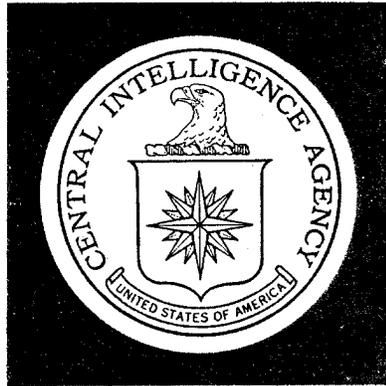
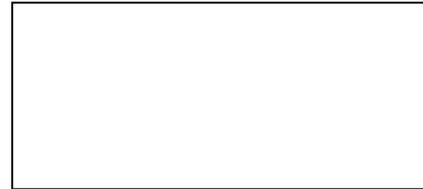


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*The Hanoi-Peking-Moscow Triangular
Relationship*



~~Top Secret~~

4 November 1968



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
4 November 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Hanoi-Peking-Moscow Triangular Relationship

Summary

Hanoi's decision last spring to open talks with the US represented a substantial gain for the USSR and a sharp setback for China in their competition for influence in Hanoi. Soviet satisfaction and Chinese dismay over this turn of events, however, should not obscure the central reality that the North Vietnamese have made their own decisions throughout the war. They have had to thread a hazardous course through conflicting counsel and pressures from Moscow and Peking. In this they have shown remarkable political skill, playing the Soviets against the Chinese, compelling both to provide material assistance on Hanoi's terms and to concede Hanoi's right to chart its own course.

The Chinese were playing for high stakes in pressing for an outcome in Vietnam which could be plausibly represented as a defeat for the US. Peking was not, however, prepared to use threats of force or logistic pressure in an effort to prevent Hanoi from negotiating. The Chinese apparently concluded that such moves would be self-defeating and thus had no real choice except to retreat grudgingly from their hard-nosed opposition to talks.

Hanoi's tendency to lean toward Moscow in the present phase of the contest was evident in its endorsement of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research, the Office of Economic Research, and the Office of National Estimates.

[redacted]

The North Vietnamese clearly judge that they can expect little support from Peking in their apparent intention to scale down the level of hostilities and probe for a settlement which they recognize will fall well short of their maximum goals.

As long as US forces remain in South Vietnam and the contest over a settlement continues, Hanoi cannot afford an open break with China. But the North Vietnamese apparently intend to work toward a position of clear independence from both Peking and Moscow. To this end, they probably will seek economic and diplomatic relations with non-Communist governments in Southeast Asia and elsewhere and play down their subversive ventures in neighboring countries. These aspirations to play a larger role in Asian affairs may in turn bring Hanoi into collision with China's long-run ambitions for predominant power in East Asia.

1. The bizarre incident in mid-October in which Hanoi authorities were obliged to send troops to rescue four Soviet visitors who had been surrounded and harangued for over seven hours by Chinese Communist Embassy personnel presents in microcosm North Vietnam's dilemma in being constantly exposed to the cross-fire of the Sino-Soviet feud. The long delay in freeing the beleaguered Soviets reflects the characteristic North Vietnamese reluctance to become directly involved in the feud and suggests that this delicate matter had to be carried to a high level for decision. Within a few days, Hanoi was filled with a new round of rumors about Sino - North Vietnamese frictions, stimulated in large part by the Soviet and East European missions, and by speculation concerning progress in the Paris talks. For Hanoi, this episode was only the most recent illustration of the willingness of its two great Communist allies to disregard North Vietnamese interests in their obsessive prosecution of the great schism.

2. The recent sharpening in Sino-Soviet enmity is directly related to the issues raised by Hanoi's decision last spring to open talks with the US. Moscow and Peking, of course, clearly recognized that this decision marked a major turning point in the long Vietnam conflict and that it introduced a new political dimension that could be decisive in determining the outcome of the war. For the Paris talks posed the supreme test for conflicting Soviet and Chinese counsels to Hanoi in the past four years--a test which would have a major bearing on the complex triangular relationship in the years ahead.

3. The Russians eagerly endorsed Hanoi's decision and have tried to portray the Paris talks as a vindication of their tactical prescriptions. Peking, on the other hand, viewed the North Vietnamese move with dismay, angrily denouncing the US peace "hoax" and exhorting the Vietnamese Communists to continue to fight until "victory is achieved on the battlefield."

4. Although events since last April present a superficial impression of a substantial gain for the USSR and a sharp setback for China in their competition

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for influence in Hanoi, this should not obscure the central reality that the Hanoi regime has remained master of its own strategy and decisions throughout the war. Hanoi's repeated affirmations over the past four years of its determination to fight indefinitely until "complete victory" is achieved did not signify an ascendancy of Chinese influence any more than Hanoi's agreement to open talks with the US represented acceptance of Soviet advice.

5. All major North Vietnamese decisions appear to have been taken independently on the basis of Hanoi's own evaluation of the prevailing military balance and political situation at each stage of the conflict. There is no evidence, for example, that Soviet and Chinese advice had any significant influence on Hanoi's strategy for coping with the situation created by the unexpected American entry into the war in 1965. North Vietnamese decisions [redacted]

[redacted] clearly indicated recognition that prolonged and strenuous military efforts would be required before the Communists would be in a position to enter negotiations on acceptable terms. Neither Soviet pressure in 1965 or early 1966 for negotiations as a means of forestalling further US escalation of the conflict nor Chinese opposition to talks in any form at any time deflected Hanoi from its determination to steer an independent course and to enter talks at a time of its own choosing. When the North Vietnamese finally decided last spring that the time was ripe, they issued their 3 April offer of "contacts" with the US

[redacted]

6. There appears to be no correlation between Hanoi's decisions over the course of the past four years and the ebb and flow of Chinese versus Soviet relations with Hanoi. The North Vietnamese, of course, have had to thread a hazardous course through conflicting Sino-Soviet pressures. But Hanoi has demonstrated remarkable political skill in resisting these pressures, in compelling the two Communist giants to provide military and economic aid very much on its own terms, and to accept Hanoi's lead in political strategy on such vital matters as the timing and terms of negotiations with the US.

[REDACTED]

Sino - North Vietnamese Relations

7. The Chinese leaders, or at least the more dogmatic Maoists in Peking, had good reason to be chagrined over Hanoi's decision to begin negotiations. They were playing for very high stakes in pressing for an outcome in Vietnam which could be plausibly represented as a major Communist victory. Their peremptory insistence that the Vietnamese Communists could impose a defeat on the US if they persisted in waging a protracted conflict while shunning all forms of compromise and negotiations was not inspired merely by a desire to demonstrate the efficacy of "people's war" against imperialist power. Peking's constant advocacy of uncompromising military struggle reflected a dogmatic conviction that the Vietnam war plays a vital role in Maoist strategy for dealing with the three fundamental challenges facing China, as Mao Tse-tung defines them: the US, the Soviet Union, and Mao's domestic enemies.

8. In Mao's conception, Vietnam offered an ideal opportunity to impose a defeat on the US which, in his mind, would lead to a general diminution of American power in East Asia and, specifically, to a reduction in American political and military commitments to nations adjacent to China's borders. Thus a Communist victory in Vietnam would be the key to removing the barrier of American influence and power which blocks China's ambitions for predominant power in East Asia. It is conceivable that the Maoists even persuaded themselves that a humiliating American defeat in Vietnam would set in motion a chain of events that would eventually open the way for settling the Taiwan problem on Peking's terms.

9. Vietnam played an equally vital role in the Maoist drive to discredit Moscow in the Communist world and to destroy Soviet influence in Asian Communist movements in particular. Peking's political strategy tried to exploit the fact that the Soviets had no direct stakes in a Communist victory in South Vietnam and that their overriding concern was to forestall a dangerous escalation of the war. China's scornful rejection of Moscow's repeated appeals for "united action" on behalf of the Vietnamese Communists and its constant allegations of Soviet "collusion" with the US were aimed directly at discrediting the Soviet policy of limited cooperation with the US in areas of mutual advantage and at stimulating suspicions of Moscow's reliability in Hanoi and in other Communist parties.

10. Finally, Mao appears to have regarded a bitter and prolonged war in Vietnam as a valuable weapon for arousing both anti-US and anti-Soviet emotions in China and for turning the issue of China's policy in reacting to the American intervention in Vietnam against his domestic opponents. The initiation of US bombing in February 1965 and the subsequent commitment of major US ground forces seems to have aggravated policy differences within the Chinese leadership. Propaganda warnings in 1965 stressing the danger of imminent war with the US were accompanied by suggestions in the Peking press that such figures as Liu Shao-chi, Peng Chen, Lo Jui-ching and Teng Hsiao-ping were advocating, in varying degrees, at least a temporary and tactical easing of tensions with the USSR at a time of potentially grave threat to China's security. In a speech in May 1965, for example, Lo Jui-ching cautiously urged the need to "unite the socialist camp" in the interests of resisting US aggression. The Maoists subsequently (in 1967) accused Liu Shao-chi of exaggerating the threat of US imperialism in 1965 and of advocating compromise with the Soviet revisionists. These polemical charges undoubtedly were exaggerated, but it is conceivable that Liu, Teng, and other senior party leaders, under pressure of the US intervention in Vietnam, favored a course of at least testing the offer of Khrushchev's successors at this time of a modus vivendi, including a cessation of polemics and a resumption of Soviet aid to China.

11. Hanoi's move to open talks with the US and, in particular, recent progress in the talks, clearly undercut the Maoist exploitation of the war at home and abroad. There is no evidence, however, that these changes in the complexion of the Vietnam conflict had any direct bearing on the apparent ascendancy since July of "moderate" forces in the Chinese leadership. Nor is there any evidence that Peking attempted to dissuade Hanoi from proceeding with negotiations by threatening to curtail its material support. The Chinese apparently were fully aware that the application of such coercive pressure would be self-defeating. A significant reduction of Chinese material aid would not only impair Hanoi's ability and will to continue fighting and undercut Chinese influence at a critical juncture, but would expose China to a most damaging North Vietnamese public rebuke.

12. The disruption in rail shipments to North Vietnam early last summer was caused primarily by severe Cultural Revolution disorders and flooding in South China. It is doubtful that Peking exercised sufficient control over the chaotic situation in Kwangsi at this time to have prolonged the disruptions deliberately even if it had wished to demonstrate displeasure over Hanoi's course. It would have been theoretically possible for Peking to have insisted on maintaining its engineer units in North Vietnam at full strength after they had completed their construction projects. But three of five Chinese construction units appear to have been withdrawn over the past year, totaling as many as 15,000 construction troops. Four Chinese antiaircraft divisions remain in North Vietnam. Two of these have had their tours extended, however, and it is possible that the cessation of US bombing will prompt Hanoi to arrange a reduction of this force.

13. There is no reason to believe that even the most zealous Maoists have ever contemplated some audacious stroke, such as direct military intervention in North Vietnam, to force Hanoi to abandon a course to which Peking is strongly opposed. There would appear to be no parallel between this situation and the circumstances that led to the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet leaders had considerable reason to be confident that the Czechs would not fight, particularly when confronted with a massive occupation force. But the Chinese could have no such confidence about Hanoi's reaction. On the contrary, North Vietnam's record of resistance to the French, Japanese, and Americans over the past quarter of a century must impress even the most ardent hawks in Peking. There is, moreover, serious doubt that Maoist forces at the center commanded sufficient political and administrative authority at any point in the past year or so to have mobilized an intervention force even if they had been disposed to resort to a policy of military intimidation against Hanoi.

14. In any case, the Chinese have had no real choice but to reconcile themselves, however grudgingly, to the fact of Hanoi's ability and determination to chart its own course in defiance of outside pressure. Peking's belated public acknowledgment of the Paris talks on 19 October suggests that the Chinese sensed that a break in the diplomatic impasse was imminent and that a tactical retreat from their extreme position on negotiations was required.

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Soviet - North Vietnamese Relations

15. In contrast with Peking's dismay and retreat, the Soviet leaders view Hanoi's present course with obvious satisfaction, for their two major objectives have been achieved: to avert an expansion of the war and to strengthen Soviet influence in Hanoi as a prime means of checking the erosion of the Soviet position within the Communist world. Moscow's massive material aid to North Vietnam has been highly effective in blunting Chinese allegations about Soviet indifference to the fate of the Vietnamese Communists and charges that the Soviets were "collaborating" with the US in trying to bring about an early end to the war, thus depriving the Vietnamese Communists of victory.

16. Although Moscow has seen some advantages in a continuation of the war, it has generally sought to persuade Hanoi to follow a flexible course, keeping open the option of early negotiations. [redacted]

[redacted] Premier Kosygin's appeal for an international conference three weeks after the beginning of US air attacks in the North. For the North Vietnamese, this appeal and subsequent Soviet and East European reminders of the advantages of an early negotiated settlement underscored Moscow's unwillingness to give unqualified support to Hanoi's pursuit of its maximum objectives in South Vietnam.

17. Despite this legacy of friction, the North Vietnamese have not hesitated to enlist Soviet support in the Paris talks and have consulted with Moscow much more closely than in the past. The most striking evidence of the importance Hanoi now attaches to Soviet support is its prompt endorsement of the occupation of Czechoslovakia. [redacted]

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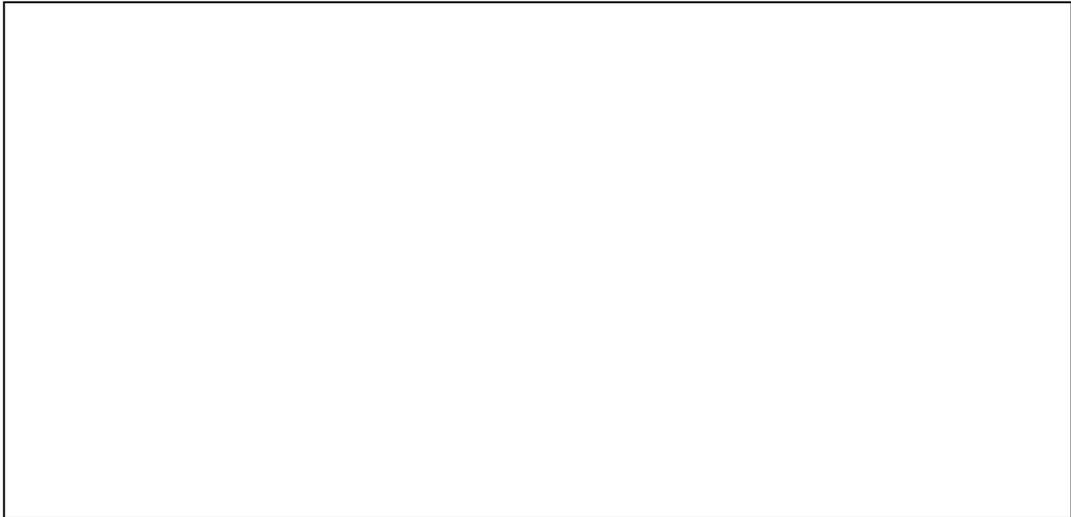
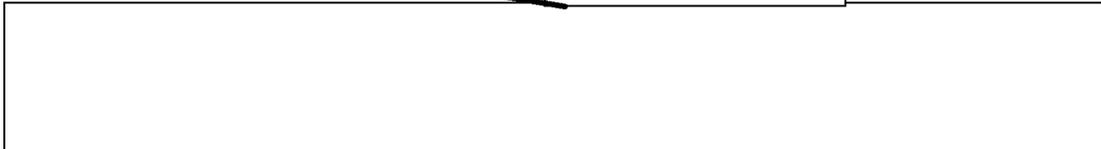
Sino-Soviet Relations

18. There have been no changes in state and party relations between Moscow and Peking in the past year which would have any significant bearing on their policies with respect to Vietnam. The upsurge in Chinese polemics in the past several months has been stimulated by Peking's frustration over the improvement in Soviet - North Vietnamese relations and by Chinese attempts to capitalize on the generally hostile reaction among foreign Communist parties to the occupation of Czechoslovakia. The Chinese have tried to portray the USSR as an aggressive and unreliable ally and to project themselves as the protector of weak and exposed Communist regimes. Three days after the intervention in Czechoslovakia, Chou En-lai called attention to the danger of a Soviet move into Rumania and vaguely promised Chinese support to the Rumanians. On the occasion of Albania's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, the Chinese reaffirmed their usual noncommittal assurance of the support of "700 million Chinese people."

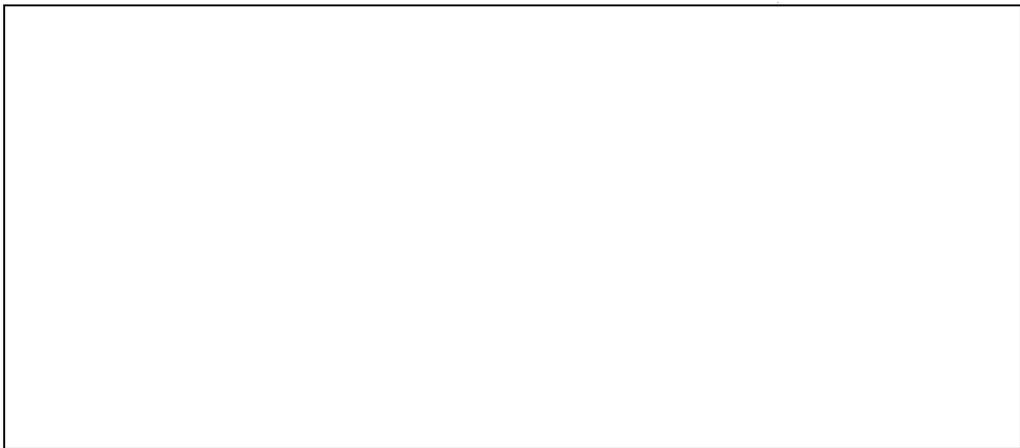
19. Peking's protest against alleged intrusions by Soviet military aircraft and charges that Soviet troops are concentrating along the border appear to be no more than routine political warfare calculated to exploit Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia. There are no indications of any change in the Soviet military posture along the frontier since August that might arouse genuine Chinese concern.

20. During the past four years the Soviets have gradually doubled the strength of their ground forces in the area and now have twenty-four divisions along the Chinese border.

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23. In any case, the Soviet build-up reflects the profound change in the political climate between the two countries. It may have been influenced by China's development of nuclear and missile capabilities. It certainly has been justified--in Soviet eyes--by the violence and confusion of the Cultural Revolution, which necessitate a readiness to react forcefully to Chinese adventures, and perhaps even to be ready to intervene should the course of internal conflict in China present an opportunity to further Soviet interests.



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25. The Chinese, for their part, have made no effort to keep pace with the Soviet military build-up. They have not deployed any major new ground force units to the border area. The present Chinese order-of-battle forces along the Mongolian and Soviet borders are relatively weak.

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26. Despite the ferocious antagonism between Moscow and Peking, neither appears to have any interest in escalating the verbal and political duel to the level of a military confrontation. The Soviets have no appetite for inviting serious trouble on their long border with China at a time when they are deeply involved in the hazardous enterprise of trying to check the erosion of their position in Eastern Europe. The Chinese leaders, for all their verbal militancy, have always displayed a prudent caution in dealing with the USSR and the US, which reflects their acute awareness of China's military inferiority in relation to both of the super powers. They will be careful to avoid any premature collisions.

The Communist Troika and Future Attitudes Toward Southeast Asia

27. The advent of the negotiating phase in the Vietnam conflict has brought the 1965-68 chapter of the triangular relationship to a close. But the coming phase of protracted negotiations and maneuvering for military advantage in South Vietnam may witness some significant changes in the alignments and issues that have prevailed in the past four years.

Hanoi's Position

28. In the months immediately ahead, the terms and limits of Sino-Soviet competition and maneuver on Vietnam issues are likely to remain fixed by Hanoi's military tactics in the South and its position.

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in the negotiations. North Vietnam's decision to enter negotiations does not mean that it has abandoned its long-term goal of bringing the South under its control or that it is now reconciled to an indefinite partition of the country and to a prolonged US military presence. The 1968 strategy of "general offensive and general uprising," long envisaged as the final stage of the war, was designed to bring the struggle to a head, with the primary political objective of breaking allied will to continue the war and opening the way for negotiations on terms favorable to the Communists. This strategy, of course, implied a clear recognition that Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces could not achieve a military decision and that the Communists would have to settle for a compromise in the South well short of their maximum objectives.

29. The over-all thrust of the next phase in Hanoi's policy probably will be to move the struggle away from the intensive and exceedingly costly military confrontation of the past three years toward a more limited and controlled level of conflict that will preserve Communist military and political assets in the South. It seems highly unlikely that Hanoi sees any serious prospect of final settlement on acceptable terms as long as the US maintains a strong military presence. The prime Communist objective in the negotiations, therefore, almost certainly will be to extract an agreement in principle for the withdrawal of all "foreign forces" from South Vietnam.

30. As for North Vietnam's intentions beyond the Vietnam arena, it seems unlikely that it will take any actions in either Laos or Cambodia which, in its view, would jeopardize higher priority objectives in South Vietnam. Hanoi will defend its pretensions to a sphere of influence in these two countries, but it would recognize that a major increase in military or subversive operations there would run a high risk of provoking a strong US reaction that would endanger the priority aim of reducing the US military presence in Vietnam.

31. Beyond the traditional Indochina limits of Hanoi's ambitions, the North Vietnamese are likely to claim a larger role in Southeast Asian affairs commensurate with their demonstrated power and achievements. They probably will seek to establish trade and diplomatic

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relations with non-Communist governments both in Southeast Asia and in the outside world. One of Hanoi's principal motives in moving in this direction would be to emphasize its independence from both Peking and Moscow. Hanoi already has shown interest in developing post-war economic relations with Japan and Western Europe.

Areas of Potential Sino-Vietnamese Friction

32. Hanoi's aspirations to play a larger role in Southeast Asia could well collide with Chinese pretensions in this area. The Chinese over the short term probably will be content to recognize the primacy of Hanoi's interests in Laos and Cambodia, but Thailand may become a cockpit of Sino - North Vietnamese rivalry. The North Vietnamese will be anxious to settle old scores with the Thai regime, arising from the latter's involvement in Vietnam and may be reluctant to acquiesce indefinitely in China's predominant influence in the Thai Communist Party and the Communist-led Thai "independence movement."

33. Hanoi, on the other hand, will have to balance these ambitions with the need to maintain at least outwardly satisfactory relations with China as long as the US maintains a military presence in Vietnam and the struggle for South Vietnam remains unresolved. Geopolitical realities will oblige Hanoi to continue to exercise restraint and caution in dealing with China. Even a limited settlement in Vietnam, perhaps no more than an armistice along the lines of the 1954 Geneva agreement, would enable the North Vietnamese to reduce their dependence on China. A settlement would also give freer play to historical Vietnamese fear and hostility toward China.

China and Vietnam

34. Although events have forced Peking to retreat from its uncompromising opposition to negotiations, the Chinese probably will now shift their ground and try to recoup this setback by becoming the champion of Hanoi's maximum demands in the talks. They can be expected to urge Hanoi to prolong the talks indefinitely, arguing that time will work to the advantage of the Vietnamese Communists. Their common interest with Hanoi in achieving the withdrawal of US forces will provide a strong incentive for supporting to the hilt Hanoi's demands for an agreement on this issue.

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35. Peking's obsessive rivalry with the USSR, however, may impel the Chinese to take actions that undercut these mutual interests. Soviet success since 1965 in recovering a strong presence in both North Vietnam and North Korea represents a sharp setback for Chinese aspirations in Asian and international Communist affairs. The Chinese probably will continue probing for ways to disrupt Soviet relations with Hanoi and this can hardly fail to produce further frictions with the North Vietnamese.

USSR and Vietnam

36. The termination of bombing and the prospect of prolonged negotiations will tend in some ways to increase Moscow's freedom of maneuver in its relations with both Hanoi and the US. The Soviets, however, will continue to face the dilemma of balancing their interests with respect to the US and other Western powers against the requirements of their position in the Communist world and the feud with China.

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[redacted] Moscow undoubtedly fears that the Chinese would be the principal beneficiaries of such reduction of American power. Although the Soviets have given formal support to Hanoi's goals in South Vietnam, the specific terms of a Vietnam settlement probably are a matter of relative indifference to Moscow so long as the integrity and security of the Hanoi regime are assured.

37. As a practical matter, however, the Soviets have little choice under present circumstances but to support Hanoi's position in the negotiations. Their priority interest in protecting the favorable position they have established in Hanoi since 1965 probably will rule out any role as a mediator between the two sides. It would obviously be extremely risky for the Soviets to urge concessions on Hanoi at a time when the Chinese are pressing the North Vietnamese to insist on maximum terms. The Soviets may therefore try to play down their role on issues in the talks by concentrating on providing generous economic and technical assistance for Hanoi's reconstruction efforts. Moscow, however, might urge the Vietnamese to be "reasonable" on some questions if the talks appeared to be in serious trouble.



38. Moscow's unfavorable prospects for strengthening its position among Asian Communist parties probably will encourage greater Soviet attention to expanding its diplomatic and economic influence in the rest of Southeast Asia. The Soviets are likely to focus this effort on promoting existing ties with Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, and they may even seek to expand relations with Thailand, depending on Hanoi's attitude toward the Bangkok regime.