A 1954 North Vietnamese stamp featuring Mao

China's Exercise of *Realpolitik* and 'Containment' during the First and Second Indochina Wars, 1954-1973

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Introduction: Why Understanding Chinese "Containment" during the First and Second Indochina Wars Matters

On a clear July afternoon in 1954, the North Vietnamese delegation walked out proudly from a conference room in a small hotel in Geneva. That morning had been very tense, with the Vietnamese and the French constantly exchanging uncomfortable glances. The Chinese delegation walked along with the Vietnamese, congratulating them on their victory over the imperialists. The Chinese believed that they had much to celebrate, as they had succeeded in promoting their position as the leader of Asian Communism by employing intense anti-imperialist rhetoric. Most importantly, Beijing believed it had secured a firm alliance with Hanoi to counter the possible spread of American and Soviet influence in Southeast Asia.[1]

Yet, little did the Chinese know that they had just experienced the prelude of the longest "hot" war in Cold War history—the Vietnam War.[2] Beijing would experience a radical transformation in its role, from a political adviser to a nation struggling to free itself from colonial rule to a major participant in a bitter diplomatic tug-of-war with Washington, Moscow, and Hanoi as it tried to maintain its ideological integrity as a leader of the Communist world and protect southern China against a constant American military threat throughout the two Indochina wars. How did China's commitment to ideological solidarity and anti-imperialism adapt to a major international war in Vietnam in which China had to confront the United States diplomatically and be wary of the Soviet Union, previously its closest ally during the early years of the Cold War?

Much has been written about the impact of French colonialism in Vietnam and the United States' exercise of "con-

1 "Agreement of the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam," July 20, 1954 (https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/genevacc.htm).

2 The Vietnam War was also one of the most serious refugee crises in the 20th century, producing over a million refugees by the end of the war in 1975. See Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 207.

tainment" in the Second Indochina War.[3] Understanding the war as an American affair is highly plausible, for the United States was primarily involved in fighting the North Vietnamese on the ground. However, the Vietnam War was also a diplomatic war that used words as bullets. China actively participated in the war through a diplomatic exercise of its own version of "containment," blending anti-imperialism and *realpolitik* in framing its political rhetoric aimed at curbing both American and Soviet influence in Vietnam.

A discussion of China's involvement in the First and Second Indochina Wars is important for three main reasons. First, what is commonly known as the "Vietnam War" was only the second of the two Indochina Wars. To understand the origins of the Second Indochina War, it is imperative that we understand what happened during the First Indochina War. China, which negotiating peace for the sake of North Vietnam and for itself during both wars, will provide an explanation of the importance of linking the two wars together. Therefore, we must begin in 1954, when the decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu affirmed Vietnamese independence from France and began the Sino-Vietnamese alliance through China's ardent diplomatic support of Vietnam.

In addition, understanding China's role in the two wars will contextualize the wars within the framework of a general Cold War history and help us appreciate their importance as international historical events. They were not only bilateral conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union, but also trilateral geopolitical and ideological conflicts between China, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

Finally, the topic of China's involvement in the two Indochina Wars has much potential for further research with the release of new sources. Qiang Zhai's *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* argues that China adjusted its diplomatic strategies throughout the two Indochina Wars according to Beijing's relations with its Cold War rivals. Qiang argues that during the 1950s and 1960s, Beijing had close ties with Hanoi because Mao Zedong thought that Ho Chi Minh as a firm Communist could serve as a bulwark against further American advancement into the Chinese mainland. However, by the 1970s, Moscow posed a bigger threat than Washington as it tried to break down the Sino-Vietnamese alliance by urging Hanoi to negotiate peace instead of continuing the anti-American struggle.

Chen Jian's *Mao's China and the Cold War* examines the Chinese leadership's strategies of international diplomacy towards the United States and the Soviet Union during major crises such as the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Chen argues that the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-U.S. rapprochement were the monumental events that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. The two works are notable because they are the first serious inquiries into about China's relationships with the first two Indochina Wars and, to a larger extent, the political environment of an international Cold War. Despite their originality, there are two important limitations with Zhai and Chen's works. First, the geographical range of their primary sources is very limited. Most of Zhai and Chen's sources are Chinese military and diplomatic records. Second, there are newly available primary sources to expand the two authors' scope of research.[4] Most recently, the Woodrow Wilson Center's archives on the First Indochina War, the Geneva Conference, and the Second Indochina War provide more detailed information about Chinese diplomacy during the two wars through previously inaccessible Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese primary sources, all recently translated into English.[5] Furthermore, since the primary sources dealing with China during the Indochina Wars illuminate both local and international political contexts in which the Chinese leadership chose its diplomatic strategies, scholars will be able to gain a balanced appreciation of the complexities facing Chinese policymakers during the first two Indochina Wars.

I will supplement Zhai and Chen's main arguments by showing how China pragmatically employed anti-imperialist and anti-American rhetoric as important cornerstones of its unique international diplomatic strategy: balancing ideological commitment with geopolitical security throughout the course of the first two Indochina Wars. I will demonstrate how China survived through the First and Second Indochina Wars by ma-

3 See Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2012) for discussions of French colonialism in Vietnam. For discussions of American involvement in the Vietnam War, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War*: *The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: The University of California Press, 1999), John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2005) , George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (McGraw Hill Publishing, 2013). For a general discussion of American historiography on the Vietnam War, see Phillip E. Catton, "Refighting the Vietnam War in the History Books: The Historiography of the War," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 18, No. 5, Vietnam (October, 2004), pp. 7-11.

4 Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 267-293 and Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 327-334 and pp. 351-360.

5 See "Indochinese War," (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/152/indochinese-war) "Geneva Conference of 1954," (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/7/geneva-conference-of-1954) and "The Vietnam War" (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/87/vietnam-war) archives of the Woodrow Wilson Center's International Cold War History Project.

nipulating the Sino-Vietnamese alliance to contain U.S. and Soviet influence, all the while being very wary of the unpredictable dynamics of Cold War politics from 1954 to 1973.

China and the Geneva Conference (1950-1954)

The first diplomatic encounter between the People's Republic of China and Vietnam occurred in 1950, when Vietnam entered into the fifth year of its bitter nine-year anti-colonial struggle against France. The success of the 1949 Communist revolution was a major turning point, for, as Chen Jian argues, Vietnam had a "golden opportunity" to gain Chinese support.[6] Furthermore, by 1950, the course of the First Indochina War had become increasingly favorable for Vietnam; even with American support, France could no longer be confident of restoring the colonial order in Indochina. Within the United States, there was increasing skepticism about providing further military assistance to France, as George F. Kennan later recalled in his memoir.[7]

Nevertheless, the fall of China to Communism convinced American foreign policymakers that France was the only alternative to what Dean Acheson called "a Commie domination of Indochina."[8] As George C. Herring argues, the spread of Communism to Asia would mean the loss of a large number of American allies, the outbreak of another global war, and the loss of access to one of the world's largest sources of raw materials.[9]

In contrast to the United States' perception of Vietnam as a major bulwark against the spread of Communism, the Chinese Communists considered helping Vietnam a "duty" because, as Chen Jian argues, China felt that it had an "international obligation" to help nations engaged in anti-imperialist struggles.[10] China's commitment to Vietnam's cause was such that Liu Shaoqi told Luo Guibo, China's political adviser to Vietnam, to inform Hanoi that the Chinese Communist Party would "do its best to satisfy Vietnamese requests" and send effective military advisors to direct Vietnamese forces against the French.[11]

The Chinese leadership's perception of supporting Vietnam's struggle against France as its "international obligation" was a complex product of *realpolitik* that reflected Communism, historical anti-imperialism, and geopolitics. China believed that it was essential that the Vietnamese struggle against France, as an Asian revolution, closely followed the "Chinese model"—a Communist and anti-imperialist revolution aimed at realizing national liberation in Asia and throughout the rest of the world. As Qiang Zhai and Chen Jian argue, China believed that the success of Vietnam's anti-imperialist struggle would be clear proof of the successful implementation of the "Chinese model" and would solidify China's position as the leader of the Communist bloc in East Asia.[12]

Furthermore, as Qiang Zhai argues, "national liberation" had always been an integral part of the Chinese historical consciousness. The Qing Empire's defeat in the Opium Wars (1842-1858) and the Sino-French War over Annam (1884-1885), and the bitter struggle against imperial Japan during the Second World War (1937-1945) were powerful historical lessons that clearly taught the Chinese leadership that it must not let Vietnam remain under the yoke of imperialism.[13] Since Communism also endorsed anti-imperialism as a central ideological component, China had historical and ideological justification for supporting Vietnam's struggle against France.

In addition to ideological and historical opposition to imperialism, China's decision to help Vietnam originated from a pragmatic concern of finding China's place in international Cold War politics. The Chinese leadership was alarmed at the growing influence of the United States in Asia after the end of the Korean War and the establishment of a republican government in Taiwan. Furthermore, as Winberg Chai argues, since Chiang Kai-Shek continued to order attacks on mainland China even after his supporters fled to Taiwan and Southeast Asia, Beijing feared that the Nationalists would use Vietnam as a military base.[14] In essence, China perceived its commitment to Vietnam as a precautionary move to protect its political sovereignty and national security.

6 Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 120.

7 George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1950-1963*(New York: Little Brown, 1972), pp. 58-60 in Marilyn B. Young, John J. Fitzgerald, and A. Tom Grunfeld eds., *The Vietnam War: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 35.

8 Frederik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2012), p. 198 and "Dean Acheson to the Manila Embassy," January 7, 1950. Adapted from George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014), p. 18. See also Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, England: The University of California Press, 2005), pp. 59-101.

9 Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 22 and p. 24. For a discussion of American involvement in Vietnam before 1950, see Mark Phillip Bradley, *Imaging Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

10 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 122.

11 "Liu Shaoqi's telegram to Luo Guibo," May 19, 1950,"adapted from Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam War, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 19.

12 Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 126 and Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 22.

13 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 24.

14 Winberg Chai, "The Taiwan Factor in U.S.-China Relations: An Interpretation," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall, 2002), pp. 132-133.

Hence, after the end of the Korean War, the Chinese leadership immediately turned its attention to the First Indochina War and sent Wei Guoqing as a military advisor to Vietnam, just as Liu Shaoqi had promised. Under the guidance of Wei Guoqing, the Vietnamese Communists formulated a decisive plan to surround Dien Bien Phu, which the Chinese believed would have an "enormous impact on the development of the international situation."[15] To that end, Wei Guoqing advised the Vietnamese Communists to adopt "protracted warfare," which would "separate and encircle the enemy and annihilate them bit by bit."[16] The Chinese urged the Vietnamese forces to "eliminate the enemy totally," and to "not save artillery shells" to claim a "final victory."[17] Furthermore, with the United States having denied France's requests to intervene militarily on its behalf and to send military advisors to train the South Vietnamese army, a favorable conclusion to the First Indochina War for the North Vietnamese seemed highly likely.

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu, which was, as George C. Herring aptly puts it, the "first anti-colonial military victory against a Western power," really did have immense international influence.[18] On March 2, 1954, preparations were well under way for a global conference on the aftermath of the First Indochina War. China was highly eager to participate in this conference. When Chinese participation was officially confirmed through the support of the Soviet Union, Zhou Enlai said that the decision to convene in Geneva was a "great achievement" because China's participation in the conference "already marked a big step toward relaxing international tensions," winning "widespread support by peace-loving peoples and countries all over the world."[19] Zhou Enlai would be primarily responsible for projecting Chinese diplomatic interests throughout the two Indochina Wars because Mao Zedong directly chose him to serve as China's Foreign Minister—a post that he held from 1949 to 1958. Zhou was also Mao's most faithful and trustworthy follower—a relationship that would last until Zhou's death in the spring of 1976.

A key Chinese objective during the Geneva Conference was to officially confirm a cease-fire in Indochina. China wanted, as Zhou Enlai expressed in a report to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, to "undermine the policy of blockade, embargo, and expanding armaments and war preparations by the U.S. imperialists and of promoting the relaxation of the tense international situation."[20] Hence, it was crucial for China that the Geneva Conference present a clear solution to the problem in Indochina. To that end, Zhou Enlai argued that China should adopt a policy of "negotiating while fighting," which would be "beneficial for the people in Indochina to carry out struggles for liberation."[21]

Three months before Vietnam and France officially signed the Geneva Accords, the Vietnam Group of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference drafted what it called a "Comprehensive Solution to Restoring Peace in Indochina." The document stated an armistice between Vietnam and France as the main goal of the conference. China, the United States, and the Soviet Union would assure that there would be no military vehicles or personnel sent into Vietnam from the day that the armistice would be signed.[22] Most importantly, the fourth clause of the document clearly fulfilled China's wish for a peaceful and stable Indochina:

"The government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the government of the State of Vietnam, the resistance government of Laos and the government of the Kingdom of Laos, the Committee for National Liberation of Cambodia and the government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, with the participation of democratic parties and organizations in the three countries, should establish a provisional joint committee, which should be in charge of the preparatory work for achieving peaceful unification, national independence, and democracy and freedom in the three countries in Indochina."[23]

The guarantee of Indochinese independence was especially important to China because a complete cessation of all military activities was a necessary precondition for Indochina and China to realize what Zhou Enlai called the Five Principles of Coexistence and ultimately, peace for all of Asia::

"Asian countries must mutually respect each other's independence and sovereignty and not interfere in each other's internal affairs; they must solve disputes through peaceful negotiation and not through threats and military force; they must establish normal economic and cultural relations on the basis

15 Han Huaizhi et al., eds., *Dangdai Zhongguo Jundui de Junshi Gongzuo (Military Affairs of the Contemporary Chinese Army)*, Vol. I, p. 530. Adapted from Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 133.

16 "Telegram, Central Military Commission to Weiguoqing, January 24, 1954," adapted from Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 134.

17 "Quote from *The Military Affairs of the Contemporary Chinese Army*, Vol. I, pp. 533-534," adapted from Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 137.

18 Herring, *America's Longest War*, pp. 44.

19 "Preliminary Opinions on the Assessment of and Preparation for the Geneva Conference, prepared by the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (drafted by PRC Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai) [Excerpt]" March 2, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No. 206-Y0054. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111963)

20 "Preliminary Opinions on the Assessment of and Preparation for the Geneva Conference," March 2, 1954.

21 "Preliminary Opinions on the Assessment of and Preparation for the Geneva Conference," March 2, 1954.

22 "Draft Memorandum, 'A Comprehensive Solution for Restoring Peace in Indochina,' prepared by the Vietnam Group of the Chinese Delegation Attending the Geneva Conference," April 4, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No. 206-00055-04 (1); original Record No. 206-C0008. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110592)

23 "Draft Memorandum, 'A Comprehensive Solution for Restoring Peace in Indochina,'" April 4, 1954.

of equity and mutual benefit and disallow discrimination and limitation. Only in this way can Asian countries avoid the unprecedented catastrophe of Asians fighting Asians."[24]

Since China actually experienced the "unprecedented catastrophe" herself when she engaged in an eight-year struggle against Japan during the Second World War, Zhou was cautioning Vietnam to not expand its war against France beyond Southeast Asia, lest China be forced to take military action to prevent the spread of violence and actually fight against Vietnam. In addition, Zhou, as Mao Zedong's most trusted aide, was directly presenting Mao's belief in the need for a pan-Asian anti-imperialist struggle and an exercise of *realpolitik* aimed at deterring American military intervention. Furthermore, since three nations—Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—all shared a border with China, and because there were no officially recognized borders within Indochina, China was concerned about the possibility of Vietnamese military intervention in neighboring territories, which would fundamentally disrupt "peaceful coexistence." Zhou Enlai told Richard Casey, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, that it was China's wish to see Laos and Cambodia become "countries of the Southeast Asian type," with no more foreign intervention and a firm guarantee of free elections as soon as possible. However, Zhou argued that the most pressing issue was to end the war in Indochina.[25]

For the Chinese leadership, "ending the war" had to strictly mean a complete cessation of French imperialism in Indochina. To that end, Zhou argued that a cease-fire was the most rational answer to the Indochina problem, because, as he told British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, the solution to the Indochina question must be "fair, reasonable and honorable for both sides."[26] To make sure that the French understood the importance of a cease-fire, Zhou Enlai met with Jean Chauvel, the French Ambassador to Switzerland, on July 13, 1954. Chauvel informed Zhou that France had completed a document "drafted for the cease-fire agreement and some principles after the cease-fire," but one that also acknowledged that "the current solution is not for separate governments."[27] Zhou replied that he appreciated Chauvel's efforts and although the document was a preliminary draft, it still deserved China's attention. Zhou promised that China would "study it in detail" and provide a response to the French "as soon as possible."[28]

Four days later, Zhou Enlai met with the French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France to make sure that there would be no external interference during the Geneva negotiations, especially from the United States. During the meeting, both men agreed that Vietnam and France were "gradually getting closer" to an agreement for peace in Indochina.[29] However, Zhou told Mendès France that China was concerned about the United States' intentions in creating a Southeast Asian defense organization comprising Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. If such an organization were created, it would go against China's wishes for a restoration of peace in Indochina, and for Laos and Cambodia to become "peaceful, independent, friendly, and neutral countries," which was the essence of Zhou's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.[30] Furthermore, Zhou warned that a Southeast Asian defense organization would only nullify the purpose of the Geneva Conference because rather than guaranteeing the completion of Indochina's national liberation movements, the whole of Indochina would remain as a political dependency of a major foreign power. As Zhou told Mendès France during a meeting on July 17, 1954:

"If they [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] join America's alliance and establish American bases, then the restoration of peace becomes meaningless. It will increase America's influence, and decrease the influence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This is not beneficial for the Indochinese people or the French people."[31]

Mendès France assured Zhou that the United States had no interest in establishing bases in the three countries. He told Zhou that China should trust France "without any reservation" that even if the United States did establish a Southeast Asian alliance, it would not include the three countries that form Indochina.[32] However, the problem of regrouping Indochina and the prospect of reducing French forces remained a persistent issue well into the final week before the scheduled date for signing the cease-fire. Mendès France defended the

24 *Renmin Ribao(People's Daily)*, May 14, 1954. Adapted from Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 55

25 "Minutes, Meeting between Zhou Enlai and the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey (Summary)," June 18, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Records No: 206- Y0009. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111502)

26 "Minutes of Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Anthony Eden," May 14, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No.: 206-C0055. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110619)

27 "Minutes of Zhou Enlai's Meeting with [Jean] Chauvel," July 13, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111073)

28 "Minutes of Zhou Enlai's Meeting with [Jean] Chauvel," July 13, 1954.

29 "Minutes, [Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC)] Zhou Enlai's Conversation with [French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France] (Exerpt)," July 17, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No. 206-Y0007. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111070)

30 "Minutes, [Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC)] Zhou Enlai's Conversation with [French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France] (Exerpt)," July 17, 1954.

31 "Minutes, [Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC)] Zhou Enlai's Conversation with [French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France] (Exerpt)," July 17, 1954.

32 "Minutes of Zhou Enlai's Meeting with [Pierre Mendès France]," July 17, 1954.

presence of French troops in Laos as a necessary security measure due to the fact that Laos needed time to adequately prepare for its own self-defense.[33]

Zhou warned that the stationing of French troops must end when the political organization of Indochina was completed. Zhou argued that while France's political supervision of Indochina was not "aggression," the French must realize that they were fundamentally "foreign forces." The Laotian regrouping issue should only be "provisional," and after reunification through elections, the Laotian resistance forces could become part of the Royal armed forces or local police forces, or simply be demobilized. This would be "promoting reunification and not disunity."[34] Zhou clearly showed the French how firmly he adhered to the principles of "peaceful coexistence" throughout the negotiation process. This Chinese engagement was highly proactive compared to the caution and disinterest of John Foster Dulles and the American delegation, which did not wish to lose Indochina to Communism but also feared that the Geneva Conference would only provide, as George Herring puts it, a "fig-leaf of respectability to French surrender."[35]

However, the Geneva Conference did not secure Vietnamese unification. While the Geneva Accords confirmed the "complete cessation of all hostilities in Vietnam"[36] and the prohibition of introducing any "troop reinforcements and additional military personnel,"[37] as Pierre Asselin painstakingly argues, the issue of how Vietnamese reunification would occur remained unaddressed in the agreement.[38] Ngo Dinh Diem rejected the Geneva Accords and staunchly refused to form a unified coalition government with the Communists, eventually establishing a separate Republic of Vietnam, with himself as its President. Furthermore, Vietnamese Communists opposed Articles 4 and 6, since they prohibited the introduction of fresh troops, which could permanently prohibit Vietnam from realizing its ambition to form an Indochina confederation.[39]

The Chinese and the Soviets refused to acknowledge the restrictions imposed by the armistice, especially Article 4, which prohibited the introduction of foreign military personnel into Indochina. The clause would prevent the two nations from forming an alliance with North Vietnam—a critical policy that would effectively "contain" the influence of one another and of the United States. For China, it was especially crucial that it prevented American military intervention in Southeast Asia, for failing to do so would critically damage China's reputation as an ardent supporter of "national liberation," which in turn could jeopardize the Sino-Vietnamese alliance and, more broadly, China's relations with Southeast Asia.

Despite the limitations imposed by Article 4, China was still confident that the agreement clearly established the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The Geneva Conference successfully produced what Zhou, during his meeting with the French Ambassador to Switzerland Jean Chauvel, called "a glorious cease-fire" between France and Indochina—the chief objective for which China fully "supported and promoted" the conference.[40] The cease-fire was a necessary step in Vietnamese-French negotiations because, as Zhou Enlai told Pierre Mendès France, military issues are "always related to political issues," which meant that stopping the conflict in Indochina was the "first step" after a successful conclusion of the negotiations.[41] The clear realization of this "first step" through the Geneva Agreement fulfilled China's wish "to make contributions to genuine progress and…to oppose any obstruction or destruction."[42] Zhou Enlai and the Chinese leadership were highly satisfied that the Geneva Conference effectively promised a "restoration of peace in Indo-China" thereby making China's participation in the conference a "success."[43]

As such, from China's perspective, the conference was successful because it prevented American military intervention and allowed the First Indochina War to remain primarily a Vietnamese national affair that did not spread across the Sino-Vietnamese border. Most importantly, as Chen Jian argues, a Communist North Vietnam would act as a "buffer-zone" between China and the capitalist Western world, thereby guaranteeing the security of southern China. Zhou's dominant role during the Conference confirmed the rise of China as a major power in world politics and effectively signaled a major shift away from a long history of diplomatic humiliation dating back to the First Opium War. By ending its long history of humiliation by foreign aggression, as Chen Jian argues, China was able to demonstrate through the Geneva Conference that it had the ability to realize an international political agenda

33 "Minutes of Conversation between Zhou Enlai, Pierre Mendès France, and Eden," July 19, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111060)

34 "Minutes of Conversation between Zhou Enlai, Pierre Mendès France, and Eden," July 19, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA.

35 Herring, *America's Longest War*, p.46.

36 Chapter II, Article 10 of the 1954 Geneva Accords (https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/genevacc.htm).

37 Chapter III, Article 16 of the 1954 Geneva Accords.

38 On this issue, see Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2013) especially chapter 1, "Choosing Peace, 1954-1956," pp. 11-44.

39 Chapter I, Articles 4 and 6 of the 1954 Geneva Accords (https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/genevacc.htm)

40 "Minutes, Zhou Enlai's Meeting with [Jean] Chauvel," June 22, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No. 206-Y0007.

41 "Minutes, Zhou Enlai's Meeting with [Pierre] Mendes-France," June 23, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No. 206-Y0007.

42 "Minutes, Zhou Enlai's Meeting with [Pierre] Mendes-France," June 23, 1954.

43 "Minutes of Zhou Enlai's Meeting with Bidault," June 1, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CFMA, Record No. 206-Y0007. Obtained by CWIHP and translated for CWIHP by Li Xiaobing. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111478.

without depending on other foreign powers.[44] China thereby emerged, as Chen Jian puts it, as "the main patron, as well as a beneficiary" of the 1954 Geneva Conference.[45] However, little did the Chinese leadership know how brief the sweetness of its first diplomatic success would be, with trouble brewing at home and abroad barely two years after the Geneva Conference.

China's Internal and External Crises after the Geneva Conference (1956-1959)

China could not savor its victory in Geneva for too long, for the country was highly internally and externally unstable. Domestically, China had to prove itself worthy of becoming a self-proclaimed vanguard of Asian Communism. To that end, Mao Zedong concentrated on solidifying his position as China's ultimate leader. After Nikita Kruschev delivered his "secret speech" condemning the destruction that Stalin had brought to the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong was busy promoting his own personality cult and making sure that the Chinese people did not develop an "unhealthy interest" in the "revisionist" Communism promoted by the "immature" Kruschev.[46] Furthermore, the Great Leap Forward was not producing its desired results, primarily due to a severe shortage of natural resources and bad planning.[47] In essence, China had a hard time establishing charismatic leadership and demonstrating Communism's potential to successfully resolve an agrarian-industrial complex and elevate its economic status to match its political reputation as the vanguard of Asian Communism.

Internationally, southern China became vulnerable to a military threat as some Nationalists who had not fled to Taiwan used Southeast Asia as a base to recuperate. This issue was especially troublesome in 1959, when China accused Laos of colluding with Chiang Kai-Shek by lending the Muong Sing region, which was used to carry out espionage activities, to Taiwan. The Chinese Communists suspected that pro-U.S. and pro-Taiwan forces wanted to use the Sino-Laotian border to provoke a conflict that would justify American military intervention in the region. Furthermore, when China became entangled in military conflicts with South Vietnam over the Paracel Islands, and when the United States began to encourage the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, Mao Zedong complained that such moves clearly proved that the United States was "trying hard to undermine, even to tear up the Geneva Agreement."[48] China was also uncomfortable with the Soviet Union because it was increasingly becoming revisionist and, as Mao Zedong felt, the Soviet Union was trying to "choke" and "strangle" China.[49]

From North Vietnam's perspective, consistent Chinese support was crucial for the success of the Vietnamese revolution because it was important for the Lao Dong Dang (Vietnamese Workers' Party) to directly control most of northern Vietnam and the northern delta. Fulfilling this strategic objective was important because, according to a report sent to the V. W. P.:

"It is not only related to the consolidation of the whole liberated area but also serves as a foundation for achieving complete unification and independence for the nation. Also, it is related to not only the execution of all immediate tasks but also the economic restoration and long-term construction of the nation."[50]

In addition to formally winning Chinese support for unifying Indochina, the North Vietnamese were able to, as Ang Cheng Guan explains, "enrich the theories of the revolutionary war and army" by learning from the Chinese example.[51] Ho Chi Minh paid an official visit to China on September 26, 1959 and delivered a speech in which he described Hanoi-Beijing relations as "brotherly" and as inseparable as lips and teeth. He also acknowledged the importance of national independence and of Communist victory for both countries.[52] However, because Hanoi had already authorized military actions against Saigon by ratifying Resolution 15, and because most Vietnamese Communists favored using violence to achieve national unification, Ho's chief motive for visiting Beijing was to

44 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 143.

45 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 205. Most recently, Pierre Asselin affirms Chen's assertion by arguing that China's main interest in the Geneva Conference was to prevent an internationalization of the First Indochina War. See Paul Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique," *Cold War History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 2011), p. 174.

46 Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 51.

47 Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 21-40.

48 Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indochina Conflict, 1956-1962* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc. and Publishers, 2012), p. 108.

49 Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keyssar, "Anna Louise Strong: Three Interwiews with Chairman Mao Zedong, "*China Quarterly No.103*, (September 1985); Han Suyin's Interviews with Anna Louise Strong in 1964 and 1969 in Han Suyin, *Wind in the Tower: Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution 1949-1975* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), pp. 169-170, adapted from Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indochina Conflict, 1956-1962*, p. 109.

50 "Fulfilling the Responsibilities and Promoting the Work Ahead." Adapted from Pierre Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique," *Cold War History*, Vol. 11, No. 2, May 2011, p. 172

51 Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (New Delhi: Natraj, 1974), pp. 45 and 73. Adapted from Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indochina Conflict, 1956-1962*, p. 127.

52 Ang, p. 128.

realize an ideal balance of forces, which was, as Pierre Asselin puts it, the "barometer" by which the Vietnamese Communists measured the progress of their revolution.[53]

However, Beijing did not wholeheartedly share Hanoi's desire to form a brotherly relationship of mutual respect. China's support of Vietnamese reunification was borne largely from a pragmatic geopolitical calculation rather than from a pure commitment to the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. China considered a reunified Vietnam to be the keystone to a pacified Indochina. China also hoped that Vietnam would not seek further geographical expansion, which could potentially challenge Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. Hence, until 1959, China's approach toward North Vietnam's military operations to achieve reunification was very cautious, only sending a task team which was advised to take no other action than to listen to North Vietnam's requests.[54] During this period, the Chinese helped the Vietnamese develop their economy, most notably by assisting in the implementation of land reforms that closely followed the original Chinese model, focusing on expropriating land from the landowners and putting the distribution of land under state control.[55] However, according to Qiang Zhai, Vietnam's land reform was suspended because in addition to popular hostility towards the policy by 1956, the Vietnamese Communists also feared a backlash from the landed gentry who could ally with South Vietnam to overthrow them.[56]

China's auxiliary role was understandable, because for the Vietnamese Communists, "reunification" did not just mean the rebirth of a unified Vietnam but a unified Indochina. It was essentially a question of whether Vietnam would exist as an independent sovereign state or as the leader of an Indochina confederation. Initially, the problem of reunification aroused intense debate within North Vietnam on the question of whether a pacifist or a militant approach towards South Vietnam was suitable. Finally, on May 13, 1959, the North Vietnamese announced their ultimate decision during the Fifteenth Central Committee Conference, which emphasized the continuation of a bitter struggle against the American-backed Diem regime and hoped that sympathizers in South Vietnam would join the Communist cause:

"Our compatriots in the south will struggle resolutely and persistently against the cruel U.S.-Diem regime holding aloft the tradition of the South Vietnamese uprising, the Ba To uprising and the August general uprising…and other valuable traditions of the workers' movement and of countless legal and semi-legal struggles…Our people are determined to struggle with their traditional heroism and by all necessary forms and measures so as to achieve the goal of the revolution."[57]

According to Lien-Hang Nguyen, after much deliberation during the Fifteenth Plenum held in May 1959, Hanoi concluded that it should proceed with the plan to overthrow the Diem regime. To that end, it established Group 559 to maintain a consistent flow of supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Four months later, the supply route reached southern Laos, which was expected to become the new headquarters for North Vietnamese military operations in support of fellow Communist Pathet Lao forces. However, because Hanoi was uncertain about whether it would be able to get sufficient material support from Beijing due to uncomfortable Sino-Soviet relations after Kruschev criticized Mao's failure during the Great Leap Forward movement, news of Hanoi's plans did not reach Saigon until 1960.[58]

In addition, the internal political situation in North Vietnam was not completely organized. Although the North Vietnamese concluded that a military struggle was more feasible than waiting for negotiations, there were many pressing problems that Hanoi had to address before proceeding with the plan. First, Hanoi had to consolidate its socialist project by completing currency reform and by rooting out counter-revolutionaries. In addition, the Communists in Saigon were too poorly organized for an effective recruitment drive to take place. Most importantly, if Hanoi attacked Saigon, the North Vietnamese Communists feared that they would not only lose Moscow's support by violating "peaceful coexistence," but also invite unnecessary American military intervention.

Beijing remained ambivalent and did not intervene on Hanoi's behalf for two main reasons. First, China did not want to provoke the United States and stage a direct confrontation, especially given the immensely tense international political climate. Second, should China encourage Vietnamese expansion into Laotian territory and eventually to all of Indochina, China would be betraying its own support of anti-imperialism at the cost of jeopardizing diplomatic relations with other Communist allies in Southeast Asia. Hence, China believed that the volume of its military and technological aid should be proportionate to the level of conflict that Vietnam faced while maintaining political order in Indochina. Any further direct aid, such as sending military reinforcements on Hanoi's behalf, would not only jeopardize China's relations with the rest of Southeast Asia, but also ruin China's fulfillment of its goal of balancing ideology with geopolitics to deter American and

53 Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965*, p. 55.

54 The team was sent to Vietnam at Pham Van Dong's request to Zhou Enlai. See "Zhou's Meeting with Pham Van Dong," October 17, 1959, adapted from Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 82.

55 A detailed analysis of the impact of land reform at the village level in China is given in Zhang Xiaojun, "Land Reform in Yang Village: Symbolic Capital and the Determination of Class Status," *Modern China*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January, 2004), pp. 3-45.

56 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 75.

57 "Editorial in *Nhan Dan*, May 14, 1959," adapted from King C. Chen, "Hanoi's Three Decisions and the Escalation of the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Summer, 1975), p. 246.

58 Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The North Carolina University Press, 2012), p. 46.

Soviet intervention in Indochina and along China's southern border.

Instead, in late 1959, China chose to directly address these concerns by resuming its role as the chief political mentor to the Vietnamese Communists. China's decision stemmed from a complex concoction of two important motives. First, China feared that should the United States use South Vietnam's ambition to defeat the Communists as a pretext to increase its military presence in Saigon, the conflict would surely spread to Hanoi. Second, China did not want the Soviet Union to expand its influence in Vietnam.[59] Should the Soviet Union boldly choose to militarily confront the United States, China feared that the North Vietnamese would turn their attention to Moscow for technical and material support, supplanting an important role that Beijing had assumed to cement the integrity of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance.

Second, Beijing had a good reason to be worried about Moscow. By the early 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split had already become inevitable. Differences between Chinese and Soviet interpretations of what was going on in Vietnam were most pronounced during the Moscow Conference, held from November 10 to December 1, 1962. China believed that it had to continue supporting Vietnam's war for national liberation. By contrast, the Soviet Union believed that China was only trying to expand a local conflict into a global one. Hence, the Soviets accused China of paying "lip-service" to Vietnam, oscillating between "peaceful coexistence" and an inevitable continuation of the war. Although the Moscow Statement confirmed Zhou Enlai's Five Principles and supported Vietnam's war against imperialism, it was merely a "cosmetic truce," leaving China very suspicious of Soviet "revisionism."[60]

China was motivated by these two central reasons to advise Vietnamese Communists that while an armed struggle against the corrupt Ngo Dinh Diem regime was necessary, they should limit the use of warfare to fulfill their central revolutionary aim—to unite Vietnam under Communist rule.[61] This instruction cleverly mixed China's historical experience with "protracted warfare" in its struggle against Japan (1937-1945), which required "rallying in unity and persevering in resistance through a united front," with its strategic desire to limit the spread of the Vietnam War beyond its loci of origin.[62] Beijing knew that national sovereignty is the heart of a nation, while alliances are merely blood vessels. Even Moscow, once Beijing's most trusted ally in the Communist world, turned into one of Beijing's most bitter enemies a year later.

The Sino-Soviet Split and Its Impact on China's Indochina Policies (1960-1962)

Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated after the Moscow Conference. China criticized the Soviet Union's version of "peaceful coexistence," which favored seeking peace in Vietnam for the sake of easing Cold War tensions with the United States. In addition, when the Soviet Union began to pressure Vietnam to pay back debts, China accused the Soviet Union of abusing the anti-imperialist nature of the "peaceful coexistence" doctrine. To assure Hanoi of Beijing's sincere devotion to "peaceful coexistence," and to make sure that Vietnam was more attached to China, Zhou Enlai was sent to instruct North Vietnam on industrial development. This decision was largely borne out of China's implementation of its own industrialization plans aimed at realizing self-reliance and at "seeking truth from facts." China realized that any nation aspiring to become rich through industrialization had to establish a production system that befitted its political system. China wished to spread its success to Asia and to the world, which was why Zhou Enlai told Vietnamese officials that China was "very willing" to introduce its own experience to Vietnam.[63]

Despite China's eagerness to promote its own industrial model to the North Vietnamese, there were significant obstacles. First, the collectivized production program did not significantly increase Vietnam's productivity. According to Qiang Zhai, by 1962, the North Vietnamese State Planning Board confessed that North Vietnam was too politically and economically "unsophisticated" to implement collectivization.[64] Second, the flow of Chinese aid was temporarily suspended due to the outbreak of the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962. While "America's capitalist press had created a chart on the Sino-Indian border issue that still classified Vietnam as a part of China," North Vietnam wished to demonstrate its ability to pursue its own national interests without China's advice, while at the same time wishing to see continued Chinese support for its cause. Therefore, Hanoi cautiously declared neutrality dur-

59 Li Jie, "Changes in China's Domestic Situation in the 190s and U.S.-Sino Relations," in Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), p. 294.

60 Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p. 191. See Austin Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), pp. 156-176 for further elaboration on this issue.

61 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 83.

62 For further elaboration on "protracted warfare," see Mao Zedong's "On Protracted Warfare," a lecture-series delivered from May 26 to June 3, 1938 at the Yenan Association for the Study of War of Resistance Against Japan.(http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm).

63 "Zhou Enlai's Talk with the Vietnamese Workers' Party (Dang Lao Dong)," May 12-13, 1960. Adapted from Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 84.

64 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 85.

ing the conflict, greatly disappointing Beijing.[65]

However, Hanoi's claim of neutrality was highly pragmatic, because for North Vietnam, the unresolved question of a proper reunification was a more urgent matter. The North Vietnamese believed that as a progenitor of nationalist movements in Indochina, they had the right to lead the Indochina region as a confederation, rather than a region divided into three independent states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. As Qiang Zhai correctly observes, political unity was essential for Indochina to recover from the ravages of the long and brutal struggle for freedom against colonial rule.[66]

However, Hanoi's plans for national and regional reunification had to be postponed because there was a resurgence of instability in Laos from 1960 to 1962. Laos became increasingly pro-U.S. and pro-Taiwan, prompting a military response from the Communist Pathet Lao forces. The North Vietnamese chose to intervene militarily on behalf of the Pathet Lao. The North Vietnamese wanted to assure Communist political hegemony in Southeast Asia, while also making sure that American military intervention did not unnecessarily transform the Laos Crisis into a major international war.

China remained ambivalent towards North Vietnam's military operations in the region. From China's perspective, Vietnam's military intervention in Laos was very welcome, for it would protect China from what Liu Guibo called an American attempt to "sabotage" the Geneva Agreements.[67] Furthermore, as Ang Cheng Guan argues, the North Vietnamese military was performing a crucial task in place of China—restoring order and pacifying Indochina—and thereby preventing a large-scale war from occurring "too close for Beijing's comfort."[68]

However, close ties between Hanoi and Moscow, fostered by the Soviet Union's logistical support of Vietnam's military activities in Laos, made Beijing increasingly suspicious of both Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The Chinese and the Soviets sharply disagreed about the proper solution to the Laotian Crisis, exacerbating the Sino-Soviet Split. As Nguyen argues, unlike China, which favored supporting the Pathet Lao to increase Communism's international sphere of influence, the Soviet Union favored cooperating with the West to conclude a cease-fire in Laos and ultimately neutralize the country.[69] From China's perspective, the Soviet Union's stance was unacceptable, for it would leave open the possibility of an anti-Communist and pro-U.S. regime that could promote its ideas across Southeast Asia, exposing southern China directly to another possible source of American military threat.

To resolve this uneasiness, China had two options. It could increase its aid to the Pathet Lao and compete against Moscow and Hanoi, or it could participate in an international conference to negotiate terms for peace.[70] Since the first option entailed the risk of inviting American military intervention into Laos for the sake of "containment," which would aim to democratize the country and expose China to further tensions with Indochina, China chose the second option with the aim of producing a cease-fire in Laos, which would prevent American intervention and guarantee the security of southern China. To that end, China, as Lien-Hang T. Nguyen puts it, "loudly increased its support for the Laotian Communists" and "favored the continuation of the Pathet Lao's struggle so that it could "negotiate from a position of strength."[71]

China was fully dedicated to helping Laos acquire an advantageous position during the negotiations. According to Qiang Zhai, China's new Foreign Minister Chen Yi concentrated on "seizing higher moral ground" by "portraying the Communists as victims and the United States as the aggressor."[72] Chen forcefully reiterated Zhou Enlai's "peaceful coexistence" doctrine as a main cause for Chinese support of Southeast Asia.[73] This line of rhetoric struck a strong chord with Hanoi, which was also wary of inviting American intervention in Southeast Asia. In May 1962, the Pathet Lao forces occupied Nam Tha, the last remaining stronghold of the rightist Phoumi government. Two months later, on July 23, 1962, the Geneva Agreement on Laos officially confirmed the neutrality of Laos.[74]

The neutralization of Laos indirectly fulfilled China's two major objectives in participating in the conference. First, it prevented the United States from intervening in Indochina. Second, China demonstrated and increased its influence in the region through its support for the Pathet Lao. As Qiang Zhai argues, although the peace created at the conference was a "mirage" and did not significantly change the political status

65 "Ho Chi Minh's Views on the Sino-Indian Border Conflict," November 24, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC MFA 106-00729-04. Translated for CWIHP by Anna Beth Keim. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114463

66 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 61. Zhai argues that Vietnam's motivation behind the creation of an Indochinese confederation had its roots in the French colonial tradition of treating Indochina as a single entity—an ironic imperialist construct.

67 "Liu Guibo's Speech at the Second National Conference on Foreign Affairs," March 4, 1959, adapted from *Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 94.

68 Ang Cheng Guan, "The Vietnam War, 1962-1964: The Vietnamese Communist Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35.4 (October 2000), p. 602.

69 Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 58 and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 104.

70 Chae-jin Lee, "Communist China and the Geneva Conference on Laos: A Reappraisal," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (July, 1988), p. 524.

71 Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p. 58.

72 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 101.

73 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 101-102.

74 "Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos," July 23, 1962 and the "Protocol to the above-mentioned Declaration.," July 23, 1962 (https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20456/volume-456-I-6564-English.pdf)

quo—North Vietnam was still actively involved in Laos—it did produce two historically significant harbingers. First, Hanoi would increasingly seek China's assistance throughout its war against the United States, and second, the fundamental difference between Hanoi and Beijing's policy on Laos—intervention versus a strategic desire to neutralize Laos—would bring about a breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese relations by the end of the Vietnam War, eventually leading to the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War.[75]

The biggest problem confronting Hanoi was that even the decision to militarily intervene in Laos was inconclusive. The North Vietnamese were divided between the choices of pursuing immediate reunification through the use of military force and seeking "peaceful coexistence" with their Southeast Asian neighbors, a policy that won much support from the Soviet Union, which wanted to have a relaxed relationship with the United States. However, the great influence of Chinese diplomacy during the First Indochina War and the political bond that subsequently formed were not easily dispensable either, as Hanoi knew all too well that the Chinese were more reliable providers of direct technological and military support due to geographical proximity. This would prove very true when the United States began its military intervention in Vietnam in the late summer of 1963.[76]

American "Bandit-Style Imperialism" and Chinese Response (1963-1968)

The Chinese were very worried about the ambiguous but clearly strong American desire to seek victory at all costs in Vietnam. In March 1963, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi told Xuan Thuy, his North Vietnamese counterpart, that the Chinese government and people were "deeply concerned about the grave situation created by U.S. imperialists in South Vietnam and are firmly opposed to the U.S. imperialists' crime of stepping up their war of aggression there."[77]

However, China was careful to distance itself from a direct military confrontation with the United States over Vietnam. China's primary motives for aiding Vietnam were that Vietnam was a Communist ally suffering from foreign imperialism and because a spillover of the Vietnam War into Chinese territory would force China to engage in an unnecessary war against the United States for the sake of maintaining a peaceful southern border. Hence, China made sure to carefully balance its ideological duty of supporting a Communist country with its realist duty of preserving national security.

Furthermore, China was not militarily ready to actively fight on the Vietnamese side because, as a report by the War Department emphasized, there were "many problems emerging" and some of them were "very serious."[78] The failure of the Great Leap Forward movement had taken a massive toll by creating major economic and social problems. China's push for rapid industrialization resulted in a general imbalance between industrial and population growth such that the industrial sector became "over-concentrated." For example, 60 percent of the civil machinery industry, 50 percent of the chemical industry, and 52 percent of the national defense industry was concentrated in 14 major cities with a population of over one million.[79] China was essentially experiencing a "military-industrial-population" complex, which if left unsolved would leave the entire mainland China vulnerable to possible American military attacks. In addition, China faced the problem of maintaining balanced population growth in cities which were near coastal areas and were "very vulnerable" to airstrikes. There were no "effective mechanisms" to encourage the continuation of war preparations while also ensuring the evacuation of the majority of Chinese civilians in the event of war.[80] Principal railroad junctions, bridges and harbors were also heavily exposed to air attacks such that if the initial stages of the Vietnam War should spread to China, these important "transportation points" could "become paralyzed."[81] China urgently needed to solve these critical problems which were "directly related to the whole armed forces, to the whole people, and to the process of a national defense war."[82] Mao described the report as "excellent" and worthy of careful study and gradual implementation of its recommendations.[83] The "gradual implementation" of the report's suggestion bore fruit through the creation of

75 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 111.

76 For further discussion about the American decision to enter the Second Indochina War, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and London: The University of California Press, 1999), pp. 1-42.

77 "*Peking Review*, No. 10 (March, 1964), p. 25,"adapted from Frank E. Rogers, "Sino-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1964-1966," *The China Quarterly*, No. 66 (June, 1976), p. 296.

78 "Report by the War Department of the General Staff," April 25, 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, *Dangde wenxian*[2] (Party Documents) 3 (1995), 34-35. Translated by Qiang Zhai. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111513. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was another major political and social problem that limited China's preparations for war. See Roderick Macfarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008).

79 "Report by the War Department of the General Staff," April 25, 1964.

80 "Report by the War Department of the General Staff," April 25, 1964.

81 "Report by the War Department of the General Staff," April 25, 1964.

82 "Report by the War Department of the General Staff," April 25, 1964.

83 "Mao Zedong's Comments on the War Department's April 25 Report," August 12, 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Dangde wenxian[2] (Party Documents) 3 (1995), 33.

the "Third Front," which was a radical effort to make China as self-sufficient in industrial production as possible, reducing the degree of vulnerability to American attacks.[84] Until 1963, the "Third Front" accounted for almost 40 percent of China's national industrial production.[85]

Unfortunately, the United States' rapid translation of the Tonkin Resolution's principles into military action by 1964 meant that China could no longer afford to direct its attention solely to domestic problems.[86] Although Mao initially assumed that the United States, China, and Vietnam all would not want a war, events on the battlefield told a different story.[87] The deeper North Vietnam became entangled in its struggle against American aggression, the more proportional the relationship between the amount of American pressure on Vietnam and Vietnam's necessary reliance on Chinese assistance became.[88]

In 1965, as American military efforts further intensified, Beijing chose to integrate ideology and pragmatism by helping North Vietnam as a Communist ally and at the same time exercising geopolitical *realpolitik* to effectively prepare itself against American intervention.[89] The resulting answer was that China would provide North Vietnam with whatever it could based on the latter's demands, but only if North Vietnam promised to be fully responsible for its own actions during the war. This was because, as Liu Shaoqi told Le Duan, Hanoi essentially had the "complete initiative."[90]

Nonetheless, China assured North Vietnam that it did not wish to assume a passive role in supporting the North Vietnamese military effort. In July 1964, Mao told the Vietnamese delegation to an important conference held in Hanoi to discuss the war that China shared Vietnam's goal of victory in the war and that it would provide "unconditional support." Most importantly, China also made a promise to the North Vietnamese that was highly conscious of its own national security. China promised North Vietnam that if the United States expanded the war beyond Vietnam, China would send ground forces and more economic aid.[91]

According to Chen Jian, China's decision to deeply commit itself to North Vietnam's struggle against the United States can be understood in three ways. First, China was still consciously devoted to the principle of helping other socialist countries complete their Communist revolutions by overthrowing imperialist nations—a position that Hanoi also welcomed because it did not want a "dishonorable Munich" type agreement with the United States.[92] Second, China wished to export its own Communist revolution as a model for the rest of the world. From China's perspective, a Communist revolution had a uniform beginning—the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and imperialists—and required an unending flow of proletarian revolutionary action to fully realize that goal. This uniform beginning was both the purpose of the revolution and the essence of its continuous process. The rest of the socialist world was the "world's countryside"; China was to be a leader of the socialist camp and lead a "continuous revolution" against the capitalist side of the world, which was represented by the "world's cities." Within this "countryside versus cities" paradigm, the victory of the Communists in Vietnam was expected to serve as concrete evidence of how China's vision of a "continuous revolution" was a realizable goal.[93]

It is also likely that China had another important realist motive: the Sino-Soviet split. Throughout the 1960s, ideological tensions between China and the Soviet Union had become more acute than they had been in 1956. Mao Zedong was increasingly critical of Kruschev's anti-Stalinist views and condemned Kruschev as a "revisionist." Zhou Enlai also concurred with Mao's view and criticized the Soviet Union for "carrying out nothing but Kruschevism," making it "absolutely impossible for them to change."[94] China was worried about the possibility of Soviet-North Vietnamese collaboration during the war. Even if there was no collaboration between North Vietnam and the Soviet Union, China's leaders felt that China had to guide North Vietnam to victory over anti-imperialism, for failure to do so would result in a loss of national prestige and credibility. Hence, as Chen Jian aptly argues, China perceived Vietnam as a "litmus test for true Communism."[95] Therefore, China favored clandestine cooperation with North Vietnam such that no major details about the relationship would be revealed to the Soviets. As Zhou Enlai told Ho Chi Minh on March 1, 1965:

"In our course of revolution, and in our struggle

84 Barry Noughton, "The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *The China Quarterly,* No. 115 (September, 1988), p. 353.

85 Noughton, "The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," p. 365.

86 Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp. 193-221.

87 Li Xiangqian, "The Economic and Political Impact of the Vietnam War on China in 1964," in Priscilla Roberts eds., *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), p. 182.

88 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 129.

89 On American military escalation, see Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp. 300-332.

90. "Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan," April 8, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113058

91 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 209.

92 "French General Delegation, Hanoi to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris," April 4, 1965, #99, Asie-Oceanie: VietnamConflit, Archives Diplomatique de France, La Courneuve, Paris, I. Adapted from "'We Don't' Want a Munich': Hanoi's Diplomatic Strategy, 1965-1968," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (June, 2012), p. 548

93 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 211-212.

94 "Zhou Enlai talking to Ho Chi Minh," March 1, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113055.

95 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 211.

against the U.S., the matters of top secrecy should not be disclosed to them. Of course, we can mention the principles, which we also want to publicize. We oppose [the Soviet] military activities that include the sending of missile battalions and 2 MiG-21 aircraft as well as the proposal to establish an airlift using 45 planes for weapon transportation. We also have to be wary of the military instructors. Soviet experts have withdrawn, so what are their purposes [when they] wish to come back? We have had experience in the past when there were subversive activities in China, Korea, and Cuba. We, therefore, should keep an eye on their activities, namely their transportation of weapons and military training. Otherwise, the relations between our two countries may turn from good to bad, thus affecting cooperation between our two countries."[96]

Zhou had a good reason to suspect the Soviets' sincerity about providing aid to North Vietnam. Six years earlier, Kruschev had ordered the withdrawal of all Soviet scientists from China without any prior official notification to Mao Zedong—a decisive event that ushered in the Sino-Soviet split in 1960. Zhou was therefore cautioning Ho about the potential for great dishonesty on the part of Moscow towards Hanoi. In addition, the magnitude of the war was already big enough with the Americans bombarding almost every inch of Vietnamese territory. Soviet military intervention would not only unnecessarily enlarge the scale of the conflict, but should Moscow successfully defend North Vietnam's interests, Hanoi might be tempted to abandon the Sino-Vietnamese alliance in favor of an alliance with Moscow. Such a scenario would critically shift the balance of power within the Communist world in favor of Moscow and hence, China ironically ended up supporting the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam more than the North Vietnamese did.

Fortunately for Beijing, Hanoi did not require direct Soviet military intervention, for it was determined to show that "the American imperialists and their lackeys sabotaged the 1954 Geneva Agreement."[97] The North Vietnamese also did not lose sight of their original objective of promoting national reunification and supported those Southern Vietnamese who were fighting the Americans for the sake of the "just cause" of national independence.[98] The North Vietnamese interpreted their mission of national liberation as a call for international resistance against American imperialism.

Moreover, the North Vietnamese wished to create their own sphere of influence as leaders of the Communist world. They believed they were making a "great contribution" to the world because they were supporting not only national liberation but also peace, democracy, and socialism.[99] American imperialists were using South Vietnam as a testing ground for their "special warfare" strategy, which was aimed at extinguishing the struggle for liberation by the peoples of all nations. The United States was essentially carrying out a policy of "neo-colonialism" and was preparing for "a new world war."[100] To confront and prepare an adequate military response to the United States' attempt to encroach on Vietnam's sovereignty, North Vietnam favored cooperation between North and South Vietnam to put forward "appropriate requests for assistance and support."[101]

Mao Zedong eagerly wanted to prove that the United States' policy of expanding aggression against South Vietnam was highly misguided and instructed Zhou Enlai to convince leaders from the non-aligned nations that American aggression in Vietnam would "fail completely."[102] Zhou met men such as Pakistani President Ayub Khan and Algerian President Ben Bella and told them that there was "no possibility that Vietnam would yield to American pressure."[103] An "unconditional surrender" was a veneer with which the United States really wanted to "scare China."[104] China would not be intimidated nor would it abandon its original stance of supporting Vietnam. Unconditional surrender was nothing but "requesting that the people in South Vietnam should stop armed struggle, that North Vietnam should stop supporting the struggle in South Vietnam, and that the puppet troops in South Vietnam would be given some breathing space, so that the United States would be able to strengthen its military presence in South Vietnam."[105] The situation in Vietnam confirmed why Zhou reflected China's readiness and anxiety about defending herself from American aggression. From 1965 to 1969, the violence in Vietnam intensified as the United States focused on increasing, as Marilyn Young put it, "the body count of enemy dead rath-

96 Zhou Enlai talking to Ho Chi Minh," March 1, 1965

97 "Resolution of the Party Central Committee on the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities," March 27, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Party Central Committee, Hanoi.

98 "Resolution of the Party Central Committee on the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities," March 27, 1965.

99 "Resolution of the Party Central Committee on the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities," March 27, 1965.

100 "Resolution of the Party Central Committee on the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities," March 27, 1965.

101 "Resolution of the Party Central Committee on the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities," March 27, 1965

102 "Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan," April 2, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113057).

103 "Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan," April 2, 1965

104 "Zhou Enlai to Algerian President Ben Bella" March 30, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113056).

105 "Zhou Enlai to Algerian President Ben Bella," March 30, 1965.

er than attempt[ing] to secure territory."[106] The battleground became so dangerous that, according to Truong Nhu Tang, a North Vietnamese soldier:

"We [soldiers] lived like hunted animals, an existence that demanded constant physical and mental alertness…. The rice ration for both leaders and fighters was twenty kilos a month… it was our entire diet, a nutritional intake that left us all in a state of semi-starvation."[107]

Despite the miserable conditions under which soldiers were engaged in the war and the skepticism and ambivalence of the American public towards the war, the United States sent 180,000 ground troops by the end of 1965. This figure would double at the end of 1966, clearly demonstrating the United States' urge to bring the direction of the war under its control and secure a convincing victory. As Frank Rogers put it, the United States was trying to promote a "limitless expansion until the enemy relented."[108]

China was determined to prove that American usage of Vietnam as a strategic base to both achieve a victory over the Communists and to "contain" China at the same time was a highly dangerous policy. China believed that the coexistence of a war of aggression and a war of defense was not possible because, as Zhou Enlai told Pakistani President Ayub Khan during a meeting in Karachi on April 2, 1965, it becomes "impossible to draw a line" between two very different kinds of war. The United States was clearly trying to stage a war of imperialist aggression in the name of "containing" a threat—a poor excuse to justify American plans to invade Vietnam.[109] However, the impossibility of "drawing a line" in a war does not mean that a war must necessarily be inevitable. China was furious with the United States for ambiguously justifying its increased commitment to expanding a war that had no fundamental objective. The United States was responsible for devising a capricious policy based on an unclear definition of "aggression." As Zhou told Khan:

"American propaganda claims that if Vietnam does not stop its "aggression," the United States will expand the war of aggression. This is the most ridiculous bandit-style logic of imperialism. According to this logic, South Vietnam's resistance to American aggression is "aggression," and North Vietnam's support to South Vietnam is "aggression" against one's own compatriots. If so, the resistance by the NLF in Algeria to the French colonists becomes Algeria's "aggression" against Algeria, and Egypt's taking back the Suez Canal becomes the Egyptians' "aggression" against the Egyptians…. This question became crystal clear as soon as I discussed it with the Algerians and Egyptians. This is nothing but America's bandit-style logic. On the other hand, the United States is propagandizing that the expansion of the war will be limited to South Vietnam, and that it only wants North Vietnam to stop its support to South Vietnam. The United States is hoping to separate South Vietnam from North Vietnam, thus isolating the South."[110]

Zhou clearly believed that the ambiguity of the United States' definition of "aggression" was chiefly responsible for obstructing Vietnamese unification. This, in turn, was detrimental to China's national security, because the longer the conflict in Vietnam persisted, the more unstable China's southern border would become. In addition, the ambiguity of "aggression" implied that China could not move into Vietnam to protect its national security, for this would only justify the United States' continuation of its war against "aggression."

The root cause of the ambiguity of "aggression" was the ambiguous manner by which the United States conducted its policy of "containment." Zhou told Ayub Khan that the fundamental problem with American "containment" towards Vietnam was that it was highly unpredictable and "wavering," because:

"First, it asks the Vietnamese to stop "aggression" against the Vietnamese, this is groundless. Second, it has been wavering on expanding the war. Whenever it takes a step, it will look around for taking the next step. It does not have a fixed policy."[111]

Zhou also told Khan that it was precisely such ambiguity in American "containment" that would lead to certain American defeat. Despite the fact that the policy was "unsound," Zhou argued that the United States was adamantly refusing to admit the reality that "to withdraw is the best way to save face." Instead, the United States was "recklessly" trying to continue the war, which would cause it "to lose more face."[112]

However, the Chinese leadership was careful to avoid direct involvement in the Vietnam War as much as possible and concentrated on protecting southern China from the war through diplomacy. When General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party Le Duan visited Beijing to ask for Chinese aid on April 8, 1965, Chinese Communist Party Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi told him that while China would do its best to support Vietnam, if there was no "invitation" from Vietnam, the Chinese would not come to Vietnam. Liu added that the

106 Young, Fitzgerald, and Grunfeld eds., *The Vietnam War: A History in Documents*, pp. 101-102.

107 Truong Nhu Tang, with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage, 1986), pp. 157-171, adapted from Young, Fitzgerald, and Grunfeld eds., *The Vietnam War: A History in Documents*, p. 101.

108 Frank E. Rogers, "Sino-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1964-1966," *The China Quarterly*, No. 66 (June, 1976), p. 295.

109 "Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan," April 2, 1965.

110 "Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan," April 2, 1965.

111 "Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan," April 2, 1965.

112 "Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan," April 2, 1965.

North Vietnamese had the "complete initiative."[113] Liu represented the Chinese leadership's prevailing view that the Vietnam War had to remain strictly fought in Vietnam.

Ironically, while the phrase "complete initiative" seemed to suggest that Vietnam could autonomously request assistance whenever it was required, it was actually China that exercised initiative to its advantage. China oscillated between providing aid and suspending it. For example, on May 16, 1965, Mao Zedong agreed with Ho Chi Minh that China would send construction teams to build six roads along the North-South Vietnamese border to enhance combat efficiency in future battles.[114] However, China also wanted to remind North Vietnam of Liu Shaoqi's warning that it would only enter the war if there was a request for military assistance. On the same day, Zhou Enlai met with Nguyen Van Hieu, a journalist, and reminded Vietnam of the four important principles China would abide while formulating its policies toward the war. First, China would not voluntarily engage in a war with the United States. Second, China would remain consistent throughout the course of the war. Third, China would always be militarily ready should the war spill over the Sino-Vietnamese border. Finally, if the United States expanded the Vietnam War by means of air warfare, China would respond with ground attacks.[115]

China's refusal to enter the Vietnam War militarily should not be equated with a total disregard for military preparations. The Chinese had three major objectives in choosing military preparedness as a central strategy against the United States. First, they wanted to counter what was perceived as an increasing Soviet influence in Vietnam. China especially deemed inappropriate the Soviet Union's proposal to open negotiations between Vietnam and the United States, as it would disrupt the fulfillment of China's socialist mission of ensuring Vietnam's national liberation. Opening an international conference for U.S.-Vietnam negotiations was a direct "manifestation of weakness in front of American imperialism." This in turn, would "strengthen the aggressive revelry of the United States" and "damage the fighting spirit of the Vietnamese people."[116] Defending Vietnam from American imperialism was also an indirect but clear method of showing the United States the importance of adhering to agreed principles. China wanted to teach the United States that it had violated the 1954 Geneva Agreement and that genuine peace would only be realized when the United States completely withdrew its military and let the peoples of Southeast Asia solve their problems on their own. So long as the United States continued to "make noises about broadening the war," it was certain that the conditions for negotiations were "not ripe."[117]

China made sure that the Soviets also understood the relationship between making such "noises" and the prospect for negotiations. When the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Kosygin asked the Chinese to help the United States devise an exit strategy in Vietnam, Chinese leaders warned the Soviets not to use Vietnam as a bargaining chip in their relations with the United States. Zhou Enlai even branded such an attempt as undeniable evidence that the Soviet Union was trying to "sell out its own brothers."[118]

China wanted to curb possible American-Soviet collusion in working out a peace plan for Vietnam and to preserve the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. Zhou Enlai met North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong in October 1965 and warned his Vietnamese counterpart not to rely heavily on Soviet aid because their help was "not sincere."[119] Zhou Enlai argued that Vietnam could always depend on China to assume the Soviet Union's role in Vietnam because the Chinese always wanted to help Vietnam and never thought about "selling them out" as the Soviets did.[120] China only allowed the Soviet Union to use Chinese railways to ship military supplies to Vietnam,

113 "Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan," April 8, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations*(http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113058).

114 "Discussion between Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh," May 16, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113059).

115 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Nguyen Van Hieu and Nguyen Thi Binh," May 16, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversation s* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113060).

116 "Oral Statement of the PRC Government." Transmitted by PRC Vice-Foreign Minister Liu Xiao to the Chargé d'Affaires of the USSR in the PRC, Cde. F. V. Mochulskii, on February 27, 1965. *[Source: Arkhiv Veshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii(Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation; AVPRF), Moscow, Russia, fond 0100, opis 58, delo 1, papka 516, 1-2. Translated from Russian by Lorenz Lüthi.]*.

117 "Oral Statement of the PRC Government,"February 27, 1965.

118 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Ho Chi Minh," May 17, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113061).

119 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," October 9, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113065).

120 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, October 9, 1965."

which amounted to 43,000 tons by the end of 1965.[121]

China's decision to deploy a massive amount of military personnel and equipment was not whimsical, but rather was a highly calculated move that fully reflected Liu Shaoqi's prescient warning about a critical need for military preparedness. On May 19, 1965, Liu told the Central Military Commission that "faster and better" military preparations were highly necessary because the enemy "may even dare to invade" and if there were no adequate preparations, such a prospect "would not be impossible."[122] Liu argued that if China successfully carried out a defensive war against the United States, it would prove that the American military's lack of morale was a decisive factor that would mark the difference between a just and unjust war.[123] Liu Shaoqi argued that an increase in the number of troops, an increase in the number of military regions, and a unified leadership were the three essential ingredients for a successful military preparation for a possible American invasion of the Chinese mainland. China would never retreat in the face of an enemy invasion unless it was "cut into parts."[124]

Zhou Enlai felt that China's decisions needed sufficient international legitimacy. Nine days later, he met with Indonesian Prime Minister Subandiro and explained that China's decision to militarily counter a possible spread of the war into its own borders was meant to show how wrong it was for the Americans to "dash around madly" in Vietnam advocating "gradual escalation." The United States chose a policy that was the "worst taboo in a military sense," that was based on extreme pragmatism which had to be countered using all necessary means, including both air and ground warfare. Zhou argued that China was even prepared to fight abroad against the United States should Chinese territory become occupied by American troops.[125]

Finally, China understood Vietnam's conflict with the United States as a major extension of Vietnam's struggle for national liberation—a direct echo of China's perception of the importance of the First Indochina War. During a meeting in June 1965 with Tanzanian President Julius Nyere, Zhou Enlai stressed that the situation in Vietnam was "most serious" from a world-wide perspective and that the more "America is bogged down," the better it would be for the continuation of Vietnam's national liberation movement. The most important question was how support would be provided for Vietnam's cause, and Zhou told Nyere that China was willing to provide "all kinds of support" to Vietnam and disperse the strength of the United States, thereby rendering it powerless.[126]

From June 1965, China sent various kinds of military personnel such as minesweepers, engineers, and logistic units to North Vietnam. In addition, until 1968, when the Tet offensive was reaching its boiling point, China diversified and increased the volume of its material support, from weaponry to various foodstuffs and other daily necessities. Chinese aid to Vietnam was most significant during the peak years of the Tet Offensive. In 1967, 170,000 Chinese soldiers were deployed to provide infrastructural help to Vietnam—constructing bridges, railroads and factories. By March 1968, Chinese troops stationed in Vietnam amounted to 320,000.[127] As such, until the end of the Tet Offensive, Chinese support for Vietnam remained fairly consistent. It was only from the early 1970s, when the war was drawing near to its conclusion with North Vietnam's occupation of Saigon, that Sino-Vietnamese relations hit their nadir and China drastically reduced its support of North Vietnam.[128]

The rapid increase of Chinese support to Vietnam up until the end of the Tet Offensive was based on fervent opposition to a negotiated peace with the United States. The Chinese Foreign Ministry criticized the Johnson Administration's call for international support for peace negotiations as an exploitation of the ignorance and the fear of Third World nations about a possible expansion of war. The Chinese feared that should negotiations really take place, they would decisively sever diplomatic relations between China and the Third World.[129] In addition, the United States was indirectly trying to sever Sino-Vietnamese relations. The United States branded China as the "only obstacle" to negotiations, eagerly trying to blame the Chinese for delaying a crucial opportunity to show the United States' genuine commitment to realizing peace in Vietnam. On the other hand, the United States was inviting forces that were hostile to China, such as "the Soviet revisionists, India, Yugoslavia, and other reactionaries."[130] Under such

121 *Peking Review*, March 11, 1966, p. 5. Adapted from Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 150. See also Li Danhui, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute over Assistance for Vietnam's Anti-American War, 1965-1972," in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, pp. 296-304.

122 "Liu Shaoqi's Speech to the Central Military Commission war planning meeting on May 19, 1965," May 19, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, *Dangde Wenxian* 3 (1995), 40 (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110410).

123 "Liu Shaoqi's Speech to the Central Military Commission war planning meeting on May 19, 1965."

124 "Liu Shaoqi's Speech to the Central Military Commission war planning meeti.ng on May 19, 1965."

125 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Indonesian Prime Minister Subandrio," May 28, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113062).

126 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Tanzanian President Julius Nyere," June 4, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77Conversation*s(http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113063).

127 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 135-136.

128 Zhai*, China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 137.

129 "Chinese Foreign Ministry Circular, "Vietnam 'Peace Talk' Activities,"" August 19, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Jiangsu Provincial Archives, Q 3124, D, J 123. Translated for CWIHP by Qiang Zhai (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114469).

130 "Chinese Foreign Ministry Circular, 'Vietnam 'Peace Talk' Activities,"" August 19, 1965.

circumstances, negotiations were nothing more than a "betrayal of the Vietnamese people."[131]

China's opposition to a negotiated peace was such that Zhou Enlai even rejected French Minister of State Andre Malraux's offer to neutralize the Vietnam War, arguing that the United States started the war in violation of the Geneva Accords and that the war would continue because the United States was unlikely to leave Vietnam.[132] Chen Yi, the new Chinese Foreign Minister, elaborated on this particular point by praising the North Vietnamese for their determination to achieve a final victory which would eventually "unmask the face of the enemy." Unmasking America's true intentions in Vietnam was crucial because the Americans showed "no signs of wanting to have peace" and were instead busy trying to open talks to "deceive public opinion." The only feasible option left for North Vietnam was to engage in political struggle in response.[133] Although China desired a conclusion of the Vietnam War on North Vietnam's terms, a cessation of the conflict was highly unlikely in 1965, because the time was, as Zhou Enlai put it, "not ripe."[134] The Chinese leadership thought that should North Vietnam choose to negotiate with the United States, negotiations must only take place when North Vietnam could establish positive conditions.[135] China was once again firmly adhering to its cornerstone principle that "peaceful coexistence" could not be realized without full respect for national sovereignty.

China's support for a complete North Vietnamese victory remained firm until the Tet Offensive. During a meeting with Le Duan, Zhou Enlai praised North Vietnam for being at the "forefront of the anti-American struggle" and said that the blood of the Vietnamese people had been shed for a noble cause, earning them a high reputation as the "standard-bearers of a world revolution."[136] Zhou also urged the North Vietnamese to be wary of Soviet support, which was primarily aimed at arranging an armistice between Vietnam and the United States. Such a move was "deceitful," because it aimed to "cast a shadow between Vietnam and China." Improvement in U.S.-Vietnam relations would only obstruct the continuation of Vietnam's national revolution. Adhering to the Soviet Union's proposal for a negotiated peace was akin to adhering to "revisionism," which was incompatible with Vietnam's anti-American resistance.[137]

China and North Vietnam spent much of the following year analyzing ways to carry on Hanoi's struggle against the United States. Zhou Enlai told Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap that the American military strategy was largely centered on a heavy use of artillery—a tradition that began in the American Revolution and one that the American used as if they were "conducting exercises."[138] Zhou also warned that Vietnam must prepare for two likely scenarios. First, the war could simply expand. Second, should the Vietnamese refuse to surrender, the Americans could chose to totally blockade all of Vietnam's coastlines, even at the risk of jeopardizing relations with other countries. Zhou argued that Vietnam must promote a national propaganda, appeal for sympathy and aim to divide the enemy as much as possible to continue waging a war—the highest form of political struggle.[139] Zhou recommended that the Vietnamese take their time in fighting the United States, because it was a 100-mile journey that could only be completed when the first 90 miles were traveled.[140]

Hence, China sought to localize the war by mentoring the North Vietnamese on how they could effectively wage a de-

131 "Zhou Enlai's talk with E. H. K. Mudenda, Agricultural Minister of Zambia" August 20, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Diplomatic History Research Office of the People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry, ed., Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975 (Chronology of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities, 1949-1975) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993), p. 474. Translated for CWIHP by Qiang Zhai (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111524).

132 "Chinese Foreign Ministry circular, "Malraux's Visit to China," August 12, 1965, Record Group 3124, File 123. Jiangsu Provincial Archives. Cited in Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 162.

133 Chen Yi, "On U.S. Aggression in Vietnam," in *Vice-Premier Chen Yi Answers Questions Put By Correspondents* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), p. 6. (www.marxists.org).

134 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi," December 19, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113068).

135 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Nguyen Trinh Dinh," December 19. 1965. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWHIP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB39.pdf).

136 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Le Duan," March 23, 1966. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, 77 *Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113069).

137 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Le Duan," March 23, 1966.

138 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap," April 7, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113073).

139 "Zhou Enlai's Talk with Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap," April 10, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Diplomatic History Research Office of the People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry, ed., Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975 (Chronology of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities, 1949-1975) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993), p. 510. Translated for CWIHP by Qiang Zhai. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112660)

140 "Discussion between Mao Zedong, Pham Van Dong, and Vo Nguyen Giap," April 11, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113053).

fensive war on their own. On April 11, 1967, Mao Zedong met with Pham Van Dong, the North Vietnamese Prime Minister, and told him that North Vietnam should firmly adhere to its strategy of guerilla warfare and maintain a defensive position throughout the course of the war:

"First, of course, it is necessary to construct defensive works along the coast…. The best way is to construct defensive works like the ones [we had constructed] during the Korean War, so that you may prevent the enemy from entering the inner land. Second, however, if the Americans are determined to invade the inner land, you may allow them to do so. You should pay attention to your strategy. You must not engage your main force in a head-to-head confrontation with them, and must well maintain your main force. My opinion is that so long as the green mountain is there, how can you ever lack firewood?"[141]

Mao also emphasized that since fighting a war of attrition was "like having meals," it was best not to take "too big a bite."[142] True victory in a war could only be declared when a nation demonstrates that it is able to fully "digest" the war and learn from that experience how to prepare for a much larger conflict against a more powerful adversary. By the end of 1967, the North Vietnamese had very painfully learned what Mao meant, losing more than 200,000 men.[143] However, members of the pro-war faction in the North Vietnamese government, such as Le Duan, remained convinced that Hanoi could still claim a victory because

"It is impossible for the United States to maintain its current troop level, to expand the war, or to drag it out. The Americans have no other option than employing greater military strength…I say we increase our military attacks so we can then seize the initiative to advance the diplomatic struggle in order to use world public opinion against the imperialist Americans and their bellicose puppets."[144]

After much deliberation, on January 21, 1968, North Vietnam's politburo issued an official statement announcing the beginning of the Tet Offensive. The statement confirmed the formation of the "Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces," which would aim to "divide the enemy to the greatest extent," and fight for "independence and sovereignty, freedom, and democracy," all of which would be possible through the realization of the ultimate goal—withdrawal of American troops. The Alliance was to fight for a liberated and unified Vietnam, and for anyone who wanted a South Vietnam that was "sovereign, independent, democratic, peaceful, and neutral."[145]

For Beijing, the most important objective was to effectively control the amount of violence near its southern border. Furthermore, China's leadership was increasingly wary of a possible collaboration between Vietnam and the Soviet Union because the Tet Offensive strongly emphasized controlling cities and towns in South Vietnam, a strategy which the Chinese considered as immature. As Lien-Hang Nguyen argues, Beijing strongly disapproved of the strategy because it was a "total repudiation of Mao's protracted warfare and an embrace of Soviet-style warfare."[146] Therefore, the ideal amount of violence that China favored was, as Qiang Zhai describes, "low to mid-intensity," so that China could localize the conflict in Vietnam as much as possible to avoid a direct military confrontation with the United States and wrestling with Moscow over how much support should be provided to Hanoi.[147] With these crucial objectives in mind, China advised the Vietnamese to engage in mobilized warfare against the United States. Zhou Enlai told Ho Chi Minh on February 7, 1968 that Vietnam should consider organizing Army corps which would maximize numerical superiority to overwhelm the United States:

"Each of them will be composed of 30,000-40,000 soldiers, and each of their combat operations should aim at eliminating 4,000-5,000 enemy soldiers in whole units. These field army corps should be able to carry out operational tasks far away from their home bases, and should be able to engage in operations in this war zone, or in that war zone. When they are attacking isolated enemy forces, they may adopt the strategy of approaching the enemy by underground tunnels. They may also adopt the strategy of night fighting and short-distance fighting, so that the enemy's bombers and artillery fire will not be in a position to play a role. In the meantime, you may construct underground galleries, which are different from the simple underground tunnels, in three or four directions [around the enemy], and use them for troop movement and ammunition transportation. You also need to reserve some units for

141 "Discussion between Chinese and Vietnamese delegations," April 11, 1967,"History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112155).

142 "Discussion between Mao Zedong, Pham Van Dong, and Vo Nguyen Giap, 11, 1967."

143 William Thomas Allison, *The Tet Offensive: A Brief History with Documents* (New York and Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 2008), p. 7.

144 "Vietnamese General Staff-Combat Operations Department, *Lich su Cuc Tac Chien*," p. 468, adapted from Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p. 98.

145 "Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable," January 21, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Party Central Committee, Hanoi. Translated for CWIHP by Merle Pribbenow (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/11397). See also Allison, *The Tet Offensive*, pp. 22-27 and 28-56 for a general discussion of the specific stages of military operations during the offensive.

146 Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p. 113 and Nguyen, "The War Politiburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2 (February/August, 2006), pp. 29-30.

147 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 178.

dealing with the enemy's reinforcements."[148]

In addition to strongly encouraging the extensive use of guerrilla warfare against an enlarging American force, upon hearing the Johnson Administration's announcement of the so-called "March 31 Statement," China seized the chance to increase its level of criticism of the United States. On April 13, 1968, Zhou Enlai met with Pham Van Dong and warned of a possible continuation of American aggression. Zhou called the Johnson Administration's decision to send more troops to Vietnam a "wicked and deceitful scheme" and argued that it was evident that the Johnson Administration did not want to give up on the war.[149] However, Zhou was also wary of Vietnam's mistakes in agreeing to sit at the negotiation table with the United States. Zhou criticized Vietnam's leaders for solving the Johnson Administration's problems, making a decision which so many people did not understand. Zhou believed that the Vietnamese ceded a superior position during the negotiations by accepting the Johnson Administration's offer to "meet" instead of "contacting" the Vietnamese, thereby lessening the importance of rejecting the negotiations for the Vietnamese to gain an advantageous position over the United States. This blatant display of complacency allowed the United States to easily reject Vietnam's offer of Phnom Penh and Warsaw as venues for negotiations.[150]

These two critical mistakes not only "increased the number of votes for Johnson and increased stock prices in New York," but also allowed the United States to employ a "double-dealing policy" of continuing to bomb South Vietnam while prolonging its efforts to hold negotiations.[151] Zhou suggested that instead of negotiating a way out of the war, the North Vietnamese should prepare to fight for the next two or three years, focusing on the question of how to gain a great victory, which would require large-scale battles.[152] However, Hanoi had a more realistic solution in mind that would not require any fighting—negotiating with Washington.

The Paris Peace Talks and the Last Gasps of Tension (1968-1971)

Despite China's warnings to not engage in negotiations with the United States, North Vietnam agreed to negotiations on May 13, 1968. The North Vietnamese delegation, led by Xuan Than Thuy, demanded a complete American withdrawal from Vietnam. In response, the American representative Averell Harriman demanded North Vietnam's complete withdrawal from South Vietnam. However, the conference was brought to a deadlock over the issue of when the bombings in South Vietnam would cease. The United States offered a final compromise in which North Vietnam's military de-escalation would guarantee a total cessation of the bombings. On October 27, 1968, the two sides officially agreed that bombings would be brought to an unconditional halt and that the United States would recognize the Saigon government in the Paris peace talks.[153]

When Beijing heard the news of the agreement, it quickly reminded Hanoi that the negotiations were just a silent phase of a war that was far from over. On November 17, 1968, Mao Zedong told Pham Van Dong that negotiations are like fighting and involve deception. Hence, it was unwise to rely solely on negotiations to make the United States withdraw its troops from Vietnam. Mao told Pham that China would withdraw unneeded troops from Vietnam and send them back if assistance was required.[154] Convinced that the failure of the Tet Offensive marked Hanoi's political independence from Beijing and departed from Mao's doctrine of "protracted warfare," China withdrew most of its military personnel from Vietnam by the summer of 1970.[155]

As negotiations between Nixon and Thieu were underway, Beijing cautioned Hanoi to be suspicious of Washington.[156] On April 12, 1969, Zhou Enlai told a North Vietnamese delegation to Beijing that while China was happy to see North Vietnam's determination to fight the Americans and the South Vietnamese and that the Nixon Administration was "facing a lot of difficulties," the Nixon Administration was still "stubbornly promoting neo-colonialism" in Vietnam.[157] Zhou argued that while Nixon was "more intelligent" than Johnson in recognizing Cambodia, China was not optimistic about what was happening in Cambodia because Cambodia was "tilting to the right," and the United States already knew that China was

148 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh," February 7, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations*. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112172).

149 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," April 13, 1968. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations*. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112173).

150 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," April 13, 1968.

151 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," April 13, 1968.

152 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," April 17, 1968. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112174).

153 Zubeida Mustafa, "The Paris Peace Talks," *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (First Quarter, 1969), pp. 30-31.

154 "Discussion between Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong," November 17, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22*, 77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112181).

155 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 179.

156 On this topic, see Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, pp. 140-142.

157 "Zhou Enlai and Kang Sheng's comments to a COSVN Delegation" April 12, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112182).

supplying the North Vietnamese forces via Cambodia.[158]

Zhou's pessimistic assessment of the military situation proved correct as Nixon announced his determination to take "effective and strong measures" to reduce American casualties by substantially increasing the American military commitment in Vietnam.[159] In response, the Hanoi-based *People's Daily* harshly criticized the Nixon Doctrine for

"…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 trying to achieve a compromise between the big powers in an attempt to make smaller countries bow to their arrangement."[160]

North Vietnam's military headquarters, sharing the same fear about the Nixon Doctrine as the *People's Daily*, issued a nation-wide directive urging the continuation of the struggle against the United States, even if it had to be done without Chinese assistance.[161]

However, since China clearly understood how important the security of its southern border was in the face of increasing American aggression, it did not sit idly and wait for a natural failure of its "containment" policy. By the end of December 1969, China had completed a road that linked Yunnan Province with Muong Sai in northern Laos. As Qiang Zhai argues, China was still keen to protect its influence over its Communist allies in Southeast Asia, although it had militarily withdrawn from Vietnam. North Vietnam became very suspicious of the veracity of China's commitment to the Sino-Vietnamese alliance, and China's activities in Laos would become a major factor in the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations throughout the 1970s.[162]

Moreover, China had to pay attention to more than Vietnam during the early 1970s, as the war in Vietnam expanded to Cambodia. More specifically, the Nixon Administration's secret bombing of Cambodia, which would last for three months after its initiation on April 29, 1970, meant the appearance of a major new source of instability along China's southern border. The answer to whether Cambodia could guarantee neutrality lay in the hands of Lon Nol, a pro-democracy Cambodian candidate who enjoyed American support, and Prince Sihanouk. China supported Sihanouk because Nol's victory in upcoming general elections in 1971 would allow the United States to expand the war into Cambodia. By contrast, Sihanouk's victory would ensure Cambodia's neutrality. Although it was clear that Sihanouk's victory would be more advantageous for the security of its southern border, China was caught in a dilemma over the problem of whether to support the incumbent Sihanouk government. The Sihanouk government's proclamation of neutrality assured that Hanoi's influence over Cambodia would effectively be capped. On the other hand, as Qiang Zhai argues, China's perception of the Sihanouk government's "tilt to the right" brought fears that it would increase the intensity of the revolutionary Samlaut forces, which were anti-American. Failure to support the Communist Samlaut forces would jeopardize China's international credibility as the vanguard of Asian Communism. Yet, because China strongly trusted Sihanouk's ability to lead a stable government, it had a difficult time clearly deciding with whom to form an alliance..[163] Furthermore, China wanted to establish an independent Indochina consisting of sovereign states—a plan that directly ran counter to Vietnam's ambition of increasing its influence through the creation of a united front against American aggression. Hence, a successful handling of the crisis in Cambodia was a critical cornerstone to determining the postwar order of Indochina.[164] China once again successfully balanced geopolitical security with ideological commitment.

On March 21, 1970, Zhou Enlai told Pham Van Dong that China and Vietnam should support Sihanouk because of his support for the anti-American struggle and because Cambodia shared a history of anti-imperialist struggle against France and Japan. Pham Van Dong replied that he did not see any need to negotiate with Cambodia about the expansion of the war, and that China will have to "wait, explore Cambodia's attitude, and play for time."[165]

However, Zhou did not wait for Cambodia's response. Zhou Enlai met with Sihanouk and told him that so long as he was "determined to fight to the end," China would fully support him.[166] About a month later, China hosted an informal conference on Indochina and urged all Indochinese peoples to be united in the struggle against American aggression, a struggle China promised to strongly support. The conference most notably saw Sihanouk's agreement to Vietnam's use of Cambo-

158 "Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, Pham Van Dong, Hoang Van Thai and Pham Hung address the COSVN delegation," April 20, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations*. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112183).

159 Richard Nixon, "Vietnamization Speech," November 3, 1969 (http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc14.html).

160 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. Adapted from John W. Garver, "Sino-Vietnamese Conflict and Sino-American Rapprochement," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 454-455.

161 John W. Garver, "Sino-Vietnamese Conflict and Sino-American Rapprochement," p. 455.

162 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 180.

163 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 182-183.

164 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 184.

165 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," March 21, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112185).

166 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Prince Sihanouk," March 22, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112189).

dian territory in preparation for the war's possible expansion beyond Vietnamese territory.[167]

When the United States finally invaded Cambodia in May 1970, China encouraged North Vietnam to continue fighting the Americans without any fear. During a meeting with Le Duan, Mao Zedong argued that the United States had its limits in military capacity, and refuted Nixon's claim that the United States had never been defeated up to the Vietnam War, citing the Korean War and the First Indochina War as notable examples. Mao further advised Le to use the United States' fear of being defeated to North Vietnam's advantage, because the Americans "had no guts." Mao argued that North Vietnam had a more legitimate cause in the war, for it was the Americans who had "sabotaged the two Geneva Conferences." Mao was very certain of North Vietnam's eventual victory over the United States such that he thought it was better that the United States had breached the agreements reached during the Geneva Conference.[168]

On September 17, 1970, Pham Van Dong met with Zhou Enlai and told Zhou that North Vietnam was considering diplomatic negotiations with the United States, although diplomacy was just a "play with words." Pham argued that North Vietnam wished to influence both American and world public opinion by making North Vietnam's intentions clear on two major issues: an unconditional withdrawal of American troops and a removal of the Thieu government in South Vietnam. Zhou replied that North Vietnam should share with China critical information regarding the negotiating process because of their close relationship.[169]

China supported North Vietnam not only to prevent a possible escalation of the American military threat, but also to deter the possible spread of Soviet influence over Vietnam. On March 7, 1971, Zhou Enlai met with Le Duan and told him that inviting the Soviet Union to participate in Southeast Asia's affairs was a risky business, because it would cause the loss of both China and Vietnam's political independence. "If we take the Soviets' side, they will control us. And if there is disagreement between us, we should talk it out on the basis of independence and self-reliance. If we establish a world-wide people's front that includes the Soviets, they will control this front. So you have to take the initiative on this matter...the Soviets wish to establish a united front in which we have to listen to them."[170]

Beijing soon thought up a simpler, albeit risky, method to solidify the Sino-Vietnamese alliance and contain Moscow—increasing economic and military aid to Hanoi.

Between Peace and Ideological Integrity (1971-1973)

China sought to assuage its own fear of a close Soviet-Vietnamese relationship by increasing the volume of its military and economic aid to North Vietnam from 1971 to 1973. China sent engineers and technicians to repair critical road networks that connected Vietnam with China's southern border. In addition, China made sure that tense Sino-Soviet relations did not impede the acceleration of China's support for North Vietnam and signed agreements with various Soviet satellite states to allow supplies to reach Vietnam more quickly. On June 18, 1972, China and North Vietnam agreed that shipments from Cuba and Eastern Europe could pass through Chinese ports to facilitate the delivery of supplies.[171]

However, Hanoi was growing increasingly impatient with slow negotiations, and even South Vietnam grew very weary of the war and issued a final ultimatum. On July 1, 1971, South Vietnam's foreign minister, Nguyen Thi Binh, issued a seven-point declaration demanding that the United States give a specific date for a complete withdrawal and recognize the South Vietnamese people's right to overthrow the ruling Thieu Administration. If these terms were satisfied, South Vietnam would be a neutral country and establish normal diplomatic relations with all other countries in the world.[172] South Vietnam hoped that these demands would draw attention from both China and the United States and put a decisive end to the war.

China did not want to sever its relations with the United States for the sake of Vietnam, but did wish to see a clear end to the war. About six months after South Vietnam's issue of the seven-point declaration, Zhou Enlai met with the United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Kissinger informed Zhou that the United States wished to end the war through negotiations by announcing a timetable for a complete withdrawal. Zhou told Kissinger that the United States should withdraw

167 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 191.

168 "Discussion between Mao Zedong and Le Duan," May 11, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113033).

169 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," September 17, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113104).

170 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Le Duan and Pham Van Dong," March 7, 1971, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113108).

171 Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 74-75.

172 "A Seven-Point Declaration of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam," July 1, 1971, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry Archives, published in "Basic documents on diplomatic struggle from April 1965 to July 1980", pages 35-39 (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114440) and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 197.

from Vietnam very soon if it wished to preserve its national honor.[173] What Zhou really meant was that China wanted to see some clear proof that American and Soviet influences were "contained" by securing peace in Vietnam.[174] China's choice to normalize relations with the United States, as Nicholas Khoo puts it, led Hanoi to believe that Beijing was "violating the trust and sincerity" of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance.[175] As John Garver argues, when a Sino-American summit opened in February 1972, Vietnam complained that China and the United States had no right to decide its fate.[176] Hanoi wanted to ascertain that it was clearly in charge of what was rightly Vietnam's national affair, and did not fully expect Beijing to present conditions that were in Hanoi's favor when negotiating with the Americans. Hanoi even criticized Beijing's invitation of Nixon as akin to "throwing a life preserver to someone who is about to drown," and ordered the Vietnamese press to not publish anything on the matter until late 1971.[177]

On February 28, 1972, China and the United States signed the Shanghai Communiqué, which promised the normalization of Sino-American relations, the avoidance of international military conflict, and opposition to the establishment of hegemony over Asia and the Pacific by any nation, and confirmed that both sides would not "negotiate on behalf of any third party or enter into agreements or understandings with the other directed at other states."[178] The two sides also agreed that the normalization of China-U.S. relations would "contribute to the relaxation of tension in Asia and the world."[179] To erase North Vietnam's doubts about China's sincerity towards the Sino-Vietnamese alliance, Zhou Enlai met with Nguyen Tien Binh, Hanoi's charge d' affairs, in April and reaffirmed China's unwavering support for North Vietnam in the wake of another massive American bombing campaign. Zhou told Binh that although the United States planned to extend the bombing, it would not succeed, because China was determined to support the "serious stand of the DRV government," and to try its best to "support the Vietnamese people to carry the anti-American patriotic war to its end."[180] Zhou also met with Xuan Thuy, who was serving as Hanoi's representative to the Paris peace talks, in early July and told Xuan to concentrate on the offensive, especially during the crucial four-month period of July to October, as Zhou thought that a clear North Vietnamese victory would strongly convince Hanoi of the continuing and visible efficacy of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance against American imperialism.[181]

Hanoi also eagerly wanted to end the war on its own terms to demonstrate that the course of the war should remain independent from the Sino-American rapprochement. Furthermore, North Vietnam's leaders believed that success in the offensive would effectively discredit Nixon and significantly reduce his chances of winning reelection. Finally, as Qiang Zhai argues, despite the importance of its alliances with the two Communist superpowers, Hanoi did not want to emulate China and the Soviet Union, both of whom were becoming increasingly conciliatory towards the United States.[182]

However, what Beijing genuinely and urgently wanted to see was a permanent peace between Washington and Hanoi. In accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, North Vietnam's push for ultimate victory was of little value for Beijing if it meant an indefinite continuation of violence in Indochina. Therefore, Zhou met with Le Duc Tho and urged Hanoi to negotiate with the United States. While Beijing did not recognize the Thieu Administration, for it was a "puppet of the United States," Zhou suggested that Hanoi could accept it as a "representative" of the coalition government and urge the United States to correctly assess the conflict in Vietnam as a national one, and therefore, outside military intervention was no longer necessary.[183] Le replied that only when the United States recognized a tripartite government would Hanoi allow for general elections to take place. Zhou advised that it was probably wise for Hanoi to play a balancing game in which the establishment of a coalition government would buy time for

173 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 196 and Nguyen *Hanoi's War*, p. 213.
174 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 197.
175 Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, p. 68.
176 John W. Garver, "Sino-Vietnamese Conflict and Sino-American Rapprochement," *Political Science Quarterly*, .Vol. 96, No. 3 (Autumn, 1981), p. 455.
177 Garver, "Sino-Vietnamese Conflict and Sino-American Rapprochement," p. 454.
178 "Joint Communiquéof the United States of America and the Peoples' Republic of China," ("Shanghai Communique") February 28, 1972 (http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/shanghai_communique.pdf), p. 2.
179 "Shanghai Communique," p. 3.
180 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Nguyen Tien," April 12, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113111). See also Shen Zhihua, "Sino-U.S. Reconciliation and China's Vietnam Policy," in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, pp. 355-359.
181 "Zhou Enlai's Talk with Xuan Thuy, Head of the DRV Delegation to the Paris Talks, in Beijing," July 7, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975 (Chronology of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities, 1949-1975) (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi chubanshe, 1993), p. 636. Translated for CWIHP by Qiang Zhai. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111532.
182 Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 202.
183 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho," July 12, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* . (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113113)

North Vietnam to grow stronger than South Vietnam.[184]

Hanoi chose to ignore Zhou's confusingly contradictory advice and tried to militarily pressure South Vietnam to agree to a Communist-led national reunification. National reunification had to be realized at any cost, even if it meant that the Nguyen Thieu regime could not be overthrown.[185] However, Hanoi's belief in deciding its own fate soon turned out to be a mirage, for Beijing quickly exploited the failure of the Spring Offensive as a sure chance to teach Hanoi about conducting flexible negotiations. The Communist forces only had enough strength to defend Hanoi from American bomb attacks, and could no longer exert pressure on South Vietnam.[186] After engaging in "people's diplomacy" by inviting Jane Fonda to assess the intensity of American bombings, Hanoi finally agreed with Washington in July to initiate negotiations.[187]

China clearly favored this rapid development of a consensus around negotiations, for Hanoi's success in negotiations with Washington would not only accelerate a Communist victory in Vietnam, which would surely provide China with much credit for being Hanoi's dedicated ideological companion, but would also increase the safety of China's southern border. Thus, China eagerly pushed North Vietnam to sit for negotiations as soon as possible. On December 29, 1972, Mao Zedong told Nguyen Thi Binh that success in the negotiations was crucial because it would not only normalize relations between Hanoi and Saigon, but also decide the duration and the nature of the conflict. If the war should continue for another century, it was a revolution; otherwise it was "opportunism."[188] Zhou Enlai met with several other North Vietnamese high officials, including Le Duc Tho, and urged them to continue negotiating seriously with Washington, since Nixon was planning to withdraw American forces from Vietnam completely. Zhou emphasized that flexibility in negotiations should have one important aim: to allow the Americans to leave Vietnam.[189]

Zhou was not suggesting, however, that China had completely abandoned North Vietnam's cause. He met with Le Duc Tho on July 12, 1972 and urged Hanoi to concentrate on addressing the problem of what should be done with Nguyen van Thieu, South Vietnam's President.[190] Zhou said that China did not approve of Nguyen because he was merely a "puppet of the U.S." and would only recognize Thieu if he agreed to be part of a coalition government. When Le mentioned the problem of dealing with neutral forces who were both "pro-French and pro-Vietnamese," Zhou advised that it would be in Hanoi's best interest if Saigon "played with time," debating about who were the most suitable members for a coalition government, so that Hanoi could have time to recover and continue fighting.[191] However, what Zhou told Le was only a half-truth.[192] China was growing extremely weary of almost two decades of political instability along its southern border and decided to restore Sino-American relations and seek genuine and permanent peace.[193]

Hence, Zhou quickly flew to Washington to discuss with Kissinger concrete and effective solutions to end the Vietnam War as soon as possible. During their meeting, both Zhou and Kissinger agreed that there must be a clear conclusion to the war through peace negotiations between Washington and Hanoi. Kissinger emphasized that the United States no longer had any interest in "defeating or destroying" North Vietnam. It was for "everybody's sake" that peace be firmly realized in Indochina.[194] Should the war continue, it would cause the United States to "act much more violently" than under normal circumstances and Hanoi would have to face consequences that would go beyond Vietnam and affect the security of Indochina as a whole.

In addition, Kissinger assured Zhou that there was no longer any "fundamental opposition" to the normalization of Sino-American relations.[195] Zhou replied that China only wished for a quick withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam and full political independence for Indochina.[196] The Zhou-Kissinger conversation made it clear that Sino-American relations would no longer have to remain cold due to what

184 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho," July 12, 1972.

185 George C. Herring, "The Cold War and Vietnam," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 18, No. 5, Vietnam (October, 2004), p. 20.

186 Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, pp. 260-261.

187 Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p. 261.

188 "Discussion between Mao Zedong and Nguyen Thi Binh," December 29, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113114).

189 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho," January 3, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, *77 Conversations* (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113116).

190 Le was the Special Adviser to the North Vietnamese delegation during the negotiations.

191 "Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho," July 12, 1972.

192 Lien-Hang Nguyen makes a similar observation in *Hanoi's War*, p. 256.

193 For an elaboration of Beijing's motives to push Hanoi toward negotiations with Washington, see Shen Zhihua, "Sino-U.S. Reconciliation and China's Vietnam Policy," in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, pp. 359-365.

194 Henry Kissinger, "Discussion with Zhou Enlai of Moscow Summit, South Asia, and Vietnam," Top Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, June 20, 1972, p. 36 (http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/nsa/documents/KT/00516/all.pdf).

195 Kissinger, "Discussion with Zhou Enlai," p. 36.

196 Yafeng Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 168, and Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), p. 186 and p. 189.

was happening in Vietnam. With respect to the fact that China's primary goal in its diplomacy since 1954 had always been protecting the stability of southern China, it was logical for the Chinese leadership to instruct Zhou to negotiate terms for peace, ideally without sacrificing any Chinese soldiers. Kissinger's promise of American withdrawal assured the security of southern China after 19 years of constant geopolitical insecurity.

On January 27, 1973, the American and Vietnamese delegations signed the Paris Accords. The Accords confirmed that the United States "fully recognized the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam." The agreement granted full autonomy to Vietnam in answering the critical question of national reunification, on the basis of "discussions and agreements between North and South Vietnam, without coercion or annexation," so that both sides could promptly start negotiations.[197] However, Mao Zedong was keen to recognize that American withdrawal from Vietnam would not resolve the original tension between North and South Vietnam. Hence, he installed a "safety valve" in Indochina by advising Le Duc Tho to concentrate on "stabilizing the situation in South Vietnam."[198] Mao thereby successfully adhered to non-interference, containing the conflict between Hanoi and Saigon strictly within Vietnam and also securing a firm defense of Southern China. Beijing watched, unscathed, as Saigon fell on April 30, 1975. China's two decades of international diplomacy against the United States and the Soviet Union were finally over.

Conclusion: Chinese "Containment" During the First Two Indochina Wars as a Major Jigsaw Puzzle in History

Throughout the first two Indochina wars, China wanted to maintain a complete equilibrium between ideological integrity and geopolitical security. For almost two decades, China's main concern was to secure the stability of southern China by pivoting between China's domestic and international priorities. Domestically, Mao Zedong had to worry about maintaining his power, while also making sure that China's industrialization did not get bogged down by the pressure of the war. Internationally, China adopted Communist ideological integrity and anti-imperialism as its major slogans for foreign diplomacy, primarily relying on Zhou Enlai to make non-aligned nations understand its position. China also tried to give North Vietnam sufficient confidence about its sincerity towards the Sino-Vietnamese alliance and sought to use that alliance to its own advantage, eventually going so far as to abandon it in 1972. Such diplomatic flexibility allowed China to avoid shedding much of its own blood throughout the two Indochina Wars.

However, there is more to explore about the dynamics of China's involvement. Since the Chinese Communist Party does not make available primary sources on China's activities during the Cold War, the primary sources studied in this paper represent only the tip of the iceberg. Hanoi's role during the two wars also remains very hazy because of the Vietnamese government's restrictions on access to important Party documents. Further study about Vietnam's initiatives during the 1954 Geneva Conference and about North and South Vietnamese motives and actions throughout the Second Indochina War is highly necessary to clarify Vietnamese agency during the war.[199] Finally, more research on Soviet and American initiatives during the two wars needs to be done, and given that barely forty years have passed since the fall of Saigon, there is much potential for more original scholarship to be published on Soviet and American roles during the two Indochina Wars.

Despite these limitations, I have attempted to present Chinese "containment" during the first two Indochina Wars—balancing ideological integrity with geopolitical integrity—as an exercise of *realpolitik* during one of the most turbulent moments in world history. Although China had to oscillate between ideological integrity and geopolitical security interests, often alienating North Vietnam, this was always for the sake of southern China's security. China's unique cultural, historical, and political motives to pursue this strategy during the longest military conflict in international Cold War history might allow us to understand "varied and paradoxical consequences" of China's strategy and transcend the dichotomy of a "Democracy versus Communism" paradigm in Cold War history.[200] Only then will the remaining pieces of the Cold War jigsaw puzzle finally have found their rightful places.[201]

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199 Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p. 11.

200 See Matthew Connelly, "Taking off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (June, 2000), p. 767 and p. 769.

201: See Edward Hallet Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage House Books, 1961), p. 135.

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