their findings for the first time in English.⁷

Chinese-language secondary literature and memoirs form an important body of evidence for this article.⁸ The transcripts of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and memoirs of Soviet officials provide unique insight into Soviet decision-making. East German, Bulgarian, Swiss, and British archival documents offer a window on Hanoi's, Beijing's, and Moscow's views. U.S. transcripts of meetings with Soviet and Chinese leaders as well as the recently published documents of the back-channel between the Soviet ambassador, Anatolii Dobrynin, and the national

2. Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

3. Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

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

5. Chris Connolly, "The American Factor: Sino-American Rapprochement and Chinese Attitudes to the Vietnam War, 1968–1972," *Cold War History*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (November 2005), pp. 510–527.

6. Lien-Hang Nguyen, "Between the Storms: An International History of the Second Indochina War, 1968–1973," Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2008, pp. 195–197; Lien-Hang Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese Split and the Indochina War, 1968–1975," in Odd Arne Westad et al., eds., *The Third Indochina War* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 12–32; Chen Jian, "China, the Vietnam War, and the Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968–1973," in Westad et al., eds., *The Third Indochina War*, pp. 33–64; and Luu Doan Huynh, "The Paris Agreement of 1973 and Vietnam's Vision of the Future," in Westad et al., eds., *The Third Indochina War*, pp. 87–102.

7. Li Danhui, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute over Assistance for Vietnam's Anti-American War, 1965–1972," in Priscilla Roberts, ed., *Behind the Bamboo Curtain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 289–318; and Shen Zhihua, "Sino-U.S. Reconciliation and China's Vietnam Policy," in Roberts, ed., *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, pp. 349–368.

8. A note on the use of diacritic marks and transliteration: All languages in Latin script except Vietnamese keep their diacritic marks. Russian loses its soft (ь) and hard signs (Ъ); in the case of soft vowels (ю, я, ё) and soft consonants (щ), simplified transliteration rules are applied. Similar rules apply for Bulgarian. Some terms and names (Hanoi instead of Hà Nội, Moscow instead of Moskva, etc.) are used in their divergent but widely applied spellings. Chinese names appear in Pinyin without tone marks.

security adviser to President Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, are equally crucial pieces in the puzzle.

The international stage of the final two years of the Paris negotiations was the edifice of larger developments that had started in the late 1960s. On the one side, Nixon had received an unspecified mandate in the 1968 election to end the Vietnam War. He continued the Paris talks initiated by his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, and implemented a gradual withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from Vietnam and the simultaneous shift of burden from U.S. to South Vietnamese ground troops (Vietnamization). On the other side, the DRV faced a difficult situation after January 1968. The Tet Offensive, which was aimed at achieving a decisive battlefield victory, had undercut U.S. public support for the war but was also a military setback for North Vietnam.⁹ Because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) chairman Mao Zedong had supported the North Vietnamese strategy of fighting while refusing to seek a negotiated settlement since 1965,¹⁰ North Vietnam's willingness to negotiate with the United States in the spring of 1968 led to a decline in Chinese support. In turn, the Soviet Union, with its long-standing policy of nudging the warring parties toward a negotiated solution, became the most important source of assistance.¹¹

The Paris peace talks ran along two tracks. Since May 1968, official plenary negotiations brought together the United States and the allied Republic of Vietnam (RVN), on the one side, and the DRV and its southern ally, the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), on the other. Secret negotiations of Kissinger with, usually, the North Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) Politburo member Le Duc Tho and former DRV Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy started in August 1969, quickly superseding the official plenary meetings. After the secret talks were publicly revealed by the press in early 1972, they continued as private meetings. From 1968 to 1971, the negotiations remained in a deadlock. The DRV tabled non-negotiable demands for U.S. withdrawal and the overthrow of the RVN government, and the United States set its own high conditions on various technical and political issues.¹²

9. Robert Schulzinger, *Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 259–267, 275, 277–278.

10. Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 302–329.

11. Zhai, *China*, pp. 176–180; and Gaiduk, *Soviet*, pp. 145–155.

12. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 1–30.

Sino-American Rapprochement and North Vietnamese Strategic Thinking, March–June 1971

The failure of the 8 February incursion into Laos by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) revealed that Vietnamization had not worked for *one* of the purposes the United States had intended it—offensive strikes into enemy territory.¹³ The operation, code-named Lam Son 719, was supposed to disrupt vital North Vietnamese supply routes in southern Laos to the Communist guerrilla forces in South Vietnam.¹⁴ For the DRV, this offensive not only brought a massive offensive ground operation close to its home territory, but also stirred considerable concern about an even greater escalation—including the possible use of nuclear weapons by the United States—as Prime Minister Pham Van Dong told the Bulgarian ambassador to Vietnam. Simultaneously, on 22 February, Vice Premier Le Thanh Nghi obtained in Beijing a supplementary economic and military aid commitment, which, in his words, was “of important significance” at that critical juncture.¹⁵ Although this package ended a decline of Chinese aid that began in 1968, the new assistance probably did not reach the DRV before the ARVN retreated on 15 March after sustaining losses of 50 percent.¹⁶ Overall, Chinese supplies of weapons to North Vietnam increased enormously in 1971 over the preceding year. Shipments of artillery pieces rose by 257 percent, rifles by 41 percent, tanks from zero to 80 units, and vehicles from zero to 4,011, just to name a few.¹⁷

During and after Lam Son 719, the Soviet Union pursued a dual approach of forming a socialist united front behind the DRV and of cajoling the United States to come to an agreement in Paris. On 25 February the Soviet ambassador to China, Vasilii Tolstikov, urged Prime Minister Zhou Enlai once more to adopt a joint position with the socialist camp regarding Vietnam, but Chinese leaders again stuck to the policy they had been pursuing since 1965 of refusing to coordinate international aid.¹⁸ Because Secretary General Le Duan attended the 24th congress of the CPSU, which started on 30 March, Dobrynin had met with Kissinger on 25 March and urged him to

13. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 259–261.

14. Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1998), p. 241.

15. Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 68. Exact quantities of Chinese aid are not known.

16. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 27. For annual military aid from the PRC, see Zhai, *China*, p. 136. No detailed breakdown per month or agreement is available.

17. Zhai, *China*, 136.

18. “Information,” 10 March 1971, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bestand: Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten [Files of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the Political Archive of the Office for Foreign Affairs, Berlin; hereinafter referred to as PAAA-MfAA], Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor China, Microfiche C 585/77, p. 299.

use Moscow as a conduit for messages to Hanoi. However, Kissinger had nothing to convey to Le Duan.¹⁹

On 5 March 1971, Zhou Enlai flew to Hanoi, his first visit since the death of the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh in 1969.²⁰ According to a Swiss embassy report, Zhou had been invited shortly after the start of Lam Son 719 but did not leave until the military threat had receded. Seeking to counter Soviet diplomacy, Zhou offered even more support: “Whatever you need, please request it. . . . [W]e do not hesitate to assume the greatest national sacrifice.”²¹ However, he still refused “so-called joint action” with the Soviet Union for “historical” reasons—the Sino-Soviet split.²² The Chinese premier also did not reply to Pham Van Dong’s proposal to form an anti-American united front in Indochina, even though both sides were concerned about the possibility that the United States would use nuclear weapons in Vietnam.²³ In fact, the impending Sino-American rapprochement prevented the PRC from committing itself to an anti-American enterprise, whereas Lam Son 719 encouraged the DRV to seek one. The final communiqué committed each side to what was dear to the other. Beijing received Hanoi’s support for the liberation of Taiwan, a major point of friction with Washington, and the DRV obtained greater military commitments.²⁴ Chinese deliveries of heavy weaponry, tanks, ships, and vehicles increased precipitously in 1971 and 1972.²⁵

After the success of the People’s Army of (North) Vietnam (PAVN) in repelling the ARVN in Laos, Hanoi reassessed the situation in Indochina. In light of the repeated failures of the ARVN, the leaders of the DRV concluded

19. “137. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.),” 25 March 1971, in David C. Geyer and Douglas E. Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969–1972* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007), p. 319. On Le Duan’s presence, see “Hanoi Party Head Reaches Moscow,” *The New York Times*, 29 March 1971, p. 6.

20. “About the Visit of Chou Enlai to the DRV,” 23 March 1971, in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor China, Microfiche C 584/77, p. 23.

21. “Political Report No. 3/71: Zhou Enlai in Hanoi,” 17 December 1971, in Bundesarchiv Bern [Federal Archive Berne; hereinafter referred to as BA Bern], E 2300-01, Akzession 1977/29, 7, “1971 p.a. 21.31 Peking Politische Berichte” and Yun Shui, *Chushi qiguo jishi* [Records of Serving in Seven Countries] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996), pp. 132–133.

22. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi bian [CCP, Central Documents Research Office], *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949–1976* [Chronicle of Zhou Enlai’s Life, 1949–1976], Vol. 3 [hereinafter referred to as ZELNP 3] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), p. 442.

23. Ang, *Ending*, p. 68. Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, “ZhongMei hejie yu Zhongguo dui Yue wajiao (1968–1973)” [“Sino-American Reconciliation and China’s Foreign Policy toward Vietnam (1968–1973)”], in *Meiguo Yanjiu*, No. 1 (2000), p. 101.

24. Li Danhui, “Vietnam and Chinese Policy toward the United States,” in William C. Kirby et al., eds., *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 188. The exact amount of Chinese aid is unknown.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 188; and Zhai, *China*, p. 136. The exact delivery dates of Chinese aid are not known.

that the South Vietnamese army was a hollow shell. According to the official PAVN history, the Politburo decided in May 1971 to “develop our strategic offensive posture in South Vietnam to defeat the American ‘Vietnamization’ policy, gain a *decisive* victory, and force the U.S. imperialists to negotiate an end to the war from a position of defeat.”²⁶ What would become the Easter Offensive of late March 1972 combined regular troops with local guerrilla forces and was supposed to last through summer and fall.²⁷ In early May, Le Duan again traveled to Moscow to explain the new strategy to CPSU General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. The Soviet ambassador to North Vietnam, Ilya Shcherbakov, later told the Bulgarian embassy in Hanoi that the DRV hoped not only to bring down the RVN government, but also to use a Tet-style offensive to force the United States into surrender in view of the presidential elections in late 1972: “We [the DRV] will overthrow Nixon, like we have overthrown Johnson.” North Vietnam requested more weapons from the Soviet Union. Although Moscow satisfied all of Hanoi’s wishes, no evidence on the size of the aid has surfaced.²⁸ According to Western estimates cited in a semi-official Russian publication, Soviet military aid increased in 1971 from 75 million to 100 million dollars and included large numbers of tanks, vehicles, and anti-aircraft missiles.²⁹

U.S. officials, too, appraised the failures of Lam Son 719.³⁰ The Nixon administration by this point had reached “the fork in the road” as forecast by Kissinger in mid-1970; the president had to decide on unilateral withdrawal at a slow pace while leaving the political solution up to the Vietnamese themselves, or to “offer [to the DRV] a more rapid withdrawal in an effort to make a political settlement.”³¹ In March 1971, Nixon believed in “a chance of negotiation” to “get us the hell out of there” because “the whole Communist world

26. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 283; emphasis added.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 283–284; and Stephen P. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Easter Offensive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 26–28, 35–39.

28. “Report by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” n.d., in *Arkhiv na Ministerstvoto na Vunshnite Raboti* (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia; hereinafter referred to as AMVR), Op. 21p, a.e. 33, Ll. 103–104.

29. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, p. 33; and V. A. Zolotarev, ed., *Rossija (SSSR) v lokalnykh voynakh i voennykh konfliktakh vtoroi poloviny XX veka* [Russia/USSR in Local Wars and Military Conflicts of the Second Half of the 20th Century] (Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2000), pp. 93–94. No breakdown of weapons deliveries is available.

30. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 28.

31. “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon,” 20 July 1970, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol. VI, pp. 1134–1135 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers).

is in terrible shape.”³² Later that month, the White House decided to withdraw more U.S. troops but—as a precaution—“to keep a large air force there” until after the 1972 elections.³³

Because the DRV was planning a new offensive, Xuan Thuy made fresh demands during the 15 April plenary meetings, including the formation of a government “in Saigon without [RVN President Nguyen Van] Thieu, [RVN Vice President Nguyen Cao] Ky, or [Prime Minister Tran Thien] Khiem.”³⁴ A proposal submitted by Kissinger as a “final” offer in his secret meeting with Xuan Thuy on 31 May reflected the changed military situation. The proposal included—for the first time—concessions to long-held DRV demands, such as a set withdrawal date, as well as U.S. acquiescence to allow PAVN troops to remain in the RVN after the ceasefire. However, Washington still insisted on a political role for the South Vietnamese themselves following the U.S. withdrawal and without American participation. The offer thus separated military withdrawal and political issues to be solved in sequence and not simultaneously, as the DRV had always demanded.³⁵

The 31 May offer also occurred against the background of major changes in the international context that the White House believed would benefit the U.S. negotiating position.³⁶ As early as January, through Romanian channels, the PRC had invited Nixon for a visit, but the president had not reacted.³⁷ On 3 March, two days before Zhou traveled to Hanoi, Vice Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua led the Swiss ambassador to believe that the PRC was willing to help end the war through negotiations.³⁸ After returning from Hanoi on 8 March, Zhou Enlai instructed the Chinese table tennis team to allow “politics to seize an advantageous position” at the impending table tennis world championships in Nagoya, Japan.³⁹ Afterward, when the U.S. team visited the PRC in April, Zhou publicly hailed “a new page in the relations of the Chinese and American people.”⁴⁰ On 21 April, via Pakistan, Zhou sent a letter to Nixon

32. “Oval Office Conversation No. 471-2, 19 March 1971,” in Jeffrey Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), pp. 146–148.

33. “Oval Office Conversation No. 474-1, 26 March 1971,” in Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, pp. 146–148.

34. “Action Memorandum,” 15 April 1971, in Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), VW00817, pp. 1–2. The archive is available at <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/home.do>.

35. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 31 May 1971, in DNSA, KT 00282, pp. 1–21; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 27–28; and Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, p. 265.

36. Chen Jian, *Mao’s Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 249–262.

37. Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, p. 262.

38. “Political Report No. 2,” 4 March 1971, in BA Bern, E 2300-01, Akzession 1977/29, 7, 1971 “p.a. 21.31 Peking Politische Berichte.”

39. ZELNP 3, pp. 442–444.

40. “Chou Says New Page Has Opened,” *The New York Times*, 15 April 1971, p. 1.

inviting “a special envoy of the President.”⁴¹ It was no wonder that, while discussing the “nailing of the North Vietnamese,” Nixon instructed Kissinger on 26 April to “pursue the Chinese thing as hard as you can.”⁴² Two hours after the Pakistani envoy delivered Zhou’s letter later that evening, Kissinger told Nixon that “if we get this thing working, we will end Vietnam this year. *The mere fact of these contacts makes that.*”⁴³ Nixon immediately replied with an affirmative letter sent via Pakistan.⁴⁴

While the Chinese reply gestated for four weeks, Le Duan stopped over in Beijing en route from Moscow. The Vietnamese had understood the meaning of “ping-pong diplomacy,” and thus Le Duan reminded his hosts that “China is an important factor for the people of Indochina to drive out U.S. imperialism.”⁴⁵ Eventually, Chinese leaders clarified their position. A CCP Central Committee plenum on 26–29 May decided to commit the country to the following priorities: Taiwan, PRC membership in the United Nations (UN), Sino-U.S. trade, and U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Korea, and Japan. Although Vietnam was lumped in the basket of lowest priority, the Chinese believed that Sino-American cooperation would help Indochina to achieve ultimate victory because it would help Nixon refocus his policy from East Asia to the Middle East and Europe.⁴⁶ After these priorities had been adopted, Zhou sent a reply to Nixon through the Pakistani channel, inviting Kissinger for preparatory secret talks and the president for a visit afterward.⁴⁷ Nixon was delighted. The prospect of Sino-American rapprochement and the idea of a Moscow summit with Soviet leaders seemed to provide the necessary levers to force the North Vietnamese to make concessions in Paris.⁴⁸

41. “Message from Premier Chou En-lai,” 21 April 1971, in National Archives and Records Administrations (NARA), Nixon Presidential Materials Project at the National Archives, Box 1031, Exchanges Leading Up to HAK Trip to China—December 1969–July 1971 (1), n.p.

42. “Oval Office Conversation No. 489-17, 26 April 1971,” in Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, pp. 155–156.

43. “Transcript of a Telephone Conversation between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” 27 April 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 306.

44. “Extract of MEMCOM,” May 1971, in NARA, Nixon Presidential Materials Project at the National Archives, Box 1031, Exchanges Leading Up to HAK Trip to China—December 1969–July 1971 (1), n.p.

45. “Political Bureau of C.P.C. Central Committee Gives Banquet and Soiree in Honour of Viet Nam Workers’ Party Delegation,” in Xinhua News Agency, *Daily News Release*, 13 May 1971, p. 4.

46. Xu Dashen, ed., *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shilu* [Year-by-Year Records of the People’s Republic of China], Vol. 5 (Changjun, China: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1994), pp. 713–714.

47. “Message From the Premier of the People’s Republic of China Chou En-lai to President Nixon,” 29 May 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 332–333.

48. “Oval Office Conversation No. 508-13, 2 June 1971,” in Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 163.

At that very time, Hanoi was fine-tuning its own strategy.⁴⁹ DRV leaders were convinced that Nixon needed a success for his reelection effort in 1972 and that he had been forced to put forward the “final” 31 May proposal.⁵⁰ Hanoi chose to follow a flexible diplomatic strategy that included a direct reply to Kissinger’s proposal—the secret 8-point proposal, tabled by Le Duc Tho on 26 June in the secret Paris talks—and the similar, public 7-point proposal by the PRG, published in the French capital on 1 July. The VWP Politburo also decided to make 1972 the year of the “decisive victory.”⁵¹ After a year’s absence, Le Duc Tho arrived in Paris on 23 June with the 8-point proposal in his pocket.⁵² Although the document encompassed nothing new, Kissinger reported to Nixon that “for the first time . . . they produced a proposal in response to one of ours” and presented their ideas as a negotiating document rather than as a series of nonnegotiable demands. Kissinger optimistically described the cordial negotiation atmosphere and Le Duc Tho’s willingness to stay in Paris until a settlement was reached.⁵³

When Kissinger met Nixon on 1 July to review the North Vietnamese proposals, the discussion quickly turned to Kissinger’s impending secret visit to China. The president instructed his envoy to “build on three fears” in Beijing—fears of further U.S. escalation in Vietnam, of the rise of Japan, and of the Soviet threat.⁵⁴ Nixon also demanded “some progress in Vietnam” from China for his own future trip to Beijing.⁵⁵ But the Chinese seemed not to be willing to bear the onus of bringing Hanoi into line. On 4 July, the PRC agreed with the DRV on additional Chinese military aid and openly endorsed the PRG’s public, 7-point proposal.⁵⁶

In the wake of Lam Son 719, Hanoi, Beijing, Washington, and Moscow made mutually exclusive decisions on strategy that ended up influencing events until early 1973. The ARVN failure in Laos prompted the DRV to embark on a maximalist strategy of decisive military action against the RVN and

49. Military History Institute, *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 283–284; and Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” pp. 195–197.

50. “Information Report of the ADN Correspondent in Hanoi from 5 August 1971,” in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor Vietnam, C 1083/73, pp. 55–57.

51. Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Le Duc Tho—Kissinger Negotiations in Paris* (Hanoi: The Gioi, 1996), p. 181; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 37–38; Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 175; and “Peace Proposal,” 1 July 1971, in DNSA, VW00838, pp. 88–89.

52. “Le Duc Tho Leaves for Paris after One Year Absence,” *The New York Times*, 24 June 1971, p. 4.

53. “Peace Proposal,” 26 June 1971, in DNSA, VW00835, p. 87.

54. “Memorandum for Record,” 1 July 1971, in DNSA, KT00298, pp. 1–2.

55. “Oval Office Conversation No. 534-3, 1 July 1971,” in Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 185.

56. “Peking Gives Hanoi Aid,” *The New York Times*, 5 July 1971, p. 2. The exact amount of Chinese aid is unknown.

of uncompromising diplomatic demands in Paris. Chinese leaders promised more military and economic aid to Hanoi but, did not rule out a negotiated solution. This dual strategy was related to the impending Sino-American rapprochement and, most likely, the desire not to lose influence in North Vietnam to the Soviet Union. The United States decided to scale down its own expectations by offering far-reaching concessions in the Paris negotiations, designed to substitute for Vietnamization as a vehicle of disengagement. However, Washington was willing to negotiate only on a U.S. withdrawal, not on the elimination of the RNV government, as demanded by Hanoi. In late May, U.S. officials even expected a quick diplomatic solution in Paris as the first tangible result of the Sino-American rapprochement. Finally, the Soviet Union worked—unsuccessfully—to strengthen Hanoi through socialist unity and military aid while continuing its long-standing policy of working toward a negotiated end to the conflict.

Kissinger's Secret Visit to Beijing, July 1971

The first meeting between Zhou and Kissinger, on 9 July, focused mostly on Indochina. Kissinger explained his own secret proposal of 31 May and demanded that the DRV accept the international status of the RVN or else the war would continue. He even hinted that a solution to the Indochina problem might accelerate the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Taiwan. Sharing many of Kissinger's ideas, Zhou admitted that the "Vietnamese people feel that they were deceived during the first [1954] Geneva Conference"—evidently a hint of China's co-responsibility for the current situation.⁵⁷

The following day, the Chinese position on Vietnam suddenly hardened. After Zhou had briefed Mao overnight, the latter decided, in view of the continued bloodshed in Vietnam, that the North Vietnamese must benefit from Sino-American rapprochement as well. Hence, he gave priority to Vietnam over Taiwan.⁵⁸ Zhou bluntly informed Kissinger that the Taiwan issue could wait "for over 15 years" and that "if the situation does not relax in Indochina, we must continue to give aid to Indochina." Although Zhou urged his guest to drop support for Nguyen Van Thieu, he also asserted that China would not accept any obligations on behalf of North Vietnam. Kissinger understood:

57. "Memorandum of Conversation," 9 July 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 369–376.

58. Wei Shiyuan, "Jixing mimi fangHua neimu" [The Inside Story of Kissinger's Secret Visit to China], in Pei Jianzhang, ed., *Xin Zhongguo waijiao fengyun* [Events of New China's Diplomacy], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1991), pp. 41–42.

“We are not asking the People’s Republic of China to stop giving aid to its friends.”⁵⁹ He returned to Washington via Paris and reported to Nixon that the secret meeting with Le Duc Tho on 12 July had occurred in a constructive atmosphere and that the DRV demand for Nguyen Van Thieu’s resignation was “the only remaining problem.”⁶⁰

Chinese statements to Western visitors reflected the shift in PRC attitudes. On 5 July, Zhou had expressed to the Australian opposition Labour Party leader Gough Whitlam support for another Geneva conference.⁶¹ However, on 18 July, after Kissinger’s departure, Zhou told the French officials Alain Peyrefitte and Etienne Manac’h that a “Geneva conference was out [of the] question” as long as the United States refused to negotiate with all national liberation movements, and that any conference “could not have the same participation as in 1954.”⁶² This tallied with a renewed Chinese emphasis on Mao’s 1968 statement that the Geneva conference was a mistake.⁶³

On 13 July, Zhou flew to Hanoi for a 24-hour visit to see Le Duan and Pham Van Dong.⁶⁴ After reviewing the developments of Sino-American relations since 1969, the Chinese prime minister asserted that “Indochina was the most important question in our meeting with Kissinger” and that “the United States linked the settlement of the Indochina problem with the settlement of the Taiwan problem.”⁶⁵ However, he reassured his hosts that “the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Viet Nam is Problem No. 1, and the question of China joining the United Nations is second.”⁶⁶ Zhou promised to support the PRG’s 7-point proposal.⁶⁷ Although he said he had told Kissinger “that the talks on the Vietnam Peace problem are in Paris, they are not in Beijing,” he

59. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 10 July 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 406–421.

60. “Memorandum,” 14 July 1971, in DNSA, KT00307, pp. 1–27.

61. “Australian Says China Now Favors Indochina Parley,” *The New York Times*, 15 July 1971, p. 1; and ZELNP 3, p. 467.

62. “Political Report No. 10,” 4 August 1971, in BA Bern, E 2300–01, Akzession 1977/29, 7, “1971 p.a. 21.31 Peking Politische Berichte,” p. 2; and ZELNP 3, p. 469.

63. “39. Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 17 November 1968,” in O. Arne Westad, et al., eds., “77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1977,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 22 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 1998), p. 142; and “57. Le Duc Tho and Ieng Sary, 7 September 1971,” in Westad, et al., eds., “77 Conversations,” p. 180.

64. Yun, *Chushi*, p. 134.

65. “13 July 1971,” in Phong Luu Tru—Bo Ngoai Giao [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives], *Dai su ky chuyen de: Dau tranh ngoai giao va van dong quoc te trong nhung chien chong My cuu nuoc* [Important Account of a Special Subject: The Diplomatic Struggle and International Activities of the Anti-American Resistance and National Salvation], Vol. 4 (Hanoi: Luu Hanh Noi Bo, 1987), pp. 280–281.

66. SRV, *Truth*, pp. 47–48; and “13 July 1971,” pp. 280–281.

67. “13 July 1971,” pp. 280–281.

tried to prod the North Vietnamese to concentrate on the U.S. withdrawal first and focus on Nguyen Van Thieu's removal later.⁶⁸

Le Duan and Pham Van Dong adopted a "negative attitude" because they "think that the Nixon visit . . . is against the interests of Vietnam."⁶⁹ Hanoi forbade Beijing to negotiate on its behalf: "Vietnam is our country; you have no right to talk about Vietnam with the United States!"⁷⁰ Fearing the impact of Sino-American rapprochement on Vietnam, the DRV leaders were convinced that Nixon "hopes to save himself through this step" before the 1972 election.⁷¹ Hanoi did not even want to accept Beijing's sensible advice to focus on negotiating the U.S. withdrawal. The talks ended in a "chilly" atmosphere.⁷² The 16 July VWP Politburo meeting concluded that Sino-American rapprochement, which it considered a "torpedo" against DRV peace policies, had superseded peace in Vietnam as an election winner for Nixon.⁷³ Hanoi decided to spoil Nixon's political future by focusing on military action instead of negotiations.⁷⁴ Le Duan expressed anger to the Chinese ambassador, Wang Youping, some weeks later, saying "that it would have been better for China to invite Nixon as the one who has lost the war in Vietnam, not as the one who has won it."⁷⁵ What the Vietnamese Communists feared, as PRG Foreign Minister Nguyen Thi Binh told Zhou in mid-September, was that Sino-American rapprochement made Washington's negotiating position in Paris inflexible.⁷⁶

Kissinger's secret meeting on 26 July with Le Duc Tho revealed how much his Beijing visit had shaken the DRV. With an agreement on most issues in reach and a U.S. aid offer on the table, Le Duc Tho was torn. He talked about peace but continued to insist on Nguyen Van Thieu's removal. Alluding to the Beijing trip, he warned Kissinger that there were no "magical

68. Shen and Li, "ZhongMei hejie," p. 103. On the comment to Kissinger, see Wang Taiping, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi* [A Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China], Vol. 3, 1970–1978 (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1999), p. 54.

69. "Memorandum by Boris Stoichev," n.d., in AMVR, Op. 22p, a.e. 33, L. 163; and "Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov," n.d., in AMVR, Op. 22p, a.e. 33, L. 166.

70. Li Danhui, "ZhongMei huanhe yu yuanYue kangMei: Zhongguo waijiao zhanlüe tiaozheng zhong de Yuenan yinsu" [Sino-American Rapprochement and the Aid-Vietnam-Resist-American War: The Reasons behind the Adjustment of China's Foreign Strategy], *Dangde Wenjian*, No. 3 (2002), p. 72.

71. "Information," n.d., in AMVR, Op. 22p, a.e. 33, L. 218.

72. *Ibid.*, Ll. 218–219.

73. "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," 5 December 1971, in AMVR, Op. 22p, a.e. 90, L. 303.

74. "Information Report of the ADN Correspondent in Hanoi from 5 August 1971," in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor Vietnam, C 1083/73, pp. 55–57.

75. "Memorandum by Verbuln Tsanev," 13 September 1971, in AMVR, Op. 22p, a.e. 33, L. 156.

76. Wang, *Zhonghua*, p. 54.

ways” of settling the Vietnam War.⁷⁷ In conversations with the French and Soviet governments, Le Duc Tho displayed a clearer sense of priorities. U.S. economic aid did not matter as much as Nguyen Van Thieu’s fall.⁷⁸

The 1 August meeting between Le Duc Tho and Zhou in Beijing was doubly significant.⁷⁹ First, it revealed that the DRV did not expect a diplomatic settlement; otherwise, Le Duc Tho would not have broken his promise in June to stay in Paris until one was reached.⁸⁰ Second, it was an opportunity for Beijing to underscore its closeness to Hanoi by publicly asserting that the PRC supported the DRV’s positions.⁸¹ Recalling bilateral differences on negotiation strategy in previous years, Zhou promised neither to negotiate with the United States on behalf of the DRV nor to deviate from the North Vietnamese political line.⁸²

On 16 August 1971, Kissinger secretly met Xuan Thuy in Paris to offer a U.S. withdrawal by 1 August 1972. The Vietnamese countered with a proposal to release all U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) after the withdrawal, but still insisted on Nguyen Van Thieu’s removal.⁸³ Hanoi was betting on U.S. domestic politics, as DRV Vice Foreign Minister Hoang Van Tien had indicated to the Bulgarian ambassador a week earlier, on 9 August.⁸⁴ Also on the 9th, Kissinger had complained to Dobrynin that the North Vietnamese “are putting off negotiations on substance of the issues themselves” until all U.S. troops had withdrawn.⁸⁵ The secret Paris negotiations had reached a dead-lock.⁸⁶

77. “Information Memorandum,” 26 July 1971, in DNSA, KT00312, pp. 1–37.

78. “From USDel France,” 29 July 1971, in DNSA, VW00849, pp. 1–3; and “182. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.),” 29 July 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 416.

79. ZELNP 3, 472–473. No details of the meeting have surfaced.

80. Officially, Le Duc Tho returned home for health reasons, but a Vietnamese source admits that this was a “political illness.” See Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 211.

81. Le Duc Tho arrived on the official PLA day, when political statements on foreign and security policy were made. “Peking Army Says U.S. Must Quit Asia,” *The New York Times*, 2 August 1971, pp. 1–2; and “Official Transcript of the Wide-Ranging Interview With Premier Chou in Peking,” *The New York Times*, 10 August 1971, p. 14. For Zhou’s 26 August interview with Tanyug, see “Press Conference: Chou En-Lai Pledges to Support NVN Demands in Talks with US: Belgrade,” 28 August 1971, in Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive (TTU VCA), Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 04—Political Settlement, Item No. 2301413026, pp. 1–3. The Vietnam Center and Archive is available online at <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/vietnamarchive/reference/>.

82. “1 August 1971,” in Phong Luu Tru—Bo Ngoai Giao, *Dai su ky chuyen de*, p. 297; and “Note,” 3 September 1971, in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor China, Microfiche C 569/77, p. 114.

83. “Memorandum,” 16 August 1971, in DNSA, KT00334, pp. 1–8; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 29; and Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 202–207.

84. “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 19 August 1971, in AMVR, Op. 22p, a.e. 33, Ll. 207–216.

85. “188. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” 9 August 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 429.

86. “Memorandum of Conversation,” n.d., in DNSA, KT00352, pp. 1–17; Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 207–208; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 29.

When CCP Politburo member Li Xiannian traveled to Hanoi in late September 1971, he publicly expressed the PRC's determination to "support the North Vietnamese in their fight against 'imperialistic American aggression,'" reaffirming Zhou's harsh rhetoric of the previous month.⁸⁷ The visit was significant because it occurred after Lin Biao's mysterious death in an airplane crash as he flew from China on the night of 12–13 September to escape to the Soviet Union. After the demise of Mao's successor-turned-rival, the CCP chairman started to woo more moderate top officials, who had suffered from the Cultural Revolution, and continued to pursue the opening toward the United States.⁸⁸ But Li Xiannian's mission signified a major hardline commitment to the DRV. The two sides agreed on an economic and military aid packet worth 3.614 billion yuan for 1972—a sum equal to 48.67% of all of PRC foreign aid in the country's largest foreign aid budget since 1949.⁸⁹ According to a Bulgarian report, Li Xiannian's mission also was designed as an attempt "to neutralize to a certain degree the political effect from the visit of the Soviet delegation" shortly thereafter.⁹⁰

With Beijing upping the ante, Moscow followed suit. On 2 August 1971, Brezhnev had told his East European allies that the USSR was embarking on a dual policy. First, he would invite Nixon to Moscow after the latter's trip to China. Second, given how "poorly Vietnam took to the news" of Nixon's invitation to Beijing, the CPSU had decided "to send a high-ranking . . . delegation to Vietnam."⁹¹ Nikolai Podgornyi, the chairman of the CPSU Presidium, was invited to come to the DRV in early October. On 20 September, Dobrynin asked Kissinger whether he "had any message that Podgornyi should take to Hanoi."⁹² In preparation for a meeting between Nixon and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko ten days later, Kissinger counseled the president that Moscow's policy was "to be kept in the diplomatic game" without transcending "the current line of Hanoi."⁹³ Some days later, Kissinger even

87. "Hanoi Gets Peking Pledge," *The New York Times*, 26 September 1971, p. 10.

88. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 339–340.

89. Shen and Li, "ZhongMei hejie," 104; and Xu, *Zhonghua*, p. 754. The exact breakdown of Chinese aid is unknown.

90. "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," 5 December 1971, L. 303.

91. "Aktennotiz über den Verlauf des Krim-Treffens am 2. August 1971," in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv [Foundation Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR in the Federal Archive], Berlin (SAPMO), Zentrales Parteiarchiv der DDR, J IV 2/2/A–2419, n.p.; Gaiduk, *Soviet*, pp. 229–230; and Dallek, *Nixon*, pp. 286, 300–302.

92. "197. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.)," 20 September 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 445.

93. "201. Memorandum from President Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon," n.d., in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 458.

urged Nixon to “reserve a possible direct Soviet role for later in our present game plan” because there was no need to “embellish” Soviet diplomatic intervention in October.⁹⁴ Hence, the only thing Nixon said to Gromyko when he met him on 30 September was that the United States would not allow Nguyen Van Thieu to be replaced without a democratic election, which the Communists could help to organize. Gromyko promised to “pass this on to Hanoi.”⁹⁵ The U.S. offer about the democratic process was not sincere, however. In the impending October elections, only Nguyen Van Thieu ran after he, helped by the U.S. embassy in Saigon, used legal, political, and financial means to bar all other candidates from registering.⁹⁶

According to Brezhnev’s later CC report on Podgorny’s October 1971 visit to Hanoi, the North Vietnamese asserted that Zhou had promised not to “sacrifice” Vietnam in connection with the Sino-American rapprochement, but that they nevertheless feared that the PRC had assumed the “mission to solve the Indochina problem.”⁹⁷ Hanoi’s leaders further hoped to push for a solution on the basis of the PRG’s public 7-point proposal but now believed that the “Nixon visit nullifies” it completely. As a consequence, the North Vietnamese were counting on the U.S. antiwar movement and Soviet “political-moral and material aid.”⁹⁸ Podgorny informed the North Vietnamese of the invitation for Nixon to come to Moscow in May 1972, which would not be officially announced until 12 October.⁹⁹ The Vietnamese leaders did not voice any objection.¹⁰⁰ Dobrynin later communicated to Kissinger that Podgorny had told the North Vietnamese that “it was time to end the war,” preferably before Nixon’s visit to the Kremlin.¹⁰¹ But the Soviet leader, like the Chinese prime minister before, was unable to convince Hanoi to drop the demand for political change in South Vietnam.¹⁰² The public communiqué announced additional military, economic, and diplomatic aid and stressed the demand for Nguyen Van Thieu’s re-

94. “202. Memorandum from President Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” 28 September 1971, in Geyer and Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 459.

95. “205. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.),” 30 September 1971, in Geyer and Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 479.

96. Dallek, *Nixon*, 319; and Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, p. 276.

97. “CPSU Plenum, 22–23 November 1971,” in *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI)*, Fond (F) 2, Op. 3, Delo (D.) 255, L. 21.

98. “Note,” 2 November 1971, in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Sowjetunion, Microfiche C 1194/73, pp. 3–5.

99. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 210.

100. Stephen J. Morris, “The Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970s: The View from Moscow,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 25, CWIHP, 1999, p. 18.

101. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 30 October 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XIV, p. 25.

102. Gaiduk, *Soviet*, p. 232.

moval.¹⁰³ In late October, Dobrynin briefed Kissinger on Podgorny's visit, asserting that neither Beijing nor Moscow was willing to transcend the Paris negotiation process.¹⁰⁴

On 11 October, the day before the Nixon administration announced Nixon's visit to Moscow, Kissinger made another secret, far-reaching offer in Paris. The proposal, which included a U.S. withdrawal, free presidential elections, Nguyen Van Thieu's resignation a month before, and the simultaneous release of POWs, made North Vietnam suspicious.¹⁰⁵ If Hanoi accepted, it would benefit Washington in negotiations with Beijing and Moscow; if the DRV refused, the United States might make public the failure of negotiations and blame North Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the offer threatened to undermine the rationale for the military solution Hanoi was envisioning for 1972, as the VWP Politburo realized: "Time is not on the enemy's side. That is why the United States wants a quick resolution, so that they can reduce the difficulties they are facing. However, we will not simply passively follow their lead. On the contrary, we must take the initiative and select the proper opportunity to achieve our own strategic intentions."¹⁰⁷

The DRV saw Sino-American rapprochement as a sinister plot by both the PRC and the United States to end the war on terms unfavorable to Hanoi. This development seemed to undermine North Vietnam's maximalist strategy of using military and diplomatic pressure on the United States. However, Hanoi's accusation that Beijing was guilty of duplicity was too severe, as Zhou told visiting North Vietnamese officials:

After Kissinger had visited China, I immediately came to Hanoi to inform the fraternal party about the situation, pulling my heart out. For 22 years after the PRC was founded, it was not recognized by the United States. . . . Now Kissinger and Nixon take the initiative to come to China to talk, which is tantamount for them to acknowledging their mistakes. Khrushchev could go to the United States [in 1959], but I, Zhou Enlai, cannot go to Washington. You can go to Paris and talk with the United States, why should we not be able to talk

103. "Wide Soviet-Hanoi Accord Initiated by Podgorny Visit," *The New York Times*, 10 October 1971, pp. 1, 4. Exact quantities of Soviet aid are not known.

104. "217. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.)," 30 October 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 505.

105. "Peace Proposal," 11 October 1971, in DNSA, VW00861, p. 90.

106. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger*, p. 211.

107. *Vietnamese Diplomacy: 1945–2000 [Ngoai giao Viet Nam: 1945–2000]* (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2002), p. 246; quoted in George Jay Veith, "The Politburo and the Paris Peace Accords: The Decisions for War, Peace, and the Return to War, June 1971–June 1973" (paper presented at the "War, Diplomacy, and Public Opinion: The Paris Peace talks on Vietnam and the End of the Vietnam War (1968–1975)" Conference, French Ministry of Defense, Paris, 13–14 May 2008), p. 3.

with the United States in Beijing? We demand from the United States to withdraw [from Vietnam] as quickly as possible. We do not sell out our friends.¹⁰⁸

Although the PRC secretly advised the DRV to aim for a realistic negotiated outcome in Paris, the Chinese in fact had made the solution of the Vietnam crisis their top priority, stood publicly behind Hanoi's maximalist strategy, and committed vast military and economic resources. Chinese sources do not reveal the reasoning behind Chinese diplomacy, but they were likely related to Beijing's awareness of its own co-responsibility for the length of the Indochina conflict, to its attempt to maintain influence in Hanoi, or to both. Similarly, Moscow retained its dual strategy of negotiating with the United States—not only on Vietnam, but also on détente—while arming Hanoi in order to stay in the diplomatic game in Indochina. Interestingly, the DRV was less hostile to U.S.-Soviet détente than to the U.S.-Chinese rapprochement. Washington's additional concessions in the political sphere—the offer of free elections and Nguyen Van Thieu's prior resignation—in October created a dilemma for Hanoi, which still did not want to give up the aim of toppling Thieu. Because the U.S. proposal fell short in this regard, the DRV decided to put the military aspects of its strategy ahead of its diplomatic aims.

Kissinger and Pham Van Dong in Beijing, October–November 1971

Kissinger flew to Beijing on 20 October 1971 for seven days of talks. This was the first visit of a major foreign guest after Lin Biao's demise, signifying the importance of Mao's new policy of moderation.¹⁰⁹ Zhou had apparently requested the DRV leadership beforehand “to harmonize the positions,” but Hanoi had curtly replied that there was no need to confer with Beijing about its well-known standpoints.¹¹⁰ On 25 October, five days after Kissinger's arrival, the UN General Assembly recognized the PRC as the sole, legitimate representative of China.¹¹¹ The Taiwan issue thus suddenly moved into the spotlight, ahead of Indochina. Most of the Kissinger-Zhou talks in Beijing, however, revolved around Nixon's visit.

Only the second half of the talks on 21 October dealt with Vietnam. Zhou accused Kissinger of stalling in the Paris talks and announced that

108. Wang, *Zhonghua*, p. 60.

109. “Dear Hugh,” 22 February 1972, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), FCO 21/962.

110. “CPSU Plenum, 22–23 November 1971,” in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 255, L. 21.

111. “End of China's Isolation,” *The New York Times*, 26 October 1971, p. 1.

Indochina “is a question even more important than the question . . . of the People’s Republic of China in the United Nations, and a question even more important than the normalization of Sino-American relations.” Kissinger replied by reviewing the secret talks since 31 May and laying the blame for the deadlock on the DRV. Zhou admitted that he did not know many details of the secret Paris talks but did not offer any Chinese mediation. Kissinger declined to provide the American documents of the secret Paris talks for fear of putting the PRC, a DRV ally, on the spot.¹¹² Kissinger later optimistically reported to Nixon that “Peking [Beijing] will be helpful.” His observation was based on informal talks with Marshal Ye Jianying, who claimed that Beijing wanted peace but that Hanoi was too “proud” and “egged on by Moscow.”¹¹³ Although this assertion was untrue, Kissinger put the onus on Moscow for his failed diplomacy when he met with Dobrynin on 9 November.¹¹⁴ Replying to an inquiry by the ambassador, Kissinger also boldly claimed that “we had never expected the Chinese to help.”¹¹⁵ In fact, Washington *did* expect help from Beijing. On 20 November, the Nixon administration indirectly asked the Chinese ambassador in France, Huang Zhen, to raise the stalled negotiations with Pham Van Dong, who had arrived that day in China for a week-long stay.¹¹⁶

During Pham Van Dong’s visit to Beijing, PRC and DRV officials hoped to coordinate their positions before Nixon’s visit, but each side had its own agenda. China tried to allay Vietnamese reservations about the Sino-American rapprochement, whereas North Vietnam wanted to protest against improved relations between the PRC and the United States and restore unity behind Hanoi’s positions.¹¹⁷ Zhou’s welcome speech on 21 November pledged complete “revolutionary friendship and militant unity,” and Pham Van Dong replied in a similar vein.¹¹⁸ However, Pham Van Dong’s praise for Soviet contributions to liberation wars and his overtly friendly gestures to Soviet diplo-

112. “Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, ‘UN and Indochina,’” n.d., in NARA, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Security Council Files, Box 1034, Polo II—HAK China Trip October 1971 Transcript of Meetings, pp. 10–17, 23–26.

113. “Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon,” November 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 527–544.

114. “Memorandum of Conversation,” n.d., in DNSA, KT00384, pp. 1–3.

115. “Memorandum of Conversation,” n.d., in DNSA, KT00394, pp. 1–7.

116. “Letter from the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the Military Attaché at the Embassy in France (Walters), Washington,” 19 November 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/hof/frus/nixon/e13/72513.htm>.

117. “First Estimate of the Visit of the Vietnamese Party and Government Delegation to China,” 30 November 1971, in PAAA-MFAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor China, Microfiche C 584/77, 7, pp. 8–9.

118. “Premier Chou En-Lai’s Speech,” in Xinhua, *Daily*, 21 November 1971, pp. 26–28; and “Premier Pham Van Dong’s Speech,” in Xinhua, *Daily*, 22 November 1971, pp. 30–36.

mats in China were a diplomatic slap in the face for the CCP.¹¹⁹ The following day, Pham Van Dong and Mao could not find any common ground.¹²⁰ The North Vietnamese leader demanded in vain that the Chinese rescind Nixon's invitation, whereas Mao urged Pham Van Dong to be realistic about Nguyen Van Thieu's removal: "Where the broom cannot reach, the dust is not swept away."¹²¹ Pham Van Dong admitted that "we still do not have the formidable strength to force the enemy into collapse."¹²² For the Chinese side, North Vietnam's inability to overthrow Nguyen Van Thieu was the primary reason to adopt the gradualist strategy of negotiating a U.S. military withdrawal before addressing the political issues.¹²³ For the Vietnamese side, this was the ultimate motive to get more support. Throughout the fall, the DRV had in fact continued planning its Easter Offensive, stockpiling weapons, and training units for mobile warfare.¹²⁴ At least on the surface, the DRV and the PRC demonstrated unity at the end of the visit with the publication of the 25 November communiqué that endorsed Hanoi's positions, but this did not slow down the DRV war planning.¹²⁵ On 29 November, four days after Pham Van Dong's visit to Beijing, Le Duan issued orders to the southern guerrillas to prepare for a large-scale offensive in 1972.¹²⁶

Officials in Washington sensed that Hanoi was pursuing a hard line on Nguyen Van Thieu as a cover for military preparations. On the 18th, Kissinger told Dobrynin that "we were reaching the end of our patience."¹²⁷ Two weeks later, Nixon sent a letter to Brezhnev warning that Soviet-American relations would deteriorate if the DRV launched an attack.¹²⁸ The Moscow summit was at risk. Against this background, the CPSU CC met in late November to discuss international relations. Brezhnev's speech on the evening of the 22nd called for a dual strategy of strengthening the DRV with military

119. "First Estimate of the Visit of the Vietnamese Party and Government Delegation to China," 30 November 1971, p. 9; and "Information on the Visit of the Vietnamese Party-Government Delegation in Beijing," 5 December 1971, L. 309.

120. "Chairman Mao Meets D.R.V.N. Party and Government Delegation Led by Premier Pham Van Dong," in *Xinhua*, 23–24 November 1971, p. 34–35.

121. SRV, *Truth*, p. 50; and Li, "ZhongMei huanhe," 72.

122. Wang, *Zhonghua*, p. 50.

123. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger*, p. 210; and SRV, *Truth*, p. 49.

124. Military History Institute, *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 284–286.

125. "First Estimate of the Visit of the Vietnamese Party and Government Delegation to China," 30 November 1971, p. 10.

126. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," p. 218.

127. "224. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.)," 18 November 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, pp. 520–521.

128. "226. Note from President Nixon to the Soviet Leadership," 3 December 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 528.

and political aid while pursuing détente with Nixon.¹²⁹ However, this position did not go unchallenged. The following day, the Ukrainian party leader and CPSU Politburo member Petro Shelest demanded a class-based foreign policy and struggle against imperialism.¹³⁰ This served as a reminder to Brezhnev that détente was not uncontested within the ranks, even though his proposals carried the day.¹³¹ The Soviet Union wanted the summit in May 1972—largely because it did not want to endanger agreements on Germany and nuclear arms limitation, as Brezhnev’s speech to the plenum reveals.

In the fall of 1971, Chinese leaders continued publicly supporting the maximalist strategy of North Vietnam while secretly advising Hanoi to follow a less extravagant course. The PRC did not believe that the DRV was militarily capable of toppling Nguyen Van Thieu and thereby ending the war on its own terms. North Vietnam, in turn, showed its disappointment with Beijing’s views and continued to pursue a maximalist strategy. The United States hoped—unrealistically—that the PRC would pressure the DRV to unlock the Paris talks. U.S. officials also warned Moscow that the planned summit was at risk if Soviet leaders aided Hanoi’s military plans. The Soviet Politburo remained divided on the matter.

Nixon in Beijing, January-March 1972

With the talks in Paris deadlocked and Chinese and Soviet diplomacy unresponsive, Nixon approved a short bombing campaign against North Vietnam on 26 December 1971—just before Kissinger’s deputy, Alexander Haig, left for Beijing to prepare the details of Nixon’s own visit. Three days later, the PRC publicly promised “unflinching” support to Vietnam and decided to make the bombing a topic during Haig’s visit.¹³² After Haig arrived on 3 January, he was suddenly called to an unannounced meeting with Zhou at midnight. The American explained the U.S. escalation: “Despite these proposals of October 11th, we have seen a step-up of attacks [by Hanoi] . . .—a humiliation that no great power can accept.” He then tried to play on China’s security needs: “The continuation of the war in Southeast Asia can only give Moscow an opportunity to increase its influence in Hanoi and to further the encirclement of the People’s Republic of China.” Zhou replied “very frankly,

129. “CPSU Plenum, 22–23 November 1971,” in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 255, Ll. 24a–25.

130. *Ibid.*, Ll. 29a–30.

131. “Resolution of the CC Plenum,” 23 November 1971,” in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 255, Ll. 43a–44.

132. Li, “ZhongMei huanhe,” 73; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 29.

that our opinions differ from yours.” He disputed the necessity to bomb North Vietnam, which, in fact, had given “the Soviet Union . . . an opportunity to increase its influence.”¹³³ Haig’s attempt to play on China’s fears also backfired when Mao heard Zhou’s briefing: “Encirclement of China! They want to come to rescue us, this is outrageous! . . . China neither asks a favor from the United States nor for that reason abandons the duties assumed to the Indochinese people.”¹³⁴ On the evening of 6 January, Haig was again summoned to Zhou, who bluntly told him that the bombing of the DRV “brought an unfavorable element to the [Nixon] visit. . . . He took strong expressions of concerns for PRC’s viability and independence” and that Beijing “need[ed] no help from us.”¹³⁵

In early 1972, the Americans realized that they had failed to convince the Chinese into pressuring the Vietnamese. On 22 January, the DRV and PRC signed another military agreement for an undisclosed amount.¹³⁶ Chinese supplies of weapons increased in 1972 again over the preceding year. Supplies of artillery pieces grew by 17 percent, rifles by 32 percent, tanks by 175 percent (to 220 units), and vehicles by 118 percent (to 8,758 units).¹³⁷ No wonder that the United States decided to change track by bullying Moscow. On the 21st, Kissinger warned Dobrynin that “the Soviet Union might think it could embarrass us in Peking by encouraging North Vietnamese attacks now, but it paid a heavy price in our goodwill.” The Soviet ambassador, in line with the CC plenum decision of late November, replied that the “last thing the Soviet Union wanted was a confrontation with the United States in the months before the Moscow summit.”¹³⁸

On 25 January 1972, Nixon made a “generous and far-reaching” offer on American television to end the war.¹³⁹ The offer followed his announcement on 13 January that he would cut U.S. ground forces in half to around 70,000 men by 1 May.¹⁴⁰ The speech on the 25th was what the DRV had been dread-

133. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 3 January 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 640, 646.

134. Shen and Li, “ZhongMei hejie,” 105.

135. “Message From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)” and is dated 8 January 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 650.

136. Guo Ming, *ZhongYue guanxi yanbian sishinian* [The Evolution of Sino-Vietnamese Revolutions over the Last Forty Years] (Nanning, China: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 271.

137. Zhai, *China*, 136.

138. “250. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” 21 January 1971, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 559.

139. “Address to the Nation,” 25 January 1972, in DNSA, VW00907, pp. 181–185.

140. “Nixon Will Bring 70,000 G.I.’s Home in Next 3 Months,” *The New York Times*, 14 January 1972, p. 1.

ing for three months. Nixon cited Hanoi's failure to respond to the previously undisclosed 11 October offer. He even divulged the secret Paris negotiations, the secret U.S. proposal of 31 May, and the DRV's secret 8-point proposal of 26 June. The president used the momentum by proposing a U.S. withdrawal six months after an agreement, an exchange of POWs, and a presidential election in South Vietnam supervised internationally and run by Vietnamese representatives from all political movements.¹⁴¹

On 31 January the DRV delegation, saying that it would "not permit 'the U.S. to mislead public opinion,'" published the text of its 26 June proposal.¹⁴² Apart from getting even in the propaganda war, Hanoi was uneasy about the possibility that Nguyen Van Thieu would win a free election. According to U.S. intelligence, the DRV delegation told French Communists in Paris that Nguyen Van Thieu was the only man able to keep the RVN together: "Nixon must be persuaded, as was Kennedy (with respect to Diem), of the necessity to drop [Nguyen Van] Thieu."¹⁴³ On 5 February, the DRV rejected Nixon's proposal.¹⁴⁴

Nixon's offer of 25 January met a similar fate with the Chinese, who called it "an ultimatum."¹⁴⁵ The following day, Zhou told U.S. journalists in Beijing: "If the American Government continues to back President Nixon's eight points [the 25 January offer] . . . then it will not be possible to end the war. . . . [However], your President is coming [to Beijing]. Who knows if he may change his views."¹⁴⁶ Kissinger was still optimistic about Chinese mediation and asked PRC officials on 5 February to organize a meeting between him and Le Duc Tho, who was rumored to visit Beijing during Nixon's visit.¹⁴⁷ But the Chinese chose to stay out of U.S.-DRV negotiations.¹⁴⁸ It finally dawned on Washington that Beijing would not mediate. Although Nixon wrote in his preparatory notes "1. Taiwan—most *crucial*. 2. V.Nam—most *urgent*," he also jotted down some words he wanted to convey to Zhou: "We had hoped you would help—but now it doesn't matter."¹⁴⁹

141. "Address to the Nation," 25 January 1972, in DNSA, VW00907, pp. 181–185.

142. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 215.

143. "Cable," 7 February 1972, in DNSA, VW00922, pp. 1–2.

144. "North Vietnamese Reject Nixon Proposal Officially," *The New York Times*, 6 February 1972, p. 3.

145. "Memorandum from the Defense Attaché in France (Walters) to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)," 30 January 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 655.

146. "Thoughts Of Chou," *The New York Times*, 6 February 1972, p. E2.

147. "Memorandum from the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the Defense Attaché in France (Walters)," 5 February 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 657. No evidence that the Chinese reacted to this inquiry has been found.

148. Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 184–185.

149. "Nixon's Notes, February 15 and 18, 1972," in Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 200.

Even though the PRC refused to help, Moscow suddenly did. Following Kissinger's warning to Dobrynin on 21 January about Soviet encouragement of North Vietnamese military escalation, the ambassador alerted Gromyko that the United States might look to China to resolve the Vietnam crisis, thereby excluding the Soviet Union from the diplomatic game in Southeast Asia. Although Dobrynin reassuringly added that "it will be difficult to reach a Vietnam settlement without the USSR," he advised Gromyko to discuss "Vietnam's future military and political plans" with Hanoi.¹⁵⁰ Soviet leaders obviously sensed the danger of losing diplomatic stature in Indochina. After a long meeting on 7 February with Kissinger on unrelated topics, Dobrynin suddenly and, seemingly, casually presented a letter from Brezhnev to Nixon. In it, Brezhnev expressed understanding for the negative North Vietnamese reaction to Nixon's latest proposal but nevertheless offered "to facilitate overcoming the difficulties" in the Paris negotiations.¹⁵¹ Orally, Dobrynin relayed some of Hanoi's concerns, among them obvious pretexts for stonewalling before the Easter Offensive, such as the claim that the DRV did not understand Nixon's proposals. Kissinger replied that he was willing to continue to talk privately to Le Duc Tho or Xuan Thuy in Paris and even was willing "to come to Moscow secretly." Dobrynin promised to relay this to his superiors.¹⁵² Leaders in Moscow must have felt they were back in the diplomatic game.

Although Nixon was not optimistic about Chinese support during his visit to the PRC on 21–28 February, he raised the topic during his first meeting with Zhou. Accusing the Soviet Union of "want[ing] the U.S. tied down" in Indochina, he promised to "get out of Vietnam . . . through the policy of Vietnamization." Fearing a rhetorical entanglement, Zhou immediately replied: "We can only remain in a position of supporting them [the North Vietnamese] and not speaking on their behalf." When Nixon insisted that "we cannot remove the government of the South Vietnamese," Zhou responded that the RVN was an artificial U.S. creation not worth saving. Thus, there was no question, he said, to "continue our aid" but to stay out "unless, of course, you attack us." Nixon one last time tried indirectly to suggest that his host should mediate: "I don't ask the Prime Minister to do anything about it, and certainly not to do anything about it publicly." Zhou did not reply.¹⁵³ Three

150. "254. Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry," 26 January 1972, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 571.

151. "258. Letter from General Secretary Brezhnev to Nixon," 5 February 1972, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 582.

152. "259. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.)," 7 February 1972, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, pp. 583–584.

153. "Memorandum of Conversation," 22 February 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 713–719.

days later, the president once more expressed his “hope . . . that he [Zhou] would at least not do what the Soviets appear to be doing, that he would not encourage the North Vietnamese to refuse to negotiate.”¹⁵⁴

Although China was not giving an inch on Vietnam, the DRV was highly dissatisfied. At the customary Chinese New Year party in the PRC embassy on 21 February, not a single Vietnamese guest showed up.¹⁵⁵ The DRV resented “the trump card Peking is giving Mr. Nixon merely by playing host to him . . . [and thereby] making a bigger contribution to Mr. Nixon’s re-election campaign than the Republican party itself.” Hanoi did not fear a “Chinese sell-out” after having barred Beijing from negotiating on its behalf. In the end, as Hoang Tung, a North Vietnamese CC member and editor-in-chief of the party newspaper *Nhan Dan* (The People), told a U.S. reporter, “Nixon believes there are fairies in the moon. He hopes to win by talking to Peking what he has failed to win by fighting on the battlefield. He’s gone to the wrong place.”¹⁵⁶

After Nixon’s visit to Beijing, Zhou traveled to Hanoi on 3 March.¹⁵⁷ The Chinese prime minister informed Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, and Le Duc Tho that he had told Nixon that the PRC would continue to support the DRV and that the solution to the Indochina conflict had to be based on the PRG’s 7-point proposal of 1 July.¹⁵⁸ However, he urged his hosts to seek a negotiated solution instead of a decisive military battle and relayed “Nixon’s threat that the Vietnamese would not do well after his re-election, if they would not negotiate on the basis of the American 7-point [31 May] proposal.”¹⁵⁹ In public, Beijing continued to promise “all-out support” for Hanoi.¹⁶⁰

The DRV leaders expressed dissatisfaction with Nixon’s visit to China, accusing the PRC of “throwing a life buoy to Nixon, who just had been drowning.”¹⁶¹ Le Duan warned his guest: “Now that Nixon has talked with you, they will soon hit us even harder.”¹⁶² Reminding the Chinese comrades

154. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 24 February 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 772–779.

155. Yun, *Chushi*, p. 138.

156. “A Different Salute for the President: View from Hanoi,” *The New York Times*, 20 February 1972, p. E1.

157. Yun, *Chushi*, 137; and ZELNP 3, p. 515.

158. Wang, *Zhonghua*, p. 55.

159. “Dear Comrade Minister,” 4 April 1972, in PAAA-MfAA, VS-Hauptstelle, G-A 342, p. 109.

160. “China Denounces U.S. Air Attacks,” *The New York Times*, 10 March 1972, p. 7.

161. “Dear Comrade Minister,” 4 April 1972, p. 108; and Guo, *ZhongYue*, p. 103.

162. Li, “Vietnam,” p. 198.

of the agreement not to negotiate with the U.S. imperialists behind Hanoi's back, the North Vietnamese leaders also hinted at past Chinese slips: "You have already admitted your 1954 mistake, so you should not commit another one."¹⁶³ Washington's warning of dire consequences, conveyed by Beijing, reinforced Hanoi's conviction to put the military struggle ahead of peaceful negotiations.¹⁶⁴ As Hoang Tung had bluntly said even before Nixon's arrival in the PRC: "While Nixon gets his 21 gun salute in Peking, we'll be giving him a different kind of salute in South Vietnam. There will be more than 21 guns. And they won't be firing blanks."¹⁶⁵

An East German party delegation on a visit to the DRV in early March reported that North Vietnamese leaders acknowledged that Nixon's visit had caused many lower-level party members to worry about a decline of China's military aid and transshipments of Soviet aid. The report also provided a rare glimpse into everyday life: "The internal situation in the DRV is under tension. The life of the people has not improved in the past years. The military struggle has exhausted the country, despite [foreign] support. In the national average, the working population consists 75 percent of women and 25 percent of men. Productivity is very low. Parts of the population physically are not able to work for more than 4–5 hours per day."¹⁶⁶ The report suggested that the DRV might not have the resources for more than one last military effort which it had been planning for a year.

In view of Nixon's visit to Beijing, the United States made a final effort to convince the PRC to restrain North Vietnam, citing Chinese security needs vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Beijing neither fell for it nor halted further military commitments to the DRV. Subsequently, Washington tried to shame Hanoi in the global area by revealing the secret talks and the U.S. proposal of 31 May, but this ploy merely stiffened North Vietnamese resolve. However, the Sino-American rapprochement spurred the Soviet Union to fear a loss of influence. Moscow therefore offered what Beijing had refused to do: mediation in the Paris talks. Although Zhou made no concessions on Vietnam during Nixon's visit to Beijing, the Chinese prime minister privately cautioned the North Vietnamese comrades against a military solution. Officials in Hanoi dismissed this overture in an undiplomatic and rude tone. The response revealed lingering fears of the impact of the Sino-American rapprochement on North Vietnam's ability to carry through its maximalist strategy.

163. Zhai, *China*, p. 200.

164. "Dear Comrade Minister," 4 April 1972, p. 110.

165. "A Different Salute for the President," p. E1.

166. "Information for the Secretariat of the SED CC," 21 March 1972, in SAPMO, DY 30/IV B 2/20/28, n.p.

The Easter Offensive, March–June 1972

A VWP CC plenum in mid-March 1972 discussed the “patriotic fight and economic tasks for 1972.”¹⁶⁷ Recalling “the great victories . . . in early spring of 1968,” the plenum forecast a successful repetition of the political fallout of the Tet Offensive that would lead U.S. concessions to long-standing North Vietnamese demands in Paris.¹⁶⁸ The final attack plan consisted of a major assault on the northern provinces of the RVN (Quang Tri and Thua Thien) and deep penetrations from Laos and Cambodia into the Central Highlands (toward Hue) and into Cochin China (Mekong Delta), respectively.¹⁶⁹ Yet, the final VWP Politburo meetings also addressed the possibility of an incomplete military success, which might endanger success “on the negotiation front.” The Politburo hoped that such a development, if it did occur, would at least bolster the chances of a diplomatic solution.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, continued U.S. troop withdrawals since 1971 caused Hanoi to be optimistic.¹⁷¹ On 30 March, five well-armed divisions totaling 120,000 men attacked.¹⁷² The North Vietnamese had timed the offensive so that “Nixon will not dare to send back ground units to South Vietnam before the presidential election.”¹⁷³

The assault displeased Soviet leaders, who believed that its launch before Nixon’s visit to Moscow was an “expression of disrespect” and an “attempt” to make the summit “fail,” especially “because there had been no such activities before his visit to Beijing.”¹⁷⁴ According to U.S. intelligence, Le Duc Tho told the French Communists in May 1972 that Soviet officials not only had been informed in 1971 but had also promised military aid, and that the Chinese had favored the idea, too.¹⁷⁵ But what did Beijing and Moscow *really* know about the Easter Offensive, and how significant was their military aid? Chinese military aid in 1971 and early 1972 was somewhat larger than in 1967, the year before the Tet Offensive.¹⁷⁶ Soviet military assistance grew only little

167. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 218.

168. “V.N.V.P. Central Committee Holds 22nd Plenum,” in *Xinhua, Daily*, 13 April 1972, pp. 1–2.

169. Military History Institute, *Victory in Vietnam*, 289–290; and Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, pp. 61–79, 132–152, 235–280.

170. Veith, “The Politburo and the Paris Peace Accords,” p. 6.

171. Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” p. 237.

172. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 39; and Zhai, *China*, pp. 202–203.

173. “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 22 June 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 22–23.

174. “Information by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” n.d., in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, L. 12.

175. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, p. 24.

176. Zhai, *China*, p. 136.

in the early 1970s to a level five times smaller than in 1967.¹⁷⁷ These trends reflected Hanoi's expectation that it faced a smaller number of U.S. troops and their less qualified, though more numerous, ARVN allies. Once the Easter Offensive started to falter, this lower level of military support allowed the VWP leaders to gloss over their own miscalculations by berating Moscow and Beijing for providing aid only for defensive purposes.¹⁷⁸

The documentary record makes clear that the Soviet Union knew about the DRV's plans for an Easter Offensive but probably did not know the timing and scale. Most likely the same is true of the PRC, though no concrete evidence has surfaced. As early as May 1971, Soviet officials had been aware of Hanoi's plans for a Tet-style offensive intended to break Nixon's political back, but the North Vietnamese did not indicate the size of the planned offensive.¹⁷⁹ Also, the amount of aid delivered to Hanoi suggests that neither Beijing nor Moscow expected a military crisis that was longer and larger than the offensive in early 1968. However, Soviet leaders probably understood the political risks of supporting the offensive. In late 1971 and early 1972, U.S. officials had repeatedly warned that such a crisis would damage U.S.-Soviet relations.¹⁸⁰ Disappointment with China and the Soviet Union over Nixon's visits to Beijing and Moscow must have led the DRV to conceal the PAVN's preparations for its Easter Offensive. A Soviet military mission did not detect any signs just a few days before the operation started.¹⁸¹ Still, the Soviet and Chinese supplies of tanks, artillery, and vehicles to North Vietnam were what made the Easter Offensive possible in the first place.¹⁸² In the end, as developments in April and May suggest, Moscow and Beijing were less surprised by the event itself than by its extent and eventual escalation.

Not until 6 April, after a week had passed, did Nixon order a retaliatory bombing campaign.¹⁸³ On 11 April, the United States indicated its willingness to convene a plenary meeting in Paris on the 20th and a private meeting later.¹⁸⁴ In mid-April, after PAVN troops had taken the small district city of Loc Ninh in Cochin China at the Cambodian border, the DRV believed it

177. Zolotarev, ed., *Rossiya (SSSR)*, p. 94.

178. Nguyen, "Between the Storms," pp. 260, 273.

179. "Report by Aleksandr Aleksandrov," n.d., in AMVR, Op. 21p, a.e. 33, Ll. 103–104.

180. "224. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.)," pp. 520–521; "226. Note from President Nixon to the Soviet Leadership," p. 528; and "250. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," p. 559.

181. Morris, "Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle," p. 19.

182. Zhai, *China*, 136; and Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, p. 24.

183. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho—Kissinger*, p. 219.

184. Mentioned: "Talking Points," n.d., in DNSA, VW00931, pp. 1–10.

was reaching a position of strength on the battlefield.¹⁸⁵ On 17 April the Hanoi authorities ordered Xuan Thuy, their envoy in Paris, to use the impending plenary meeting as “a propaganda forum.”¹⁸⁶ After an unpleasant meeting on 20 April, Nixon and Kissinger agreed that if the proposed private meeting on 2 May did not materialize, the bombing would intensify.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, on 26 April, Nixon announced a further withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. ground troops.¹⁸⁸ On 2 May, just before the first private meeting, the PAVN took the most northern RVN province, Quang Tri.¹⁸⁹

During the first month of the Easter Offensive, the PRC followed its standard line of publicly supporting the DRV.¹⁹⁰ Replying to a U.S. message that rejected accusations of “sabotaging the talks in Paris,” UN Ambassador Huang Hua read Kissinger an admonition from Zhou calling on the “U.S. . . . [to] examine its own attitude.”¹⁹¹ Right after the Chinese prime minister sent that cable on 12 April, he received the DRV chargé d’affaires, Nguyen Tien, to promise unity and more aid.¹⁹²

The Nixon administration had more luck with the Soviet Union. In an “agitated” meeting with Dobrynin on 3 April, Kissinger accused the Soviet Union of having armed the DRV with the necessary weaponry, but also acknowledged that “Moscow did not perform any planning and encourage Hanoi.”¹⁹³ Dobrynin reported to Moscow that Kissinger requested “some restraining influence on Hanoi” but was not willing to endanger the summit.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, U.S. officials delayed preparations for Nixon’s visit as a means of

185. Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, p. 302.

186. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 220.

187. “Cable,” 24 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00952, pp. 1–3.

188. “Vietnam Report,” 26 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00357, pp. 1–10.

189. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 235–236; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 44.

190. Xu, *Zhonghua*, pp. 814, 815; “112. Message from the Government of the People’s Republic of China to the Government of the United States,” in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72566.htm> (available only in electronic form); “Chou Condemns U.S. Escalation,” *The New York Times*, 17 April 1972, p. 10; “Chou, in Interview, Gives Backing to Vietnam Reds,” *The New York Times*, 20 April 1972, p. 20; and “China Pledges Assistance to Anti-U.S. Forces in War,” *The New York Times*, 25 April 1972, p. 20.

191. “Message from the Government of the United States to the Government of the People’s Republic of China,” n.d., in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 874; and “Memorandum of Conversation,” 12 April 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 880.

192. Shen and Li, “ZhongMei hejie,” 107–108; and “Zhou Enlai and Nguyen Tien, Beijing, 9:50 pm, 12 April 1972,” in Westad et al., eds., “77 Conversations,” pp. 181–182. The exact quantities of Chinese aid are unknown.

193. “279. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” 3 April 1972, in Geyer and Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, pp. 639–640.

194. “281. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” 6 April 1972, in Geyer and Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 643.

pressure.¹⁹⁵ On the 10th, Dobrynin advised Gromyko to organize a “direct meeting between U.S. and DRV leaders on Soviet soil” to give the Soviet Union “a head start” in the diplomatic game.¹⁹⁶ While Dobrynin tried to flex diplomatic muscles, he complained two days later to Kissinger that “[you] have put yourself into the position where a miserable little country can jeopardize everything that has been striven for” between the U.S. and the USSR.¹⁹⁷ Eventually, the two men agreed on a secret Kissinger visit to Moscow to discuss Vietnam. The Nixon administration even offered a secret meeting with a representative from Hanoi in Moscow.¹⁹⁸

Moscow tried to nudge Hanoi to a less belligerent position in order to smooth the summit preparations after Dobrynin warned Gromyko that Vietnam had become “the main issue for Nixon.”¹⁹⁹ Ambassador Shcherbakov informed the North Vietnamese that the United States hoped for the restart of the Paris talks, but he also warned that after the DRV “has mobilized practically all its regular forces” the failure of its war plans might lead to “a large-scale [U.S.] operation on the DRV territory itself.” But the North Vietnamese leaders rejected the offer of a secret meeting in Moscow.²⁰⁰ Brezhnev later told Kissinger that Hanoi even demanded the cancellation of Nixon’s visit.²⁰¹

During the first meeting in Moscow, on 21 April, Kissinger told Brezhnev that the United States wanted “an honorable withdrawal” from Vietnam, a “time interval between our withdrawal and the political process,” and the return of POWs.²⁰² The following day, Kissinger proposed the restoration of the status quo ante of 29 March and serious negotiations to end the war during private talks in Paris on 2 May. Brezhnev lauded the Americans’ willingness to negotiate but refused to commit the USSR to any concrete action.²⁰³ In an informal personal conversation, however, the Soviet leader “said he would do anything to de-escalate the fighting but he could not ask North

195. “Talking Points,” 1 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00931, pp. 1–10.

196. “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” 10 April 1972, in Geyer and Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 655.

197. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 12 April 1972, in DNSA, KT00465, pp. 1–2.

198. Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents, 1962–1986* (New York: Times Books, 1997), p. 244; and Attached Telecon: “Memorandum of Conversation,” 12 April 1972, in DNSA, KT00465.

199. “301. Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” 19 April 1972, in Geyer and Selva, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, p. 675.

200. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 222–224.

201. “Memorandum,” 24 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00953, pp. 1–3.

202. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 21 April 1972, in DNSA, KT00471, pp. 1–37.

203. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 22 April 1972, in DNSA, KT00472, pp. 1–35.

Vietnam to withdraw its troops.”²⁰⁴ In another meeting in the late afternoon, Brezhnev told Kissinger about the problems with the summit and the limits of Soviet influence in the DRV: “You still have time to generate this favorable background. We are doing what we can.”²⁰⁵ After Kissinger’s final meeting with Brezhnev, on 24 April, Gromyko informally told Nixon’s envoy that Moscow was willing to transmit Washington’s “proposal [of 21 April] to Hanoi with the attitude of bringing about a rapid solution of the war.” Kissinger turned up the heat by saying that “the private [2 May Paris] meeting had to bring rapid and concrete results; if it failed the President would escalate.”²⁰⁶ After Kissinger cabled Nixon about the talks, the president warned: “We have used the summit ruthlessly as a means of pressure. . . . If we turn the screw too far and they decide all is lost they will jump us. Brezhnev is no softie.”²⁰⁷

According to Brezhnev’s later CC report, Konstantin Katushev, the Soviet foreign trade minister who headed the Soviet mission to Hanoi on 25–29 April, tried to encourage the North Vietnamese to adopt “more dynamic tactics.”²⁰⁸ He not only transmitted Kissinger’s proposal but also communicated the warning about escalation. Pham Van Dong bluntly replied that the DRV would continue with military operations in order to enhance its negotiating position in Paris.²⁰⁹ In a 1 May letter, Brezhnev urged Nixon to show “restraint in Vietnam,” or else Soviet-American relations might suffer.²¹⁰

Kissinger’s meeting with Le Duc Tho on 2 May, the day that Quang Tri fell, was an exchange of accusations and counteraccusations, often peppered with high doses of sarcasm. Kissinger warned that the United States would not hold negotiations “at the point of the gun,” and Le Duc Tho noted that Nixon’s “term is soon going to come to an end.”²¹¹ The meeting adjourned without result, as Nixon wrote Brezhnev.²¹² The DRV believed that the Easter Offensive would continue to achieve “victories,” but feared that the “U.S. is endeavoring to use the Soviet Union and China to limit our success on the battlefield.”²¹³ Nixon, however, decided on 4 May to escalate the conflict. He

204. “Cable,” 22 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00945, pp. 1–6.

205. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 22 April 1972, in DNSA, KT00473, pp. 1–7.

206. “Memorandum,” 24 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00953, pp. 1–3.

207. “Cable,” 24 April 1972, in DNSA, VW00952, pp. 1–3.

208. “CPSU Plenum, 19 May 1972,” in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 272, L. 16.

209. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 224–226.

210. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 245; and Gaiduk, *Soviet*, pp. 237–238.

211. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 2 May 1972, in DNSA, KT00478, pp. 1–28.

212. “321. Letter from President Nixon to General Secretary Brezhnev,” 3 May 1971, in Geyer and Selwege, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, pp. 793–795; and Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 245.

213. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 233.

was willing to risk the Moscow summit, which “isn’t worth a damn . . . if the price for it is losing Vietnam.”²¹⁴ On the 8th, the president publicly announced the bombing and mining of all harbors in North Vietnam to cut the flow of material aid to the DRV “until it frees all POWs and halts war.” Dobrynin, who was briefed right before the announcement, called any “interference with Soviet ships . . . an act of war.”²¹⁵

That very day, Zhou received letters from Moscow and Washington. The first, from Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin, reacted to Nixon’s announcement and requested the unloading of Soviet supplies in Chinese ports and the onward transport on Chinese railroads.²¹⁶ This letter preceded a request by Xuan Thuy to Zhou to settle Sino-Soviet conflicts and coordinate military supplies.²¹⁷ The second letter, from Nixon, explained the decision to bomb supply lines. He reminded Zhou of Soviet designs on Indochina and called the Easter Offensive a “massive assault . . . designed to embarrass the United States.”²¹⁸

On 9 May the DRV asked for mine-clearing assistance from both the Soviet Union and the PRC. Moscow evidently did not reply, but Zhou immediately ordered the dispatch of a mine-clearing team, which eventually encompassed 8,000 men and stayed, because of repeated U.S. mining campaigns, for a year.²¹⁹ According to an East German intelligence document, one of the Chinese mine-clearing ships was sunk during an American bombing attack in 1972.²²⁰ In meetings with Xuan Thuy on 13–16 May, Zhou also agreed to a hidden maritime shipping route, increased weapons deliveries, and rush

214. Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 220. Nixon’s comment is recorded in Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 45–46.

215. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 8 May 1972, in DNSA, KT00481, pp. 1–2; and Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 246–247.

216. Shen Zhihua, “ZhongSu zai yuanYue kangMei wenti shang de maodun yu chongtu (1965–1972),” Part III, n. 21, available on-line at http://www.shenzhihua.net/ynzz/000033_3.htm; and “CPSU Plenum, 19 May 1972,” in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 272, L. 33.

217. Shen, “ZhongSu,” Part III, n. 21.

218. “Letter from President Nixon to the Premier of the People’s Republic of China Chou En-lai,” 8 May 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 897–899.

219. “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 22 June 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 17–31; Qu Aiguo et al., *YuanYue kangMei* [Assisting Vietnam, Resisting America] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 296–299, 302; Deng Lifeng, “YuanYue KangMei shulüe” [A Summary of the Aid-Vietnam-Resist-America War], *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu*, No. 1 (2002), p. 90; Zhai, *China*, p. 136; Shi Yingfu, *Mimi chubing yare conglin* [Sending Troops Secretly to the Subtropical Jungles] (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1990), pp. 299–315; and Wang Xian’gen, *YuanYue kangMei shilu* [A Factual Account of Assisting Vietnam and Resisting America] (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubanshe, 1990), p. 256.

220. “[No title],” 23 December 1972, Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Federal Commissioner for the Documents of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic, Berlin; hereinafter referred to as BStU), 107/84, Bd. 4 “Gerhard Unger,” Blatt 172–173.

transports.²²¹ But Zhou rejected Kosygin's request, for fear that it would provoke the United States to bomb Chinese railroad lines.²²² As a substitute, negotiations in late May with the DRV ambassador to the PRC, Ngo Thuyen, resulted in a doubling of Chinese military aid.²²³ Simultaneously, Zhou promised to rush, free of charge, Soviet and East European aid through the PRC by rail, but apparently still made no commitments regarding the transshipment of Soviet goods from Chinese harbors to North Vietnam.²²⁴

After Kosygin had sent his letter to the PRC on 8 May, Soviet leaders spent several days discussing the Moscow summit. The hardliners around Podgorny, Shelest, and Defense Minister Andrei Grechko wanted to "bloody the nose" of the Americans because otherwise the Soviet Union would lose credibility.²²⁵ The party's chief ideologue, Mikhail Suslov, remained undecided, and the pragmatists Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Gromyko feared that a cancellation of the summit would endanger agreements on Germany and nuclear arms limitation. Moreover, they were irritated that the North Vietnamese leaders had not properly informed them about their military plans, despite the long history of massive Soviet aid. Thus, a cancellation would amount to granting Hanoi a veto over Moscow's foreign policy.²²⁶ The CPSU Politburo eventually decided to share political responsibility by calling a CC plenum for 19 May.²²⁷ In the meantime, Brezhnev sent a letter to Nixon on 11 May accusing the United States of violating international maritime law and endangering Soviet ships.²²⁸ Nixon immediately ordered measures to avoid such incidents and a reduction of bombing during the summit.²²⁹ In turn, Soviet leaders tried to arrange a private meeting between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger in Paris, but the DRV did not react.²³⁰

The CPSU CC plenum on 19 May was the decisive showdown between

221. Shen and Li, "ZhongMei hejie," 108; Deng, "Yuan Yue," p. 90; and Wang, *Yuan Yue*, p. 256. The exact quantities of Chinese aid are unknown.

222. Shen, "ZhongSu," Part III, n. 21.

223. Li, "Vietnam," pp. 199–200. The exact quantities of Chinese aid are unknown.

224. Shen, "ZhongSu," Part III, n. 22.

225. A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva* [From Kollontai to Gorbachev] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), p. 223; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 253; and Georgii Arbatov, *The System* (New York: Times Books, 1993), p. 183.

226. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 253.

227. Arbatov, *System*, p. 184; and Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 253.

228. "335. Letter from General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon," 11 May 1972, in Geyer and Selvage, eds., *Soviet-American Relations*, pp. 809–810.

229. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 247–248.

230. "Memorandum of Conversation," 15 May 1972, in DNSA, KT00486, pp. 1–3; and "Memorandum of Conversation," 17 May 1972, in DNSA, KT00488, pp. 2–3.

the anti-American hardliners and the pragmatists in pursuit of détente.²³¹ After Brezhnev had reviewed the Vietnam problem and made the case for the summit, Grechko demanded a “struggle against imperialism.”²³² Eventually, Kosygin, Gromyko, Suslov, and the State Security (KGB) Chairman Yuri Andropov supported Brezhnev, as common sense trumped ideology.²³³ Subsequently, on 21 May, the pragmatists ousted Shelest from his position as Ukrainian Communist Party boss.²³⁴ Brezhnev was finally ready to receive Nixon the following day for a week-long visit.

On the second day of talks, 24 May, Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgornyi bluntly told Nixon that détente and the bombing in Vietnam were “incompatible.” The president, in turn, asked for help to end the war.²³⁵ During two meetings on 27 and 28 May, Kissinger accused the DRV of refusing to negotiate, but Gromyko blamed the United States for insisting on a guarantee that the RVN would not become Communist. Kissinger retorted that the only condition for withdrawal was that there was no guarantee for this to happen. Eventually, Gromyko offered to send a high-ranking mission to Hanoi.²³⁶ In the final meeting on 29 May, Brezhnev demanded—and got from Nixon—two concessions: Nguyen Van Thieu’s resignation two months (instead of only one) before presidential elections in South Vietnam, and a bombing moratorium during the visit of the Soviet delegation to Hanoi.²³⁷

Despite the DRV’s negative attitude toward Nixon’s visit, leaders in Hanoi understood that the Indochina conflict was too “remote” for the Soviet Union, which faced problems “closer to home, such as those of China, the Middle East, and Europe.”²³⁸ Hanoi’s stance also could not conceal the fact that the Easter Offensive had failed.²³⁹ The PAVN casualty rate was immense, and the RVN was not even close to collapse.²⁴⁰ With the DRV suffering under

231. Arbatov, *System*, pp. 185–186.

232. “CPSU Plenum, 19 May 1971,” in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 272, Ll. 9–16.

233. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, p. 223; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 253; and Arbatov, *System*, p. 186.

234. “Kremlin Demotes Shelest, Hard-Liner towards West,” *The New York Times*, 22 May 1972, p. 1; and “Shelest Is Removed as Ukraine’s Leader,” *The New York Times*, 26 May 1972, p. 5.

235. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 24 May 1972, in DNSA, KT00497, pp. 1–19.

236. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 27 May 1972, in DNSA, VW00972, pp. 1–16; and “Memorandum of Conversation,” 28 May 1972, in DNSA, VW00973, pp. 1–21.

237. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 29 May 1972, in DNSA, KT00510, pp. 1–5.

238. “Nixon Visit Won’t Solve War, Mrs. Binh Says,” *The New York Times*, 23 May 1972, p. 14; “Hanoi Denounces Trip as One of Nixon Tricks,” *The New York Times*, 24 May 1972, p. 14; Morris, “Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle,” p. 19; and Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 236.

239. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, p. 234.

240. Zhai, *China*, p. 204.

crippling U.S. air strikes, the VWP Politburo decided on 1 June to mobilize the last reserves.²⁴¹ Hanoi still believed that it could hold out “until the decisive moment” at “the end of September” when “Nixon has not too much time left.” But later that month, the DRV downgraded the aim of the ongoing military campaign “to get[ting] rid of the dictatorship in the South.” In the first half of June, Le Duan and other VWP Politburo members secretly visited South Vietnam to assess the crumbling situation at the front.²⁴²

North Vietnamese leaders treated Podgornyĭ’s visit on 15–18 June as a Soviet publicity stunt.²⁴³ They were particularly frustrated, as they claimed later to the East Germans, that the Soviet Union was not providing additional heavy weaponry while the Easter Offensive was continuing.²⁴⁴ Soviet officials apparently did not know why several VWP Politburo members were absent from Hanoi and therefore blamed Hanoi’s “extremely difficult” attitude for the delay of the mission.²⁴⁵ North Vietnam reproached the Soviet Union for permitting Nixon to visit Moscow, for not employing “more concrete means, including military force, to force Nixon to retreat,” and for not offering to send de-mining equipment. The North Vietnamese “bluntly” demanded from Moscow: “They [the Americans] will mine, you will de-mine, until the blockade is over.”²⁴⁶ When Podgornyĭ transmitted Nixon’s promise that Nguyen Van Thieu would resign two months before any elections, his hosts promised to study the proposal but indicated that they would decide only after the Chinese had briefed them on Kissinger’s impending visit to Beijing.²⁴⁷

While Podgornyĭ was in Hanoi, Le Duc Tho arrived in Beijing to request the transshipment of Soviet, Cuban, and East European goods from Chinese harbors via railroad to North Vietnam, to which Zhou finally agreed.²⁴⁸ Le Duc Tho left the Chinese capital on the 18th—a day before Kissinger arrived.²⁴⁹ In between, Podgornyĭ stopped over and informed Zhou about the

241. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 53.

242. “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 22 June 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 21, 25.

243. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 237.

244. “Information on Some Developing Tendencies in Vietnam,” September 8, 1972, in BStU, MfS HVA 387, 136–139.

245. According to what Dobrynin told Kissinger later. See “Memorandum of Conversation,” 26 June 1972, in DNSA, KT00521, p. 2.

246. “Information by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” n.d., in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 13–14. See also “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 22 June 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, L. 29.

247. According to what Dobrynin told Kissinger later. See “Memorandum of Conversation,” 26 June 1972, pp. 2–3.

248. On the date, see Li, “Sino-Soviet Dispute,” 306–307. On railroad transport, see “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 22 June 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, L. 27.

249. “Comrade Le Duc Tho Returns to Hanoi,” in Xinhua, *Daily*, 20 June 1972, p. 11.

possibility of a ceasefire and simultaneous bombing pause.²⁵⁰ Although the meeting did not lead to any joint cooperation, it was the first Sino-Soviet encounter at the highest level since 1969, a sign of diminishing tension between the quarreling powers.²⁵¹

Even before Kissinger's 5-day visit, Zhou had hinted that a solution in Indochina might be found only with the election of the Democratic presidential candidate, George McGovern.²⁵² In the first meeting, Zhou reminded his guest that "when we discuss Vietnam we should discuss it from the aspect that we are not looking for excuses to extend the war and are not looking to inflict a military defeat on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."²⁵³ After listening to Kissinger's briefing on Nixon's visit to Moscow the following day, Zhou turned to Vietnam by twice raising the specter of a Democratic victory in November. Kissinger, however, did not go for the bait, and the talks were suspended with Zhou's promise to confer with Mao.²⁵⁴ Kissinger reported to Nixon that "Chou made no statements" and that it seemed "he wished to ponder the U.S. position before offering his own."²⁵⁵ On the 21st, though, Zhou told Kissinger that no matter how the Americans phrased it, the United States had to withdraw from an unjust war, drop "the government [in South Vietnam] that was set up by yourself," and respect the self-determination of the Vietnamese people. The prime minister also demanded an end to air strikes against supply lines "because you are bombing us." Finally, he came to the heart of the matter. Because the United States was not willing to commit itself to future non-intervention after its withdrawal, "the Vietnamese envisage a settlement that includes both the military aspect and the political aspect at once."²⁵⁶ In the final meeting on 22 June, Zhou told Kissinger to accept the simultaneous military and political resolution of the Vietnam conflict by accepting the Vietnamese demand for a coalition government in the RVN with-

250. "Memorandum of Conversation," 19 June 1972, in DNSA, VW00977, p. 6.

251. Since the mid-1960s, high-level meetings between Chinese and Soviet officials had rarely occurred. See Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, pp. 302–329.

252. "Advice from Chou on Ending the War in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, 18 June 1972, p. E2.

253. "Memorandum of Conversation," 19 June 1972, in DNSA, VW00977, pp. 1–7.

254. "Memorandum of Conversation," 20 June 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 912–942.

255. "141. Backchannel Message HAKTO 9 from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Beijing," 20 June 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72597.htm>.

256. "Memorandum of Conversation," 21 June 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 942–971.

out Nguyen Van Thieu. Such a government would not, as the United States had asserted in the past, be immediately controlled by the DRV.²⁵⁷

The available record indicates that Moscow and Beijing knew in advance about the Easter Offensive. Their military deliveries had enabled it, although they probably were not aware of its timing and extent. Soviet leaders were unhappy about the date—seven weeks before the Moscow summit. When the offensive led to massive U.S. escalation in early May, Moscow and Beijing worried about the drawn-out and increasingly violent conflict. In April the PRC had been loyal to the DRV in words and deeds, whereas the Soviet Union, partly out of self-interest, tried to get diplomacy started. After the escalation in May, Beijing took steps to ensure continued military supplies to Hanoi. In the talks with Kissinger in June, Zhou followed a hard line. In comparison, Soviet leaders pondered but rejected the cancellation of the Moscow summit, an outcome that was a major defeat for the hardliners and cleared the path to détente. By June, once the military failure of the Easter Offensive became obvious, Hanoi was forced to reassess its maximalist strategy.

The Crumbling of the North Vietnamese Position, June–August 1972

At a meeting in late June and early July 1972, the VWP Politburo decided to resume negotiations in Paris. A later publication claimed that several factors—battlefield victories, the collapse of morale and discipline in the ARVN, and Nixon's acceptance of Thieu's resignation in the run-up to the U.S. presidential election—convinced Hanoi to change course.²⁵⁸ But none of this squares with reality. DRV victories on the battlefield were smaller than wished for.²⁵⁹ North Vietnamese leaders had concluded—wrongly—from the ARVN's failure during the Lam Son 719 offensive that the South Vietnamese army would also fare badly in defensive warfare. After some initial setbacks, the ARVN not only managed to hold its ground but in late June also moved toward a counterattack.²⁶⁰ Hanoi now had to fear the loss of Quang Tri province—its only great territorial gain. The aerial destruction of its communication infrastructure, energy resources, industry, and supply lines in the

257. "146. Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing" 22–23 June 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72603.htm>.

258. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 240–241.

259. The same publication admits that PAVN occupied only one province (Quang Tri). See *ibid.*, p. 240.

260. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, pp. 61–79, 132–152, 235–280, 320.

DRV was immense. Whatever “could be destroyed . . . is already destroyed,” an East German report noted.²⁶¹ Finally, Nguyen Van Thieu’s government in the RVN was far from collapse, and the White House had offered his resignation long before the U.S. elections—as early as 11 October 1971.²⁶² Hardly any of Hanoi’s ambitious aims for the Easter Offensive were achieved.

Because Chinese leaders had concluded as early as November 1971 that the DRV lacked the military means to topple Nguyen Van Thieu, they subtly tried to expedite Hanoi’s change of policy. Zhou flew to Kunming on 6 July to talk with Pham Van Dong, counseling: “If the military and the political questions cannot be resolved in the Vietnamese-American talks, it is proper to establish a coalition government between the right, the neutrals, and the left in South Vietnam. But first, let the American troops withdraw and exchange POWs.”²⁶³ Zhou’s idea of a three-way coalition government was new, but the North Vietnamese did not accept it until four weeks later.²⁶⁴

Zhou returned to Beijing the following day to meet with Xuan Thuy, who was on the way to Paris, and DRV Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Ly Ban.²⁶⁵ The two guests outlined the new North Vietnamese strategy of negotiating in Paris while continuing military actions. Zhou hinted at his preference for a negotiated settlement.²⁶⁶ On 10 July, Mao outlined his position to French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann: “If I were the Vietnamese, I would not refuse to speak to Thieu.”²⁶⁷ When Le Duc Tho passed through Beijing on his way to Paris the following day, Zhou continued to push.²⁶⁸ Stating that “your tactic of fighting and negotiating that you have been conducting since 1968 is correct,” the Chinese prime minister flattered his guest by admitting that Beijing had adopted an incorrect position in this regard for a long time. But he then suggested that it might be time to negotiate with Nguyen Van Thieu directly. The historical experience had revealed that talking to the “chieftain” of the enemy—Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) in 1945

261. “Report by Vladislav Videnov,” 22 June 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, L. 25; and “Note on the Explanations on the Situation in Vietnam through the Head of the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dien,” 20 July 1972, in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor Vietnam, C 1083/73, pp. 20–23.

262. Zhai, *China*, p. 204; and “Peace Proposal,” 11 October 1971, in DNSA, VW00861, p. 90.

263. ZELNP 3, p. 534; and Wang, *Zhonghua*, p. 56.

264. Shen and Li, “ZhongMei hejie,” 111.

265. “Thuy on Way to Paris,” *The New York Times*, 9 July 1972, p. 4.

266. “Zhou Enlai and Xuan Thuy, Ly Ban, Beijing, 5:40 pm, 7 July 1972,” in Westad et al., eds., “77 Conversations,” p. 182.

267. “FM PEKING 190430Z,” 19 July 1972, in TNAUK, FCO 21/963, p. 2.

268. “Comrade Le Duc Tho Stops Over in Peking on Way to Paris,” in Xinhua, *Daily*, 12 July 1972, p. 12; and “Comrades Le Duc Tho Leaves Peking for Paris,” in Xinhua, *Daily*, 14 July 1972, p. 8.

and Pierre Mendès-France in 1954—could solve problems. Le Duc Tho, however, was not persuaded.²⁶⁹ He was still convinced that Nixon would lose the election to McGovern, who had just promised the unconditional stop of bombing, a withdrawal of U.S. troops within 90 days, and the end of the Nguyen Van Thieu regime.²⁷⁰

Kissinger started the 19 July meeting in Paris by appealing to the North Vietnamese to make concessions as Beijing and Washington had mutually done in their talks. He warned the DRV negotiators not “to turn this [presidential] election into a referendum on Vietnam” because opinion polls showed McGovern trailing. After a historical lecture by Le Duc Tho, Kissinger modified Nixon’s 8 May demand of a DRV withdrawal to the positions before 29 March, offering a cease-fire along the contemporaneous lines of control, a subsequent U.S. withdrawal, the release of all POWs, and general principles on the future political settlement in Indochina. Le Duc Tho still insisted on the simultaneous resolution of military and political issues.²⁷¹ Kissinger informed Nixon that the North Vietnamese negotiators had adopted a “non-contentious tone” and offered “fresh nuances” in their positions.²⁷² Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy cabled Kissinger’s new proposals home, where they were welcomed.²⁷³

Le Duc Tho and Kissinger again met on 1 August. Still convinced that the presidential election mattered, Hanoi had instructed Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy to exploit the impending 21–23 August Republican convention.²⁷⁴ Kissinger warned the DRV delegates: “If our election turns into a national referendum on Vietnam, you will be gambling for high stakes.” After this admonition, the negotiations went well, with mutual concessions on a ceasefire and withdrawal procedures but without any agreement on POWs. Most importantly, Hanoi was willing to let the PRG negotiate with Thieu directly—a position Zhou and Mao had adopted less than a month before.²⁷⁵ During the 14 August meeting, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho again made significant progress toward an accord, but the POW issue remained elusive.²⁷⁶

The situation in Vietnam had in the meantime become dire for Hanoi. East German officials noted that “uncontested American air supremacy” was

269. Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, pp. 234–235.

270. Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” p. 265.

271. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 19 July 1972, in DNSA, KT00527, pp. 1–49.

272. “Information Memorandum,” 20 July 1972, in DNSA, KT00528, pp. 1–8.

273. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 58.

274. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 255.

275. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 1 August 1972, in DNSA, VW00988, pp. 1–65.

276. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 14 August 1972, in DNSA, KT00542, pp. 1–65.

allowing for the destruction of traffic and communication networks in the absence of other bombing targets not yet destroyed. Although supplies to the south apparently were sufficient to hold the front line, the DRV was backing away from holding cities in Quang Tri. Even then, however, officials in Hanoi still nurtured “illusions” about McGovern’s victory.²⁷⁷ Four Bulgarian reports from the second half of August 1972 reveal a mix of North Vietnamese realism and illusion. A spokesman for the DRV Foreign Ministry, Ngo Diem, admitted that “Vietnam undergoes a complicated and hard time” and that the military campaign in the South had not worked.²⁷⁸ Pham Van Dong himself acknowledged that “the situation in Vietnam is very complicated,” but then went on to pretend that the situation in the South was hopeful.²⁷⁹ Hoang Van Tien, however, forecast that negotiations in Paris would be successful because Nixon needed a success for his reelection campaign.²⁸⁰ As for the Paris negotiations, he claimed that as long as the United States insisted on the maintenance of Nguyen Van Thieu’s government, no solution would be feasible.²⁸¹

Despite this bravado, the VWP Politburo was rethinking its strategy by August. Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy had warned “not [to] pin too much hope on McGovern” and to adopt a policy that took “the balance of forces” into account.²⁸² In late August or early September, North Vietnamese leaders decided to try to seek a final settlement before the U.S. election.²⁸³ War weariness at home influenced that decision. An East German report described the Easter Offensive as an initial success that had turned into a war of attrition. Despite a good harvest, energy sources and most industrial enterprises were destroyed. DRV officials admitted in private that the population was “tired of war.” The report concluded that North Vietnam wanted a negotiated solution, although disagreements among its leaders still existed.²⁸⁴

By this point, however, Nixon was in less need of a settlement before the election. The Republican Convention nominated him with almost complete unanimity.²⁸⁵ A mid-August Gallup poll showed Nixon leading McGovern 57

277. “Information Report,” 26 July 1972, in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor Vietnam, C 1083/73, pp. 24–30.

278. “Report by Apostol Kolchev,” 19 August 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 34–36.

279. “Report by Apostol Kolchev,” 28 August 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 55–57. This document, despite having the same title and date, is different from each of the documents cited in notes 282 and 283.

280. “Report by Apostol Kolchev,” 28 August 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 45–48.

281. “Report by Apostol Kolchev,” 28 August 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 50–53.

282. Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 243.

283. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 54.

284. “Some Remarks on the Current Situation,” 20 September 1972, in PAAA-MfAA, Abteilung Ferner Osten-Sektor Vietnam, C 1083/73, pp. 1–10.

285. “Mr. Nixon Renominated,” *The New York Times*, 23 August 1972, p. 40.

to 31 percent.²⁸⁶ The self-confidence of the Nixon administration ten weeks ahead of the election had an obvious influence on planning for Vietnam. Already during the convention, Alexander Haig had sketched a massive bombing campaign—with “Phase I” to begin “on 8 Nov 1972,” the day after the election.²⁸⁷ Kissinger told the U.S. ambassador to the RVN, Ellsworth Bunker, that “if there is no settlement by November 7th we plan to walk out by November 9th.” He was explicit about his intention of foiling any agreement in the Paris talks: “I will take personal charge of confusing who offered what.”²⁸⁸ However, the Nixon administration had only a short window of opportunity to get an agreement before the new Congress would convene in January and move to cut war funding.²⁸⁹

On 10–15 September, Kissinger visited Moscow for talks, implementing what he called the “theater planned through November.”²⁹⁰ After Brezhnev declared that the presidential election should induce Nixon to settle the Vietnam War, Kissinger bluntly replied that “the margin of support for the President is two to one.” He condemned the North Vietnamese for inflexible negotiation positions on Nguyen Van Thieu and stressed that “we cannot accept a proposition whereby we do the political work for the other side.” He indicated that he would meet Le Duc Tho on 15 September in Paris for a final push, but that it was up to the DRV to clinch the deal. When Kissinger requested mediation, Brezhnev replied: “It is not for us to get involved in the negotiations. My impression is that [the North Vietnamese] take into account both your electoral situation and possible post-election developments, and our talks here.”²⁹¹ When Kissinger traveled from Moscow to Paris, he was optimistic that the North Vietnamese were diplomatically isolated. He told a British government representative that “Hanoi could no longer rely on Peking and Moscow as in earlier days.” Yet, he also admitted that “North Vietnam nevertheless remained obdurate as ever” and negotiated from a “wholly unrealistic” position.²⁹²

Kissinger had good reasons to be optimistic. Even the official war history of North Vietnam does not deny that the PAVN had suffered major battlefield reversals. In the end, however, the DRV held on to important peripheral gains in Quang Tri province and to the district town of Loc Ninh in

286. “Two Surveys Show Nixon Getting 30–40% of Democrats’ Votes,” *The New York Times*, 20 August 1972, p. 52.

287. “Operation Plan,” 22 August 1972, in DNSA, VW00110, n.p.

288. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 31 August 1972, in DNSA, KT00549, p. 7.

289. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 73.

290. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 31 August 1972, p. 6.

291. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 13 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00563, p. 12.

292. “Memorandum,” 15 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00565, n.p.

Cochin China.²⁹³ Also, the PAVN had more soldiers on the ground in the RVN than half a year before, which helped to solidify the rule of the PRG.²⁹⁴ Yet, this had come at the huge cost of 100,000 battlefield deaths, compared with only 25,000 for the ARVN.²⁹⁵

By June 1972, the DRV had started to rethink its maximalist strategy. Three months later, it was clear that the Vietnam War would not threaten Nixon's reelection. The Easter Offensive not only had been a military and diplomatic miscalculation, but had turned out to be the last bet North Vietnam could afford. Having achieved only a minimal increase of influence in the RVN, Hanoi decided to return to Paris for talks but did not get any significant concessions from Washington. In early July, Chinese leaders, who had long sensed that the DRV strategy was fatally flawed, started to push the North Vietnamese to find a negotiated compromise through talks with Nguyen Van Thieu. Brezhnev was less active than Zhou throughout the summer but tried once more to play on Nixon's domestic needs with regard to the solution of the Vietnam problem. This effort was in vain. U.S. officials were well aware that the failure of the Easter Offensive had deprived Hanoi of political leverage in Moscow and Beijing.

DRV Concessions, September–October 1972

After Le Duc Tho and Kissinger returned to Paris on 15 September, they made mutual concessions on U.S. withdrawal, POW releases, the three-way coalition government, and Nguyen Van Thieu's resignation prior to elections. Both sides agreed to meet ten days later and reaffirmed their intention to come to an agreement by 15 October 1972.²⁹⁶ Kissinger was happy that "the North Vietnamese displayed extreme eagerness to settle quickly."²⁹⁷ But Hanoi's representatives had been too keen, misunderstanding what actually had been agreed. Kissinger had proposed: "We wish to end before October 15, if sooner all the better." A "few minutes later," he added that "we can discuss all the issues here and other forums will have finished *around the end of November 1972*."²⁹⁸ That Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy were fumbling did not escape

293. Military History Institute, *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 303–310.

294. Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, p. 326.

295. Gaiduk, *Soviet*, p. 233.

296. "Memorandum of Conversation," 15 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00566, pp. 1–51; and Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 272–282, 284–290.

297. "Cable," 15 September 1972, in DNSA, VW01001.

298. Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, 243–244. For the U.S. transcript, see "Memorandum of Conversation," 15 September 1972, pp. 1–51 (emphasis added).

Kissinger: “For the first time in the history of these talks I sensed that they were groping for their next move.”²⁹⁹ Maurice Schumann later told Kissinger that Nguyen Thi Binh and Xuan Thuy, in two separate meetings, gave the impression “they were scared” that the agreement might not materialize until 15 October.³⁰⁰

The eleven hours of talks on 26–27 September did not lead to an agreement on most outstanding issues, although Nixon himself felt the time had come to settle in principle.³⁰¹ With the negotiations seemingly deadlocked, the U.S. government returned to preparations for a bombing campaign following the election.³⁰² On 30 September, Kissinger informed Haig: “For the first time during the war, time is running for us.” He instructed Haig to make sure that “the military” has a “concrete plan . . . and [is] ready to go to deliver a maximum effort in November and December in the event the negotiations will fail.”³⁰³ Concurrently, the DRV reviewed its positions. The North Vietnamese had communicated to Moscow that they “are willing to confirm the status quo [in South Vietnam] but their dilemma is that the Politburo cannot sign something that looks like surrender.”³⁰⁴ Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy warned from Paris on 30 September: “After the U.S. election, it would be difficult to oblige the US to concede more than what we can obtain before the election.” Hanoi eventually decided on 4 October to postpone Nguyen Van Thieu’s toppling to the future.³⁰⁵

The four-day negotiating marathon on 8–11 October resulted in a draft agreement on the termination of the war.³⁰⁶ North Vietnam made a series of concessions on the political future of the RVN by abandoning several of its earlier demands. In turn, the United States committed itself to non-interference in the RVN after the U.S. withdrawal and the implicit acknowledgment of existing DRV military and political influence in South Vietnam.³⁰⁷ Although a major breakthrough had been achieved, numerous problems re-

299. “Memorandum,” 19 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00568, p. 1.

300. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 22 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00570, p. 2.

301. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 26 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00572, pp. 1–51; “Memorandum of Conversation,” 27 September 1972, in DNSA, KT00573, pp. 1–47; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 73.

302. “Memorandum,” 27 September 1972, in DNSA, VW00111, pp. 1–2.

303. “Cable,” 30 September 1972, in DNSA, VW01018, p. 1.

304. As related to Haig by Dobrynin: “Cable,” 20 September 1972, in DNSA, VW01021, p. 1.

305. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 299–306.

306. For documents, see DNSA, KT00580–KT00583; and Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 308–336.

307. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 80–85.

mained, as both sides publicly acknowledged on 13 October.³⁰⁸ According to what Kissinger later told the French ambassador to the United States, the unresolved issues were Nguyen Van Thieu's concurrence with the draft agreement, the inclusion of the RVN government and the PRG government in the signing process, and ongoing land grabs by the PAVN in the RVN.³⁰⁹

By mid-October 1972, the Nixon administration was happy about the settlements it had achieved that year with three of its greatest antagonists: the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the DRV.³¹⁰ However, already by 13 October, when Kissinger's deputy Winston Lord met Xuan Thuy in Paris, the United States required "substantive" amendments—on prisoners in South Vietnam and on the U.S. right to replace ARVN equipment periodically—before it could accept the draft agreement. The DRV objected.³¹¹ On 14 October, Nixon ordered a bombing reduction to show good will, but he was not ready to stop completely, lest the United States lose leverage.³¹² Eventually Hanoi made concessions on the military equipment issue and offered to leave the prisoner question up to negotiations between the PRG and the RVN. Thus, on 20 October, the draft agreement was finalized.³¹³

At that time, Kissinger tried to convince Nguyen Van Thieu, who had been left in limbo about the Paris negotiations, to accede to the agreement.³¹⁴ The lack of success in these talks aroused North Vietnamese concern. On 22 October, Dobrynin conveyed to Haig the DRV's misgivings about U.S. delaying tactics, asserting that the situation was "nearing a breaking point."³¹⁵ Haig, who had demanded the meeting with Dobrynin to inform the Soviet government of Nguyen Van Thieu's refusal, was instructed to appeal to Moscow to "join with us in exercising maximum influence on our respective clients so that the dialogue can continue."³¹⁶

The Nixon administration decided on 22 October to avoid any confrontational measures and restrict bombing further.³¹⁷ Nevertheless, Nixon asked

308. "Both Sides Agree Problems Remain in Vietnam Talks," *The New York Times*, 14 October 1972, p. 1.

309. "Memorandum of Conversation," 1 November 1972, in DNSA, KT00593, pp. 1–4.

310. Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 250.

311. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 336–337.

312. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 87.

313. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 340–342.

314. "Memorandum," 23 October 1972, in DNSA, KT00591, pp. 1–5; and Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, p. 255.

315. "Cable," 22 October 1972, in DNSA, VW01057, p. 2.

316. "Talking Points," 22 October 1972, in DNSA, VW01058, n.p.

317. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 98.

Pham Van Dong the following day to delay the planned private meeting in Paris, given Nguyen Van Thieu's lack of consent and Pham Van Dong's release of details in a recent interview with *Newsweek* that infuriated the president.³¹⁸ The DRV instantly replied with a demand that the United States sign the draft accords by 30 October.³¹⁹ Hoang Van Tien told the Bulgarian ambassador that the United States was artificially creating delays in order to "wreck" the Paris agreements and that this would compel the DRV to prepare for the resumption of war.³²⁰

On 24 October, Kissinger tried to mobilize Chinese influence when he met Huang Hua and expressed puzzlement that Hanoi would rigidly "take the position that we must sign the agreement by October 30." He appealed to Huang for patience because "between now and the elections we cannot have a public confrontation with Saigon." Kissinger then came to the heart of the matter: "What we would like [is] to ask the assistance of the Prime Minister [Zhou] to convince Hanoi that this is not a trick."³²¹ He left a written message for North Vietnamese leaders with Huang, laying out the issues in detail.³²² The following day, Beijing admonished Washington that "so long as the U.S. side is determined to effect a ceasefire and troop withdrawal, it is fully capable of halting Saigon's sabotage attempts."³²³ In a meeting with visiting British Foreign Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home on 30 October, Chinese Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei called Kissinger's policy what it was—a charade: "The U.S. must take the responsibility for delays."³²⁴

At the plenary meeting in Paris on 26 October, the North Vietnamese negotiators accused the United States of stalling an agreement that had been so close, and they demanded the signing of the accord by the end of the month.³²⁵ That same day in Washington, Kissinger publicly denied that the

318. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger*, p. 345; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 98–99.

319. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger*, p. 348; and "163. Memorandum for the Record, New York," 25 October 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72621.htm>.

320. "Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov," 24 October 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, LL 76–78.

321. "Memorandum of Conversation," 24 October 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 1094–1095.

322. "165. Message from the Government of the United States to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, New York," n.d., in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72623.htm> (available only in electronic form).

323. "Message from the Government of the People's Republic of China to the Government of the United States," 25 October 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, p. 1099.

324. "Official Visit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to China and Hong Kong," n.d., in TNAUK, FCO 21/1107, p. 15.

325. "Cable," 26 October 1972, in DNSA, VW01067, pp. 72–73.

United States had ever committed itself to signing by late October and expressed hope that the remaining issues could be settled in one more private meeting.³²⁶ DRV officials retorted that all points raised by Kissinger had already been agreed on.³²⁷

In the wake of this exchange, Moscow and Beijing seemed divided on further actions. In meetings on 25 and 27 October with DRV and PRG representatives, Shcherbakov and Kosygin each endorsed more talks in Paris.³²⁸ Zhou, however, went on record on 30 October in support of Hanoi's demand for signing.³²⁹ A formal message from Beijing to Washington also rejected the statements Kissinger had made on 26 October: "[T]he Vietnamese side has made very significant concessions. . . . It is only natural for the Vietnamese side to express indignation" at American delaying tactics.³³⁰ After Washington allowed the late October deadline to pass, Beijing softened its criticism. Contradicting harsh Chinese media editorials, Zhou on 1 November asserted that the United States "must bear some responsibility, but definitely not all."³³¹ At the same time, the Chinese leaders advised the DRV to "make concessions on the question of [the] withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops and on the question of North Viet Nam renouncing military aid" to its allies in the RVN.³³²

Realizing in the early fall of 1972 that time was running out, the DRV tried to reach a deal on a U.S. withdrawal before Nixon's reelection. Hanoi thereby accepted Beijing's long-standing view that North Vietnam was militarily too weak to force the United States into withdrawal. However, the United States played a cynical game of delay to get more concessions. The exclusion of Saigon from the substantive negotiations additionally complicated a breakthrough in Paris. Washington tried to mobilize Moscow and Beijing to render pressure on Hanoi, but received little help. The lack of unity between the two largest Communist powers prevented them from effectively coordinating their policies. Thus, the Paris negotiations were headed for trouble.

326. "Press Conference," 26 October 1972, in DNSA, VW01066, pp. 487–495.

327. "Hanoi Declares Issues Kissinger Cited Were Settled Earlier: Soviet Backs More Talks," *The New York Times*, 28 October 1972, p. 1.

328. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 348; and "Hanoi Declares Issues Kissinger Cited Were Settled Earlier," pp. 1, 11.

329. "Peking Supports Hanoi in Signing," *The New York Times*, 31 October 1972, 5; and ZELNP 3, pp. 561.

330. "Message from the Government of the People's Republic of China to the Government of the United States," 31 October 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 1102–1103.

331. "Peking Links U.S. with Thieu Stand," *The New York Times*, 2 November 1972, p. 13.

332. SRV, *Truth*, p. 50.

Failed Talks, November–December 1972

With Nixon's landslide election on 7 November, North Vietnamese leaders had to face the collapse of their strategy. Hanoi decided not to make more concessions but to prepare for more war while putting on a show of goodwill for the 20 November meeting.³³³ The chances that the United States would make concessions were small, however. Nguyen Van Thieu still refused to accept the 20 October agreement.³³⁴ In a meeting with Qiao Guanhua and Huang Hua, Kissinger accused the DRV of an unwillingness to compromise, but the Chinese interlocutors reminded him that the great United States should take a magnanimous position toward the "small country" Vietnam.³³⁵

When Le Duc Tho passed through Beijing on 14 November, Chinese media demanded an end to U.S. delaying tactics.³³⁶ The following day, Le Thanh Nghi arrived to discuss military and economic aid for the year 1973.³³⁷ An agreement signed on 26 November also permitted the transshipment of Soviet goods and 400 military personnel—a novelty—to North Vietnam.³³⁸ En route to Paris, Le Duc Tho received political support in Moscow.³³⁹

The meetings on 20–25 November did not produce any results. Le Duc Tho made no concessions, and Kissinger presented 69 demands for minor changes proposed by Saigon. He also read aloud a tough letter from Nixon warning Hanoi of massive military action.³⁴⁰ Each side was quick to assign blame to others. Kissinger complained to Huang Zhen on the last day of negotiations that he was "caught between two groups of Vietnamese fighting each other." Huang charged that Kissinger was negotiating only "in order to

333. "Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov," 20 November 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 99–101; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 109–110.

334. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 111.

335. "166. Memorandum of Conversation, New York" 13 November 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72629.htm> (available only in electronic form)

336. "Press Conference; Le Duc Tho Sees Chou, Li Hsien-nien on Way to Paris," 14 November 1972, in TTU VCA, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 04—Political Settlement, 2301715010, n.p.

337. Guo, *ZhongYue*, p. 271; and "Vietnamese Government Economic Delegation Leaves Peking," in *Xinhua, Daily*, 28 November 1972, p. 9. Exact quantities of Chinese aid are not known.

338. "Agreement on China's Gratuitous Economic and Military Materials Assistance to Viet Nam in 1973 and Protocol on China's Gratuitous Supply of Military Equipment and Materials to Viet Nam in 1973 Signed between Chinese and Vietnamese Governments in Peking," in *Xinhua, Daily*, 26–27 November 1972, pp. 29–30; and Shen, "ZhongSu," Part III, n. 21. Details of the agreement are not known.

339. "Tho Due to Arrive in Paris Today," *The New York Times*, 17 November 1972, p. 11; and "Hanoi Aide Lands in Paris and Asks a Speedy Peace," *The New York Times*, 18 November 1972, p. 3.

340. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 115–122; Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 357–416; and DNSA, KT00599–KT00613, VW01113, VW01117, VW01118.

suit your own unilateral needs” and was refusing to accept that the North Vietnamese “have made all the concessions which they can make.”³⁴¹ Hanoi portrayed itself in similar tones to its East European allies. The DRV was willing to give another try in Paris on 4 December but was equally ready to resume the war.³⁴² Before Kissinger returned to Paris, Nixon told him that “the agreement as it now stands is close to being acceptable,” but he insisted on the release of U.S. POWs from North Vietnamese captivity and the continued incarceration of political prisoners in the south of the country.³⁴³

Given these positions, the negotiations on 4–14 December started under a bad star.³⁴⁴ On the first day, Kissinger left a warning to the DRV with Huang Zhen, who quickly transmitted it to Le Duc Tho.³⁴⁵ Hanoi looked to Moscow for help. On 5 December, Dobrynin approached the White House with a “stiff note” demanding the United States stay within the framework of the 20 October agreement or risk a negative impact on bilateral relations.³⁴⁶ Four days later, Le Thanh Nghi and Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Novikov signed a military and economic aid agreement that had been negotiated for almost two weeks.³⁴⁷ Yet, on 10 December, Le Duc Tho overstepped his instructions, seemingly in a personal effort to avoid war, by making concessions on all open questions except on movement across the demilitarized zone (DMZ).³⁴⁸ Failing to resolve this final stumbling block, the Paris talks collapsed, and Nixon ordered the mining of Haiphong for 17 December and the massive bombing of North Vietnam for the following day.³⁴⁹ In a meeting with Huang Hua, Winston Lord—ingeniously—blamed the North Vietnam-

341. “169. Memorandum of Conversation, Paris” 25 November 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72632.htm>XVII, e-volume.

342. “Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” 27 November 1972, in AMVR, Op. 23p, a.e. 33, Ll. 89–94; “Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” 26 November 1972, in AMVR, Op. 24p, a.e. 39, Ll. 21–25; “Information No. 123/72 for the Members and Candidates of the Politburo,” 1 December 1972, in SAPMO, DY 30/IV B 2/20/28, n.p.; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 121–122; and Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 385–388.

343. “Memorandum,” 1 December 1972, in DNSA, VW01128, p. 1; and Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, p. 127.

344. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 127–142; Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 380–419; and DNSA, KT00624–00642, VW01132–VW 01156.

345. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 394; and SRV, *Truth*, p. 51. No evidence from the U.S. side has surfaced, but the Vietnamese sources seem quite accurately to represent Nixon’s 1 December instructions to Kissinger.

346. “Cable,” 5 December 1972, in DNSA, VW01133, p. 1.

347. On the signing, see the account in *The New York Times*, 10 December 1972, pp. 1, 4. No details are known.

348. Nguyen, “Between the Storms,” pp. 299–300; and Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, p. 359.

349. Gaiduk, *Soviet*, p. 243; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 144–145; and Kimball, *Vietnam War Files*, pp. 272–273.

ese for delaying an agreement.³⁵⁰ Two days later, on the day the bombing started, Kissinger sent a message to the North Vietnamese via the Chinese expressing his willingness to negotiate at any time after Christmas.³⁵¹

North Vietnam tried diplomacy to escape the rain of bombs. On 19 December, it attempted to mobilize its allies when it claimed to the Bulgarians that “during the talks in Paris the American side repeatedly told the Vietnamese that if the American demands were not accepted, they would experience the horrors of war.”³⁵² The PRC media joined their DRV counterparts in blaming the U.S. for the failure of the Paris negotiations.³⁵³ Although both Moscow and Beijing sympathized with Hanoi, they also urged a quick resumption of talks.³⁵⁴ On 26 December, Hanoi agreed to negotiations with Kissinger on 8 January but only under the condition that the bombing end. After the two sides reached agreement, the United States announced the bombing stop for 29 December.³⁵⁵ According to what the North Vietnamese leaders told the Bulgarians, the bombing targeted warehouses and communication links with the PRC, Laos, and South Vietnam and caused many casualties among the civilian population.³⁵⁶ The North Vietnamese took the bombing campaign and the simultaneous message sent by Kissinger through Chinese channels as an ultimatum, but, given the circumstances, they were willing to return to Paris to negotiate.³⁵⁷

On 2 January 1973, the U.S. House of Representatives halted funding for the war.³⁵⁸ Nixon was put on notice that he had to get an agreement. In a meeting with Huang Hua the following day, Kissinger blamed North Vietnamese obstructionism for the bombing campaign.³⁵⁹ On 6 January, he sent

350. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 16 December 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. XVII, pp. 1126–1132.

351. “170. Backchannel Message from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to William Hood, Washington,” 18 December 1972, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-13, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/hof/frus/nixon/e13/72634.htm>.

352. “Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” 19 December 1972, in AMVR, Op. 24p, a.e. 39, Ll. 10–11. Vietnamese sources reveal that Huang Zhen delivered Kissinger’s 4 December warning to the DRV delegation in Paris. See Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 394; and SRV, *Truth*, p. 51.

353. “Peking Pledges Support,” *The New York Times*, 20 December 1972, p. 90; and “China Denounces Move,” *The New York Times*, 21 December 1972, p. 16.

354. Gaiduk, *Soviet*, p. 244; and Zhai, *China*, p. 206.

355. Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, p. 422; and “Cable,” 28 December 1972, in DNSA, VW01179, n.p.

356. “Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” 22 December 1972, in AMVR, Op. 24p, a.e. 39, Ll. 6–8.

357. “Memorandum by Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” 28 December 1972, in AMVR, Op. 24p, a.e. 39, Ll. 2–4.

358. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 155–156.

359. “Memorandum of Conversation,” 3 January 1973, in DNSA, KT00644, pp. 1–7.

Dobrynin excerpts from the 9 December meeting in which Le Duc Tho had confirmed that “there is only one issue left.”³⁶⁰ Both communications were attempts to mobilize Beijing and Moscow against Hanoi even though the DRV had offered far-reaching concessions in December. Probably with the same objective in mind, Le Duc Tho conferred with Chinese and Soviet officials on his way to France.³⁶¹ However, Zhou, alluding to the possibility of Nguyen Van Thieu’s fall, told Le Duc Tho that the DRV should “let the Americans leave” because the “situation will change in six months or a year.”³⁶²

In late 1972, the United States had used hardball tactics on both the DRV and the PRC to get more concessions in Paris. When Hanoi was unwilling to buckle on every issue, Washington once again escalated the war. Both Beijing and Moscow supported the North Vietnamese, who were desperate to escape a new round of war. Faced with a congressional cut in war funding, the White House realized it had little time left to clinch a deal in Paris.

Conclusion

During the negotiations on 8–11 January, Le Duc Tho and Kissinger agreed to what would become the Paris Peace Accords of 27 January. Although both sides made concessions, Hanoi’s were greater than Washington’s. The DRV accepted the RVN as a full signatory, the delay of a political solution to the division of the country, tough military conditions for the ceasefire, the inviolability of the DMZ, the continued presence of U.S. advisers in Saigon, the prolonged incarceration of political prisoners in South Vietnam, and the release of U.S. POWs. The United States conceded mostly on minor and technical issues.³⁶³ Whether this disparity was the result of the December bombing, Chinese and Soviet advice, a realization that getting the Americans out quickly at almost any cost was the best long-term strategy, or some combination thereof is unclear. Although the North Vietnamese tried to portray the U.S. bombing as a failure and American demands in Paris as “absurd,” they stressed their own “good will” and the “firm position” of the other side.³⁶⁴

360. “Cover Memorandum,” 6 January 1973, in DNSA, VW01198, n.p.

361. “U.S. and Hanoi Aides Hold 2d Day of Technical Talks,” *The New York Times*, 4 January 1973, p. 3.

362. “Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho, Beijing, 5:30 pm, 3 January 1973,” in Westad et al., eds., “77 Conversations,” p. 186; and ZELNP 3, p. 571.

363. Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, pp. 157–166; Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger*, pp. 424–443; and DNSA, KT00646–KT00652, VW01201, VW01204, VW01206, VW01208, VW 01224.

364. “Memorandum from Aleksandr Aleksandrov,” 18 January 1973, in AMVR, Op. 24p, a.e. 39, LL. 27–29.

The final two years of the Paris negotiations were a tangled web of missed opportunities. The United States pursued a limited strategy separating the military and political aspects of the Vietnam conflict. The first would guarantee an American withdrawal with honor, the second the continued existence of the RVN for a post-withdrawal "interval." For that purpose, Nixon wanted to exploit the Sino-American rapprochement and Soviet-U.S. détente. Although Kissinger told Le Duc Tho in the summer of 1972 that the withdrawal occurred for strategic reasons, Nixon actually seemed to lose this perspective during much of the period.³⁶⁵ He had made his name in 1967 with the call for integration of China into the world for the larger common good, but once rapprochement was under way he seemed to subsume strategic thinking to tactical maneuvering.³⁶⁶ His failure to develop relations with China beyond his seminal visit is telling in this regard. Nixon's record on relations with the Soviet Union is slightly better. Although he tried to instrumentalize the Moscow summit, he generally was unwilling to risk the accomplishments of détente. More was at stake in the relationship with Moscow than with Beijing.

The PRC was not willing to participate in the U.S. game of linkage. Throughout the early 1970s, Beijing remained a loyal ally to Hanoi in words and deeds. Despite continued North Vietnamese distrust and even arrogance, Chinese leaders provided massive military and economic aid, briefed the North Vietnamese on every step of Sino-American rapprochement, refused to concede anything to the Americans in bilateral negotiations, agreed to a minimum of cooperation with the Soviet Union, and publicly backed whatever strategy North Vietnam pursued even when it diverged from Beijing's preferences. The currently available documentation suggests that several motivations lay behind this strategy: misgivings about past Chinese positions, the initial hope that diplomatic engagement would expedite the U.S. withdrawal, and a desire to preserve China's remaining influence in Indochina at the expense of the USSR. Increased political and material support, in fact, permitted Beijing to urge Hanoi behind closed doors to adopt a gradualist strategy. PRC officials doubted the military capabilities of the DRV and were therefore closer to Washington than to Hanoi in seeking a negotiated end to the conflict.

The Soviet Union had sought a negotiated end to the Vietnam War since 1965. Soviet diplomacy was spurred by the conviction that the conflict was unnecessary, by a desire to keep U.S.-Soviet détente alive, and by a fear of be-

365. "Memorandum of Conversation," 19 July 1972, pp. 13–14.

366. Richard Nixon, "Asia after Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (October 1967), pp. 111–125.

ing excluded from the diplomatic game in Indochina. However, like Beijing, Moscow did nothing to damage Hanoi's prospects on the battlefield. Soviet assistance to the war effort was a socialist duty, but it was also driven by the fear of losing influence in North Vietnam. In the end, the competition for influence between Beijing and Moscow enabled Hanoi to pursue its misguided Easter Offensive.

The DRV tried to implement a maximalist strategy. Convinced that Nixon needed peace in Vietnam to win reelection, North Vietnamese leaders insisted on an agreement that would simultaneously solve military and political issues, including a quick U.S. withdrawal and the dismantling of Nguyen Van Thieu's government. The Sino-American rapprochement seemed to undermine this maximalist strategy. Thus, Hanoi bet all on a military strategy—the Easter Offensive—to undermine the U.S. president's position at home. Ironically, this strategy was partially made possible by increased Chinese and Soviet aid, which in turn was the indirect result of the Sino-American rapprochement and Soviet-American détente. North Vietnam refused Chinese and Soviet advice for a long time and accused its allies of betraying it. Yet, the change in Hanoi's strategy in late 1972 was not the result of Beijing's or Moscow's alleged treason but the consequence of Vietnamese miscalculations. The Easter Offensive was not a second Tet Offensive that broke the political back of the Nixon administration. On the contrary, the Easter Offensive probably broke the military and economic capabilities of North Vietnam to pursue the war. The idea that Nixon needed peace in Vietnam to win reelection proved to be a mirage. Time was not running out for Nixon but for the North Vietnamese leadership. The DRV eventually accepted the separation of the military and political aspects of the conflict—a deal it essentially could have had in the spring of 1971.

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