

Sino-Vietnamese Conflict and the Sino-American Rapproachment

Author(s): John W. Garver

Source: *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 445-464

Published by: The Academy of Political Science

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2150555>

Accessed: 06-08-2018 14:26 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

The Academy of Political Science is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Political Science Quarterly*

Sino-Vietnamese Conflict and the Sino-American Rapprochement

JOHN W. GARVER

The collapse of the Saigon government in April 1975 and the subsequent unification of Vietnam under Hanoi's rule radically redefined the pattern of international relations in Southeast Asia. North Vietnam, exhilarated by its victory over the world's greatest power, began moving to establish the "special relation" between the countries of Indochina that Hanoi had long envisioned. These efforts, however, rapidly brought Hanoi into conflict with Peking, which had consistently sought to maintain the independence of Cambodia and Laos. Hanoi also more openly asserted its claims to the archipelagoes in the South China Sea. Peking had previously believed that Hanoi accepted China's claims to these islands.¹

It is important to understand, however, that the Sino-Vietnamese conflict antedates the upheaval of 1975 and that its emergence was largely a function of the two countries' relations with the two superpowers. The purpose of this article is twofold. It seeks first of all to elucidate some of the more important historical antecedents of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict in the period from the beginnings of the Sino-American rapprochement in late 1970 to the signing of the Vietnam Peace Accords in January 1973. During these years there was increasing divergence between the major foreign-policy objectives of both China and North Vietnam as Peking moved to improve its relations with the United States—a shift in policy that reflected the Chinese leadership's view that the Soviet Union constituted a greater threat to China than did the United States.

¹ "Hsiasha ch'üntao he nansha ch'üntao chengtuan de yulai" (The origin of the confrontation over the Paracel and Spratley Islands), *Jen Min Jih Pao (People's Daily)*, 15 May 1979, p. 5 (hereafter *JMJP*).

JOHN W. GARVER teaches in the department of political science at the University of Nevada-Reno. He has been a consultant on East Asian affairs with BERI, Ltd., in Hyattsville, Maryland.

Hanoi's chief concern, however, lay in mobilizing maximum pressure against the United States.

The depth of the contradiction between Peking's and Hanoi's policies raises significant questions regarding Peking's own understanding of its rapprochement with the United States. During 1979 Hanoi began charging that Peking had reached an agreement with Washington during 1970–1972 which amounted to a “betrayal” of Vietnam. Under this agreement, Hanoi now charges, Peking abandoned its previous support for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam and for Vietnamese unification and instead began pressuring Hanoi to postpone indefinitely the liberation of the South and accept a continuing, residual U.S. presence there.

There are certainly precedents for such “betrayals” in the annals of twentieth-century history. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that Washington did indeed seek Chinese (and Soviet) assistance in achieving an “honorable peace” in Vietnam. The fact that Hanoi now quotes China's leaders to substantiate this charge also gives it a certain credibility.

The question of whether Hanoi was “betrayed” (as defined by Hanoi) by Peking can be used as a convenient starting point around which to organize an investigation of the linkages between Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-American relations at that critical juncture and of the nature of China's role in the 1973 Vietnam peace settlement. This is the second purpose of this article. Although this has been a question of interest for some time, the available evidence made possible only very tentative conclusions. During 1979, however, the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations led both Hanoi and Peking to release much new information in the form of polemics to discredit the policies of the other side. On the Chinese side, there were many revealing articles in *Jen Min Jih Pao* (*People's Daily*).² Peking's propaganda was given a boost by the defection of an ex-member of the Vietnamese Worker's Party (VWP) Politburo, Hoang Van Hoan, in the fall of 1979.³ For its part, Hanoi compiled its charges into several

² The more important Chinese articles are: Li Hsien-nien, “Ichiuch'ich'i nien liuyue shihjih Li Hsien-nien futs'ungli t'ung Fan Wen-t'ung ts'ungli t'anhua peiwanlu” (Memorandum of Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien's discussions with Premier Pham Van Dong on 10 June 1977), *JMJP*, 23 March 1979, p. 1; Huang Mu, “Lishihde chiencheng, ichiuch'iliu nien ch'ingmingchieh Yüehnan saomuchi” (The witness of history, 1976 Ch'ingming grave sweeping ceremony in Vietnam), *JMJP*, 1 April 1979, p. 6, discussing China's wartime support for Hanoi; Commentator, “Yüehnan dangchü pach'üanchui lochi” (The hegemonist logic of the Vietnamese Authorities), *JMJP*, 5 May 1979, p. 1, presenting China's view of how Sino-Vietnamese relations deteriorated; Chang Chia-hsiang and Liu Wo-min, “Huainien Hu Chih-ming chuhsi” (Recollections of Chairman Ho Chi Minh), *JMJP*, 4 September 1979, p. 6, documenting Ho's interactions with Chinese leaders. Vietnam's White Paper prompted a three part Chinese response: “Chishih kungchuang yushih ch'ühsing” (Not only an affidavit, but also evil behavior), *JMJP*, 15 November 1979, p. 1; “Yüehnan kangfa, kangmei touchêng shihchi de Chungyüeh kuanhsi” (Sino-Vietnamese relations during the period of Vietnam's anti-French, anti-American struggles), *JMJP*, 21 November 1979, pp. 1, 4; “Weishenma Yüehnan tungyi hou Chengyüeh kuanhsi ohuale?” (Why did Sino-Vietnamese relations deteriorate after Vietnam's unification?), *JMJP*, 26 November 1979, pp. 1, 4.

³ Hoang Van Hoan's main contribution was, “Yüehchung chanchêng yui de shihshih pujung

long pamphlets and a ninety-page White Paper.⁴ The publication of Henry Kissinger's memoirs in 1979 also provided significant new information regarding the linkages between Sino-American and Sino-Vietnamese relations.⁵ On the basis of this new information a much more conclusive reconstruction of these critical interrelationships is now possible.

CHINA AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Throughout its struggle against the United States and the South Vietnamese regime in Saigon, Hanoi sought maximum support from both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union. During the 1950s and early 1960s, China was Hanoi's most enthusiastic backer. Conversely, as Khrushchev moved toward "peaceful coexistence" with the United States, Soviet support for Hanoi lessened. Thus, by 1963–1964 Hanoi was supporting the Chinese Communists in their polemical dispute with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The change in Soviet leadership in 1964 combined with the massive U.S. intervention of 1964–1965 to produce major changes in both Soviet and North Vietnamese policy. Moscow greatly increased its support for North Vietnam, while Hanoi adopted a strictly neutral line in the Sino-Soviet dispute. For the next ten years Hanoi walked a careful line, trying not to antagonize either Moscow or Peking while working to insure the support of both.⁶

Throughout this period Chinese aid to North Vietnam (or the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, DRV) was vital to the DRV's war effort. Although China extended economic and military aid, provided sanctuaries inside South China, and made available logistic lines running across China from the Soviet Union, China's most important contribution in support of Hanoi was a more amorphous one—its implicit threat to enter the war if U.S. escalation exceeded some unspecified level.⁷ The deployment of large numbers of Chinese troops to the DRV during 1965–1968 underlined Peking's commitment to defend North Viet-

waich'ü," (It is impermissible to distort the facts of Vietnamese-Chinese friendship), *JMJP*, 27 November 1979, pp. 1, 5.

⁴ One of these pamphlets deals with the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in February 1979: *Chinese Aggression, Why and How It Failed* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1979). The other presents a wider overview of Vietnam-China relations: *Chinese Aggression Against Vietnam: The Root of the Problem* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1979). The White Paper was published in October 1979, *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations over the Last Thirty Years* (Hanoi: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1979).

⁵ Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979).

⁶ See Brian Shaw, "China and North Vietnam: Two Revolutionary Paths," *Current Scene*, Part I, 7 November 1971, vol. ix, no. 11; Part II, 7 December 1979, vol. ix, no. 12; and Jay Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976). *Current Scene* was published biweekly in Hong Kong by the United States Information Service to provide a survey and analysis of developments in the People's Republic of China.

⁷ See Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975).

nam and placed serious constraints on the U.S. attack against the North.⁸ Hanoi was well aware of this factor. As its 1979 White Paper pointed out, "With the Korean War, the U.S. imperialists learnt the lesson that they should not wage a war on the Asian continent, especially in the countries adjacent to China, lest a direct military confrontation with China should take place."⁹

While support for Hanoi had long been, and was to remain, a central component of Peking's stridently anti-imperialist foreign policy, by 1968 new complexities in Sino-Vietnamese relations began to emerge. During the years 1968–1971 China's leadership was racked by an intense factional struggle over issues closely tied to foreign policy. The three major factions among the central leadership differed sharply in their views of the international order and about how China should respond to it. Although these factional disputes are very interesting, this analysis will focus only on the Chinese architects of the Sino-American rapprochement, that is, the group led by Chou En-lai (usually dubbed the "Moderates" by Western analysts) which was in control of China's foreign policy by late 1970. Chou's group believed that great changes were taking place in the international order with Soviet socialist imperialism presenting a great and increasing danger to China while U.S. imperialism was rapidly declining and posed little threat to China. Thus, they concluded, China should substantially improve its relations with the United States in order to help check and counter Soviet socialist imperialism and to prevent a possible joint Soviet-U.S. encirclement of China.¹⁰

Concerning their attitude toward the Vietnam War, the Moderates' approach led them to desire an end to the fighting on terms that would not lead to a rapid collapse of U.S. power in other areas of Asia and the world. The Moderates' thinking was elaborated in a series of documents used for political study within the Chinese army just after the signing of the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam in January 1973. The peace accords were a great victory, these documents said, because they defeated Moscow's plan to keep the war going. By continuing the war, the Chinese noted, the Soviets had hoped not only to keep several hundred thousand U.S. troops on China's southern borders, thereby creating hostility between China and the United States and forging another link in Moscow's strategy to encircle China, but also to keep U.S. forces pinned down in Vietnam so that they could not oppose Soviet expansionism in other areas, most notably, Europe and the Middle East. Ending the fighting in Vietnam would reduce tension between China and the United States, the document said, while increasing tension between the United States

⁸ China later revealed that between October 1965 and March 1968 a total of 320,000 Chinese troops served in North Vietnam with the annual maximum reaching 170,000. "Sino-Vietnamese relations during the period of Vietnam's anti-French, anti-American struggles," *JMJP*, 21 November 1979, p. 4.

⁹ *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations*, p. 31.

¹⁰ See Thomas Gottlieb, *Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic Triangle* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1977); and John W. Garver, "China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968–1971" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1979).

and the Soviet Union: "In this way the contradiction between them [the super-powers] will become more acute. This is an excellent development favorable to us and to the people of the world."¹¹

It was their fear of a continued U.S. presence in South Vietnam and of super-power encirclement that led the Moderates to take umbrage at Hanoi's 1968 decision to begin negotiations with the United States. They feared that such negotiations would lead to a North Vietnamese "surrender" and the acceptance of a continued U.S. presence in South Vietnam. Thus Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi, a member of Chou's Moderate group, told North Vietnamese officials in October 1968 that the agreement to negotiate was a mistake because it would leave South Vietnam under the domination of the United States and prevent its liberation.¹² Furthermore, if Hoang Van Hoan is to be believed, Hanoi made this move without consulting Peking:

At that time [in the mid-1960s] Vietnamese-Chinese relations were quite intimate, whenever there was some big problem it would first be discussed, whenever there was an important decision they would first notify the other side. But when U.S. President Johnson expressed willingness on March 31, 1968 to negotiate with Vietnam, the Vietnamese government announced on April 3 that it was prepared anytime to send a representative to negotiate with the U.S., it had not exchanged opinions with China and had not notified China. At that time Chairman Ho was in Peking recovering from an illness. Premier Chou En-lai came to visit Chairman Ho. Chairman Ho also did not know about this. China felt that this abnormal deceiving of China by Le Duan was perhaps some sort of plot.¹³

Peking responded very negatively to Hanoi's decision to negotiate and issued numerous polemics decrying the move although not specifically denouncing Hanoi.¹⁴ The amount of attention that the Chinese media paid to Vietnam generally declined steadily.¹⁵ Chinese aid decreased and, according to Hanoi,

¹¹ Political Department, Kunming Military Region, "Reference Materials Concerning Education on Situation, No. 41, The Historical Current of the People's Revolution in the World is Irresistible," in *Chinese Communist Internal Politics and Foreign Policy* (Taipei: Institute for International Relations, 1974), pp. 120–25. This document was intended for use in the campaign within the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1973 to criticize Lin Biao and rectify style of work. This particular document deals with the Vietnam peace accords and why these accords were a great victory. These documents have all the earmarks of authenticity and their credibility is supported by the fact that Chou En-lai urged these same arguments on Nixon and Kissinger during their February 1972 talks (Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1073).

¹² *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations*, p. 37.

¹³ Hoang Van Hoan, "It is impermissible to distort the facts of Vietnamese-Chinese friendship," p. 5.

¹⁴ For example, "Soviet Revisionists Stop at Nothing to Salvage U.S. Imperialist Aggression against Vietnam," *Peking Review* 12, 22 March 1968, pp. 11–13; "U.S. Imperialist Chieftan Johnson Tries New Fraud—'Partially Stopping Bombing' to Induce 'Peace Talks'," *Peking Review* 15, 12 April 1968, pp. 14–15; "Murderous Intent Revealed Before the Scheme is Fully Unfolded," *JMJP Commentator in Peking Review* 16, 19 April 1968, p. 12.

¹⁵ "Peking Reports Vietnam, 1965–1969," *China News Analysis* 780, 31 October 1969, pp. 1–7. *China News Analysis* is a highly respected independent newsletter covering Chinese affairs and

Peking threatened to cut off aid altogether.¹⁶ Moreover, in the spring of 1968 thousands of Chinese troops stationed in the DRV were withdrawn, and by mid-1970 all had returned to China.¹⁷ Sino-Vietnamese relations warmed again in the aftermath of the U.S. "incursion" into Cambodia in the spring of 1970. Peking supported Hanoi's moves to counter that thrust and aborted its recently opened talks with the United States.

PEKING'S HANDLING OF CONTRADICTIONS

By late 1970 the Moderates were in control of China's foreign policy and were setting their course toward rapprochement with the United States. To carry out such a policy while Hanoi was engaged in a desperate total war against the United States could be highly risky to Sino-Vietnamese relations. Moreover, it might drive Hanoi into closer alignment with the Soviet Union—a development that would be contrary to the very purposes underlying China's opening to the United States. To handle such contradictions, Chinese leaders had to adopt measures strongly supportive of Hanoi's struggle. The VWP leadership had to be convinced that improved Sino-American relations would not be at the DRV's expense and that China's aid would continue, indeed, would increase. Thus, Chinese aid to the DRV, which had declined during 1968 and 1969, increased substantially during 1970 and rose to record levels by 1971–1972.¹⁸ Hanoi later characterized this as an attempt by the Chinese leadership to "cover up their betrayal and to appease the Vietnamese people's indignation."¹⁹

Peking also moved into line behind Hanoi's and the Provisional Revolutionary Government's (PRG) negotiating efforts with the United States. The first tentative shift in Peking's strongly negative attitude toward Hanoi's negotiations had come late in 1968, only to be sharply reversed early in 1969.²⁰ This movement had coincided with Peking's first, abortive opening to Washington. Late in 1970 China's attitude toward the Paris peace talks again began to soften, just as the Moderates again began maneuvering to improve

published in Hong Kong. Among other things, it provides useful summaries and analysis of trends in Chinese propaganda. It also publishes occasional reviews of Vietnamese developments.

¹⁶ Nayan Chanda, "Secrets of Former Friends," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 104, 15 June 1979, p. 39.

¹⁷ "Regional Survey, China, Foreign Relations," *Asian Yearbook, 1969, Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hong Kong, p. 141 and, "Sino-Vietnamese relations during the period of Vietnam's anti-French, anti-American struggles," *JMJP*, 21 November 1979, p. 4.

¹⁸ Leo Tansky, "Chinese Foreign Aid," in *People's Republic of China: An Economic Assessment*, prepared for the U.S., Congress, Joint Economic Committee, 92d Cong., 1st sess., May 1972, p. 378.

¹⁹ *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations*, p. 41.

²⁰ See "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* 37 (January-March 1969): 169. Also, Ishwer C. Ojha, *The Changing Pattern of China's Attitude Towards a Negotiated Settlement in Vietnam, 1964–1971*, Southern Illinois University, Asian Studies Occasional Paper Series, no. 2, (Carbondale, Ill., n.d.).

ties—and begin talks—with the United States. On 13 December 1970 a Chinese government statement endorsed the peace plan proposed by the PRG.²¹ A joint Sino-Vietnamese communique of 10 March 1971 contained a similar endorsement.

Peking also responded to stepped-up U.S. military pressure against Hanoi during late 1970 and early 1971 by expressing its support of the North in stronger terms than had been used since 1964–1965. During November 1970, U.S. planes launched the heaviest bombing raids on the DRV since 1968. Equally significant was the U.S. commando raid against a prisoner of war camp twenty-three miles north of Hanoi. Launched one hour before the massive air strikes began, this raid was the first U.S. ground operation into the DRV. As such it carried an ominous hint.

Peking responded promptly with deterrent support for Hanoi. Two days after the U.S. warplanes struck, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning the U.S. bombing. This statement set the tone for several Chinese warnings which followed over the next four months:

The Chinese people are closely watching the development of the situation in Vietnam and Indochina. The Chinese government reaffirms: the struggle of the peoples of Vietnam and the other Indochinese countries is our struggle. It is the bounden internationalist duty of the Chinese people to give all-out support and assistance to the peoples of Vietnam and the other Indochinese countries in their war against U.S. aggression and for national salvation. The 700 million Chinese people provide a powerful backing for the Vietnamese people. . . . China's vast expanse is their reliable rear area and the Chinese people are determined to stand forever with the fraternal peoples of Vietnam and other Indochinese countries and unite and fight together with them till complete victory.²²

Late in 1970 U.S. and South Vietnamese military leaders began preparing the invasion of the southern panhandle of Laos which would follow early in 1971. While these preparations were going on, Peking issued a number of warnings to the United States, in terms similar to those of the earlier Foreign Ministry statement, that “new adventures” would be dangerous.²³ Once the Laos operation

²¹ “Statement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Government of the People's Republic of China,” *Peking Review* 51, 18 December 1970, p. 3. For the 10 March 1971 statement see, “Joint Communique of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Worker's Party and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam,” *Peking Review* 11, 12 March 1971, p. 18.

²² “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, November 24, 1970,” *Peking Review* 48, 27 November 1970, p. 5.

²³ The Central Committee and government statement of 13 December 1970 cited in note 21, for example, warned that “Any U.S. imperialist military adventure . . . against the Vietnamese people or the other peoples of Indo-China are also provocations against the Chinese people We sternly warn U.S. imperialism: Don't misjudge the situation and miscalculate. The Vietnamese people are resolved to fight to the end, and the Chinese people, on their part, are determined to support them to the end.” See also: “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 25, 1971,” *Peking Review* 5, 29 January 1971, p. 5; “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, February 4, 1971, February 8, 1971,” *Peking*

was launched on 10 February 1971, Peking used very strong language to express its support for Hanoi and to warn the United States of the danger of Chinese intervention. On 10 February a *People's Daily* commentator warned Washington that it was "playing with fire" and that Laos was China's close neighbor.²⁴ On 12 February a government statement called developments in Indochina a "grave menace" to China.²⁵ The United States was "spreading the flames of war to the door of China," according to the statement, and China could not remain indifferent. On 20 February the *People's Daily* commentary "Don't Lose Your Head Nixon" carried the strongest warning of all.²⁶ The invasion of Laos was "highly dangerous" and "poses a grave threat to China" it said. Nixon was going down the same path taken by Truman in Korea, it continued. Laos was not in "North-west Europe or South America," the commentary warned, but was China's close neighbor. In such circumstances the Chinese people "cannot be indifferent" and "will never let you run amuck in Indochina." This was strong language; the threat of Chinese military intervention was obvious. Elsewhere the Chinese press raised the possibility that Washington might employ tactical nuclear weapons in Indochina.²⁷

From 5 to 8 March a Chinese delegation led by Chou En-lai visited Hanoi to demonstrate Peking's support during a very critical stage of the Laos operation. The communique issued at the conclusion of that visit said that the new U.S.

Review 7, 12 February 1971, pp. 5–6. Also *JMJP* Commentator, "Shameless Blackmail," in *Survey of the China Mainland Press (SCMP)*, CMP-SCMP-70-50, December 1970, pp. 27–28, and *JMJP* editorial "Resolutely Support Vietnamese People in Carrying War against U.S. Aggression and for National Salvation to Complete Victory," in the same issue of *SCMP*, pp. 163–64. Jay Taylor argues that Peking advised Hanoi against the massive counterattack that Hanoi launched against the U.S.-South Vietnamese thrust into Laos on the grounds that a serious defeat of the South Vietnamese army might lead the United States either to stop the withdrawal of its troops or to use tactical nuclear weapons (*China and Southeast Asia*, p. 170). Lin Piao did in fact urge Hanoi and the Pathet Lao on 21 December 1970 and 19 January 1971, respectively, to persist in waging a "people's war" to defeat U.S. imperialism ("Comrade Lin Piao's Message to Comrade Vo Nguyen Giap," *Peking Review* 52, 25 December 1970, p. 3; "Comrade Lin Piao Sends Message to Comrade Khamtay Siphandone," *Peking Review* 5, 29 January 1971, p. 3). *SCMP* is a daily survey of Chinese printed media published by the American Consulate General in Hong Kong. In the early 1970s the name was changed to *Survey of the People's Republic of China Press*.

²⁴ "Action Long Premeditated," in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Daily Report, Communist China (FBIS-DR, PRC)*, no. 28, vol. 1, 10 February 1971, p. A3. *FBIS* is a daily translation of significant foreign broadcasts monitored by the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

²⁵ "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China," *Peking Review* 8, 19 February 1971, p. 6.

²⁶ *JMJP* Commentator, "Don't Lose Your Head, Nixon," in *Peking Review* 8, 19 February 1971, p. 6.

²⁷ For example, Ou Ping, "Steel tigers, or paper tigers, or bean curd tigers?" *FBIS-DR, PRC*, no. 16, vol. 1, 25 January 1971, pp. A6 and 7. This article noted that the United States had used all weapons in its arsenal in Southeast Asia except for nuclear weapons and used such euphemisms as "reckless new adventures" to refer to the possible use of atomic bombs. More explicit warnings followed the practice of citing foreign media reports, for example, "Swedish paper on U.S. using nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia," Peking radio, 30 January 1971, in *FBIS-DR, PRC*, no. 21, vol. 1, 1 February 1971, p. A15.

moves were a "menace to the security of the People's Republic of China."²⁸ China thus would "take all necessary measures, not flinching even from the greatest national sacrifices to give all-out support and assistance" to the Indochinese peoples.

By April 1971 the groundwork for Sino-American rapprochement was in place. The Moderates' factional opponents within China had been outmaneuvered and were rapidly losing their power. Moreover, the United States had not resorted to retaliatory military actions in response to the catastrophic defeat of the Laos invasion and was continuing its withdrawal from South Vietnam—and Hanoi had been reassured of China's continuing support for its struggle against the United States. Thus, on 6 April Peking made its first *public* gesture to Washington by inviting the U.S. table tennis team to visit China.

It was during July that the contradictions between China's new orientation and Hanoi's strategies came into sharp focus. On 1 July the PRG issued its Seven Point Peace Plan.²⁹ This plan was to be the centerpiece of what the VWP Politburo intended to be a major peace campaign. Great publicity accompanied the announcement of the Seven Point Peace Plan. Hanoi announced that either Le Duc Tho or Xuan Thuy was ready to meet publicly or privately with Henry Kissinger to discuss the plan. Antiwar movements in the United States were asked to publicize the Seven Point Plan and to demand that the U.S. government accept it. Hanoi clearly hoped to mobilize political pressure on Nixon to accept some version of the peace plan.

China promptly endorsed the PRG's peace plan. On 4 July 1971 the *People's Daily* endorsed the Seven Point Plan in a statement containing Peking's first endorsement of a "peaceful settlement" of the Vietnam conflict since 1965.³⁰ On 15 July, however, Peking and Washington announced the recent trip of Henry Kissinger to Peking and the impending visit of President Nixon to China. The political commotion that followed this announcement is well known. There is no question that the impact of these events worked at cross purposes to Hanoi's political strategy. Nixon was facing reelection in 1972. He had been elected in 1968 promising to bring peace in Vietnam. Were he unable to deliver on this pledge, his election battle would be an uphill one. After 15 July, and more especially after Nixon's February 1972 visit to the PRC, even if Nixon could not campaign on the basis of having ended the war in Vietnam, he could still bank on having made peace with China. Even if Americans did not believe that peace in Vietnam could be achieved by Nixon's trip to Peking, and many believed that it could, at least it seemed that Nixon was breaking with the cold war policies of

²⁸ "Joint Communiqué of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Government of the People's Republic of China, and the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Worker's Party and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," *Peking Review* 11, 12 March 1971, pp. 18–21.

²⁹ "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* 48 (October–December 1971): 815.

³⁰ "A Just Stand, A Reasonable Stand," *Peking Review* 28, 9 July 1971, pp. 15–16.

confrontation and containment in Asia. Washington never responded to the Seven Point Peace Plan.

In his memoirs Henry Kissinger waxes eloquent about the ways in which the dramatic visits by U.S. personnel to China in 1971 undercut Hanoi's political strategy.³¹ Independent of any substantive results, Kissinger says, these visits would "massively demoralize Hanoi" by raising the specter of a Chinese sell-out. Moreover, the visits would reunite the American people and start moving the United States beyond the divisions of the Vietnam era. The hope created by the visits would, Kissinger says, undercut Hanoi's efforts to exhaust the United States psychologically and to undermine public support for the government.

Hanoi was very angry with Peking's disregard of its political strategy at this critical juncture. It might well have meant that Hanoi would face four more years of war. In 1973 a North Vietnamese official speaking to Japanese reporters characterized Peking's invitation to Nixon in 1971 as throwing a life preserver to someone who is about to drown.³² The actions of large nations sometimes sacrifice small nations, the official said. In August 1972, *Nhan Dan* (*The People*), the VWP newspaper, used the same metaphor to characterize a policy of unprincipled reconciliation with imperialism based on "the narrow interests of one's country" and which violated "the common interests of the world revolution."³³ While condemning Peking's moves in such thinly veiled terms, Hanoi censored all actual news of the 15 July announcement. It was not until late in 1971 that the DRV's media finally informed its people of Nixon's impending visit to China.³⁴

It should be noted that while developments following the 15 July announcement did frustrate many of Hanoi's efforts, they did not constitute a "betrayal" as defined by Hanoi. Nevertheless, Hanoi clearly feared that such a betrayal was in the offing. On 19 July *The People* expressed its belief that Nixon was trying to win Chinese, and/or Soviet, assistance in compelling Hanoi to submit to a settlement agreeable to the United States while compromising the VWP's basic objectives. *The People* characterized the "Nixon Doctrine" as

dividing the socialist countries, winning over one section and pitting it against another in order to oppose the national liberation movement and carry out a counter-revolutionary peaceful evolution in socialist countries. Nixon's policy also consists of

³¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 735, 716, 757. In order to exacerbate Hanoi's fears it was decided that President Nixon's 15 July television speech announcing Kissinger's visit to China should *not* be billed as a matter "not related to Vietnam" as adviser Bob Haldeman had suggested in order to minimize any negative reaction (*ibid.*, p. 758).

³² This was among the Chinese grievances enumerated by Li Hsien-nien to the Vietnamese leaders in 1977 and made public in 1979. See Li Hsien-nien, "Memorandum of Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien's discussions with Premier Pham Van Dong on 10 June 1977," p. 5.

³³ "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* 52 (October-December 1972), p. 792.

³⁴ P.J. Honey, "North Vietnam Quarterly Report No. 42, Nixon's Peking Visit and the Vietnam War," *China News Analysis* 855, 17 September 1971, pp. 1-7.

trying to achieve a compromise between the big powers in an attempt to make smaller countries bow to their arrangement.³⁵

That such publicly expressed fears were real was indicated by the issuance of a directive by National Liberation Front (NLF) headquarters to its ranks shortly after the 15 July announcement.³⁶ Fearing demoralizing rumors, the directive said that in the event China reached an agreement with the United States and ended the aid that it had previously given to Vietnam, the aim of the NLF would remain unchanged and the struggle would go on without China's assistance and would succeed just as surely.

Peking tried to persuade Hanoi that it had not made a deal with the United States regarding Vietnam. Shortly after Kissinger's July 1971 visit, Chou En-lai sent a message to Hanoi explaining the contents of the recent talks.³⁷ This was followed by a Chinese delegation to Hanoi to explain further what was discussed during the talks with Kissinger. North Vietnam's leaders made their fears clear to this Chinese delegation. When informed that the Chinese government planned to discuss the Vietnam question with President Nixon during his upcoming visit, the Vietnamese objected most strongly: China had no right to negotiate for Vietnam or to discuss questions regarding Vietnam with the United States. Peking also found a number of occasions during the latter part of 1971 to issue statements supporting Hanoi and condemning U.S. military actions.³⁸ China's efforts to reassure Hanoi seem to have been successful since Hanoi's veiled criticisms in the press of Nixon's forthcoming trip ceased in early September 1971.³⁹

Moscow moved rapidly to exploit the new differences between Hanoi and Peking. Shortly after the 15 July announcement, it was disclosed that Soviet President Podgorny would visit Hanoi.⁴⁰ Podgorny arrived in Hanoi on 3 October 1971 with a large, high-level delegation. The Soviets were given a lavish

³⁵ Ibid., p. 2. For other DRV press commentary, see: "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* 48 (October-December 1971): 816; and Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia*, p. 175.

³⁶ P.J. Honey, "North Vietnam Quarterly Report No. 42," p. 4. The document was issued by the NLF Central Office for South Vietnam and was obtained by South Vietnamese intelligence.

³⁷ Hoang Van Hoan, "It is impermissible to distort the facts of Vietnamese-Chinese friendship," p. 5.

³⁸ For example: "Greeting the 26th Anniversary of the Founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," *Peking Review* 37, 10 September 1971, pp. 2-6; "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, September 24, 1971," *Peking Review* 40, 30 September 1971, p. 4; "Chairman Mao Meets D.R.V.N. Party and Government Delegation Led by Premier Pham Van Dong," *Peking Review* 48, 26 November 1971, p. 34; "Joint Communiqué of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Worker's Party and Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam," *Peking Review* 49, 3 December 1971, pp. 8-13.

³⁹ P.J. Honey, "North Vietnam Quarterly Report No. 43, President Podgorny's Visit," *China News Analysis* 865, 17 December 1971, pp. 1-7.

⁴⁰ Kenneth P. Landon, "The Impact of the Sino-American Détente on the Indochina Conflict," in *Sino-American Détente and Its Policy Implications*, ed. Gene Hsiao (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 211.

welcome by Hanoi and during the visit new, large economic and military aid agreements were signed. Shortly after Podgorny's departure, a high-level Soviet military mission arrived in Hanoi to stay until March 1972. Much of this Soviet activity was in preparation for the large-scale assault by North Vietnam's army across the 17th parallel in March 1972.

Peking, like Moscow, supported Hanoi's 1972 spring offensive—and its struggle in the aftermath of the United States's reaction to that thrust. As noted earlier, during 1971–1972 Chinese aid to the DRV reached peak levels. This assistance included 100 P-72 tanks.⁴¹ During 1972 the number of Soviet trains allowed to cross China to the DRV increased.⁴² Soviet and East European ships were allowed to off-load at ports in South China and their cargos moved overland through China to the DRV. A four-inch pipeline (sufficient to meet North Vietnam's petroleum needs) was built from South China to Hanoi. In the wake of the closure of the DRV's ports by the U.S. mining operations, this support was critical to Hanoi.

In spite of this Chinese support and assistance, it seems very likely that one reason the Nixon administration felt it could undertake the series of drastic military measures it did during 1972 was that its new relation with Peking lessened the likelihood that those long forbidden moves would provoke a strong Chinese response. By its very nature Sino-American rapprochement lessened the deterrent value of the DRV's ties to China.

It is possible that Peking intended its continued support for Hanoi and the PRG during 1970–1972 as a warning to Washington that U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, or at least continued progress in that direction, was the sine qua non of improved Sino-American relations. Peking may have been signaling Washington that it could not hope to maintain a presence in Vietnam through Chinese assistance and reminding it of the radical reversal of Chinese policy that followed the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970.

China's public statements were in line with such a hypothesis. Speaking in Peking on 19 July 1971, Chou En-lai said that the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Indochina would necessarily take precedence over efforts to improve Sino-U.S. relations.⁴³ On 9 August Chou told James Reston of the *New York Times* that the questions of Vietnam and Indochina had to be solved first in order for Sino-American relations to advance. Peking's private communications to Hanoi also took this line. During a visit to Hanoi in 1972 Chou assured Vietnamese leaders that the Chinese had told Nixon during his visit that in order to bring about the normalization of relations between the United States and China and to

⁴¹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Arms Trade Registers: The Arms Trade with the Third World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975), p. 28.

⁴² "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* 52 (October–December 1972): 790–91.

⁴³ Congressional Quarterly, *China and United States Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1973), p. 21.

moderate the situation in the Far East, "first of all the questions of Vietnam and Indochina must be solved."⁴⁴ The Taiwan question would be solved afterwards.

The hypothesis that China's actions in 1972 constituted a warning to the United States is only partially satisfactory; it does not square with the contents of the secret correspondence then being passed between Peking and Washington. In its secret, top-level correspondence with Washington, Peking indicated a willingness to go ahead with its opening to the United States while minimizing the importance of the Vietnam question. According to Henry Kissinger, on 8 December 1970 and 11 January 1971 Nixon received messages from Chou En-lai via Pakistan and Rumania respectively.⁴⁵ Neither note made any reference to Indochina and both stated that an emissary of the president would be welcome in Peking. Taiwan was specified as the "one outstanding issue" to be discussed between the two sides. These messages signaled to the United States, according to Kissinger, that Sino-American relations could improve in spite of the continuing war in Vietnam.

Chou's conflicting signals probably served several purposes. The public statements and private messages to Hanoi reassured the VWP leadership that China's opening to the United States would not be at their expense. Hanoi was, presumably, unaware of the content of the notes then being passed between Chou and Nixon conveying a somewhat different message (that is, that Taiwan, not Indochina, was the critical obstacle to better Sino-American relations). The public statements were probably designed not only to reassure Hanoi and to continue pressure on Washington to withdraw from Vietnam, but also as a solid "fallback position" should it become necessary, once again, to abort the move toward Washington whether because of factional opposition within China or because of some unacceptable U.S. re-escalation of the war in Indochina.

THE QUESTION OF A CHINESE BETRAYAL

Hanoi charges that Peking went much further than merely working at cross purposes to DRV political strategies during 1970–1973. Rather, it says, Peking truly "betrayed" North Vietnam. In exchange for pressuring Hanoi to give up its plans for liberating South Vietnam, Hanoi claims, China was to get American concessions on the Taiwan question, on PRC membership in the United Nations, and on U.S. containment policy in Asia. After the signing of the Shanghai Communique, Hanoi says, Peking tried to pressure DRV leaders into accepting the maintenance of the Thieu regime in Saigon "in exchange for American withdrawal from Taiwan."⁴⁶

It is easy to speculate on why Peking might have decided in favor of a con-

⁴⁴ Hoang Van Hoan, "It is impermissible to distort the facts of Vietnamese-Chinese friendship," p. 5.

⁴⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 703–4.

⁴⁶ *Chinese Aggression against Vietnam*, p. 33.

tinued division of Vietnam and the maintenance of a residual U.S. military presence in South Vietnam. During 1968 (and again in 1972) Hanoi ignored Chinese advice and followed policies that entailed greater reliance on Soviet material and political support. Coming as this did in the context of Moscow's stepped-up efforts to encircle China (especially following the 1969 border clashes), Hanoi's closer ties to the Soviet Union must have been very disturbing to Peking. Moreover, Peking's Moderate leadership hoped to use U.S. power to block Soviet moves in Asia and the Pacific. Given these developments, Peking might have concluded that a continued division of Vietnam and a U.S. presence in the South might be a desirable option. Given the chastisement of America in Vietnam and the emerging outlines of Washington's future Asian policy, such a U.S. presence would not constitute a threat to China. On the other hand, it would teach Hanoi a lesson by demonstrating the impotence of Moscow and the costs of ignoring China's wishes on questions of its vital interests, for example, the relations between China's neighbors and Moscow. Furthermore, if Hanoi continued to be an intractable and unreliable friend of China, it might be best not to have a united Vietnam. An American presence in South Vietnam could help manage a North Vietnam determined to follow Moscow's lead. It could also help prevent or resist a North Vietnamese attempt to control Laos and Cambodia. If, at some future time, Hanoi repented and turned to China for help, Peking might then be able to offer its good offices to intercede with the Americans on behalf of Hanoi. An arrangement might then be worked out, under Chinese auspices, providing for a U.S. exit from South Vietnam and national unification. The neutrality of such a united Vietnam might be guaranteed by international agreement.

This hypothesis is not substantiated by the evidence. Kissinger's memoirs make clear that the United States did indeed seek Chinese (and Soviet) assistance in persuading Hanoi to compromise—and also that Peking rejected such suggestions. During his discussion with Chou En-lai in July 1971, Kissinger intended to “seek some moderating influence on Indochina” and devoted a good deal of time to an explanation of the United States's policy toward Indochina.⁴⁷ When parting, Chou wished Kissinger well in the negotiations with Hanoi, but left him with the impression that Peking “could or would not do much to help us directly.”⁴⁸ In October 1971 when Washington proposed the inclusion of David Bruce (the head of the U.S. negotiating team in Paris) in a U.S. delegation that was to visit China, Peking refused for “understandable reasons.”⁴⁹ In January 1972 Alexander Haig discussed the Indochina situation with Chou. Again Chou reiterated China's support for Hanoi and urged a rapid settlement in order to reduce Soviet influence in Indochina.⁵⁰ Late in January 1972 the United States sent the Chinese a detailed report of Hanoi's rebuffs of the United States's

⁴⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 735, 749.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 757.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 769.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1051.

negotiating efforts. Chou replied with an “acerbic note” accusing the United States of trying to enmesh China in the Vietnam issue.⁵¹ During his discussions with Nixon and Kissinger in February 1972, Chou affirmed China’s sympathy and support for Hanoi and urged the United States to end the war quickly and withdraw its military forces from Vietnam. Chou also indicated, however, that China would not take sides in the continuing negotiations between Hanoi and the United States and implied that China would not intervene militarily in the conflict in Indochina.⁵² Finally, Kissinger had a long discussion of Vietnam with Deputy Foreign Minister Ch’iao Kuan-hua in February 1972 during which Ch’iao once again avowed China’s moral and material support for Hanoi while dissociating China from North Vietnam’s specific negotiating position.⁵³ This record makes clear Peking’s refusal to play the role Washington hoped to assign it.

Peking did, however, offer its good offices to mediate between the United States and North Vietnam. According to Hanoi’s White Paper, on 18 July 1971 Peking passed on to Hanoi a U.S. peace plan involving a withdrawal of U.S. troops and the release of U.S. prisoners of war within twelve months of a cease-fire.⁵⁴ In December 1972 Peking again passed on to Hanoi a U.S. message, this time a warning that unless the DRV made compromises on the peace agreement, the United States would be forced to take “necessary measures.”

Moreover, Hanoi did compromise—and more important for our purposes, Peking did urge such compromises. In April 1972 the United States dropped its longtime demand for a mutual withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam.⁵⁵ The United States now proposed, in essence, a cease-fire and a withdrawal of U.S. troops to be followed by measures to achieve a political settlement within South Vietnam. Hanoi rejected this approach and continued to demand the removal of Nguyen Van Thieu and the establishment of a coalition government in the South *prior* to a U.S. withdrawal. It was not until late in 1972 that Hanoi dropped this demand and accepted a version of the United States “two track” formula providing for separately implemented military and political settlements.

This critical North Vietnamese concession was made under intense U.S. military pressure and in the face of the possibility of four more years of war if an agreement was not reached before the U.S. presidential election. Peking was also advising Hanoi to compromise on this issue. According to Hanoi, late in 1971 Mao Tse-tung advised Pham Van Dong that Hanoi should postpone the liberation of the South, saying: “One can’t sweep very far if the handle of the broom is too short. Taiwan is too far away for our broom to reach. Thieu in

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 1052.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 1073, 1087.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 1086.

⁵⁴ *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations*, p. 41.

⁵⁵ Tad Szulc, “Behind the Vietnam Cease Fire Agreement,” *Foreign Policy* 15 (Summer 1974): 36.

South Vietnam is also out of reach of your broom, comrades. We must resign ourselves to this situation.”⁵⁶

Pham Van Dong is reported to have replied that the Vietnamese broom had a very long handle. Mao also advised Dong that the United States “could not afford to forsake” its old friends such as Nguyen Van Thieu.⁵⁷ Hanoi also now claims that Peking advised it to accept the U.S. plan that it passed on to Hanoi in July 1971. Peking is also said to have urged Hanoi in November 1972 to make concessions regarding the “withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops and the question of North Viet Nam renouncing military aid, so that the agreement can be signed.”⁵⁸

While one must remain skeptical of the veracity of Hanoi’s reporting, it should be noted that interpretations other than those provided by Hanoi can be put on the words, and actions, attributed to China’s leaders. Rather than urging the abandonment of the “liberation” of the South, Peking could just as well have been urging Hanoi to grant the United States a face-saving withdrawal, for example, without a preliminary political settlement within South Vietnam, and to allow an interval of time to pass before the final liberation of the South was carried out. Mao himself confirmed that he thought Hanoi should be more flexible when he told French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann in July 1972 that he had advised PRG Foreign Minister Nguyen Thai Binh to stop demanding Thieu’s removal as a precondition for a settlement with the United States.⁵⁹ Other evidence also indicates that Peking felt that Hanoi should compromise with the United States. Addressing a group of senior cadres on the international situation in March 1973, Chou En-lai spoke of the recently concluded peace agreements.

We told the Vietnamese comrades: we must be practical and realistic. The U.S. herself knows that to continue fighting means to stall for time with no way of knowing how long she will procrastinate. Therefore, she will make a “glorious withdrawal” through negotiation. Besides, having fought for so many years, the Vietnamese people have suffered great losses. To continue fighting will not affect the outcome for a moment. But to compel the Americans to withdraw through negotiation will leave you yourselves a half to one year for rest and consolidation. You can reconsider the problem of liberating South Vietnam later. The Vietnamese comrades have accepted our suggestions.⁶⁰

Elsewhere in the same speech Chou said that there had been disagreement between Peking and Hanoi over the provisions for a political settlement in South Vietnam after the United States’s withdrawal. In the opinion of Chinese leaders,

⁵⁶ *Chinese Aggression against Vietnam*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ *The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations*, pp. 41–42.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Szulc, “Behind the Vietnam Cease Fire Agreement,” p. 45.

⁶⁰ Chou En-lai, “Report on the International Situation,” *Issues and Studies* 13 (January 1977): 122. *Issues and Studies* is published by the Institute for International Relations in Taipei, Taiwan. While the source of this document is reason to be skeptical of its authenticity, its substance fits with other evidence such as that in Hanoi’s White Paper, Hoang Van Hoan’s statement, and Mao’s July 1972 statement to French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann.

Chou said, the provision for democratic elections after the cease-fire under the supervision of the "three political powers" in South Vietnam was "empty talk" with no concrete measures for its implementation. Apparently Peking wanted such elections to be carried out, or at least favored that an attempt be made at their implementation, while Hanoi was not overly concerned that these provisions were mere eyewash. One surmises that Peking favored a longer period of political struggle in South Vietnam while Hanoi anticipated an earlier reliance on warfare to achieve victory.

Hoang Van Hoan provides further evidence that Peking urged Hanoi to be flexible. Hoan states that shortly after the peace agreements were signed Chou En-lai compared the situation in Vietnam with that in China just after World War II.⁶¹ For almost two years the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) negotiated and retreated before launching a counterattack in the middle of 1947. Then in an instant the Chiang Kai-shek group was eliminated. Chou continued: "Vietnam must also win a period of time and prepare its strength. When the fighting begins it should completely eliminate the Nguyen Van Thieu regime in an instant because a short while after the cease fire the United States will not easily come back in."⁶²

It is important to note that these statements indicate that Peking did indeed expect a Communist victory over Saigon. What was in question between Peking and Hanoi was a question of strategy, not objectives. Peking still wanted the U.S. out of Vietnam and still supported Hanoi's effort to "liberate" the South, but favored concessions allowing the United States to withdraw and to permit the passage of several years before a renewed effort was made to crush Saigon.

The fact that the Moderate leadership in Peking urged Hanoi to grant the United States certain face-saving compromises does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that pressure was actively applied to achieve this end. Again, this conclusion does not square with the available evidence. If Peking had been actively trying to pressure Hanoi, it could have done so very effectively by forgoing any of the concrete moves it took to support the DRV during 1971 and 1972; certainly it would not have increased its aid. Moreover, if Peking was pressuring Hanoi, why, in late 1971, did Hanoi cease its press criticism of the turnaround in Chinese foreign policy? If Peking had been pressuring Hanoi, it is likely that Hanoi would have responded by innuendo warning Peking that the PRC's behavior was endangering its revolutionary credentials and its future relations with Vietnam.

⁶¹ Hoang Van Hoan, "It is impermissible to distort the facts of Vietnamese-Chinese friendship," p. 5. Hoang also quotes Mao early in 1973 to the effect that Nguyen Van Thieu still had several hundred thousand troops left, that the "final solution of the problem still depends on armed struggle," and that China would continue to supply aid during this period. PRC aid to the DRV after the signing of the peace agreements was said, by Peking, to have amounted to several billion U.S. dollars ("Sino-Vietnamese relations during the period of Vietnam's anti-French, anti-American struggles," p. 1).

⁶² Hoang Van Hoan, "It is impermissible to distort the facts of Vietnamese-Chinese friendship," p. 5.

Although Peking could not itself pressure Vietnam to compromise, it could, and did, allow the United States to do so. Peking wanted the war ended and believed that Hanoi should compromise to facilitate a U.S. withdrawal. If Hanoi was not willing to “be reasonable,” then Peking was prepared to let Hanoi bear the burden of its obstinacy. In line with this, Chou told Nixon in February 1972 that China would no longer express its opinions on the negotiating positions of the two sides.⁶³ More importantly, Chou and Ch’iao Kuan-hua indirectly indicated to the visiting American leaders that China was no longer ready to intervene militarily in the Vietnam conflict.⁶⁴ While the subtle withdrawal of China’s deterrent support at that stage of the conflict probably had little impact on American actions, it did indicate Peking’s “understanding” of U.S. attempts to coerce Hanoi into accepting a compromise settlement of the Vietnam conflict. Peking’s subdued response to the vigorous U.S. reaction (for example, mining Haiphong harbor and bombing of North Vietnam) to Hanoi’s 1972 spring offensive was in line with this approach. Nor was the embryonic Sino-American rapprochement adversely affected by the United States’s “Christmas bombing” of North Vietnam at the end of 1972.⁶⁵

The evidence indicates that while disagreeing with aspects of Hanoi’s strategy for expelling the United States from Indochina and for liberating South Vietnam, Peking continued very substantial support for Hanoi’s war effort through January 1973. Peking apparently distinguished between urging Hanoi to compromise with the United States and actively applying pressure to achieve this. While such a distinction might seem sophistic, it can also be seen as an attempt to synchronize the contradictory objectives of minimizing the influence of *both* superpowers in Indochina while creating optimal conditions for using U.S. power to check Soviet moves elsewhere in the world. By being tolerant of Washington’s efforts to force Hanoi to compromise while continuing to provide Hanoi with “firm support” and assistance, China let the United States do the dirty work, China’s future relations with Vietnam were protected, and Hanoi was kept from embracing the Soviet Union too closely.

If betrayal is defined as Chinese pressure on Hanoi to accede to a compromise settlement with the United States that would have prevented the “liberation” of South Vietnam, the charge must be rejected on two counts. First, while Peking did advise Hanoi to compromise, it did not actively pressure Hanoi to accomplish this. Rather, Peking stood aside and let Washington apply the necessary pressure. Secondly, there is no evidence that Peking did not expect a Communist unification of Vietnam after the U.S. withdrawal. The evidence indicates the opposite. What was at issue were questions of strategy, not goals.

⁶³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1073.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1069, 1073, 1086.

⁶⁵ “Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation,” *China Quarterly* 51 (July-September 1972): 598-99.

CONCLUSION

As Peking concluded that the United States was no longer its major opponent and reoriented its policies accordingly, the national objectives of the PRC and the DRV increasingly diverged. All the relevant national actors were aware of these growing contradictions. Washington and Moscow attempted, with some success, to exploit them. Peking tried to paper them over by pacifying Hanoi with generous aid and by refusing to actively pressure Hanoi on behalf of the United States. Although not betraying Hanoi, Peking's desire for improved relations with the United States did conflict with its "solidarity" with Hanoi. The "secondary contradiction" between North Vietnam and the United States had to be subordinated to the primary contradiction involving Soviet socialist imperialism. This had to be done in such a way, however, as not to undermine the primary objective—countering and limiting Soviet influence in Asia and the Pacific.⁶⁶

Regarding the general pattern of interaction between national foreign policies, this case provides an interesting example of overlapping and conflicting "triangular" strategies. Hanoi played on the rivalries between Peking and Moscow in order to compel both of them to support its struggle against the United States. Peking relied on the United States to twist Hanoi's arm when this became appropriate in order to create conditions favorable for using U.S. power to oppose Soviet advances throughout Asia. Washington hoped to manipulate Sino-Soviet rivalry to induce one or the other, or both, of them to persuade Hanoi to make critical compromises on a Vietnam peace settlement. Moscow attempted to exploit the tensions between Hanoi and Peking to increase its own leverage in Hanoi.

Hanoi, Peking, and Washington all enjoyed a fair amount of success in the short run. Hanoi's manipulation of Sino-Soviet rivalries did insure continued Chinese support and helped prevent a Chinese betrayal. Peking's handling of contradictions was, for its part, successful. Sino-Vietnamese relations did not suffer irreparably as a result of the contradictions between Hanoi's and Peking's policies during 1970–1973. Washington's policy of "linkage" did help persuade Hanoi to agree to a "two track" formula. It is ironic that this new U.S. policy helped accomplish a major objective underlying the United States's original intervention in South Vietnam—the containment of Chinese influence—even while abandoning the original strategy through which that objective was to be accomplished. Rather than attempting to contain "Chinese" influence at the

⁶⁶ According to Mao's theory of the united front, during each historical era a single chief reactionary enemy was to be identified and targeted as the primary enemy. All other, less evil reactionaries were to be "united with" during this era and won over to opposition to the primary enemy. Contradictions would still exist between these lesser enemies and the truly progressive elements of the united front, but during that particular stage of historical development those conflicts were "secondary" and had to be handled in such a way as to not detract from the common struggle against the primary enemy.

17th parallel by “teaching Hanoi a lesson” (to use the idiom of a later era), now the differences between Vietnam and China were to be exploited. Of course, by that time “containing” China was no longer a U.S. priority.

It is interesting that over the longer run, however, these particular policies of linkage or handling of contradictions helped produce bitter fruit. Hanoi’s success in manipulating Chinese fears of the Soviet Union prior to 1973 may have contributed to Hanoi’s miscalculation during the post-1975 period of the restraints that these fears placed on Peking. Peking’s attempt to manipulate Soviet-American rivalries at the expense of Hanoi’s anti-U.S. efforts undoubtedly convinced Hanoi of Peking’s insensitivity to Vietnam’s vital needs (as perceived by the VWP Politburo). After 1975 Hanoi was psychologically ready to pursue objectives that risked alienating China.⁶⁷

It is of course impossible to say whether or not Hanoi would have been more solicitous of Peking’s sensitivities during the post-1975 period if Peking had been more respectful of Vietnamese objectives during the 1970–1973 period, that is, if Peking had postponed its rapprochement with the United States until after the conclusion of a Vietnam settlement. What can be said with more certainty is that Peking’s policies during the earlier period embittered the North Vietnamese leadership. If we assume that human emotions influenced Hanoi’s foreign-policy decisions, then we can conclude that the 1970–1973 experience, while not amounting to a Chinese betrayal, did make Hanoi more willing to implement policies after 1975 that were likely to antagonize China.*

⁶⁷ In 1979 Peking bitterly quoted a Vietnamese official as saying in 1976: “During the war, making China and the Soviet Union go all out to help North Vietnam was very important. Now, Vietnam doesn’t need to follow this policy as much” (“Ping tahsiao pach’uanchuiche de niuo piaoyen” [A review of the evil performances of big and small hegemonists], *Hung Ch’i [Red Flag]* 4 (1979): 12–15).

* I would like to thank Penny Prime, James Tong, and David Zweig of the University of Michigan’s Center for Chinese Studies for their comments on various drafts of this article. Daniel Tretiak of the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong also shared with me his ideas on related topics.