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Vietnam-U.S.: **Hanoi Continues To Deny Charges** on U.S. POW's

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Hanoi has continued to reflect heightened concern about the potential for damage to its relationship with Washington from charges that in 1978 it was still holding Americans captured during the Indochina war and that Soviet KGB officers interrogated them (Trends of 15 January 1992, pages 4-6). Issuing yet another official denial of the allegations made by former Soviet KGB Gen. Oleg Kalugin, Hanoi on 20 January sent a message from its Office for the Search for Americans Missing in Action (MIA) to the U.S. MIA office in Hanoi reiterating Vietnam's position that Kalugin's claims are an "ill-intentioned fabrication" (Hanoi radio). The message--an apparent attempt to preempt Kalugin's testimony before the U.S. Congress on the 21st--went on to present in great detail what it claimed were the results of Vietnam's "serious and careful investigation" into the charges. That investigation purportedly concluded there was only one meeting between a U.S. POW and a KGB officer, in "January 1973." Reflecting Vietnam's concerns about the political fallout from the charges, the message called on the United States not to use the event "as an

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excuse to cook up a story" about American POW's being held in Vietnam after the war.

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A commentary in the party paper Nhan Dan the next day went even further in expressing Hanoi's concern about the impact of the charges on its relationship with Washington. The commentary, carried by Vietnam's press agency VNA and by Hanoi radio's English-language service on 21 January, "urged" the U.S. Government and Congress to stop using the MIA-POW question as a "political issue to block the normalization of U.S.-Vietnamese ties." It reiterated Vietnam's position that while Hanoi considers the MIA issue a "purely humanitarian one" that it will resolve "unconditionally," normalizing U.S.-Vietnamese relations would put an "early end to the MIA problem." At the same time, the commentary reflected exasperation with Washington's reaction to what it portrayed as the constant flow of "ill-intentioned reports" about missing Americans, calling on the U.S. Government to "make the American people understand the truth about the MIA issue" and to take "measures to prevent and punish those who make a profit from the sufferings of the American families."

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HEBBELH, Southeast Asia, foreign, Vietnam, USA

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