MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET

INFORMATION
February 25, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt

SUBJECT: New Frictions Between Moscow and Hanoi?

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In the past few months, as the China trip drew closer, Hanoi's nervousness and discontent with the Chinese became more open and obvious [redacted] annex to the Vietnam report). It seemed that Hanoi regarded Moscow as the more dependable of its allies. More recently, however, there has been some rather sensationalized speculation in a Victor Zorza column in the Washington Post (attached) that a split is developing between the USSR and the DRV.

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Zorza, drawing on overt material published [redacted] claims that there is now a bitter quarrel between Moscow and Hanoi. He bases this on the fact that the DRV Ambassador called on Kosygin on February 11, at the Ambassador's request, and that the conversation was described in Pravda as having taken place in a spirit of "friendship and comradely frankness." This latter phrase permits Zorza to speculate that there was an open disagreement. He claims that Hanoi requested the meeting to make a demarche over Soviet failure to support the PRG's February 2 statement elaborating on the seven points. He concludes that Moscow is toying with the idea of striking some kind of bargain with the US involving limits on arms to Hanoi; Moscow allegedly fears that China will make the same deal as a result of the President's trip, and the USSR wants to be involved in the final settlement.

The facts do not justify these extreme conclusions or interpretations, but there is a suggestion of DRV concern over the Soviet position.

It is quite right to point out the unusual characterization of the Kosygin meeting as "frank" -- and in standard Communist parlance it usually means some element of disagreement. However, it would seem doubtful that Hanoi was presenting a demarche. Pravda promptly published the full text of the PRG statement of February 2. Two days later, on February 4, Kosygin received both the DRV and PRG ambassadors together to receive the statement and the PRG's "stand" on the President's eight points. At that time

Kosygin publicly expressed Soviet support for the proposals of the DRV and PRG. Moreover, the DRV government statement of February 5 was reported by Moscow, and it included the fact that the DRV did not accept the President's proposals.

However, Moscow was lagging behind Peking in granting more authoritative support, either in the form of editorials or government statements. Not until February 10, did Pravda editorially attack the President's plan and the Soviet Government statement supporting the elaboration of the seven points was not published until a few hours after Kosygin had his "frank" conversation. It is extraordinary, however, that the Soviets published a government statement at all -- never before has Moscow used this level of support for any negotiating proposals.

At the same time, Moscow has been chary of going deeply into substance in analyzing the DRV/PRG position and the President's plan.

Hanoi's own slight shift in tone regarding Moscow was also apparent in a Commentator article that replayed the Trong Chihn speech and cited both the Soviet Union and China as countries that the US was willing to negotiate with.

All of this may be the more or less normal byplay between the Soviets and the North Vietnamese, which ebbs and flows according to Hanoi's nerves. Nevertheless, it is a straw in the wind worth noting, but not as definitively as Zorza does.

Washington Post

23 Feb. 1972

Victor Zorza

Hanoi Vents Ire On Moscow Stand

A BITTER QUARREL has broken out between the [illegible] the final terms for a Vietnam settlement.

This is evident from a Soviet press report that a meeting between the North Vietnamese ambassador and Premier Kosygin has been marked by "comradely frankness." The phrase is unprecedented in Soviet relations with Hanoi. It means, in Communist jargon, that the comrades were frank with each other to the point of rudeness.

The meeting was "requested" by Hanoi which means that it wished to lodge a formal and serious complaint at the highest level. It was the Kremlin's own announcement that disclosed the quarrel, which, so far as can be established, has not been mentioned by Hanoi. This means that the Kremlin was very angry with Hanoi, rejected its complaint, and decided to let the world know about it. Why?

Earlier in the month, there had been a stream of Communist government statements condemning Mr. Nixon's latest eight-point peace plan — from the Vietcong "government" of South Vietnam, from Peking and from Hanoi. But not from the Kremlin. A Soviet statement was issued only a few hours after Kosygin's meeting with the ambassador — thus suggesting that it was published only in answer to his complaint.

But the statement gave no joy to Hanoi. While formally supporting the Vietnamese Communist line, it was more lukewarm than the other government statements.

THE AMBASSADOR'S instructions for the Kosygin meeting may be deduced from editorial comment in the Hanoi press the day before. For the first time since Mr. Nixon had launched his summitry campaign, a Hanoi editorial identified the Soviet Union by name as the President's dupe. The new Hanoi line, based on a statement by a politburo hardliner, Truong Chinh, had it that Nixon's meetings with "the Soviet Union and China"—in that order—were designed to bring about a detente only among the big powers, "while continuing to [illegible] tions."

thus saying, in fact, that the U.S., U.S.S.R., and China were trying to impose a settlement on North Vietnam. It explained that the summit meetings were an attempt by the White House "to get what it could not obtain by force of arms." It was therefore implying that by agreeing to the summits they had betrayed their ally.

BUT WHY SAY THIS to the Kremlin at the very time Mr. Nixon was going to China? Any peace settlement would depend on an agreement to limit the supply of arms to both North and South Vietnam. As Secretary Laird argued recently, such an agreement "must be negotiated" with Russia during, as he hoped, the May summit. By the same token, since the Peking summit is taking place now, the same issue would have to be raised with Hanoi's Chinese suppliers during Mr. Nixon's present visit.

In return for limiting their arms supplies to Hanoi, the Soviet Union and China might be offered the advanced technology and the investments which they want so badly from the United States.

If a bargain along these lines is made with China first, the Kremlin could not expect to get as good a deal later as it could obtain now. It would, therefore, be tempted to get in on the ground floor now. Indeed, Mr. Kosygin seems to have told Hanoi that, with the war drawing to a close, the big powers should join in a coordinated economic aid program for Vietnam.

The day after Kosygin's "frank" talk with the ambassador, the Hanoi press intimated as much by saying that the big powers expected to settle "the fate of the smaller countries" by economic pressure. Hanoi rejected this as "a very obsolete doctrine." But the Kremlin had made its point. Its disclosure of the quarrel with the ambassador may have been intended to show to the United States that Moscow was really putting the heat on Hanoi, not just pretending to do so. But the disclosure also made it possible to attempt the present reconstruction of what took place.

21 Feb. 1972

ANNEX

HANOI-PEKING-MOSCOW: HOW STABLE THE TRIANGLE?

There has been ample evidence over the past several months that North Vietnam's approach to foreign policy questions is gradually changing. Hanoi's forthcoming attitude in its recent exchanges with the Japanese suggests that the North Vietnamese are beginning to allow practical considerations--including their concerns over their country's position in the post-war era as well as the uncertainties of the current diplomatic picture--to soften the long-standing prejudices that have limited their international flexibility. The gradual broadening of Hanoi's ties with India and perhaps the contacts that apparently have been made with Indonesia seem to be part of the same trend.

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Accompanying these tentative efforts to widen Hanoi's diplomatic contacts have been numerous expressions of concern over Hanoi's triangular relationship with Moscow and Peking. [redacted] North Vietnamese press [redacted] suggest that Hanoi is deeply worried that one patron or the other might make a deal with the US at the expense of Vietnamese Communist interests--or at least might inadvertently help the US to divert public attention away from the Vietnam issue. This concern has been expressed in different ways. [redacted] several North Vietnamese diplomats were saying, with varying emphasis, that their faith in the Chinese was wavering and that Moscow might now be the more dependable patron. More recently, Vietnamese Communist officials in Paris and elsewhere have [redacted] characterized China as an indifferent ally whose growing preoccupation with the United States might help to strengthen President Nixon's political hand both at home and abroad. Meanwhile, Hanoi's media have warned Peking and Moscow alike against being taken in by the "duplicity" of US diplomatic strategy.

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the North Vietnamese press indicate that Premier Pham Van Dong came away from his talks in Peking last November reassured that the Chinese would continue to look after North Vietnamese interests. Furthermore,

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the party first secretary recently said that, though Vietnam would be discussed at the Sino-US summit, Peking would stand squarely behind Hanoi. But even at this level the confidence may not be complete. Not only has Truong Chinh, the number two man in the country, weighed in with a speech expressing apprehension over the dangers of big-power summitry,

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President Nixon had demonstrated great courage in going to China and must be regarded as a very clever man. The tenor of this remark suggests that even an experienced pragmatist like Le Duan now foresees political and diplomatic variables that Hanoi has not had to deal with before.

Thus evidence fails to provide a clear gauge of the depth of Hanoi's worry over its relationship with its two big allies--a relationship that still forms the cornerstone of its foreign policy. North Vietnam could not continue the war at its present pace without the support of China and the Soviet Union, and a key goal of North Vietnamese diplomacy has always been to ensure an adequate flow of moral and material backing without coming under the thumb of either patron. Up to now Hanoi has been able more or less successfully to play Moscow and Peking off against each other because both have been ready to vie for influence in the Indochina war, and--more important--because neither has been willing to see the other become dominant in Hanoi.

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Other factors, of course, have had a bearing on Hanoi's relations with its two patrons. Both China and the Soviet Union have been the objects of deep-seated prejudices that have little direct relation to the generosity of either patron or the pressures they have exerted. No one outside Hanoi's inner circle can estimate the effect such intangibles have had on policy-making in North Vietnam, but it seems inevitable that they have played some role in shaping Hanoi's contingency planning and may have affected the ebb and flow of its self-confidence.

Over the years the North Vietnamese have also had to face up to the implications of Soviet dealings with their American adversary. Hanoi evidently has learned to live with this behavior--helped to do so, perhaps, by the continuing flow of Soviet assistance to North Vietnam. At no time up to now, however, have they had to make similar allowances for the Chinese, whose activities in the foreign policy field never seemed deliberately to serve the interests of Hanoi's enemies. The establishment of contacts between Peking and Washington has clearly re-opened the question of Chinese motivation, and it may be this, feeding on the old legacy of distrust, that accounts for the shrillness of Hanoi's initial reaction. In North Vietnam's highly emotional--albeit indirect--criticisms of China last August, in fact, the predictable calls for Communist solidarity in support of Hanoi were supplemented by elliptical references to the centuries-old threat on Vietnam's northern border.

The Chinese have since worked hard to persuade the Vietnamese that their role in Indochina has not altered, and Hanoi may learn to tolerate Peking's big-power waywardness as it has Moscow's. Nevertheless, the temptation to read the worst into Peking's motives may now be stronger than any rational assessment would warrant, if only because the shifts in US-Chinese relations, as the North Vietnamese press commentaries point out, raise the specter of a new form of great power hegemony with which Hanoi has

never had to contend. So long as the North Vietnamese are determined to achieve their maximum political objectives in Indochina, they will undoubtedly remain hyper-sensitive to any such change in the political environment which might limit their freedom of action or reduce their leverage on world opinion. Even now, Hanoi almost certainly is less than satisfied with Peking's public position on the Vietnamese Communists' peace proposals--a position that has often given pride of place to the call for US military withdrawal while saying little about the demand, equally important in Hanoi's eyes, for major US concessions on the political side. Nor can the North Vietnamese be entirely happy over the apparent reluctance of the Chinese (and the Soviets as well) to condemn with suitable vigor the notion of a new Geneva-type conference. Hanoi has resisted this notion in part because such a conference might give Peking and Moscow a chance to intervene more directly in Vietnamese affairs.

None of these concerns regarding Peking, however, are likely to lead to a basic shift in Hanoi's approach to the two superpowers--something that might happen only if Moscow or Peking seemed willing to give up their competition for influence in Indochina. The continuing series of "supplemental" aid agreements being signed with both parties suggests, in fact, that the competition is very much still on, and for this reason responsible members of the leadership like Le Duan are likely to remain confident of their ability to play on the Sino-Soviet rivalry for some time to come. Thus the criticisms of Peking and the occasional bouquets for Moscow among lower-level North Vietnamese officials should not be taken to mean that the regime may be moving closer to the Soviets in any fundamental sense. Rather than opt for a course that would mortgage its independence, Hanoi is likely to concentrate on looking for ways to bolster the triangular relationship which has kept it safely equidistant from the pressure centers in Moscow and Peking. The recent explicit commentaries in the North Vietnamese press, and much of

the diplomatic gossip about Chinese failures and Soviet dependability, may even be designed in part to prompt a more positive response from both allies that would confirm the value of Hanoi's traditional balancing act.

But no matter how successful they are in this effort, the North Vietnamese will probably never be able to convince themselves that their world is what it was prior to the first tentative feelers between the US and China. In part, of course, their changing perspectives are due to international shifts which predate the announcement of the US-China summitry. The recent US negotiating initiatives toward North Vietnam, as well as the longer term retrenchment of US interests in Asia and the emergence of Japan as an independent regional force have all contributed to the pressures and opportunities confronting Hanoi in the foreign policy arena. In addition, after so many years of war, the North Vietnamese may simply be taking more seriously the prospect of a post-war environment in which regional contacts will undoubtedly become a more important complement to relations with the great powers. Many of Hanoi's recent tentative feelers toward such countries as Japan, India and even Indonesia may simply be an effort to hedge its bets against the eventual outbreak of peace in the area.

Without the extra incentive provided by the changes in big-power relationships, however, it seems unlikely that Hanoi would be pursuing the new possibilities for international exchange and cooperation as vigorously as it has been over the past year. North Vietnam's apparent efforts to keep Moscow and Peking in the dark about many of its new contacts, particularly with Japan, may be a measure of its suspicions--and an indication of the complex interrelation between its old and emerging foreign policy objectives. In pursuing its new contacts abroad Hanoi cannot, of course, hope for the kind of material aid it has gotten from Moscow and Peking; nor

can it realistically expect such countries as Japan or India to come out four-square behind North Vietnamese objectives on the war. But it may well have decided that any effort to expand its international ties would be advisable and opportune, not only as political and economic insurance for the future but also as a way of reminding its two major allies that they can no longer take their role in North Vietnamese affairs for granted and had better look to their basic long-term interests in Hanoi.