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**«СИЛАМ СОЦИАЛИЗМА ВЫГОДНО, ЧТОБЫ АМЕРИКАНЦЫ
ПОКРЕПЧЕ ЗАВЯЗЛИ В ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ АЗИИ»: ПРЕЗИДИУМ
ЦК КПСС И ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЙ ЛИНИИ СССР ВО
ВТОРОЙ ИНДОКИТАЙСКОЙ ВОЙНЕ В 1965 году**

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Аннотация. В статье на основе тщательного анализа множества впервые вводимых в научный оборот документов из российских, а также ряда зарубежных архивов рассматривается один из периодов в истории Советского Союза, когда его влияние на мировой арене достигло максимума. Это был небольшой по историческим меркам отрезок времени, когда у руля Советского государства находилось так называемое «коллективное руководство» во главе с Л.И. Брежневым, А.Н. Косыгиным и Н.В. Подгорным. Авторы статьи показывают, что превращение СССР в одну из двух мировых сверхдержав едва ли стало бы возможным, если бы США не потерпели поражение в Индокитае. Чтобы доказать справедливость этого тезиса, авторы сфокусировали внимание на событиях одного из поворотных эпизодов холодной войны, приходящегося на первое полугодие 1965 г. В этом контексте подвергнуты скрупулезному анализу ход и результаты переговоров А.Н. Косыгина с руководителями ДРВ, КНР и КНДР. Ведь именно тогда, согласно исследуемым документам, Советский Союз из наблюдателя фактически превратился в одного из участников войны во Вьетнаме (и шире — противостояния с США на Дальнем Востоке) в составе антиамериканской коалиции СССР — КНР — ДРВ — КНДР. Хотя речь здесь ведется о стратегическом замысле, его рождение, как это зачастую происходит в реальной политике, было почти случайным, а подлинные авторы изучаемой геополитической комбинации долгие годы оставались в тени истории.

Ключевые слова: Вьетнам, Президиум ЦК КПСС, Вторая Индокитайская война, КНР, Брежнев, Ле Зуан, «трицентричный» миропорядок, констелляция кризисов, военная помощь.

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“It Is Favorable To the Forces of Socialism to Keep the Americans in Southeast Asia Longer”: The Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee in the Determination of the Strategic Line of the USSR in the Second Indochina War of 1965

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Abstract. On the basis of a scrupulous analysis of a large body of documents from both Russian and a number of other international archives, the authors examine – for the first time in historical literature – the period in the history of the Soviet Union when the Soviet influence in world affairs reached its zenith. This was a short period, by historical standards, when the so-called “collective leadership” headed by Leonid Brezhnev, Alexey Kosygin, and Nikolay Podgorny was at the helm of the Soviet state. The authors show that it is unlikely that the USSR’s transformation into one of the global superpowers would have been possible were it not for the US’s defeat in Indochina. To prove this assertion, the authors have focused on developments related to one of the turning points of the Cold War, namely the first half of 1965. In this context, they scrutinise the course and results of the negotiations between Kosygin and the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the People’s Republic of China, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Indeed, it was then, as evidenced by examined documents, that the Soviet Union de facto turned from an observer into a participant in the Vietnam War (and, more broadly, in the confrontation with the United States in the Far East) as part of the anti-American coalition of the USSR – PRC – DRV – DPRK. Although the authors discuss a strategic intent behind the coalition, its birth – as it often happens in real politics – was almost accidental, while the genuine masterminds of this geopolitical combination under consideration have remained in the shadow of history for many years.

Keywords: Vietnam, Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee, Second Indochina War, People’s Republic of China, Lê Duẩn, “tricentric” world order, constellation of crises, military aid.

Historical memory is a system-forming factor in the process of constructing a new world order based on the idea of polycentricity (multipolarity). For the new centers of power on the rise, history in itself, one way or another, has become an integral part of politics as their ruling elites pay much closer attention to past relations with other nations, including Russia. And this is of paramount importance to us from a practical point of view as foreign policy, after all, is a mechanism prone to inertia. However, gaining access to new sources of data allows us to gain clearer insight into the evolution of relations that the Soviet Union/Russia fostered with the nations mentioned above. This category includes such rapidly developing Asian states as China and Vietnam, who have played a significant part within the system of Russia’s contacts with nations in East and Southeast Asia. We are interconnected with these nations through decades of uneasy relations, which are primarily based on cooperation and mutual assistance, and focused on confronting a common external threat.

The authors, while not experts on either China or Vietnam, do not make it their intention to invade into the domain of researching history, nor do they intend to explore the details of the internal political landscape created by these nations. This task is successfully handled by prominent Russian Sinologists and Vietnamologists, including, for instance, a large team of authors (comprising a few foreign researchers) who have compiled an entire volume of the five-volume *Full*

Academic History of Vietnam published by the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences¹. Among them, in particular, are Lyudmila Anosova, Sergey Blagov, Evgeny Kobelev, Grigory Lokshin, Vladimir Mazyrin, Oksana Novakova, Pavel Pozner, Anatoly Sokolov, Maxim Syunnerberg, Tatiana Filimonova, and Petr Tsvetov. We should also mention a body of work by Ilya Gaiduk², who blazed the trail for examining the USSR's policies in the Indochina wars using archival documents, as well as a book written by Dmitry Zusmanovich³. It would be unjust to omit a brilliant monograph by Alexei Bogaturov, still relevant today, which addresses "the history of international relations in East Asia after World War II by employing the pass-through evaluation approach", or a recently resealed article by Vladimir Kolotov⁴.

The purpose of our research is to offer fresh insight into how the Soviet Union's policies toward the Second Indochina War were shaped. We will do so by introducing into scholarly discourse new documents from domestic archives, which until now have been totally inaccessible. We are hopeful that additional articles we have written will also be made available to readers, in which, together with this article, issues of strategic planning and history of the USSR foreign policies throughout the same period, the 1960-s, in relation to other nations of the East, have been considered, thereby allowing us to make broader generalizations.

The greater part of the documents drawn upon therein relate to the period of the initial months, when the new collective leadership in charge of the USSR headed by Leonid Brezhnev, Alexey Kosygin, and Nikolay Podgorny, commenced their governance activity. The new team came to power after Nikita Khrushchev, who was relieved from his post of First Secretary and member of the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU CC) on October 14, 1964, and, on the following day, when he was also relieved from his post of the head of the Soviet government by the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council. Over that period, when Indochina witnessed disturbing developments connected with the beginning of a systematic air campaign waged by the US against the DRV, and later when US Army expeditionary forces invaded Vietnam, Moscow was confronted with tough decisions. It would not be an exaggeration to state that those decisions were instrumental in predetermining the next step forward in the development of the Cold War. As will be outlined below, over this period various individual elements continued to fall into place and began to form a certain pattern, a "three-center" world order (though the term "tri-polar" that springs to mind is hardly appropriate, as it is common knowledge that there are only two poles), which relied upon an *asymmetrical power balance* among the USSR, the USA, and the PRC, therefore the Second Indochina War of 1959–1975 played a most critical role in defining these dynamics. Interestingly, Alexei Bogaturov even wrote about China's experience of "breakthrough growth to attain supremacy"⁵ (in fact, it was precisely the way the Chinese leaders assessed that period's existing global balance of power).

“FRATERNAL SOCIALIST NATION”

One can assert that under Nikita Khrushchev, and also under Joseph Stalin, Vietnam enjoyed only peripheral attention from the political leadership of the USSR. Nevertheless, Moscow was well aware of Ho Chi Minh, an old member of the Leninist International, and the Vietnamese Communist Party delegations who were regular visitors to the Soviet Union. An interesting dialogue between Georgy Malenkov, Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, and Phạm Văn Đồng, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, provides a clear picture of the nature of such relations. The discussion occurred in July of 1954, when the Vietnamese leader travelled

¹ Аносова Л.А., Благов С.А., Локишин Г.М. и др. Полная академическая история Вьетнама. Т. IV. Ч. I. Новейшее время (1897–1975 гг.) / ред. О.В. Новакова. М., 2014.

² Gaiduk I.V. The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War. Chicago, 1996; *Idem*. Confronting Vietnam. Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict. 1954–1963. Stanford, 2003.

³ Зусманович Д. Советско-американские отношения и война во Вьетнаме. 1964–1968 гг. М., 2016.

⁴ Колотов В.Н. Стратегические приоритеты ДРВ и США во Второй Индокитайской войне // Восток (Oriens). 2022. № 5. С. 55–67.

⁵ Богатуров А.Д. Великие державы на Тихом океане. М., 1997. С. 143.

through Moscow on his way back home from Geneva, where he attended a peace conference on Indochina. According to the memoirs of Mikhail Kapitsa, after hearing Phạm Văn Đồng's request that the USSR render assistance, Malenkov took it in stride, overall, and then began to consider the request using the following logic: "The emergence of people's democracies requires a great deal of effort and resources, the Soviet Union alone cannot handle such a task, so it would be expedient to divide the functions between the USSR and the PRC. The Soviet Union would be responsible for the strengthening of socialism and people's democracy in Europe, while China would be in charge of Southeast Asia"⁶. Thus, it can be concluded that for the Presidium of the Communist Party Central Committee, Vietnamese affairs first and foremost were relegated to the scope of responsibility of their Chinese comrades⁷.

As for the alignment of forces within the highest echelon of power in North Vietnam, according to the opinion of Soviet Ambassador to the DRV throughout 1962–1964 Suren Tovmasyan, it too did not instill much optimism. As follows from Tovmasyan's reports to the Center, Ho Chi Minh "was put on the back burner" — he was contemplating retirement, while all the power was concentrated in the hands of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) Lê Duẩn's associates, who, allegedly, were oriented toward China and supported by the majority of Party militants⁸. As a matter of fact, these circumstances, and considering the fierce battle for leadership in the world Communist movement between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Communist Party of China (CPC), were not viewed favorably by Moscow, and did not score any points for the leaders of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) (which was clearly illustrated by the two-fold reduction of Soviet assistance to the DRV throughout the 1962–1964 period.)⁹.

However, Soviet leaders always shared the geopolitical aspirations of the Vietnamese Communists, firmly believing that they were in line with the national and state interests of the USSR. Such was the situation under Stalin, who through consultations helped define the key foreign policy objectives of the Vietnamese Communists, namely to set up an Indochina Federation¹⁰, a course that was reiterated under Khrushchev. The latter's conversation with Phạm Văn Đồng on July 3, 1961, for example, attests to this. While offering commentary to Khrushchev concerning a map showing the disposition of liberation troops in the south of the country, Phạm Văn Đồng noted that an encouraging environment was being molded in South Vietnam: "When a favorable moment occurs, and when sufficient resources have been accumulated, we will raise the issue of seizing power. Our government will have a national democratic platform and will adopt the principle of neutrality in foreign policy affairs."

⁶ Капица М.С. На разных параллелях. Записки дипломата. М., 1996. С. 269.

⁷ This stance was reflected in corresponding policy papers. For more details please refer to: *Gaiduk I.V.* Confronting Vietnam. Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict. 1954–1963. P. 64–65. On the "early" stage of the Soviet-Vietnamese relations and China's role in them, please refer also to the work by M. Olsen: *Olsen M.* Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949–64. Oxford, 2005. According to the Norwegian researcher, from autumn 1962 through autumn, 1964, the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi was substantially isolated from any contacts with the leaders of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (*Ibid.* P. 118), and this factor had a serious impact on Tovmasyan's assessments.

⁸ From Tovmasyan's diary. Record of conversation with Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Pham Van Dong and Xuan Thuy. 25/12/1963 // Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (далее — АВП РФ). Ф. 079. Оп. 18. П. 37. Д. 8. Л. 164–165.

⁹ Богатуров А.Д. Указ. соч.

¹⁰ "The primary goal of the Vietnamese Communist Party is to fully evict French imperialism from Indochina and build an independent, free, democratic and united Vietnamese Republic and Federation of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos" (Ciphered cable from Beijing by Shibayev carrying the text for the draft resolution of the Vietnamese Communist Party Congress formulated jointly by Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh. 16/03/1950 // Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (далее — РГАСПИ). Ф. 558. Оп. 11. Д. 334. Л. 31. The draft was drawn up upon return of Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh from Moscow. It was approved by Stalin on March 26, 1950 (Ciphered cable by Filippov to Beijing for Mao Zedong carrying an approved draft resolution of the Vietnamese Communist Party Congress. 26/03/1950 // *Ibid.* S. 44).

In Laos, the DRV, together with the Pathet Lao and Souvanna Phouma, were engaged in a struggle for building up a united and neutral Laos”¹¹. Khrushchev responded to this by saying that Vietnam is currently gaining greater significance: “It is situated in an advantageous geographical location and strongly presents an attractive example for other nations to follow in developing socialism... The wave of the liberation movement should spread from Vietnam further on and, overwhelmingly, engage other countries. A vivid example of the DRV’s influence is both the map shown today and the Pathet Lao and Kong Le. The DRV will subsequently spread its influence in Thailand and Cambodia”¹².

THE DRIVE FOR CONSOLIDATING THE “SOCIALIST CAMP”

The fateful decisions, which in the end defined the USSR’s stance in the Second Indochina war, came about as a result of debates by the new Soviet leadership on the situation in the world Communist movement following the ouster of Khrushchev. At first glance, the debates had nothing to do with the fate of Vietnam. The main direction of foreign policy activity of Leonid Brezhnev and Alexey Kosygin in the initial period of their taking the reins at the head of the party and government were steps to strengthen the cohesion of the “socialist camp”. According to the memoirs of Brezhnev’s assistant for foreign policy matters Andrei Alexandrov, as soon as the October 1964 CPSU CC (Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee) Plenary meeting drew to a close, Leonid Brezhnev began to contact the leaders of the Union states to make them aware of the changes that had occurred (his telephone calls were made on October 14–15, 1964). The news about Khrushchev’s removal from power was taken by the leaders of the Warsaw Pact nations, overall, without drama and with a sense of understanding¹³.

However, things were more complicated as far as the independent centers of power in the world Socialist system – China, Cuba, and Vietnam – were concerned. The new collective team of the USSR leaders inherited a tense ideological conflict with the PRC. The circumstances were perceived with such anxiety that the CPSU CC Presidium did not rule out the possibility of armed clashes with the Chinese along the border¹⁴. Things were equally complicated, albeit in another dimension, regarding relations between Havana and Hanoi: the Cubans and Vietnamese were demanding that the new leaders of the USSR provide them with security guarantees in the event of military confrontation with the US. On the sidelines of the celebration to the mark the 47th anniversary of the October revolution, on November 11, Brezhnev had, as he jotted down in his notebook, a “tough conversation” with Che Guevara on this issue¹⁵. Phạm Văn Đồng in his meetings with Alexey Kosygin and Alexander Shelepin (that took place on November 9 and 12, accordingly) was also very straightforward¹⁶.

¹¹ Khrushchev’s reception of Pham Van Dong. 03/07/1961 // Российский государственный архив новейшей истории (далее – РГАНИ). Ф. 52. Оп. 1. Д. 555. Л. 112–113, 116.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ *Александров-Агентов А.М.* От Коллонтай до Горбачева. М., 1994. Р. 131–132; *Артизов А.Н., Сигаев Ю.В.* В октябре шестьдесят четвертого: смещение Хрущева. М., 2020. Р. 172.

¹⁴ The possibility was mentioned by Khrushchev at a meeting of the Presidium of the CC CPSU on 25/09/1964. Президиум ЦК КПСС. Стенограммы. 1954–1964. Т. 1. М., 2004. С. 875.

¹⁵ Both in Moscow and in Havana, it was believed that it did not make sense to rely too much on the pledges made by the US in October 1962, regarding its non-intervention strategies for Cuba. For this reason, Che Guevara used pressure tactics trying to persuade the newly appointed First Secretary, as the latter wrote in his work notes, “to make a public statement on behalf of the Soviet Union that any attack on Cuba would be deemed to be an attack on the entire Socialist camp”. *Брежнев Л.И.* Рабочие и дневниковые записи. Т. 1. М., 2016. С. 58.

¹⁶ Record of Kosygin’s meeting with the government and Party delegation of the DRV. 09/11/1964 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 64. Д. 588. Л. 71–79.

Phạm Văn Đồng's persistence was not a fluke. Having obtained security guarantees¹⁷ from China on a preliminary basis, the Politburo of the VWP Central Committee counted on a quick victory in the South¹⁸ and demanded support from the new Soviet leadership. The Kremlin "heard" what Phạm Văn Đồng had to say. It was decided to boost the morale, political assistance, as well as material aid to their Vietnamese friends¹⁹. Staff member of the CC Department for Relations with Socialist nations Igor Ognetov recalled that a new approach to the Vietnamese affairs was being adopted²⁰. And already on November 27, 1964, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in a cable to his Vietnamese counterpart Xuân Thủy stated that the USSR would not remain insensitive to the fate of their fraternal Socialist nation and stood ready to provide the required assistance to the DRV if the aggressors (meaning the US) attempted to infringe upon Vietnam's independence and sovereignty. It was also decided to furnish extra military assistance, to the tune of RUB 32 million, to the Vietnamese before the end of the year, as well as to send to Hanoi a senior level government delegation. At the same time an agreement on the transit of defense materials destined for Vietnam was reached with the PRC. On two occasions (on November 26 and December 17), the CPSU CC Presidium discussed the issue of sending Soviet military experts to the DRV²¹.

However, the Chinese issue remained a matter of paramount importance for the Presidium of the CPSU CC. The initiative of resuming contacts along Party and government tracks was brought forward by Zhou Enlai²². And such contacts took place over the November holidays in 1964. "Discussions" with their Chinese comrades lasted for hours and were held on November 8, 9, 11, and 12, 1964. As Brezhnev reported on the outcome of the talks in his address to the CC Plenary meeting, the ultimate result was to restore a certain level of mutual trust between the parties involved²³. Now, it needed to be determined what to do next.

The first "strategic session" on the Chinese issue was held immediately after the October Plenary meeting while in route to a meeting with Polish leaders Władysław Gomułka, and Józef Cyrankiewicz²⁴. With Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksey Kosygin, Yuri Andropov (then CC Secretary), Konstantin Ruskov (Department Director of CC Department for Relations with Socialist Nations) and Andrei Alexandrov all seated at a table in a train car bound for Poland, a lively exchange of views took place during which Kosygin delivered the strongest message in favor of immediate action to normalize

¹⁷ During a visit of a Vietnamese delegation to Beijing headed by Van Tien Dung on 21–23/06/1964, Mao Zedong informed Le Duan that in the event of a US intervention, a 300 000 – 500 000 strong contingent of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China would be deployed along the southern frontier of the PRC. *Li Xiaobing. The Dragon in the Jungle. The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War.* Oxford, 2020. P. 65, 66.

¹⁸ In September 1964, the Politburo of the VWPCC endorsed a resolution to conduct a series of large-scale operations with a view to achieving a major victory in the South, within the earliest feasible timeframe and thus to forestall a potential deployment of the US expedition force in Vietnam. *Victory in Vietnam. The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* / transl. by M.L. Pribbenow. Kansas, 2002. P. 137–138.

¹⁹ Илья Гайдук writes about it in: *Gaiduk I.V. The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War.* P. 19–21.

²⁰ *Огнетов И.А. На вьетнамском направлении.* М., 2007. С. 164.

²¹ Record of a conversation with Kosygin. 09/11/1964 // РГАН. Ф. 3. Оп. 64. Д. 588. Л. 71–79. From Scherbakov's diary; Record of conversation with Pham Van Dong. 05/01/1965 // АВП РФ. Ф. 079. Оп. 20. П. 45. Д. 4. Л. 1. Please refer also to: *Кануца М.С. Указ. соч.* С. 270; Minutes No. 178 of the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee dated 11/26/1964 // РГАН. Ф. 3. Оп. 18. Д. 804. Л. 9. Minutes of the Meeting No. 182 dd. 17/12/1964 // Ibid. S. 27.

²² Record of a conversation by Stepan Chervonenko with Zhou Enlai. 28/10/2964 // *Хрущёв Н. 1964. Стенограммы пленума ЦК КПСС и другие документы.* М., 2007. С. 331.

²³ Unedited shorthand report of the CPSU CC Plenary meeting. 16/11/1964 // *Хрущёв Н. Указ. соч.* С. 46. The progression of events was not hampered even by Malinovsky's trick, who, according to Zhou Enlai, declared to the Chinese at a Kremlin reception on November 7, 1964 that "we, in the Soviet Union, ousted Khrushchev, now it's your turn to ouster Mao Zedong". See: Record of a conversation by Brezhnev, Kosygin, Mikoyan, Andropov, Gromyko with members of the PRC Party and government delegation headed by Zhou Enlai. 08/11/1964 // Ibid. P. 349.

²⁴ It was the first foreign trip for the new Soviet leadership. The meeting took place on October 24, 1964, in the Belavezha Forest.

relations with China. Andropov spoke against such a move. In his view, Mao ruptured relations with the USSR, not under the influence of an emotional impulse, but rather very deliberately in a well thought-out attempt to snatch supremacy in the world Communist movement from the CPSU²⁵.

Following the results of the exchange of views in the train car meeting and taking into consideration their November contacts, the Foreign Policy Commission of the CC²⁶ examined the question concerning the normalization of Soviet Union-China relations, as did the CC Presidium at a meeting on January, 1965. The essence of proposals put forward by the Foreign Policy Commission (actively supported by Kosygin at the Presidium) contained an initiative to hold meetings between heads of government of the USSR and the PRC as early as in January – February 1965, either in Beijing or in Moscow²⁷. But, the proposal was not upheld. The more cautious attitude of the Presidium members ruled the day. (Brezhnev: “there is no confidence that we can achieve success, we might get slapped in the face”). Instead, as recommended by Andrei Kirilenko, it was resolved “to send Comrade Kosygin on a reconnaissance mission” – he should use his visit to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to make a stop-over in Beijing. The instructions issued to Kosygin (approved by the Presidium on January 28, 1965) recommended that he not only tackle trade and economic contacts and avoid any engagement in open controversy between the sides, but also that he should strongly emphasize the coordination of efforts of the USSR and PRC on the international arena²⁸.

“AMICABLE RECEPTION”

Kosygin’s Asian tour in February 1965 proved to be quite successful²⁹. His talks in Hanoi on February 6–10, reaffirmed that North Vietnam was interested in receiving Soviet military assistance. During the talks, the parties analyzed in great detail the options for developing the

²⁵ Александров-Агентов А.М. Указ. соч. С. 168.

²⁶ The Central Committee (CC) Foreign Policy Commission was established under a resolution of the Presidium on 22/10/1964. It comprised Mikhail Suslov (Chairman), Yuri Andropov, Boris Ponomaryov, Leonid Iluichyov, Andrei Gromyko, and Vladimir Semichastny. It was in operation until 1968, when the Politburo resolved to set up several commissions in charge of specific areas (national and regional).

²⁷ A note by Suslov, Andropov, Ponomaryov and Iluichyov, dd. January 7, 1965, said: “Judging by all appearances, after Khrushchev’s dismissal and nuclear weapon tests conducted by the PRC, the CPC has been trying to deal with our Party and country “from a position of strength”. It was further suggested, within 5–7 months, step by step to seek a gradual relaxation of tense relations with the CPC and a normalization of Soviet Union-China relations, it was envisaged to “exert active efforts to improve contacts along the Party line with the DPRK and PRC”. It is seen from the materials of the Foreign Policy Commission that the USSR continued to supply to the PRC strategic goods, defense material and furnished confidential data. Among other things, it was recommended to Kosygin, while in Beijing, to raise the question of T-55 tank deliveries to the PRC. See: Прокуменищиков М.Ю. Спор идет о слишком больших вещах. Неудавшаяся попытка советско-китайского примирения. 1964–1965 гг. // Исторический архив. 2007. № 1. С. 5–7.

²⁸ Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the CC Presidium. 14/01/1965; Material for Conversations with the PRC Top Leaders on the Issues of International Relations. Прокуменищиков М.Ю. Указ.соч. С. 14–19.

²⁹ It was the first foreign trip for Kosygin after he was appointed Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. The fact was paid due attention in Beijing. See: 周总理、陈毅副总理同柯西金等第一次接触谈话记录 (Shorthand record of the first meeting between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, Vice-Premier Chen Yi and Kesitszinem (Kosygin) and others). 06/02/1965 // 中華人民共和國外交部檔案館. 絕密文件 (Archive of the Foreign Ministry of the PRC. Top Secret Documents). The composition of the delegation was very impressive: CC Secretary Yuri Andropov, First Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Kuznetsov, Air Force Commander-in-Chief, Chief Aviation Marshall Konstantin Vershinin, Chairman of the State Committee for Economic Relations Georgy Sidorovich // РГНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. Д. 619. Л. 121.

defense and political situation in Vietnam³⁰. His trip to Pyongyang on February 12–13, 1965, was also rewarding³¹. Kosygin's talks with Kim Il-sung reconfirmed the credible and trust-based nature of relations between the two states, and also the DPRK's interest in receiving Soviet aid to improve its air defense capability. Kim Il-sung shared his vision of the prospects for the revolution and the situation in the South³².

Key developments, nevertheless, were underway in Beijing. In the course of many-hours-long negotiations held between Alexey Kosygin and Zhou Enlai on February 5, 10 and 11, 1965 (overall, Kosygin had eight meetings with Zhou Enlai and one with Mao Zedong), the Soviet Union – China Accords of 1949–1950 were de facto reinstated, including mutual commitment to coordinating efforts in defense and political areas. It would appear that Kosygin and Chinese leaders went as far as to discuss their potential goals for the coalition strategy in Asia. The initiative here again came from Zhou Enlai.

Of primary importance, we believe, was the first conversation between Kosygin and Zhou Enlai on February 5, 1965, that took place in a car on the way from the airport to Enlai's state residence. It is apparently comparable, in terms of its significance, with Khrushchev's conversation with Mao in November 1975, when the two leaders deliberated "how to turn the Cold War into an adverse factor for the Americans" (by a fortuitous coincidence, it was also held in a car)³³.

According to Chinese records of the conversation, in response to Kosygin's comment that it would be desirable to coordinate actions in support of Vietnam, Zhou Enlai expressed his full understanding, saying: "To win the battle against imperialism, we should act in joint effort with each other". He noted that by way of a precautionary measure, and in the event of an unfavorable twist of developments, a Chinese People's Liberation Army group of forces was deployed along the border with the DRV, adding that China would not want any escalation of war to a global level, "the Korean war did not turn into a global conflict!" Then, a critical utterance by Zhou Enlai followed: "We need to jointly support the anti-imperialistic struggle of people in Indochina...Let the Americans get stuck in ankle-deep mud there!"³⁴.

In addition to Indochina, Korea, as well as the situation in Indonesia and its conflict with Malaysia and the British Commonwealth, figured prominently in the talks with Zhou Enlai and Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi. Pursuant to his instructions, Kosygin reaffirmed that the USSR stood ready to continue supplying weapons and defense equipment to the PRC, including tanks and transport aircraft. Questions related to the trade and economic contacts, and also

³⁰ In the opinion of our Vietnamese friends, the military and political situation might develop in accordance with three basic scenarios:

– the war continues in the form of a "special-type" war (i.e. Americans will wage a war with the employment of puppet troops);

– Americans will expand the magnitude of war by turning it into a local war, and by sending its troops to South Vietnam;

– the US will unleash a war directly against the DRV. At the same time, Pham Van Dong reassured Kosygin that Hanoi had been doing everything in its ability to limit the developments in South Vietnam to the framework of "special-type warfare".

³¹ Kosygin received an invitation to visit the DPRK, when the Soviet delegation was staying in the DRV.

³² Kim was quite pessimistic in assessing the revolutionary prospects in South Korea. He believed that its triumph, the result of democratic election or due to a coup d'état, held little probability given powerful groups of US forces deployed on its territory, while the geography there was not favorable for a guerilla war. See: *Záznam Konverzace s V.P. Moskovsky, Unor 16, 1965* // *Narodni Archiv (Česká Republika)*. Ustřední Výbor KSC. F 02/1. F 96/101. Pgs. 1–26; *Record of Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK Comrade V.P. Moskovsky, February 16, 1965* // *Wilson Center Digital Archive*. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114980> (access date: 11.10.2022).

³³ From Sergei Antonov's diary. Recording of a conversation with Mao Zedong. 21/10/1959 // *АБП РФ*. Ф. 0100. Оп. 53. П. 11. Д. 443. Л. 227.

humanitarian collaboration were also tackled³⁵. The talks with Mao Zedong on February 11, 1965, proved to be extremely meaningful and extensive: they effectively confirmed the so-called concept of dividing the areas of responsibility³⁶ in the West and East:

“Mao: At present, the PRC is engaged in holding the 7th US Navy Fleet at bay, and this is the most powerful US Fleet.

Kosygin: The Soviet Army is engaged in containing the US forces in Germany.

Mao: So, yes, continue taking on the that front primarily in the West, while we will fight here in Asia. We are forced to coordinate our actions because of the Americans.

In conclusion, Mao said: “The war will immediately bring us much closer together”³⁷.

Reinstating their commitment to “dividing areas of responsibility” was also vital for the Chinese in connection with their preparations for the “Second Bandung Conference”³⁸ – the Second Asian-African Nations Conference, which was supposed to be, under the plan conceived by Beijing, a critical element for uniting the third world countries on the basis of an anti-American platform, provided that the PRC retained its supremacy. All major efforts of the Chinese diplomats, throughout 1964–1965, were exerted to meet the goal of building up such a network-centric

³⁴ See: 周总理、陈毅副总理同柯西金等第一次接触谈话记录 (Shorthand record of the first meeting between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, Vice-Premier Chen Yi and Kesitszinem (Kosygin) and others). 06/02/1965. 中華人民共和國外交部档案馆. 絕密文件 (Archive of the Foreign Ministry of the PRC. Top Secret Documents). In his conversations with the allies, Zhou would recurrently tackle the question of how to strategically “paralyze” Americans in Southeast Asia (and more broadly – in the Far East). Thus, on March 26, 1965, he deliberated on how to “lure Americans into a trap” with N. Ceausescu in Bucharest, and before that – with the Syrian Ministry of Internal Affairs, within the context that it would alleviate the pressure exerted by Western powers on the Middle East. See: Record of a conversation between Zhou Enlai and N. Ceausescu, March 26, 1965. Conversație N. Ceausescu i Zhou Enlai. Martie 26, 1965 // Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale Bucharest. FCC Chancellery. 39/1965. P. 53–86. In all probability, the idea of paralyzing Americans in Vietnam was initially articulated by Mao Zedong on October 5, 1964, during his meeting with Pham Van Dong in Beijing. Wang D. Grand Strategy, Power Politics, and China Policy toward the United States in the 1960s // Diplomatic History. 2017. Vol. 41. Iss. 2. P. 265–287.

³⁵ Wang D. Op. cit.

³⁶ As is known, the agreement reached between Moscow and Beijing on the dividing areas of responsibility was based on Stalin’s premise about the emergence of a revolutionary situation in Asia, after the victory of the Chinese revolution, and about the center of global revolutionary movement being shifted to the East. These premises were declared by Stalin in a very ingenious way – as a toast at the reception to honor the Chinese delegation headed by Liu Shaoqi at a dacha in Kuntsevo, on July 10, 1949. As remembered by a member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) CC under the CPC CC Ivan Kovalyov, the Chinese top leaders were inspired by Stalin’s declarations that the Chinese Communists should be at the forefront of all peoples of East Asia and be a trailblazer for them. See: Ковалев И.В. Диалог Сталина с Мао Цзэдуном (интервью с личным представителем И.В. Сталина в Китае И.В. Ковалевым) // Проблемы Дальнего Востока. 1991. № 6. С. 83. The ripening of Stalin’s views and their influence on the Politburo of the CPC CC can be traced to correspondence of the Soviet leader with the Chinese friends in 1949–1950, stored in his personal file in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RSASPH) Fd. 558. The Chinese call this model “back-to-back”. By the late 1950-s, according to the estimate of the Soviet Embassy in the PRC, it looked as follows: “In their approach to the foreign policy issues, our Chinese friends tend to adhere to the principle of “division of labor” between the USSR and the PRC. Proceeding from that, our Chinese friends do not propose to take any steps on the international arena in relation to the key problems facing the world (disarmament, banning thermonuclear weapons), to the UN serving as a crucial instrument in resolving those problems, they are prone to shift the center of attention to the development of their relations with the Asian, African and Latin American nations”. See: Policy letter of the USSR Embassy in the PRC. 06/08/1959 // РГАН. Ф. 5. Оп. 49. Д. 239. Л. 138.

³⁷ Notatka z Rozmowy A.N. Kosigina z Mao Tse-Tungiem. 11 lutego 1965 r. // Archiwum Act Nowic (Warszawa, RP Polska). KC PZPR, XI A/10. K. 514–533.

³⁸ On the significance of the Bandung Conference please refer to: Скоропелов П.П. «Особый способ осуществления внешней политики путем угрозы войны империалистам». Военно-политическая деятельность Президиума ЦК при Н.С. Хрущеве (1953–1964 гг.) // Восток (Oriens). 2022. № 2. С. 9–28; № 3. С. 6–30.

coalition³⁹. It was, as estimated by US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the “most ambitious large-scale diplomatic onslaught ever launched by the Chinese Communists in the free world”⁴⁰.

As noted by the Chinese researcher Dun Wang, who scrupulously reviewed the Chinese records of negotiations from the PRC Foreign Ministry archive, Kosygin was greeted and received in an “amicable” way in Beijing. “A partial normalization of intergovernmental relations ensured a required strategic depth of the security space needed to counterbalance the US”⁴¹.

A trip of the Soviet Party and government delegation to the Far East was made against a backdrop of heated debates over the military and political situation and formulation of goals for 1965 at the Politburo meeting of the Vietnamese Workers' Party CC. A directive letter by Lê Duẩn to “c. Souan” (codename of General Nguyễn Chí Thanh – Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party for South Vietnam) set out those goals as follows: “Our aim is to cause the eventual and complete disintegration of the Saigon Army... it is necessary to defeat the puppet Army in such a way that the Americans would have no time to interfere, yet at the same time to act masterfully in a tactical sense affording the Americans the ability to acknowledge their failure and to leave without losing face. Our Army, in the course of combat operations, should crush and drive away three-fourths out of nine regular puppet divisions available on the ground, resulting from several great battles. After that, by conflating an all-out uprising and a general offensive, we will strike a blow to the enemy's heart (rouse people to revolt simultaneously in Saigon and other major cities) and seize power”.

Despite the fact that the ratio between the size of the Vietnam People's Army and Saigon Army was 1:3, Lê Duẩn was prone to believe that the conditions were quite favorable for Hanoi⁴².

“THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE IS AKIN TO A PRE-WAR SITUATION”

As long as Kosygin stayed in Asia, the state of affairs in Vietnam continued to raise concerns among the Presidium of the CPSU CC (Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee). US systematic air warfare against the DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam)⁴³ gave rise to serious debate within the top leadership of the USSR. On February 11, 1965, the Foreign Ministry and CC Department⁴⁴ submitted a proposal to the Presidium on a variety of potential recip-

³⁹ *Getlig E.* Trouble Ahead in Afro-Asia: The United States, the Second Bandung Conference. The Struggle for the Third World, 1964–65 // *Diplomatic History*. 2015. Vol. 39. № 1. P. 127.

⁴⁰ Cited by: *Getlig E.* Op. cit. To assess the magnitude of the Chinese diplomatic onslaught, it can be mentioned that, throughout 1964, over a period of 53 days Zhou visited 10 countries of the African continent. In spring, 1965, his schedule was even more intense. He visited Pakistan (March 23, and April 2), Romania (March 24–27), Albania (on March 27–30), Algeria (March 30–April 1), Egypt (April 1), Burma (April 3–4). *Ibid.* P. 129; *Lüthi L.M.* Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy – a Commentary: Signalling Across Four Continents // *The International History Review*. 2013. Vol. 35. Iss. 4. P. 808. Obviously, Beijing was not isolated on the international arena and behaved like a genuine world power. The Conference was due to take place on June 29, 1965, in Algeria. However, the deposition of Algerian leader Ben Bella in the June 18–19 coup led to the shifting of the Conference towards November first, and then it was rescheduled indefinitely, after the October coup in Indonesia, when Beijing's key partner Sukarno, effectively turned into a hostage of the Indonesian military. For more details on the history of Bandung-II and the role played by the US in dismantling the anti-American coalition of the third-world nations please refer to: *Getlig E.* Op. cit.

⁴¹ *Wang D.* Op. cit. P. 265–287.

⁴² Le Duan to Comrade Souan. February 1965. *Ле Зуан. Письма на Юг. Сб. писем и телеграмм / пер. с вьет. М., 1987. С. 49–50, 59–60.*

⁴³ On February 7, 1965, the 409th battalion of the VPA Special Operation Forces attacked an airfield around Pleiku and the US Camp Holloway Army Base in South Vietnam killing, as stated in the official history of the Vietnamese People's Army, 100 enemy soldiers and 20 aircraft. See: *Victory in Vietnam*. P. 142. In retaliation, the US Naval Air Forces aircraft that took off from the Ranger, Coral Sea and Hancock aircraft carriers deployed in the South China Sea, delivered strikes against two military sites in the DRV. Another site was attacked by the Saigon aviation. Those were the first bombardments of North Vietnam announced after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. *McMaster H.R.* Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam. New York, 1998. P. 218–219.

⁴⁴ In the absence of Andropov, who accompanied Kosygin on his trip, the material was signed by Deputy Director of the Department Lev Tolkunov.

rocal actions that might be taken by the Soviet Union in this connection, and on February 12, 1965, these proposals were presented by Andrei Gromyko at the Presidium meeting. Apart from the traditional package of political and diplomatic measures, it was suggested to send “volunteer fighters” to Vietnam, which effectively meant sending Soviet troops to the DRV. Broadly speaking, the proposals issued by the Foreign Ministry (which were backed by the CC Department in the absence of Andropov) could be regarded as a deferred reaction to the November request made by the Vietnamese top leadership that security guarantees be provided⁴⁵.

A fierce discussion flared up over the issue. Draft minutes of the CC Presidium on February 12, 1965, contain information on the addresses made by those present, the greater part of whom advocated for caution (the spelling is retained as in the original):

“Gromyko — Made a report on the state of affairs.

Mikoyan — Believes there is no need to respond in such a way now.

Podgorny — It is hardly necessary now to offer military assistance and help to defend, to repel the attack.

We do not have to get involved in the war.

We do not have to send volunteers either, obviously. It would be hardly justifiable currently.

Documents to be adopted require additional adjustment.

However, some measures should be taken by us.

We need to express our protest and demand that any such action should be ceased by the Americans.

Suslov — The documents submitted by the Foreign Ministry have been issued hastily. It is apparent that we do not need to react in such a manner to each act of aggression. We have already dealt with the development in Cuba, and we barely escaped unscathed.

The proposals regarding the volunteers are totally unacceptable.

We need to hear what Comrade Kosygin has to say on his talks in the DRV.

...

Malinovsky — Believes that we have not yet used the entire array of peaceful measures before proceeding to threats.

There is no need whatsoever to get involved in combat operation.

We can render military assistance and aid along the line of public solidarity”⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ As already noted, throughout November–December of 1964, the Presidium deliberated on the issue of sending Soviet military personnel to the DRV twice, the end result of which was the proposal to supply North Vietnam with air-defense systems and to send reduced personnel to operate them. (Minutes of the Meeting No. 189 of the CC Presidium dd. 28/01/1965 // РГАН. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. Д. 617. Л. 36–37).

⁴⁶ The proposal of the Foreign Ministry (which was supported by the CC Department without much thought) to send “volunteers” to Vietnam raises a lot of questions in connection with the decision-making mechanisms adopted by the Soviet military and political leaders at the initial stage of operation of the new collective leadership of the USSR. Evidently, the “submission” of materials to the meeting of the Presidium occurred bypassing the CC Foreign Political Committee. This was vividly exemplified by the reaction of its Chairman Mikhail Suslov. That the matter involved the sending of troops and bringing this matter for discussion at the Presidium meeting without hearing the opinion of the military was also very strange. The address made by Malinovsky was explicit enough to show what he thought about it. Incidentally, there were no Defense Ministry representatives on the Committee... Military issues were customarily discussed by the USSR Defense Council, comprising Brezhnev, Podgorny, Kosygin, Ustinov (CC Secretary on Defense Matters), Grechko (First Deputy Defense Minister and Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief) and Yepishev (Main Political Department Chief). The Foreign Minister was not a member of the Defense Council, however. But the Defense Council was never a crisis management body, it was rather a commission of sorts on matters relating to the Defense Ministry. Such issues as planning, the deployment of the Armed Forces, military construction projects, new weapons for the troops while being on the agenda of the Defense Council, were, for the most part, addressed in a most general format. It might appear that there was a controversy brewing between the military and foreign policy matters, but this was not quite the case. A solution was found in the so-termed “Politburo system”, that had made it imperative to debate strategic issues for the country within the framework of a single platform in compliance with certain procedures. As is evident from the draft records of the Presidium meetings, this discussion was far from being merely a perfunctory formality.

Brezhnev shared the view of the majority of the speakers: "I agree with the opinion of my comrades, we should not be dragged into this war. But we need to generate a series of retaliatory measures and express our stance with regard to the developments in Vietnam". The conclusive statement after the debate was made by Gromyko: "We have only one track to follow – not to allow a military confrontation"⁴⁷. But, what should be done if one occurs?

An answer to this question was brought by Kosygin on his return from Beijing. On February 18, 1965, the results of the Soviet Delegation's trip were discussed at a meeting of the Presidium. The idea advanced by Zhou Enlai to the effect that "the forces of Socialism are interested in the Americans getting heavily mired in Southeast Asia" (the expression coined by Mikoyan) captured the imagination of the Soviet leaders⁴⁸. There was also some apprehension that "China would not be averse to the Soviet Union getting involved in the war". The stance was resolutely trumpeted by Mikoyan⁴⁹. Nevertheless, in the eyes of Brezhnev and Kosygin, the "upsides" seemed to outweigh the prospective "downsides"⁵⁰.

The Presidium approved the activities of the Soviet delegation. It was resolved to inform the CC members, first secretaries of the regional Party committees⁵¹ and leaders of fraternal Parties about the details of the visit, making the full memorandum of conversation between Kosygin and Mao Zedong available to them. A communication to the Vietnamese Workers' Party said that following an "exchange of opinions" in Beijing, the positions of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the CPC (Communist Party of China) on the issue of providing assistance to the DRV "have drawn closer" (correction made by Andropov's handwriting in connection with the CC resolution after it was discussed at the Presidium)⁵².

The trip helped considerably enrich the vision of the new Soviet leadership *concerning the situation in the region – as it was not fully identical to the information received by the Center from our Embassies overseas*. Thus, in relation to the power balance within the CC of the Vietnamese Workers' Party, Kosygin said that "the impression we had about Ho Chi Minh does not correspond with reality... (he. – *V.N., P.S.*) behaved in quite an independent manner... (Lê Duẩn. – *V.N., P.S.*) is in effect not at all as pro-Chinese as we thought he was"⁵³. However, the general conclusion sounded very alarming: "The (Vietnamese. – *V.N., P.S.*) Communists are firmly convinced that the USSR is not really intent on the struggle against imperialism... Moreover, a

⁴⁷ Draft record of the CC Presidium meeting. 12/02/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. П. 622. Д. 8. С. 13–14. Underscored in the original text.

⁴⁸ Draft protocol of minutes of the CC Presidium meeting. 18/02/1965 // Ibid. М. 626. П. 13–24; Dictation by Anastas Mikoyan. 04.03.1965 // РГАСПИ. Ф. 84. Оп. 3. Д. 116. Л. 7.

⁴⁹ As Mikoyan put it, "China wants Americans and other imperialists to get embroiled in the endless local battles in the most remote corners of the world, as far from the Chinese boundaries as possible, and is not averse to the Soviet Union being embroiled in the military activities either" (Ibid. P. 7–8). As time went on, these concerns appeared to be shared by Brezhnev, as he told Atonin Novotny about it in Moscow on 07/09/1965: "the Chinese are trying to trigger a confrontation between the USSR and the US". *Брежнев Л.И. Рабочие и дневниковые записи*. С. 10.

⁵⁰ Later, on 10/09/1965, in his conversation with Walter Ulbricht) Brezhnev formulated this strategic equation in the following manner: "If the Americans succeed in strengthening their positions in Asia, then they will raise the issue in Europe more energetically". Ibid. P. 157.

⁵¹ Informing the Party and administrative executives was an essential element of practicing state governance under Brezhnev. The phrase "What will the regional committees say?" (Podgorny liked to repeat it) was often heard at Presidium meetings, and it was not associated with ceremonial implications. After October, 1964, and events of the earlier period in the 1950-s, the Soviet leaders were well aware of what it meant to be deprived to the support provided by the regional committees.

⁵² Information for the leadership of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) on conversations held by the Soviet delegation headed by Alexey Kosygin with the VWP leaders. 26/02/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. Д. 631. Л. 90.

⁵³ It was not accidental that in his closing remarks Kosygin suggested having the Ambassadors in China and the DPRK replaced (Ambassador in Vietnam Scherbakov had not been working in Hanoi for half a year by that time). According to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, "given the current circumstances, they are only a brake pedal to our relations". See: Draft protocol record. 18/02/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. Д. 626. Л. 21.

similar situation prevails with other Parties in the East, who think that we are almost in collusion with the US imperialism”⁵⁴.

Summarizing the results of discussion of the Vietnamese issue on February 12 and 18, 1965 at the CC Presidium, we should bear in mind that the spirit of the discussion was largely defined by the traumatic experience had by many of the attendees relating to the “specific form of administering foreign policy through the threat of war” that Khrushchev practiced when he was the top leader of the Soviet state. The combination of a series of large-scale military and political crises, the culmination of which appeared to be the Caribbean crisis of October 1962, which brought the USSR to the brink of a military conflict with the US, was not considered by the new collective leadership of the USSR as something they would like to repeat⁵⁵. It could be asserted that a strong motivation to avert any “engagement in conflict with nuclear powers”⁵⁶ and, in a broader sense, the understanding that another world war would be fraught with disastrous consequences for Russia, became the overriding keynote of the defense and policy strategy pursued by the USSR under Brezhnev. For this reason, the Vietnamese were constantly urged by the Soviet side to start negotiations with the Americans (“the parties should feel the pulse of each other”), a rather annoying factor for the Vietnamese. This was genuine Brezhnev doctrine! However, a motivation to stay away from any direct conflict with the nuclear powers, as we will see, did not mean the pursuit of a pacifist agenda. Members of the Presidium were not vegetarians by any standard. It appears that they adopted the same logic that underlined Stalin’s concept of shifting the center of gravity for the world revolutionary movement to the East, implying that “the US would be diverted... from Europe to the Far East”, while the USSR could “benefit from it in terms of the balance of forces worldwide”⁵⁷.

It can be said that following Kosygin’s trip the basic tenets of a concept were devised to keep the “Anglo-American coalition” paralyzed in Asia through

- Supporting the “special-type war” waged by the DRV on the territory of South Vietnam. The USSR was prepared to provide assistance in improving the air defense capability of the DRV by sending an air-defense brigade to Vietnam. In its turn, the PRC reaffirmed security guarantees for the DRV in the event the US would invade its territory⁵⁸;

- Continuing to provide aid to Indonesia in connection with its opposition to Malaysia and the UK. (As underlined by Kosygin, Indonesia was fully equipped with Soviet weapons: “We gave them our Naval fleet, including submarines, we gave them missiles, we gave them military aircraft, part of our crews are still there on active duty, there are many Soviet pilots in their air forces”⁵⁹;

⁵⁴ The general conclusion made by Kosygin in relation to China and other countries he visited during his trip – “nationalism there has swept over everything”. Translated from “Party” language, it meant that the USSR’s allies within the socialist camp in Asia are guided by their own nationalist and state interests above all, and this should be taken into consideration // Ibid. S. 19–20.

⁵⁵ For more details, see: *Скороспелов П.П. Указ. соч.*

⁵⁶ Brezhnev’s Address at the June, 1967, Plenary Meeting of the CC “On the Soviet Union Policy in conjunction with Israel’s Aggression in the Middle East” // ПТАНИ. Ф. 2. Оп. 3. Д. 59. Л. 7.

⁵⁷ Ciphered cable by Filipov to Prague to the Soviet Ambassador (for Gottwald). 27/08/1950 // РГАСПИ. Ф. 558. Оп. 11. Д. 62. Л. 71–72.

⁵⁸ As advised by Kosygin, the Presidium resolved not to send air forces to Vietnam (MIG-21 air regiment), as was originally intended by the Defense Ministry, See: Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the CC Presidium. 18/12/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. Д. 626. Л. 21.

⁵⁹ *Záznam Konverzáce s V.P. Moskovsky, Unor 16, 1965.* The so-termed Confrontation – a military conflict between Indonesia and the Federation of Malaysia, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand in 1963–1966 – was somewhat overshadowed by the War in Indochina. An attempt by Jakarta to challenge the northern part of the Kalimantan Island (Borneo) being included in Malaysia led to a protracted “low intensity conflict” between the Indonesians and the British Commonwealth troops. For more details see: *Easter D. Britain and the Confrontation with Indonesia, 1960–66.* London, 2012.

– Moscow stood ready to offer assistance in improving the air-defense capabilities of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) by sending them the Volkhov anti-aircraft missile system, initially with the Soviet personnel⁶⁰.

It was also planned to reinforce the USSR Naval presence in the Pacific Ocean. On February 25 and 28, 1965, pursuant to the talks in Beijing, Moscow requested two air corridors across the territory of the PRC intended for supplying weapons to the DRV, including the right to fly across Chinese air space for 45 military transport aircraft, which were due to deliver to Vietnam the S-75 anti-aircraft systems as well as military personnel to operate/service them. Additionally, the USSR requested the possibility to deploy a MiG-21PF squadron (12 jet fighter planes) and 500-strong military personnel at the Kunming airfield in Yunnan province, China (bordering on the DRV) for the training of North Vietnam pilots, or in case of necessity – for the employment in the interests of Hanoi air-defense forces⁶¹.

Indochina became the strategic center of gravity capable of “keeping the Americans paralyzed in Asia” over the next 10 years⁶². The war in Vietnam was viewed by the Soviet military and political leaders through the prism of experience gathered by the coalition of the USSR, the PRC, the DPRK, and the DRV in the Far East throughout 1950–1953. As is widely known, military planning in Korea, Indochina, as well as along the Taiwan track over that period was executed in close coordination, primarily between Moscow and Beijing. Written communication between Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, stored at the RSASPH, testifies to this fact⁶³. Therefore, already on April 3, 1965, Brezhnev and Kosygin sent letters to the Chinese and Vietnamese top leaders with a proposal to hold a three-party conference “at the very highest level” to jointly discuss steps that should be undertaken to “protect security of the DRV” under conditions of escalated bombing attacks on its territory by US aviation. Meanwhile, the Soviet leaders emphatically asked Lê Duẩn: “Is there an agreement on behalf of our Chinese comrades to deploy part of the fighter aircraft being supplied by the USSR to the nearest airfields in China?”⁶⁴.

After talks with the North Vietnam delegation headed by Le Duan⁶⁵ (held in Moscow from April 10 through April 17, 1965) the CC Presidium adopted a resolution on the delivery of weapons to the tune of RUB 140 million to the DRV⁶⁶. In the end, over the period until

⁶⁰ On May 13, 1965, the Politburo passed a resolution to deliver to the DPRK of eight SA-75 M Dvina battalions and 50 MiG-21 aircraft and to send Soviet personnel on a mission there // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 18. Д. 342. Л. 28–32.

⁶¹ All this was told to Zhou Enlai by Nicolae Ceausescu on March 26, 1965, expressing great surprise over the “promptness” displayed by their Soviet friends. See: Conversație N. Ceausescu i Zhou Enlai. Martie 26, 1965.

⁶² After the coup in Indonesia in October 1965 (which became known in Moscow through a news release communicated by the US telegraph agency in Tokyo), the new leadership in Jakarta distanced itself from any contacts with the Soviet representatives, and the possibility “to influence the affairs in Indonesia in the right direction for the USSR was reduced to zero”, as was reported by Gromyko to the Foreign Policy Commission on November 27, 1965. See: Zakharov in the CPSU CC on the seizure of power in Indonesia by the “Indonesian Revolutionary Council”. 01/10/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 30. Д. 479. Л. 67; Gromyko Reporting to the CPSU CC Foreign Policy Commission. 27/11/1965 // Ibid. S. 76–78. In turn, as was already noted, Kim Il-Sen, in a conversation with Kosygin, on February 12–13, gave a fairly pessimistic assessment of the revolutionary prospects for South Korea.

⁶³ Correspondence is stored in Stalin's Personal File in RSASPH. Fd. 558.

⁶⁴ Brezhnev, Kosygin, Ho Chi Minh, Lê Duẩn, and Phạm Văn Đồng. 03/04/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 80. Оп. 1. Д. 517. Л. 15–16. A similar letter was sent to the Chinese; On April 17, 1965, a second letter was forwarded to the Chinese leadership. It focused on the need to take practical steps and act jointly “in the interests of protecting the security of Socialist camp frontiers and its outpost in Southeast Asia”. See: Information on the talks with the DRV delegation. 29/04/1965 // Ibid. Fd. 3. Inv. 18. M. 341. S. 66.

⁶⁵ In the course of negotiations, Lê Duẩn reiterated once again that “both Parties (CPC and VWP. – *V.N., P.S.*) sought to confine the war to the framework of South Vietnam”. Work notes made by Brezhnev during his meeting with Le Duan. 10/04/1965 // Ibid. Fd. 80. Inv. 1. M. 517. S. 10.

⁶⁶ For reference: throughout the period from 1953 until March 1965, the USSR supplied weapons to Vietnam to the tune of RUB 200 million. *Пихоя Р.Г.* Москва. Кремль. Власть. Т. II. 1964–1985. М., 2009. С. 36.

late 1966, the amount was to reach RUB 1 billion 300 thousand, including 2000 anti-aircraft guns, 144 military aircraft, over 300 tanks, as well as food, fuel, and uniforms. As was noted by Brezhnev, with a hint of gratification while addressing the December 1966 Plenary meeting of the Central Committee, “the fact that the Vietnamese can wage a war against an enemy that possesses numerical superiority is to a substantial degree the result of our assistance”⁶⁷.

However, such close coordination of efforts in a trilateral format — *de facto* the second edition of the Korean coalition from the early 1950-s — was not envisaged by Beijing. The Chinese, definitely, were not enthusiastic about Moscow interfering in the Vietnamese affairs on such a massive scale. Why is this? Was jealousy the reason behind such a stance? It was no accident that, in his conversation with Ho Chi Minh on March 1, 1965, Zhou Enlai urged him not to share any “secrets” with their Soviet friends, and to be “on the alert” with Soviet military advisors⁶⁸. Perhaps, there was an element of distrust that played its part? After all, as was reiterated on numerous occasions by Zhou Enlai in the spring of 1965 during dealings with his foreign interlocutors, the Soviet Communists were prone to accommodate US interests. However, it seems that the primary reason lies elsewhere. The analysis carried out by Chinese leaders of the options for the military and political situation in Vietnam led them to assume that the war would be of a limited scope. Moreover, Beijing, as we know now, erroneously underestimated the US’s readiness to interfere directly in a ground war in Indochina⁶⁹.

Zhou Enlai made a similar forecast of the military-political environment in relation to the war in Indochina during his conversation with Nicolae Ceaușescu in Bucharest on March 26, 1965. As Zhou Enlai believed, the conflict was being viewed as having four possible developments (“four evolution stages”, as he called them):

1. The Americans are expanding their military presence in South Vietnam and escalating air-attacks against the DRV. With the aim of averting a collapse of their puppet troops, the US can send its forces to Vietnam, a division of Marines, an infantry division, and also allied troops (a division of South Korean Marines). Those troops will not be used for engaging in combat operations, but for safeguarding the critical infrastructure facilities (seaports, airfields and big cities).

2. The US commences air-attacks across the entire DRV territory, including Hanoi, and imposes a naval blockade of North Vietnam. The war spreads to the entire territory of Indochina. The expansion of the war scope will drive China to interfere and send “volunteers” to the DRV.

3. Another stage is connected with a possible increase of US ground forces. This option, as Zhou believed, was not very likely, as it weakened the US positions in other regions of the world. A more likely scenario was commencing air-attacks against the Chinese areas that have a common frontier with Vietnam. In that case, the PRC will “offer resistance”.

4. And, finally, the fourth stage — “total war”, including the intrusion of US ground forces into Chinese territory.

⁶⁷ Leonid Brezhnev’s address “On the USSR Foreign Policy and Struggle for the Cohesion of the Communist Movement” at the December Plenary Meeting of the CPSU CC 12/12/1966 // РГАН. Ф. 2. Оп. 3. Д. 45. Л. 14. Speaking about Moscow’s strategy in the Second Indochina War, we cannot leave unnoticed its constant focus on the political and diplomatic repercussions of the War. As early as during their talks in April 1965, Brezhnev said to Lê Duẩn: “For the US imperialists, the issue at stake in this war is not only the fate of South Vietnam. They understand that the question concerns other nations, the fate of the entire Southeast Asia — Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and other states, and US prestige is also at stake... It is hard to believe that it will be feasible to attenuate the US military and especially economic might within a short time”. For this reason, according to Soviet leadership, it was appropriate to also use, alongside military measures, political leverage to advance political initiatives seeking to expedite the settlement of the Vietnamese issue, and to engage in direct negotiations with the US. See: Memorandum on the negotiations with the DRV delegation. Reference to item 12, Minutes of the Meeting of the CC Presidium No.200, dd. 29/04/1965 // Ibid. Ф. 3. Inv. 18. М. 339. С. 45.

⁶⁸ Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Ho Chi Minh // Wilson Center Digital Archive. June 15, 1965. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/165383> (access date: 08.10.2022).

⁶⁹ Conversație N. Ceausescu i Zhou Enlai. Martie 26, 1965.

By way of summarizing the analysis of various options for the development of military and political situation, Zhou assured Ceausescu that the possibility of the war in Vietnam growing into a world war is very low. A world war would mean a war between the USSR and US, something that the Americans would like to avert at any cost. A large-scale war with China, with the Soviet Union watching on the sidelines, was not in the US's best interests either. It would need to pull in all its troops from other regions of the world, and then "the whole world would rise against the Americans"⁷⁰.

The Chinese leadership was intent on avoiding the possibility that the PRC would be dragged into direct confrontation with the US (similar to the war in Korea) by sending out various signals to Washington that a US invasion of North Vietnam would trigger China's direct engagement in the war in Indochina⁷¹. And those signals were duly received in Washington as they did not want to repeat the Korean experience. The top policy makers at the US Department of Defense (Robert McNamara, John McNaughton) defined the objective of the military campaign as a "position deadlock" in South Vietnam. In a memorandum of July 1965, approved by McNamara, McNaughton provides the following description for "victory": "It is sufficient for the US to show Vietnam that they cannot win"⁷². Position deadlock, according to McNaughton, is tantamount to victory, as it will prompt the parties to reach a settlement at the negotiating table (as a matter of fact, on the US's terms!)⁷³. In the opinion of Loris Lüthi, it can be asserted that there was an "implicit agreement" between China and the US designed to reduce the magnitude of the War in Vietnam to a local conflict⁷⁴. "The war in Vietnam is a war between the Vietnamese people". It was precisely in this light that the strategy of the PRC in the Indochina war, as it grew in intensity, was discussed at a key meeting of the CPC CC Politburo on April 12, 1965. Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping said in his address: "The US bombardment is likely to continue... the war will expand... it is feasible that under the pretext of chasing Vietnamese aircraft the Americans will make an incursion into our airspace. If we do not prevent such a development, they will reach Yunnan and Guangxi. Then, the war will spread initially to part of our territory and later to the entire territory of China"⁷⁵. According to Deng Xiaoping and President of the PRC Liu Shaoqi, who shared his views, China should not be scared of being drawn into the expanding war in Vietnam, as "the duty of proletarian internationalism" binds the PRC to support the DRV. Nevertheless, the two leaders were unanimous that both the Chinese and Vietnamese people would definitely benefit if China

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Wang D. Op. cit. P. 285–287. Striving to avert a new "Korea" is perfectly understandable, when considering the fact that the war in Korea (1950–1953) was not a local conflict for the PRC, but a large-scale war involving two powerful coalitions in several theatres of war (apart from Korea, in Indochina and in the Taiwan Strait), whose closing stage drew over 1 200 000 Chinese volunteers, and which was fraught with the risk of US tactical nuclear weapons being employed. An attempt to issue a warning to Washington, in this context, seemed very appropriate. The four points articulated by Zhou in various formats in the spring of 1965, were as follows:

– China will not be the initiate a war with the US. This is testified by the stance held by the PRC on Taiwan – for 10 years, Beijing has been engaged in negotiations with the Americans over this issue;

– China will comply with all of its obligations (with regard to the DRV), as exemplified by the war in Korea;

– China is prepared to go to war (with the US);

– Aerial bombardment of China will mean a war with China, "which will know no boundaries". Eventually, this message was brought to the attention of the US side on May 31 through a temporary British Chargé d'affaires in Beijing. For more details see: *Hershberg J., Jian C.* Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China's Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965 // *International History Review*. 2005. № XXVII. P. 47–84.

⁷² United States – Vietnam Relations. 1945–1967. (The Pentagon Papers). Vol. IV. C. 6 (a). P. 4 // URL: <https://archive.org/details/UnitedStatesVietnamRelations1945to1967VolI/mode/2up> (access date: 09.03.2023).

⁷³ On the formulation of the US strategic line in Vietnam see: *McMaster H.R.* Op. cit.

⁷⁴ Lüthi L.M. Op. cit. P. 813.

⁷⁵ Quoted in: *Hershberg J., Jian C.* Op. cit. P. 63.

could avoid any direct confrontation with the US⁷⁶. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to keep the conflict under control by retaining mechanisms that were manageable. In our view, the Chinese strived to maintain primary control over the “escalation ladder” and this was the primary reason for Beijing’s resistance to the “excessive” growth of the USSR’s role (according to the Chinese) in the war in Indochina.

However, as Zhou Enlai liked to say “the laws of war are not determined by human will alone”⁷⁷. By April 1965, the aftermath of sustained aerial bombardment of the DRV⁷⁸ de facto brought all railway transport operations in North Vietnam to a standstill: railway transportation was only 100 tons a day in April, whereas the requirement was 3000 tons⁷⁹. Under such circumstances, an appeal from Hanoi⁸⁰ galvanized Beijing to take the decision to send “Chinese volunteers” to the DRV⁸¹.

In mid-May, the Americans massively escalated the bombardment of North Vietnam and commenced a military intervention into the Dominican Republic. As Soviet statesman Anastas Mikoyan recalled, it caused “a great deal of agitation at the CPSU CC Presidium”. A report of the Defense Ministry (read by Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky) forecasted that after the events in the Dominican Republic, one could expect actions spearheaded against Cuba. In this connection, the Defense Ministry suggested organizing military rallies in the West (in Berlin and along the frontier with West Germany) and that preparations be made to “launch an attack against West Berlin”. In conclusion, he added that “we should not be scared of risking war in view of the current situation”⁸².

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ Excerpt from a Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan, 1965.

⁷⁸ As was explained by Zhou to the Pakistani Premier, “if in August–September last year the Americans bombed North Vietnam only once or twice a week, they now carry out bombing attacks every day”. See: Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Li Xiaobing. Op. cit. P. 73.

⁸⁰ At a meeting in Beijing, on April 8, 1965, between Liu Shaoqi and Lê Duẩn, the Vietnamese formally lodged a request for Chinese pilots to be sent to the DRV, along with engineer and air-defense troops. According to Lê Duẩn, the deployment of the Chinese contingent will help handle four common tasks for Beijing and Hanoi. First, to reduce the area of operation for the US Air Force to the 20th or 19th circles of latitude (the Americans will be afraid of provoking the Chinese, while delivering strikes against the areas where the China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) forces are deployed. Second, to provide for an effective air-defense system of Hanoi and North of the country. Third, to ensure the efficient operation of the DRV transportation system. And, finally, the introduction of Chinese volunteers will boost the morale of the Vietnamese people. See: Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan. April 08, 1965 // Wilson Center Digital Archive. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113058> (access date: 08.10.2022). On the same day, Liu Shaoqi reported on his conversation to Mao Zedong, who approved the request lodged by the Vietnamese side (with the exception of sending pilots there). Li Xiaobing. Op. cit. P. 74. As can be seen, the deployment of a China PLA land force contingent, as was the case in Korea, was not discussed. In parallel to the preparatory efforts to bring the Chinese volunteers into the DRV, information began to circulate among diplomats of the Warsaw Pact countries in Pyongyang (with reference to the Chinese Ambassador) that the PRC and DPRK were engaged in preparations for joint military operations in the demilitarized zone in Panmunjom. See: *Szalontai B.* Whose War Plan Was It? Sino-DPRK Relations and Kim Il Sung’s Militant Strategy, 1965–1967. North Korea International Documentation Project. E-Dossier Series. Dossier No. 20. April 2016. P. 5 // URL: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/sino-dprk-relations-and-kim-il-sungs-militant-strategy-1965-1967> (access date: 09.03.2023).

⁸¹ Li Xiaobing. Op. cit. P. 74.

⁸² These proposals were drafted at Brezhnev’s instruction – Dictation by Mikoyan dd. 01/06/1965 // РГАСПИ. Ф. 84. Оп. 3. Д. 116. Л. 16. US military-political action relied on the breakthrough in the escalation of US military potential that the Kennedy Administration initiated during the Berlin crisis. Apart from a substantial build-up of strategic nuclear forces, deemed to sustain the supremacy of Washington in the nuclear field, the number of US Army formations was increased from 11 to 16, which was supposed to allow the US to wage two large-scale wars – in Europe and in Asia – concurrently and also engage in a lower-caliber conflict in another region. The essence of what was going on was grasped in the USSR perfectly well. Thus, at a meeting of the Consulting Committee of the Warsaw Pact Organization in Warsaw on January 19–20, 1965, it was maintained that the “imperialists” were placing their bets on a so-called local war, believing that the possession of nuclear weapons would serve as a guarantee against a retribution for their aggression.

Parallel to this, in April-May, deployment was underway on DRV territory of an air-defense groups consisting of two reduced strength air-defense missile regiments (they were called “training centers”)⁸³. Soviet air-defense missile crewmen waged their first action against the US Air Force on July 24, 1965 (4 F-4C fighter bomber aircraft were shot down).

And in August, a group of “Chinese volunteers” tasked with integrating air-defense forces, railway, and engineer troops was deployed in Vietnam. By late 1965, its strength grew to 160 000 servicemen, which was comparable with the strength of the group of Chinese popular volunteers at the initial stage of the Korean war (203 000 service manpower). Notably, the strength of the Chinese air-defense contingent – 21 000 service manpower – comprised 35% of the total strength of the air-defense group of the allied forces on the DRV territory, which constituted 59 000 servicemen. By way of comparison, the strength of the Vietnamese People’s Army was 400 000 men, out of which 92 000 were deployed in South Vietnam⁸⁴. The first combat of Chinese anti-aircraft gunners was on August 9, 1965 (1 F-4C jet fighter was shot down).

“The current international environment is identical to a pre-war situation”⁸⁵ is how Gromyko described the state of affairs in the world at a Presidium meeting in mid-June. Such assessments had not been made in Moscow since the final stage of the Korean war. But all attempts to set up an anti-American coalition that would act in unison with a single integrated plan, just as Stalin and Mao Zedong managed to do on the cusp of 1949–1950, were unsuccessful. The Chinese stubbornly refused to create a mechanism for coordination of efforts as they preferred to pursue “parallel” strategies. As Brezhnev notes in his notebook, “we will have to carry out international policies in conditions of a long-lasting disagreement with China”. And, as for their Vietnamese friends, it was clear, on the one hand, that “they were counting on a military victory”, but, on the other hand, as to how they were going to achieve this goal – “we have very limited information, practically none at all”⁸⁶.

“WAR OF THE CPSU CC”

By autumn, it was quite clear that the war would last for a long time. A policy letter by the USSR Embassy in Washington, D.C., entitled “The War in Vietnam and the US Stance” (dated October 22, 1965), said that the US was swiftly increasing the number of its Armed Forces on the Vietnamese battleground (from 145 000 to 200 000 troops before by end of 1965 and that an additional 100 000 troops were expected to be deployed there before April 1966). The US Air Force is ramping up its activities (the number of aircraft sorties had increased from 150 to 250–300 per day over recent months), it is likely that the airstrikes against the DRV will be stepped up. Preparations for offensive operations are underway, with a view to achieving a breakthrough by early summer in the military-political situation in South Vietnam in favor of the US and Saigon regime. According to Soviet Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Dobrynin, all this allows us to presume that the prospects for a peaceful Vietnamese settlement “are not very promising”, and that “it is more likely that that combat operations will be escalated further”⁸⁷ (on November

⁸³ Россия (СССР) в локальных войнах и военных конфликтах второй половины XX века. М., 2002. С. 84.

⁸⁴ Война в Корее, 1950–1953 / ред. С.С. Потоцкий. СПб., 2003. С. 155 (табл. 7); Victory in Vietnam. The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975. P. 156, 164; *Li Xiaobing*. Op. cit. P. 64, 100.

⁸⁵ This assessment was given by Gromyko at a Presidium meeting when debating the issue on the possibility for signing a Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between the USSR and China, which was due to carry a provision that any attack against China would be regarded as an attack against the Soviet Union. Mikoyan notes that, effectively, the formulation was deemed to reaffirm Nikita Khrushchev’s declaration made in October of 1958 during Second Taiwan Crisis (see: Dictation by Mikoyan, dd. 06/07/1965 // РГАСПИ. Ф. 84. Оп. 3. Д. 116. Л. 20–21).

⁸⁶ Leonid Brezhnev’s notes, May 24–25, 1965. See: *Брежнев Л.И.* Указ. соч. С. 86.

⁸⁷ Policy letter of the USSR Embassy in the US “The War in Vietnam and US Position”. 22/10/1965 // АВП РФ. Ф. 079. Оп. 20. П. 49. Д. 26. Л. 8, 18.

6, 1965, the policy letter, following Gromyko's instruction, was delivered to all Presidium members)⁸⁸.

A similar attitude was shared by both our Chinese and Vietnamese friends. Thus, in a conversation with Vice-Premier of the DPRK Ri Ju-yeon, Zhou Enlai notes that the situation in Vietnam "is not yet ripe for negotiations", the number of US troops is on the rise. Guerillas are operating some 15 km from Saigon, where shooting is underway in the city. "The Americans want to limit the battlefield to the territory of South Vietnam, while the same attitude is being adopted in Hanoi", the Chinese Vice-Premier said with gratification. In his response to the question: Is there any likelihood for the recurrence of events in Dien Bien Phu? Zhou Enlai noted that the Vietnamese are currently not planning to concentrate all their forces and wage a war of extermination: "They expect to achieve victory over a period of three years"⁸⁹.

Basically, such instructions were issued to its South Vietnam Bureau by the Politburo of the CPV CC in November 1965. Underscoring that "the US is a wealthy and militaristic imperialistic nation", Lê Duẩn, in his directive letter, pointed to the fact that "the strategic guideline for the revolutionary movement in the South is that they should prepare for lengthy struggle and rely on only Vietnamese forces". Only by virtue of such a struggle, when "the revolutionary Army draws the enemy into specially designated areas, where it can inflict large-scale, massive battles on them, will the revolutionary forces be able to seize the opportunity... to establish power for the people in the city"⁹⁰.

For Moscow, the final line in defining the strategic posture of the USSR in the Second Indochina War was drawn in December 1966 during the Plenary Meeting of the CPSU CC. To sum up the results of debates on this issue, Gromyko suggested the following formula: "Without being directly involved in the Vietnam war, we can make the Americans aware that a further escalation of the military operations will compel the USSR to render assistance to the DRV on an ever-increasing scale"⁹¹.

It all seemed quite simple. However, in reality, Moscow's approach toward this "local war carried out to the highest degree possible"⁹² was anything but simplistic. Initially, Brezhnev was full of enthusiasm "I wish I could go there!"⁹³ (he wrote in notebook in May 1965), while a later note made during his talks with Pham Van Dong in November 1968, was as follows:

"Either they have nothing better to do – or such was the directive, to tell us about all sorts of trifling matters, and then ask for assistance... I keep thinking, why do they do this – NOT A WORD – about genuine hardships – what does the CC think – what are the Chinese recommending – what is it, essentially, that they are seeking our friendly advice about – what is being said by our comrades from the battlefield in the South, there is a lot of truly important information and advice that needs to be discussed for the good of our cause. But we just sit here, sometimes listening as if to bedtime stories, like the ones granddads tell their grandsons"⁹⁴.

Here it is evident that he feels insulted. It is known that the Vietnamese were extremely cautious in protecting their strategic autonomy and tried not to reveal to their Soviet friends issues concerning their planning of military campaigns in the South. "Practically no information at all" – this was the refrain heard throughout the entire debate on the Vietnamese issue in the Politburo. But there was another aspect even of greater importance. Alexander Bovin (then a CC Department consultant), remembering his trip to Hanoi with Kosygin in February of 1965,

⁸⁸ Ibid. S. 6.

⁸⁹ Memorandum of the First Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Ri Ju-yeon. November 10, 1965 // Wilson Center Digital Archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118694> (access date: 08.10.2022).

⁹⁰ Lê Duẩn – CC Bureau on South Vietnam, November 1965. Ле Зуан. Указ. соч. С. 88, 106.

⁹¹ Gromyko – CPSU CC: On the State and Prospects for the Relations between the USSR and US. 13/01/1967 // АВП РФ. Ф. Отдел США. Оп. 51. П. 11. Д. 388. Л. 38.

⁹² Handwritten notes made by Brezhnev during his meetings with the DRV Party and government delegation not later than 26/04/1968 // РГАНИ. Ф. 80. Оп. 1. Д. 524. Л. 131.

⁹³ Note written by Brezhnev dd. 24–26/05/1965 // Брежнев Л.И. Указ. соч. С. 87.

⁹⁴ Handwritten notes made by Brezhnev during his conversation with the DRV Party and government delegation on 20 and 22/11/2968 // РГАНИ. Ф. 80. Оп. 1. Д. 525. Л. 70.

writes: "I sat someplace against the wall and listened carefully. And watched. I watched both the Vietnamese team and ours. Ours was made up of officials who grew up in the corridors of power, in the labyrinths of the Party apparatus. Theirs included former underground political workers, ex-political convicts who grew up on military tracks. And the two failed to understand each other. They just couldn't manage it because they assessed human life, pain, and suffering differently, very differently indeed. What seemed to us as irrational, senseless, and hopeless was filled with meaning and hope for them. What other rationale is needed if you have a fierce will to win?"⁹⁵

The difference in mentality of the Soviet and Vietnamese party apparatchiks and diplomats⁹⁶ had an impact on the disbelief of the Soviet Defense Ministry in the Vietnam's capability to win, especially against a backdrop of the absolute superiority of the US in terms of military equipment and personnel ("The ratio is 4:1 in favor of the Americans", Soviet Defense Minister Andrey Grechko pointedly contended during the talks with the DRV delegation in April 1967). The Soviet General Staff also remembered the saddening experience of Inchon⁹⁷, while being constantly apprehensive of the possibility of a potential US Marine Corps operation in North Vietnam⁹⁸. The lack of credible information from Vietnam involving GRU (Soviet military intelligence agency) sources also had a negative effect⁹⁹. In general, the prevailing opinion among the top military brass in the USSR at that time was that "this is not the Defense Ministry's war, but the CPSU CC's war"¹⁰⁰.

In essence, this was exactly the case. The Politburo held the reigns over the matter firmly: assistance to the DRV from the USSR was constantly increasing, and as Kosygin noted in a meeting with Phạm Văn Đồng on August 11, 1966: "We do not consider ourselves to be outside observers of this war. In fact, we are active participants in it"¹⁰¹. Moreover, the stance of the Soviet leaders was totally devoid of any idealism. The Politburo viewed the Vietnam war primarily through the prism of China's eagerness to expand its influence in Asia, reflecting elements of the fierce competition between the PRC and the US for a predominance in the region. Strictly speaking, this view was shared by the Americans themselves, and as recalled by Kosygin, this was what US President Lyndon Johnson told him during their summit in Glassboro, New Jersey, US (held on June 23 and 25, 1967)¹⁰². In this context, the phrase uttered by Mao: "You (the USSR) should deal with Europe, and we (China) will take care of Asia"¹⁰³ was perceived by the Soviet

⁹⁵ Бовин А.Е. XX век как жизнь. Воспоминания. М., 2017. С. 118.

⁹⁶ Theories that the Vietnamese were too optimistic in the assessment of their own situation and their possibilities in the South, and likewise that the Vietnamese conflict had affected the development of Soviet – US relations negatively, are a common refrain traceable throughout all of the Foreign Ministry documents of that period. See, e.g., a comment by USSR Ambassador in the DRV Ilya Scherbakov related to his conversation with Nguyen Van Vinh on 13/06/1967 (it deals with planning the Tet offensive in 1968 // РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 59. Д. 331. Л. 109) or a Foreign Ministry memorandum "The Vietnamese Conflict and Soviet-American relations" dd. 31/12/1966 // АВП РФ. Ф. 079. Оп. 21. П. 55. Д. 29. Л. 56.

⁹⁷ The Inchon amphibious operation was conducted in September 1950, by UN troops under the command of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur with the aim of besieging and destroying the bulk of the North Korea People's Army (NKPR) in South Korea. As a result of this assault, the NKPA suffered a crushing defeat. The DPRK was rescued from total destruction solely by "Chinese volunteers" joining the war. For more details, please refer to: Попов И.М., Лавренев С.Я., Богданов В.Н. Корея в огне войны. М., 2007.

⁹⁸ Report of conversations held at the CPSU CC with the DRV delegation. 01, 03 and 05/04/1967 // РГАНИ. Ф. 80. Оп. 1. Д. 522. Л. 20.

⁹⁹ See: Pyotr Ivashutin at the CPSU CC. 15/11/1968 // Ibid. Fd. 5. Inv. 60. M. 417. S. 107–118. Judging by the data received by the Agency through military intelligence sources, the work along this track was commenced not earlier than in 1970.

¹⁰⁰ This comment was made by a high-ranking official from the Defense Ministry in a conversation with Bovin. Бовин А.Е. Указ. соч. С. 123.

¹⁰¹ Recollections of Igor Ognetov communicated verbally.

¹⁰² Summit meetings between the USSR and US leaders over the post-war period and visit to the USSR by Vice-President Richard Nixon (fact sheet issued by the History and Document Department, USSR Foreign Ministry. 30/03/1972 // РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 64. Д. 5. Л. 24).

¹⁰³ Notatka z Rozmowy A.N. Kosigina z Mao Tse-Tungiem. 11 lutego 1965 r.

leadership as a proposal to divide up spheres of influence. And Moscow was quite satisfied with this, in principle. But the implication was they were not talking about Europe alone.

Already in May of 1965, the CC Presidium addressed a range of issues related to the restoration of “mutual understanding and trust” in the relations with Turkey. In this connection, the USSR Foreign Ministry proposed to regard Turkey as a “gateway” to the Middle East: “when the US gets bogged down in its aggressive activities in Southeast Asia, improving the Soviet Union – Turkey relations can be viewed, alongside the further strengthening of the USSR’s positions in the UAR (United Arab Republic), Algeria, and Syria, as one of the most crucial foreign policy objectives of a strategic nature”¹⁰⁴. This line was subsequently continued. As was underscored in a positional paper authorized by Gromyko and submitted by the Foreign Ministry to the Politburo on April 6, 1970: “As the US will be engaged in the Vietnam war for a protracted period, (it is expedient. – *V.N., P.S.*) to use this factor to consolidate our positions in areas that pose a great political interest to us (the Middle East, Arab nations, and India)”¹⁰⁵.

As written in the classical work entitled “Strategy” by Alexander Svechin, “establishing a strategic goal for war, seemingly so easily accomplished, in reality appears to be a most difficult challenge for a policy maker’s mind. Here, the most serious misconceptions can come to the surface”¹⁰⁶. The Presidium of the CPSU CC – at the behest of their Chinese friends and thanks to Kosygin’s strategic instinct – was able avoid such misconceptions, having managed to adequately designate the USSR’s goals in the Second Indochina War, which was gathering momentum. This allowed the USSR to successfully engage in strategic competition with the US, relying on a relatively meager resource base (the volume of the Soviet economy at that time was just barely over 50% of the United States’ GNP (Gross National Product))¹⁰⁷.

The Presidium in this case acted as an “integral combat leader”¹⁰⁸, averting any extreme and arbitrary decision-making. This was very significant under circumstances when their key objective, to assist Vietnam, yet doing so without causing a global war, appeared to be suspended in the air. Although the impression was that the world was isolated from such a nuclear war by heavily drawn red lines, markers on the world map were constantly being moved, and escalation proceeded onward. Nevertheless, in these conditions, the estimations of Soviet leaders, and likewise those of their Chinese and Vietnamese friends, proved to be quite accurate.

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¹⁰⁴ Gromyko to the CPSU CC “On the Activities to Foster the Development of Relations with Turkey”. 05/05/1965 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 16. Д. 694. Л. 100–112. It was suggested that a “sphere of vital interest” for the USSR be created in the Middle East. See: Gromyko at the CPSU “On the State and Prospects for the Relations between the Soviet Union and the United States of America”. 13/01/1967 // АВП РФ. Ф. Отдел США. Оп. 51. П. 11. Д. 388. Л. 38.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum by Gromyko to the CPSU CC “On Our Subsequent Course and Some Actions with regard to the US”. 06/04/1970 // РГАНИ. Ф. 3. Оп. 268. Д. 1242. Л. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Свечин А.А.* Стратегия. М.; СПб., 2003. С. 11.

¹⁰⁷ According to a CIA estimate. See: *Trachtenberg M.* Assessing Soviet Economic Performance during the Cold War // Texas National Security Review. 2018. Vol. 1. № 2. P. 83. Military expenditures of the USSR constituted app. 7,5% of its GNP (RUB 14.3 billion). Советская военная мощь от Сталина до Горбачева / отв. ред. А.В. Минаев. М., 1999. С. 90, 105. Additional expenses amounting to 1% of GNP allocated for assistance to the allies should also be added. See: Fact Sheet on the Volumes, Tracks, Types, and Conditions underlying USSR Economic Assistance to Developing Nations as Compared against the Aid Provided by Western States. Российский государственный архив экономики. Ф. 4372. Оп. 81. Д. 1775. Л. 72. It was below the maximum limit of military spending during times of peace, estimated at 10% of the GNP (*Симонов Н.С.* ВПК СССР. М., 2015. С. 482) and roughly correlated with the share of national security spending in the US GNP in 1965 (7,4%). *Gaddis J.* Strategies of Containment. Oxford, 2005. P. 393.

¹⁰⁸ *Свечин А.А.* Указ. соч. С. 111.

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