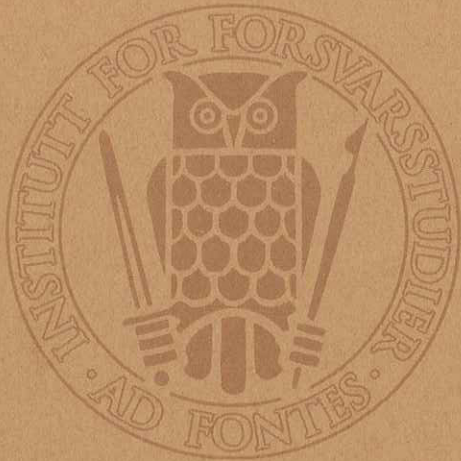


► FORSVARSSTUDIER 4/1997 ◀



Solidarity and National Revolution

**The Soviet Union and the Vietnamese Communists
1954-1960**

Mari Olsen

IFS

INSTITUTT FOR FORSVARSSTUDIER



FORSVARSSTUDIER 4/1997

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Preface

A new generation of international historians is growing up with access to primary sources from former communist states. Mari Olsen's generation, with some backing from veteran historians of the cold war, is going to correct the Western bias that still characterises cold war history. Her study of Soviet-Vietnamese relations in the period between the two Indochina Wars builds on a thorough examination of available material from the foreign ministry of the former Soviet Union, and sheds new light on the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. Ironically her most conspicuous finding is that the Soviet Union wielded less influence over Vietnamese decisions than many earlier historians have thought. Moscow had some moderating influence, insisting for a long time that the Vietnamese comrades should stick to the Geneva agreement and seek a peaceful solution to the problem of national unification. Since, however, this policy led nowhere and the communist movement in South Vietnam was subjected to disastrous repression from the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, the Vietnamese communists adopted a new policy in the late 1950s, leading to the formation of the National Liberation Front in 1960 and to the southern insurgency that would bring about the Second Indochina War. The Vietnamese were able to secure support both from China and the Soviet Union for this policy, but it grew out of the Vietnamese experience and was only reluctantly accepted in Moscow.

Mari Olsen goes far towards arguing that the Soviet Union was dragged unwillingly into supporting Hanoi's policy for an armed insurgency in the south. She has many other interesting points to make in her study, but this is probably the one that most of her readers will remember. Some may also want to seek further evidence before being entirely convinced. Since Mari Olsen could only examine foreign ministry files, and was prevented from getting access to minutes from the few high level meetings that took place in the period (see her introduction), there will be a need for additional studies in the future. Mari Olsen's point needs to be confirmed by further research, based on the Soviet Central Committee archives, and perhaps on

Chinese and Vietnamese sources as well. The degree of actual Soviet influence in Vietnam can perhaps best be measured on the Vietnamese side, using Vietnamese sources.

Mari Olsen is part of a collective effort to correct a Western bias. One side-effect of the communist system was to prevent the emergence of genuine historical scholarship in a great number of the world's nations, and to prevent foreign experts from basing their historical studies on solid sources. Thus the Vietnam War is often thought of as a war in the history of the United States and its foreign policy rather than an event in the history of Southeast Asia, Indochina and Vietnam. After the end of the cold war, we have seen not only an upsurge of western studies based on Soviet, Chinese and East European source material, but also the emergence of a generation of independent-minded, source-critical historians from former communist countries. They now take up positions in their own national as well as in western universities. The Russian scholar Ilya Gaiduk's study of Soviet policies towards Vietnam in the 1960s was published even before Mari Olsen had completed her study of the 1950s. Chronologically, however, Mari Olsen's book forms the immediate background for the study told in the book of Gaiduk.

One serious bias remains in the scholarship of the Indochina Wars. From a Vietnamese - and also Laotian and Cambodian - perspective, the Soviet Union may be considered a part of the West. The inside version of the Indochinese part of the story remains to be told. Still today it is impossible both for foreign and Vietnamese historians to get access to source material from debates and major decisions in the Vietnamese Communist Party during the period when it was called the Vietnamese Worker's Party (1951 to 1976). This applies to the People's Revolutionary Party of Laos as well. Young Vietnamese and Laotians who are curious about their own country's history can of course read the authorized version. If they know the English language, they can also satisfy their curiosity by delving into the American side of the story, and now they can learn what the Russians and Chinese were doing in their countries, and what the foreign communist dignitaries thought about their leaders. But the young Indochinese cannot

study the main political events in their own country, based on national source material. The ironic effect of the communist parties' continuing insistence on secrecy is to deprive their own young generations of an opportunity to form independent, national scholarship. Laos and Vietnam remain doomed to a colonial-style dependence on foreign expertise and foreign history.

Let me express the wish that Mari Olsen's study will soon become widely known in Vietnam, and that it will be used as an argument for developing Vietnamese historical scholarship.

It is with pride that I recommend the present study both to Vietnamese and international readers interested in the international background to the Second Indochina War. The book is a slightly revised version of a pioneering and extremely valuable thesis, breaking new ground on the basis of hitherto unexploited sources, and advancing the controversial hypothesis that Moscow was unable to control its Vietnamese client.

Copenhagen, 4 August 1997

Stein Tønnesson

Author's note

The transliteration from Russian in the text and in the footnotes is based on that used by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. All translations from Russian are my own. The use of words such as friend and comrades are translated directly from Russian. When *tovarishch* is used in Russian I use the English word *comrade*, and the Russian word *druz'ya* is translated into English as *friends*. I have not attempted to interpret the meanings of these words.

There are three different ways of spelling Viet-Nam: with the hyphen, without the hyphen (Viet Nam), and as one word (Vietnam). I have adopted the latter; Vietnam, except when spelled otherwise in a direct quotation. The same spelling has been adopted in the case of Vietminh.

I use the terms North and South in a geographical meaning. When referring to northerners and southerners I mean the persons origin. For example the term "southern regroupees" refers to Vietminh cadres who moved from the South to the North after the withdrawal of Vietminh forces from the South as provided for in the Geneva Agreement. The changes between North Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), as well as South Vietnam and the State of Vietnam, and subsequently the Republic of Vietnam, have been adopted to achieve variety in the text.

Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam was the name of the Vietnamese Communist Party from 1951 to 1976. In the period before 1951 it was called the Indochinese Communist Party. It is usually translated into English as the Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP), but is also referred to as the Lao Dong. For this thesis I have chosen the short form of the Vietnamese name; the *Lao Dong*.

Appendix 1 showing the positions of Lao Dong leaders is based entirely on available Soviet documents. The Vietnamese side has yet to release a full account of members of the top Lao Dong leadership, and accordingly information about the changes within the leadership which occurred during the latter part of the 1950s.

This study is a slightly revised version of my thesis in history. I would like to thank in particular the following people for their assistance and enthusiasm: my academic supervisor Odd Arne Westad at the Norwegian Nobel Institute, Sven G. Holtmark at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, and Stein Tønnesson at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. Thanks to financial support from the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies and the Cold War International History Project I have had the opportunity to present my work at international conferences.

Abbreviations

North Vietnam and the socialist Camp

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CC	Central Committee
MID	Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<i>Ministersvo Innostrannich Del</i>)
SEAD	Southeast Asia Department (<i>sub-department in MID</i>)
KGB	Committee on State Security (<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti</i>)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
VWP	Vietnam Worker's Party
Lao Dong	Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam (<i>the Vietnamese translation of the VWP</i>)
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam (<i>North Vietnamese</i>)
NLF	National Liberation Front of South Vietnam
VNFF	Vietnam Fatherland Front
PRC	People's Republic of China
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (<i>North Korea</i>)

South Vietnam and the United States

SVN	State of Vietnam (<i>to 22 October 1955</i>)
RVN	Republic of Vietnam (<i>from 23 October 1955</i>)
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam (<i>South Vietnamese</i>)
U.S.	United States
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TERM	Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission
TRIM	Training Relations and Instruction Mission

Introduction

The American decision of May 1950 to assist France in the First Indochina War was based upon the "domino theory" - the fear that all of Vietnam would fall into the Communist sphere and take with it the rest of Southeast Asia.¹ In other words, the U.S. government used the fear that the whole of Asia would come under Communist control to legitimate its involvement in French Indochina.

The two wars in Vietnam, and the American involvement in particular, have been well covered in scholarly literature since the late 1950s. With regard to the Soviet involvement in Indochina, it is an under-researched field, mostly due to the lack of primary sources from the Communist side. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union archives in many of the former Communist states have started to open up and foreign scholars have been able to work with previously classified documents. This study is a result of this development. It is based on documents from the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation (Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii (AVPRF)), and discusses the relationship between the Soviet Union and Vietnam from August 1954 to the end of 1960. It takes as its point of departure the results of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the division of Vietnam, and the prospects for reunification. It is the first work describing relations between the Soviet Union and Vietnam in the latter half of the 1950s based on Soviet archival documents. Until Vietnamese archives become available to researchers, an analysis of Soviet documents will also give a new insight into Vietnamese priorities in the period.

Three main issues will be discussed throughout the study. *First*, the degree of Soviet influence in, and its attitude toward the Vietnamese struggle for reunification. How did Moscow perceive the growing wish among the Vietnamese to develop a strategy based on an armed struggle to reunify Vietnam? And did Moscow attempt to influence Lao Dong policies

toward the South? *Secondly*, Vietnamese perceptions of Soviet attitudes to their reunification policy. Did Hanoi alter its policies according to Soviet preferences? And *thirdly*, the Moscow - Hanoi - Beijing triangle. To what extent did the Sino-Soviet relationship influence the relationship between the Soviet Union and Vietnam? In each chapter these themes will be discussed through a detailed analysis of the political relations, and to some extent also the economic and military relations, between the two countries.

Previous accounts

Over the last five years there has been an enormous development within the study of Soviet foreign policy. With the opening of Soviet and other Communist archives for scholars, and the somewhat fragmentary publications of Chinese collections, a number of books and articles have been published. The access to primary sources has revived interest in the role of personalities and ideology as motivations behind Soviet foreign policy. Three recent examples are Vojtech Mastny's *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* which examines the crucial years from 1947 to 1953, and emphasizes how Stalin's personality made the Cold War unavoidable.² And the works by Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, and John Lewis Gaddis *We Now Know* which both focus on the period from the 1940s to the 1960s.³

The new sources have also made it possible to study independently limited periods of time or certain events in Soviet foreign policy. The Korean question has been discussed in several works by Katryn Weathersby; Alexandre Mansurov has focused on the period leading up to the war; and A.N. Lankov has discussed the situation in Korea during the crisis of 1956.⁴ The Chinese side has been accounted for in Chen Jian's *China's Road to the Korean War*, and the work *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War* by Sergei Goncharov, John W. Lewis and Xue Litai tells the inside story of the creation of the Sino-Soviet alliance and the origins of the Korean War.⁵

As for the Vietnam War there has so far only been one other attempt to

analyse the Soviet involvement based on Soviet sources. In *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* Ilya V. Gaiduk focuses on the period from 1964 to 1973 in Soviet-Vietnamese relations. He relies mainly on previously unavailable Soviet documents from the post-1953 Central Committee Archives, and supplements these documents with materials from American archives. Gaiduk's work is informative and it discusses both Soviet-Vietnamese relations and Soviet-American relations with regard to Vietnam. It also takes into account the deteriorating relationship between the Soviet Union and China, emphasising how the growing Sino-Soviet split accelerated the development in relations between the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). He shows how the Soviet Union supported the DRV to prove that they were a reliable partner in a situation where they were fighting with China over the leadership within the Communist camp. Hanoi, he claims, could take advantage of the split between Moscow and Beijing by manouvering between the two. The DRV is described as a very difficult partner to handle for Moscow, and he claims that Moscow had no choice but to continue their assistance to Hanoi.⁶

Gaiduk's account is informative and the combination of Soviet and American materials provides a good insight into relations between the two superpowers and the smaller communist state. The main weakness of this work, however, is that it does not take into account how the state of Soviet-Vietnamese relations before 1964 influenced and formed policies in the following years. With the present study I intend to show how the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship of the 1960s must be seen in light of what happened in the 1950s.

In addition to the new works which have become available over the last few years, a number of older accounts have proven very useful to this work. In his classic textbook on Soviet foreign policy, *Expansion and Coexistence*, Adam B. Ulam claims that in the latter part of the 1950s "South East Asia in general and Vietnam in particular were [...] of secondary importance to the Soviet Union."⁷ Since 1950 the Soviet Union's policy in Southeast Asia had been dictated largely by its relations with China, and accordingly it was not until 1960, with the Sino-Soviet conflict out in the

open, that the situation drastically changed. Referring to Hanoi's decisions to initiate a new civil war, Ulam underlines that it would have been unlikely for Ho Chi Minh to resume the armed struggle as a means of reunification contrary to the advice of China and the Soviet Union.⁸ What he sees as Moscow's problem in the area was its need "to keep its hand in the affairs of Indochina and not let the Communist movements in the area lapse exclusively into the Chinese sphere."⁹

An earlier attempt to analyse the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship is made by Douglas Pike in his *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance*. His work is mostly based on American sources, and to a lesser extent some printed Vietnamese materials. He refers to the policy of the Khrushchev period as being contradictory, claiming that the Soviets saw opportunities in Vietnam, but that they feared a deeper involvement and therefore decided on a policy of caution in the area. With regard to Vietnam's importance in Soviet foreign policy Pike generally supports Ulam, and claims that "the dominant characteristic of Soviet behavior in Asia during the past fifty years has been reaction, not action."¹⁰

R.B. Smith's *An International History of the Vietnam War: Revolution versus Containment, 1955-61* is the first of three volumes in which he attempts to incorporate developments in Vietnam into a wider international context. Smith discusses and compares the motives of the major powers involved in Vietnam. He lays much emphasis on both Soviet policy and internal Vietnamese affairs, and he provides a thorough analysis of the interaction between the two. However, like many others he overestimates Soviet influence in Vietnam, implying that the Vietnamese communists would not have acted contrary to the advice of their Communist ally.¹¹

A last group of works on the Vietnam War attempts to evaluate the reason behind the Communist success. Representative of this interpretation is Gabriel Kolko's *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* and William J. Duiker's two books *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* and *Sacred War. Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam*. All three works are appraisals of Hanoi's response to American warfare and ultimate victory. The success of the

Communist party was a result of its commitment to a comprehensive strategy of people's war, linking nationalism with social reform, all built on the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. In *Sacred War* Duiker attempts to explain why individual Vietnamese chose to support Ho Chi Minh rather than his nationalist allies.¹²

Few studies have focused on the late 1950s from a Vietnamese perspective. One exception is Carlyle A. Thayer's *War by Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-60*. Thayer gives a detailed study of the establishment of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam by tracing its origins back to the 1954 Geneva conference. The book contains an examination of the various stages in the struggle for national liberation in Vietnam. It shows how the failure of political negotiations between the two parties to achieve reunification led to a military struggle between the Diem regime and the Communists.¹³

The Moscow archives

The study is based on research in the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation (Arkhir vnesheinei politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii (AVPRF)). The source material for this study is considerable, and the sources I use will be determined by the questions I pose. There are several methodological problems inherent in the use of Soviet sources for this study. I have singled out four: The first is the possibility of gaps in the source material and the need to use a wider interpretation of existing sources to cover that gap. A second question is whether the sources reflect what I am looking for. And the third is related to the problem of studying a triangle (Moscow-Hanoi-Beijing) from only one side. This study will focus on the Soviet angle, and the Chinese and Vietnamese sides will be left to scholars with competence in that field. The fourth and final remark concerns the question of how my key issues and approaches will influence my choice of sources.

In the AVPRF I have worked with two different sets of funds¹⁴; the secret fund on Vietnam - Referentura po V'etnamu, and a number of secretariat funds, including two foreign minister funds - Molotov and Shepilov, and

Shepilov, and several deputy minister funds. The funds contain materials in several different categories, such as memos, reports of events, both analytic and merely descriptive, orders to the ambassador can be found, sometimes also suggestions to and resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The predominant part of the documents are, however, records of conversations. All conversations the Soviet diplomats had with Lao Dong leaders, other DRV officials, and foreign representatives in the DRV were typed out and subsequently sent to Moscow. They were never meant to be made public, and they often expose the motions of the participants and enable the researcher to gain a feeling for the atmosphere of the relationship.

In theory almost all files from the Referentura po V'etnamu in the AVPRF for the 1954-1960 period have been declassified. The files that are not yet fully available for researchers are the quarterly and yearly embassy reports. These are analytic documents containing the embassy's evaluation of the current situation and proposals for future policies. The reports are often followed by the Soviet Foreign Ministry's (MID) evaluation of the embassy's work in the period. In addition, a number of files that under present regulations should be available, such as record of conversation files, have not yet been declassified on the grounds that they contain personality characterisations of officials. As far as files from other funds, are concerned - particularly the secretariats of the ministers - it is more difficult to determine how much of their holdings on Vietnam has been declassified.

The AVPRF contains mainly reports and analyses written by officials in the Foreign Ministry. However, occasionally one may also find documents based on information gathered by representatives from other institutions such as the General Staff of the Soviet Army, the KGB, and the Communist Party. From other studies we know that Foreign Ministry documents are well represented in the Central Committee files. This underlines the importance of MID and its employees in forming the foreign policies of the Soviet Union.

Using Soviet archival materials has its limitations, and a serious objec-

tion to this thesis could be its one-sided documentary basis both locally and internationally. I will, nevertheless, argue that documents from the AVPRF will make a useful contribution to our understanding of the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship in this period.

In addition to the AVPRF I also consulted other archives in Moscow in search of documents on the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship, but with no luck. The post-1953 Central Committee archive, the Tsentr khraneniya sovremennoy dokumentatsii [Storage Center for Contemporary Documents] (TsKhSD) has large holdings on Vietnam, but for the time being its International Department with files on contacts between communist parties is closed. I checked the pre-1953 Central Committee archives, the Rossiyskiy tsentr khraneniya i izucheniya dokumentov noveishey istorii [Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents on Recent History] (RTsKhIDNI) for the files of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union, Kliment Y. Voroshilov, and First Deputy Premier, Anastas I. Mikoyan. As we shall see later these two men headed important delegations to the DRV, Mikoyan in April 1956 and Voroshilov in May 1957. There was no information on these visits in the files, except a photo of Voroshilov in Hanoi. As for other archives of interest in Moscow, such as the Presidential archives and the archives of the Ministry of Defense, these remain closed to foreign scholars.

Further research

In addition to the materials on Vietnam, other parts of the AVPRF could also have contributed to different aspects of this work. China was the most important determinant in Soviet policy toward Asia. This study will show how China played an important part in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship, bringing forward the question of using Soviet documents on China to further enlighten developments with regard to Vietnam. The AVPRF contains large holdings on China, and with regard to Vietnam it is indisputable that Soviet materials on China will improve our understanding of the Vietnamese role in Sino-Soviet relations. This, however, is a subject for

further research. Within the framework of this study I have chosen to focus on China only when its relationship with Vietnam or the Soviet Union had a direct influence on Soviet-Vietnamese relations.

Chapter 1 - Vietnamese communism and the Soviet Union (July - December 1954)

When the Geneva agreement was signed at the end of July 1954 the official relationship between the Soviet Union and Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam was still very recent. Only a little more than four years had passed since the Soviet Union had formally recognized the government of Ho Chi Minh in January 1950. At the time of recognition the Vietminh, Vietnam's communist-oriented nationalist force, was in the middle of a colonial war with the French.¹⁵ Prior to recognition, contact between the Soviet Union and Vietnam was on a party basis, primarily through Vietnamese revolutionaries studying the experiences of the Soviet state.¹⁶

Vietnam remained under French colonial administration until March 9, 1945, when it was occupied by Japanese forces. In early September 1945, shortly after the Japanese surrender in August - Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Vietminh, proclaimed independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. After the Second World War, France aimed at re-establishing its control in French Indochina. The attempt to regain influence was not successful, and led to the First Indochina War, lasting from 1946 to 1954. The war ended with a Vietminh victory in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, and a cease-fire agreement was reached at the Geneva conference in July.¹⁷

This chapter is about the Geneva Conference, the agreement reached during the conference, and the positions of the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam with regard to the agreement. It will explain developments in both the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the State of Vietnam immediately after the conference, and discuss the

beginning of the post-colonial relationship between the DRV and the Soviet Union in light of the origins of the DRV's adherence to the Socialist camp.

Soviet and Chinese positions during the Geneva Conference

From the Soviet point of view the Geneva settlement was a major success. In general terms the conference enabled Moscow to further international détente, and removed the threat of escalation in Indochina through American military intervention. This gave Moscow a chance to introduce China as a great power, and possibly also reduce the tensions in China's relationship with the West, especially the United States. More specifically, the Conference promoted Soviet objectives in Europe, as it served as an opportunity to undermine the plans for the rearmament of Germany within the planned European Defence Community (EDC). In France the slow progress at Geneva led to a government crisis and subsequently to the establishment of a government headed by Pierre Mendes-France who was not enthusiastic about the idea of the EDC. On August 30, 1954, the French National Assembly refused to ratify the EDC proposal and thereby undermined the plans for German rearmament even before they were brought into being.¹⁸

Moscow's priorities in Geneva were clear. The situation in Europe and the furthering of Soviet interests were more precious than the welfare of the Vietminh and the creation of a new Communist state in Indochina. The Soviet Union opted for the partition of Vietnam to reach a solution to the Vietnamese problem, an idea that was shared by Great Britain and eventually also France. In the end the Soviet delegation, which had arrived at Geneva with low expectations, found that its proposals for partition and elections after a delay of 24 months became the final outcome of the conference.¹⁹

To China the Geneva Conference was an important event in the development of its foreign policy. Because the Conference greatly enhanced

Beijing's international status it was considered a diplomatic triumph. China's basic objective during the conference was to prevent an internationalization of the Indochina conflict that could lead to a situation similar to the one in Korea. The Chinese feared American intervention and had thought Washington was determined to torpedo the Geneva conference, looking for opportunities to move into Southeast Asia.²⁰

China made three major contributions to the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements. It persuaded the Vietminh to withdraw its troops from Laos and Cambodia. When the Geneva negotiations had reached a deadlock in mid-June 1954, China managed to obtain Ho Chi Minh's consent to proceed with the general peace plan. And finally, China also solved the issue of the composition of the international supervisory commission. In addition Zhou Enlai played an important role in persuading the North Vietnamese to accept the 17th parallel as the demarcation line. He considered it a temporary tactical concession on the part of the Vietminh, and argued that as soon as French troops were no longer in Vietnam, the Vietminh would be able to reunify the country.²¹

The Soviet Union and China shared a common desire to end the war in the region, and during the conference they followed a line of consultations and close co-operation. Moscow was the more moderate partner of the two, and expected less from the final outcome than the Chinese, and more certainly than the Vietminh. Together the two powers exerted a restraining influence on the Vietminh, thereby illustrating how international strategic considerations took precedence over the ideological obligation to support the struggle of a fellow communist party.²²

The Geneva Agreements²³

On July 20, 1954 the Geneva Agreements were signed after several months of negotiations. The signing of the agreements marked the end of the Franco-Vietminh war, and the beginning of French withdrawal from Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). During the conference Vietnam was divided into two zones, with separate administrations. The southern

zone, the State of Vietnam (SVN) was ruled by the American supported Ngo Dinh Diem, and the northern zone, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, by Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party.²⁴

The result of the Conference was a settlement of the war in Indochina based on two separate, but connected agreements. The first agreement was a ceasefire signed by the representatives of the belligerents: Ta Quang Buu, vice minister of National Defense for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and Brigadier General Henri Deltiel for the French Union Forces in Indochina. The ceasefire agreement contained provisions for the regroupment of troops. Under its terms the troops of the People's Army of Vietnam (the Vietminh) would regroup north of the 17th parallel, while French Union forces would regroup south of it.²⁵ In anticipation of the reunification elections, the provisions of the Agreement stated that the "civil administration in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces are to be regrouped there in virtue of the present Agreement."²⁶ In addition the provisions agreed upon in the ceasefire part of the Agreement stated that there were to be no troop reinforcements, no augmentation of weapons, no military bases, and no foreign military alliances on the part of the administration of either zone.

The second agreement, the so-called Final Declaration, was dedicated to Vietnam's political future. It took note of several particulars of the cease-fire prohibiting any increase in troop levels, armament, foreign military aid, or the signing of alliances. The declaration also stated that the 17th parallel should not be interpreted in any way as a political or territorial boundary, and that free general elections by secret ballot were to be held two years later in July 1956 under the supervision of an International Control Commission (ICC).²⁷ The Commission consisted of representatives from India, Poland and Canada, with India holding the chairmanship. It was established at the time of the cease-fire to provide for control and supervision, while the actual responsibility for the execution of the Agreement rested with the parties. Consultations between representatives for the two zones to prepare the elections were to start on July 20, 1955. However, this declaration was not signed by any of the heads of delegations,

only verbally endorsed by some of them.²⁸

The agreement also provided for a joint commission composed of an equal number of representatives from the two zones. Its task was to facilitate the execution of those provisions of the Cease-fire Agreement concerning the joint action of the two parties.²⁹

According to the provisions of the Geneva Agreement, the partition of Vietnam was only meant to last two years. Within this period the two parties were supposed to have arranged for democratic general elections for both zones. We know today that these elections never took place. What was meant to end the war in Indochina, turned out to be the prelude of another war, which was to become both longer and more devastating than the war with the French.

Hanoi and the Geneva Agreement

Hanoi accepted the results of the Geneva Conference because in the summer of 1954 the Vietminh leaders could see no viable alternative. The Soviet Union and China both wanted an end to the war, and had strong opinions regarding the final outcome at Geneva. The Vietminh, although not directly controlled by either of the two, was not unresponsive to their wishes. The cost of the war had been heavy, and it would have been impossible to continue, at least without Chinese support. To the Vietnamese an end to the war had no little appeal.³⁰

Accepting a cease-fire and temporary partition offered several advantages to the Vietminh. One was the possibility of economic assistance, first of all from the Soviet Union and China, but also from other countries within the Socialist camp. A cease-fire would also contribute to the international recognition of their state in the north, although they would have to give up some territories south of the 17th parallel. Moreover, with control of their own territory, the Vietminh would be able to establish solid state power in the North, and build a base for further revolutionary activities if that should prove to be necessary.³¹

Besides, the Geneva Agreement contained provisions that, if enforced

by the Great Powers, might lead the Vietminh to a complete political victory through peaceful means within a short time. The leaders of the Vietminh were confident that if the elections had been held in the summer of 1954, victory would have been theirs. They therefore argued for elections within 6 months, but had to settle for Molotov's 24 months proposal.³² Although not satisfied with the agreement reached at Geneva, the future leaders in North Vietnam accepted its provisions and turned to a more immediate concern, making the Democratic Republic of Vietnam a fully accepted member of the Socialist camp.

Vietnam's communist heritage

The leading Vietnamese nationalists had chosen Marxism-Leninism as their guiding ideology instead of the American or French declarations of independence. Why, out of these two possibilities, did the Vietnamese nationalists choose Marxism-Leninism? Several theories have been presented ranging from the possibility of a historical accident, to the hypothesis that the alleged similarities between Confucianism³³ and Marxist doctrine made it easier for the future communist leaders to embrace the Leninist ideas of a revolutionary collectivism rather than the more individually oriented doctrines of Western capitalism.³⁴

The reason behind the Vietnamese success during the war against the French and the Americans was their ability to combine communism with nationalism. Ho Chi Minh was the most important figure in combining these two forces. In 1919, after the First World War, Ho was in Paris where he urged the Allied leaders at the Versailles Peace Conference to recognize Vietnamese independence. He joined the French Socialist Party as Nguyen Ai Quoc - "Nguyen the Patriot" - where he first encountered Leninist ideology. He read Lenin's tract entitled *Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions*, and saw it as a strategy that could assist the colonial peoples in liberating themselves from foreign domination.³⁵ In 1923 Ho Chi Minh was invited to Moscow to study Marxist theory and work at the Comintern Headquarters. A year later, in 1924, he left for Canton in southern China to

serve as a Comintern interpreter.³⁶

Ho Chi Minh's goal was an independent and strong Vietnam free from foreign domination, and Marxism was a tool to achieve that goal. Together with his communist followers he founded the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (League for Vietnamese Independence) in 1941. This organization is more commonly known as the Vietminh. Its aim was to win the support of both moderate and radical elements by supporting the dual goals of national independence and social reform. Through the Vietminh's success in the struggle against the French, the communist nationalists won legitimacy. Their ability to build a regime based on internal support further strengthened their position.³⁷ Communism in Vietnam was born out of the nationalist movement. Most Vietnamese communist leaders started their revolutionary careers as members of nationalist groups, and then turned to Marxist ideology because it seemed like the most effective way to achieve independence.³⁸

At the Geneva Conference the Vietminh leaders openly expressed their wish to be part of the Socialist camp. The French attempt at colonial reconquest, and the American assistance to the French, had further alienated the Vietminh from the Capitalist world, and convinced the Vietnamese leaders that Marxism was the correct path to follow. The Chinese and Soviet recognition of the DRV government in January 1950, and the subsequent Chinese military assistance to the Vietminh, indicated that an alliance with the Socialist camp was possible. When the Lao Dong assumed power in the northern zone they regarded the Soviet Union and China as close friends of their regime. The leaders in Hanoi felt a historical adherence to Communism, and were prepared to rebuild their society according to Communist ideals.

Consolidation of the two zones

Once the Geneva Agreement was signed the governments in the two parts of Vietnam started to consolidate their powers. The character of this process differed significantly in the two zones.

In the North the Lao Dong had a solid grip on power, and its leader, Ho Chi Minh, was a popular and charismatic leader. Ho had earned his popularity during his long struggle against French colonial rule in Vietnam. With the Vietminh he was the victor in the First Indochina War ending with French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. It was the communist forces originating from the Vietminh that took power in the north after the Geneva partition.³⁹

In 1954 the Lao Dong's control over the police, the military, the administration, and the people at large, was almost total, and accordingly there was no real opposition in that part of the country. Ho Chi Minh was in a favorable situation as the unquestioned leader of most of the people north of the 17th parallel, as well as to some groups south of it.⁴⁰ Even so, some groups resisted, such as many of the Catholics in the North. In the early months after Geneva almost 1 million Catholics, encouraged by the Catholic hierarchy and organized by Ngo Dinh Diem's American advisors, fled from the North to the South.⁴¹

The consolidation of the southern zone proceeded somewhat differently from what we have seen in the north. In June 1954 the United States pressured Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai to appoint Ngo Dinh Diem prime minister, and in July Diem returned to Saigon to formally take control over the government. From an American point of view Diem was a logical choice for the premiership of an independent Vietnam. He was anti-French, had impeccable credentials as a nationalist, and even more importantly as a staunch anti-Communist. He was also a devout Catholic, and had long administrative experience.⁴²

Once in position, it was soon obvious that Diem lacked many of the qualities required for the imposing challenges he faced in a divided Vietnam. He loved his country but was an elitist who had little understanding of the needs and problems of the Vietnamese people. His ideals were taken from an imperial Vietnam that no longer existed. In contrast to the leader in the North he had no plan for modernizing the nation or mobilizing his people. He lacked the charisma of Ho Chi Minh, as well as broad support among people in the south.⁴³

Diem's position in Saigon was insecure. Without support from the United States Diem would not have been able to cope with the enormous problems he confronted in his first year. The first crisis came with the massive exodus from the North to the South, consisting mostly of Catholics who encouraged by Diem with promises of land and livelihood, fled from the northern Communist regime. Thereafter followed the sect crisis lasting until the spring of 1955. In South Vietnam there were three large religious sects: the Binh Xuyen, whose armed elements were in control of Cholon, in the area nearby Saigon, and the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, who both literally ran states within the state. It was the American decision of December 31, 1954, to support South Vietnam directly rather than channeling the aid via France, that enabled Diem to take control over the sects. The shift in American policies strengthened Diem and weakened the sects, as it deprived them of the financial support they had received through the French.⁴⁴

During his first year in office Ngo Dinh Diem consolidated his power in all possible areas. He eliminated his main opponents - the three sects - and as American advisors gradually replaced French officials in South Vietnam, Diem's position was solidified.

Building the North

The years following partition were hard for the people of North Vietnam. They had fought their way out of colonialism, but misery and lack of freedom continued to be part of their lives. The country had been seriously damaged after 8 years of war, and partition did not improve conditions. One serious problem was food supply. The North had always depended on the vital food reserves of the South, but partition deprived them of these reserves. Already during the first winter after partition the food situation became critical and the country was on the brink of a famine disaster.⁴⁵

In Hanoi the leaders turned to the enormous task of rebuilding the country. Their first priority was to turn the country into a socialist state, a goal which they aimed to reach quickly, regardless of the suffering and

terror they inflicted on their people. The material condition of the people was a secondary concern in these years, and the early phase of reconstruction demanded superhuman sacrifices. In most cases a quick reconstruction was given higher priority than the lives of thousands of people working to rebuild the country. The railroad between Hanoi and the Chinese border is one example. It was rebuilt in less than six months, and involved the enforced recruitment of over 80 000 workers.⁴⁶

The most important stage of Lao Dong's social revolution in North Vietnam was the *land reform*. It not only involved the transfer of land from the landlords to the poor peasants, but was more generally directed against all the sources from which the old rural elite drew its power.⁴⁷ Based on modified Chinese models, the Hanoi authorities introduced land reform in 1953. During the last phase of the Franco-Viet Minh War the poorer peasants were mobilized into a victorious military force. During the latter part of 1954 the same land reform notably helped to increase agricultural output and efficiency. Through land reform the party leadership expected to achieve rapid change in the whole structure of North Vietnamese society. This would create social conditions on which the leaders power monopoly could rest safely.⁴⁸

The land reform in North Vietnam was carried out under communist leadership. It gave the Communists an opportunity to win the gratitude of the poor and to develop a political structure in the villages, while simultaneously recruiting cadres from among the peasants. To many Vietnamese peasants the land reform campaign represented their first encounter with communism, and may help to explain why the relationship between the peasants and the ruling Communist Party was better in North Vietnam than it was in the Soviet Union after collectivization.⁴⁹

In the early phase land reform was carried out on a small scale, but from 1955 the campaign intensified. Control was exercised by cadres reporting to a central land reform committee working outside the ordinary Party channels, and in close cooperation with local village committees. As a part of the campaign peasants were categorized into five classes ranging from "land lord" to "farm worker". The leaders concluded that land lords

and other feudal elements represented 5 percent of the rural population, and the cadres were sent out to liquidate these. But few farmers in the North possessed more than three or four acres of land, which meant that few peasants actually would fall into the "land lord" category. Nevertheless, from 1955 so-called "agricultural reform tribunals" were set up, and the cadres started to execute the 5 percent who according to their statistics had to belong to the land lord category.⁵⁰ The DRV government has never published an official count of those killed in the land reform, but historians working with the subject have given estimates of executions ranging from 3000 to 50 000.⁵¹

The radicalization of the land reform campaign led to a wave of terror. Still it was only in 1956 that the Lao Dong leaders began to realize the seriousness of the land reform excesses. A "rectification of errors" campaign was launched by mid-1956, and the leaders publicly admitted that serious mistakes had been made. The rectification of errors campaign in North Vietnam did not accelerate until after the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956.⁵² The impact of land reform and the rectification of errors campaign on the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship will be discussed in chapter three.

Establishing a Soviet-Vietnamese relationship

When Soviet Ambassador Aleksandr Andreevich Lavrishchev arrived Hanoi in late September 1954, he was the first Soviet ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Although diplomatic contact between the Soviet Union and Vietnam had existed for more than four years, the war had been a hinderance to a further elaboration of these contacts. The Geneva Conference and the subsequent partition of Vietnam changed the situation, and from the fall of 1954 the Soviet Union established an embassy in Hanoi to maintain contact with the DRV leaders.

Moscow's instructions to Ambassador Lavrishchev in the fall of 1954 indicate Soviet priorities in Vietnam in the years to come. In general terms the main priorities were implementation of the ceasefire agreement, an

analysis of the degree of foreign presence in Vietnam, and the chances of a reunification within the Geneva framework. The instructions do, however, contain several other interesting concepts indirectly revealing Soviet thinking on Vietnam in the period.⁵³

Both capitalist and communist presence in Vietnam were carefully studied by the Soviet policy-makers. The growing American influence in Southeast Asia was a serious concern, especially as a result of U.S. efforts to include most of the countries in the region in a defence pact - the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). On the communist side the Soviet Union gave priority to the study of China's role in Southeast Asia, and particularly to the establishment of friendly relations between China and the DRV.

With regard to the internal developments in Vietnam, the Soviet Foreign Ministry focused on both the political, the economic, and the military situation. In politics the main object would be the Lao Dong. Emphasis should be on the condition of its ideological policy and organisational work, conditions within the leadership, and contact with the mass organizations, first and foremost the Lien Viet (the Unified National Front).⁵⁴ Moscow also signalled its willingness to provide the DRV government with the "necessary assistance [...] to strengthen the democratic system in the country." Financially the Soviet Union should assist in the restoration and development of the economy, and the carrying out of land reform. Militarily Moscow would give "necessary assistance [...] to strengthen the forces of the people's army". Moscow signalled its intention to establish formal relations between the two countries in both the economic and military fields.⁵⁵

Although the Soviet leaders found it necessary to give advice and support to the North Vietnamese in a number of areas, they maintained that the Soviet Union would not interfere with the internal affairs of the DRV. The Lao Dong would remain the authority on internal Vietnamese affairs. Despite this attitude, the instructions to the ambassador contained a number of suggestions aimed at future North Vietnamese policies toward the South. According to Soviet policy-makers the DRV's most important

task was the reunification of Vietnam within the Geneva framework - free general elections as stated in the Final Declaration of the Geneva Agreement. The North Vietnamese should adopt a policy of establishing, as well as strengthening already established relations, with all patriotic, religious, and political organizations in the South. From a Soviet point of view the aim of this policy would be to unmask, and then subsequently isolate, the government of Ngo Dinh Diem as well as the parties, organizations, and officials supporting it. It was also important to eliminate possible provocation by the United States and France in Indochina. The main aim of the two states was to prevent general elections in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.⁵⁶

The emphasis on non-interference in internal affairs combined with the suggestions on policies toward the South demands an explanation. Moscow knew that the South Vietnamese government was in a weak position. It was totally dependent on foreign aid, and contrary to the government in the North, it lacked the support of its people. Taking into account the southern situation in the fall of 1954 there was a possibility that Ngo Dinh Diem's government would not even last to participate in general elections. In that case the Lao Dong could have the South "by merely picking up the pieces."⁵⁷

The Soviet suggestion was well rooted in marxist tradition. If the rapidly deteriorating situation in the South was contrasted with a successful Socialist state in the North, the southern people would change their course and opt for a social revolution. However, in the South the situation improved. With the help of his French and American allies, Diem gradually managed to consolidate his powers and get rid of his enemies. His new grip on power changed the situation, and, as we shall see in chapter two, it also forced the Soviet Union to reformulate its suggestions on southern policies.

Moscow's first steps in Vietnam

From the very start of the Soviet-DRV alliance material and practical assistance played an important role. Considering the state of the DRV economy and their limited capability to finance a costly reconstruction of

the country, the Lao Dong leaders found it natural to turn to the Soviet Union for assistance. The requests for assistance in the fall of 1954 were discreet and modest. They ranged from military assistance to fulfill the cease-fire agreement, to appeals for immediate aid to prevent famine.

Most of the appeals for assistance were, after some internal discussion, eventually sanctioned by Moscow. When DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong asked permission to use Soviet ships to transfer North Vietnamese forces back from the South, the Head of the Southeast Asia Department (SEAD) in MID, Kirill Vasil'evich Novikov, declared that he would not recommend providing such assistance to the DRV.⁵⁸ Regardless of Novikov's disapproval, higher officials within the MID bureaucracy sanctioned the request from Hanoi. Thus, in the end Soviet ships were used to carry both North Vietnamese forces and civilians, and at a later stage to transport rice from China to the DRV.⁵⁹

It was Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov who disagreed with Novikov and approved the assistance to Hanoi. During the 1950s Molotov was the Soviet foreign minister who showed the most interest in Vietnam. He had personally met several of the Vietminh leaders, and had played an active role both during preparations for the Geneva Conference in the spring of 1954, and during the conference itself. As one of the engineers behind the agreement, Molotov was well acquainted with the current situation, and also aware of possible future complications in Vietnam. We do not have access to his personal papers, but his active involvement in the decision-making processes concerning Vietnam, compared to his successors in the Foreign Ministry, Dimitrii Shepilov and Andrey Gromyko, indicate that he had a special interest in a successful development in the area.⁶⁰

In addition to transport assistance the North Vietnamese also requested more direct military assistance. Pham Van Dong stated that "he would be glad if a group of Soviet military colleagues would arrive in Vietnam to assist in the implementation of the Cease-fire Agreement."⁶¹ Moscow was aware of the DRV need for advice in the current situation and suggested that a group of advisors should be dispatched to Vietnam. The decision

was not made without concern for possible Chinese reactions. Chinese military advisors had been active in Vietnam since 1950, and the Soviet leaders did not want to risk any complications with the Chinese over the question of military assistance. As a result it was decided to engage the military advisors as assistants of the military attaché to avoid any complications with the Chinese comrades.⁶²

In late 1954 and early 1955 the government in Hanoi feared that a serious famine was about to hit the country. The October harvest in the North had failed, and since partition the DRV had been deprived of the important food supplies from the southern zone. The critical situation was solved by shipping rice from China on Soviet ships to the DRV.⁶³ Later a similar situation was worked out through a triangular agreement between the Soviet Union, Burma and the DRV. In exchange for rice to the DRV the Soviet Union supplied Burma with industrial equipment.⁶⁴

In the fall of 1954 the Soviet Union and the DRV had not signed any formal agreements on either economic or military assistance. Assistance was given upon request, in most cases without further discussion, but no long-term plans for assistance were made at this early stage. As we shall see in chapter two, the relationship was not formalized until Ho Chi Minh's first official visit to the Soviet Union as DRV Head of State in July 1955. As far as support to reconstruct the country was concerned, Moscow constantly reassured the leaders in Hanoi of the priority given to the rebuilding of North Vietnam, not only by the Soviet Union itself but also by the other members of the Socialist camp.⁶⁵

In late December 1954 the Lao Dong leaders decided to launch a widespread protest campaign criticizing the American and French violations of the Geneva Agreement for Vietnam, and the politics of the Diem government. This campaign was only one in a series of demonstrations held all through the fall of 1954. Previous campaigns had involved several peace organizations in South Vietnam, and were followed by numerous arrests. This campaign was held in a number of towns and villages in North Vietnam, and was heavily covered in the DRV press. It attacked the American intrigues in South Vietnam, and characterized the Diem govern-

ment as "lackeys of American imperialism".⁶⁶ DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong appealed to both Moscow and Beijing for public support in the campaign.⁶⁷

As we shall see in the next chapter, Moscow's response to the appeals for public support for the campaign was negative. The Soviet leaders were not happy with the behavior of their Vietnamese allies, and would not publicly support attacks on either the South Vietnamese government or its allies. This negative response was the first of several initiatives from the Soviet side where they outlined necessary policy-moves to the Lao Dong leaders. Notwithstanding a slow start, by late 1954 the Soviet policy-makers had started to get a grip on how to handle the situation in Vietnam.

The official relationship between the Soviet Union and the DRV began in 1950. Four years later they entered their first major crisis as partners. The Geneva Conference was a success - at least for the Great Powers. The Soviet Union was satisfied with its achievements during the Conference, whereas its young friend, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, gained less at Geneva than it had initially expected.

The first few months of the relationship in the fall of 1954 were quiet. In Hanoi reconstruction was the main theme, with consolidation of the Socialist state as the final goal. However, the war had devastated the country and outside assistance was imperative if the reconstruction process was to succeed. Soviet assistance was kept at a minimum, and as we have seen it was provided in only a few cases, and upon special request. The relationship still had to be adjusted and defined, from the Soviet side as well as from the Vietnamese. The quiet period after Geneva gave the Lao Dong leaders a good opportunity to find out what they could expect from their Soviet ally, and it gave Moscow a chance to evaluate the situation and further elaborate future strategies.

The appeal for assistance in the campaign against the South marked the end of this period. The situation demanded more initiative from the Soviet

side. Already during the Geneva Conference Moscow had exposed its wish to control events in Indochina. As we shall see in the following chapters, Vietnam became gradually more important to the Soviet Union. There were several reasons for Vietnam's increased importance in Soviet political strategies; one was the DRV's close relationship with China, another was the growing American presence in South Vietnam and the changes in the character of Soviet foreign policy from the mid-1950s. However, the Soviet wish to support the DRV as a member of the Socialist camp would soon clash with the Soviet wish to improve its relationship with the West.

Chapter 2 - Forging a new relationship (December 1954 - February 1956)

From late December 1954 the Soviet-DRV relationship changed character. As opposed to the quiet months following Geneva, Moscow now seized the initiative and started advising Hanoi on how to deal with the southern zone - the State of Vietnam. Parallel to these initiatives Moscow also played an important role in planning diplomatic moves to arrange consultations for elections scheduled for July 1955 and the general elections scheduled for July 1956. This chapter will focus on both the Soviet recommendations to the North Vietnamese from late 1954 through 1955 and the diplomatic struggle to implement the Geneva Agreement. The chief purpose will be to discuss the extent of Soviet influence on the policies of the Lao Dong during this period, with special emphasis on the question of reunification and the creation of a strategy toward the South. Focus will also be on the role of external factors such as the U.S. presence in South Vietnam and even more importantly on the traditional Chinese influence in Vietnam. These themes will be assessed both in relation to domestic concerns in Vietnam and in light of the international position of the Soviet Union. Finally, the aim of this chapter will be to evaluate whether Soviet policy toward Vietnam from late 1954 through 1955 was consistent, or whether Moscow was in effect following a two-track policy.

Diplomatic struggle: Moscow, Hanoi and the International Control Commission

In the first period following the Geneva Conference it was important for Moscow to reach a solution within the Geneva framework. Hence, an implementation of the Geneva Agreement and the existence and work of the International Control Commissions in all three Indochinese countries

played important roles in the planning of Soviet strategy in this area through the latter part of the 1950s. According to the provisions in the Final Declaration of the Geneva Agreement, general elections would be held for the whole of Vietnam in July 1956. The purpose of the elections was a reunification of the two zones under a government chosen by the Vietnamese people through free, democratic elections. Consultations for elections were scheduled to start on July 20, 1955 between competent representatives from both of the two zones.⁶⁸

Throughout 1955 Moscow laid great emphasis on the diplomatic struggle for the fulfillment of the Geneva agreement. The Soviet leaders promoted the work of the ICC. They issued statements concerning its status and insisted in public that all efforts toward a fulfillment of the agreement should be carried out through diplomatic channels and within the Geneva framework. In the early years after Geneva, as well as later, its main vehicle in this diplomatic campaign was the mechanism of the three ICCs.

The Hanoi government worked hard to initiate consultations, but in spite of their efforts the elections were not to be held. Neither the Diem government nor its American ally were interested in arranging elections which could result in a reunified Vietnam possibly led by a Communist dominated government. The prevailing assumption in both the North and the South was that the Communists would probably receive enough votes in both zones to secure posts in a future government. Therefore Ngo Dinh Diem was reluctant to enter into consultations, and subsequently elections, that could favor the Hanoi government.⁶⁹ Without Diem's consent it would be impossible to hold the consultations. In the North the Lao Dong continued, in spite of the unfavorable situation, to fight for implementation of the Geneva Agreement. To succeed, however, Hanoi was dependent upon the full support of its Communist allies.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the first months following Geneva were rather quiet ones in the Soviet-DRV relationship. The North Vietnamese had their hands full with the reconstruction process, the emphasis at the time was on consolidating the state north of the 17th

parallel, rather than planning new adventures in the South. During these months, the contact between the two countries consisted mostly of official communiqués referring to the Soviet assistance to the DRV during the negotiations at Geneva. The few appeals for assistance were, as we have seen, made discreetly, and Moscow's assistance was kept on a low level. As long as the situation in Vietnam was calm, Moscow saw no need to interfere.

In late December 1954 the situation changed. Events in Vietnam forced Moscow to play a more active role. In a note to Foreign Minister Molotov, the Head of the Southeast Asia Department in MID, Kirill Novikov, predicted that Hanoi's public treatment of the state and government in South Vietnam could threaten the chance for a full implementation of the Geneva agreement, and provoke intrigues from the American side. Novikov underlined that "considering the possibilities of intrigues on the part of the United States, which is interested in a deterioration of the relationship between the DRV and South Vietnam, I believe it expedient to carefully recommend the government of the DRV not to use various kinds of labels with regard to Ngo Dinh Diem, as well as to the government he heads."⁷⁰

The statement indicates that the sharp tone in the North Vietnamese criticism of the Diem government in South Vietnam had started to worry the Soviet leaders. In late 1954 and early 1955 Moscow had no interest in encouraging the DRV to arrange a campaign against the South Vietnamese government, and the Soviets would certainly not participate in such a campaign. There were several reasons for this Soviet attitude. The Soviet Union feared that an aggressive state in the North could provoke the U.S. and lead to a deeper involvement from their side, a situation the Soviet leaders wanted to avoid. The U.S. should not be given the opportunity to exploit the situation and thereby complicate the relationship between the two zones before the elections. The continuous North Vietnamese criticism of South Vietnam could also destroy the possibilities of holding elections. The South Vietnamese authorities were very reluctant to enter into consultations with the DRV, and seen from the Soviet side the North Vietnamese public criticism of Ngo Dinh Diem could only further complicate the situation.

In general the period starting from late December 1954 was characterized by an increased Soviet interest in Vietnam. The initiative presented above was only the first in a series of recommendations from the Soviets to the North Vietnamese during the winter and spring of 1955.

In its official pronouncements Moscow stood up for the Geneva Agreement. It defended the legal position of the agreement and insisted that its provisions should be followed. The Soviet Union also emphasized that all discussions concerning the agreement should be held with the participation of all the Great Powers, and not only some of them. In mid-march 1955, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Vasilii Vasil'evich Kuznetsov, expressed his misgivings concerning the plans of the United States, Britain and France to discuss the Vietnamese general elections at the NATO meeting in Paris in April that year. According to Kuznetsov, it would be necessary to ask for an explanation of this behavior from Great Britain and France because "such a measure would show the governments of France and Great Britain that the Soviet Union was on guard against their attempts to violate the Geneva Agreement."⁷¹ In 1955 a solution within the Geneva framework was, from a Soviet point of view, the best possible solution. The example above illustrates the Soviet emphasis on reaching a diplomatic solution to the Vietnamese problem. In addition it may also show how the Soviet leaders feared that other powers would take control over the situation and developments in the region.

The Soviet position as co-chairman of the Geneva conference seemed at times to be a problem rather than an advantage in the Soviet-DRV relationship. Legally the co-chairman position did not imply any binding obligations on the Soviet Union. As historian R.F. Randle remarks, being chairman "was largely a procedural task, however, with no obligation to enforce the provisions of the Geneva agreements or otherwise act collectively to preserve the political equilibrium in Indochina."⁷²

Randle's argument is legally correct. The Soviet leaders did not sign or agree to any documents which made them more responsible for political developments in the region than any of the other states that had participated at the Geneva conference. To the Soviet Union, however, there was also

another aspect which played an equally important role. The state created in the northern zone of Vietnam had proclaimed itself socialist, and could not be completely ignored by the leader of the socialist camp. So whether the Soviet Union was legally bound by their role as participant and co-chairman of the Geneva conference or not, the role they had assumed would, inevitably, become an important factor in the years to come.

In situations where the interests of the DRV authorities and the ICC representatives clashed, the Soviet diplomats were eager to calm things down. It is also interesting to see that in situations of disagreement with the ICC, Hanoi turned to Moscow for advice. Moscow was indeed willing to give the advice needed.⁷³ As long as the ICC was allowed to work under acceptable conditions the Soviets felt there was a fair chance of achieving a lasting solution to the Indochinese problem within the framework of the Geneva Agreement. As a result Moscow continuously promoted a good relationship with the ICC in all three Indochinese states, and aimed at improving the ICC's working conditions.

Of equal importance is the question of whether the Soviets trusted in diplomacy alone in this context, or whether their policy in Vietnam also included other instruments. In the following we shall see how the Soviet leaders, while promoting the diplomatic solution to the Vietnamese problem, also had other measures in mind for the leadership in Hanoi.

The start of a new Soviet policy?

From late spring 1955 Soviet policies toward Vietnam started to move in a new direction. While still emphasizing the importance of reaching a solution within the Geneva framework, Moscow also encouraged the North Vietnamese to increase their influence in South Vietnam through a number of offensive measures. In short, the Soviet suggestion can be divided into two interlinked parts: Hanoi should use all efforts to unmask the aggressive actions of the Americans in South Vietnam, and Hanoi should also work to increase its influence among the southern population, preferably through the establishment of a mass organization.

During the spring of 1955 the Soviets were increasingly worried by the U.S. presence in South Vietnam. This was reflected in Moscow's behavior at the time. The first sign came in a note to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) from Foreign Minister Molotov in mid-May 1955.⁷⁴ The note is an evaluation of the current situation in Vietnam. It contains a description of the growing American presence in South Vietnam with references to how the U.S. was trying to undermine the economic position of France and worked to reduce French influence especially within the army. According to Molotov the Americans also tried to take over the French position as advisor, and generally tried to increase their influence in the political sphere.⁷⁵ The growing tension between the Americans and the French, combined with the intensification of civil strife between different political groups in South Vietnam, created, according to Molotov, a favorable situation for the North Vietnamese. In his words the situation should be used to "strengthen those public forces in South Vietnam which are in favor of a reunification of the country on a democratic foundation and which hold an anti-imperialistic position and speak for the national sovereignty of the country."⁷⁶

Molotov also underlined that at a meeting on April 1, 1955, the Central Committee of the Lao Dong had passed a resolution containing orders to the local party organization in South Vietnam.⁷⁷ However, referring to consultations with the Soviet Ambassador to Hanoi, Aleksandr Andreevich Lavrishchev, and the Soviet Ambassador to Beijing, Pavel Fedorovich Iudin, Molotov concluded that there were several serious deficiencies in the North Vietnamese directive. As he saw it the "aggressive policy of the Americans had been badly and insufficiently unmasked", a situation which enabled the Americans to simultaneously "spread propaganda against Communism and against the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China."⁷⁸

Even though they agreed on the need to exploit the situation in South Vietnam, the Soviet leaders did not seem very pleased with the way in which the North Vietnamese handled the situation. The potential in the South was not exploited, which meant that both the North Vietnamese and

their allies missed possibilities of gaining influence. In addition, according to the Soviets, the situation enabled the Americans to conduct a widespread campaign against both the Soviet Union and China, as well as against Communism in general. As a result the Soviets saw a need to inform their Vietnamese friends on how to handle the situation. Molotov emphasized that "our friends in the DRV have not yet made good enough use of the situation in South Vietnam in order to conduct the necessary work in that part of the country, especially with regard to the forthcoming elections in July 1956."⁷⁹

Molotov did not, however, criticize the Vietnamese without also giving advice on how to exploit the situation in a way the Soviet Union would see as satisfactory. His explicit advice to the Vietnamese was to "to lay more emphasis on the conduct of work in South Vietnam in order to activate and unite the patriotic and anti-imperialistic forces in this part of Vietnam."⁸⁰ Moscow was seriously concerned about the situation evolving in the South. Most communist cadres had left the South for the North, and Diem had severely impaired the remaining communist networks, meaning that these would have to be rebuilt in order to serve their cause in the South.⁸¹

As a follow-up to the Foreign Minister's evaluation of the situation MID presented the main contents of his note in telegrams to the Soviet ambassadors in Hanoi, Beijing, Paris and Warsaw. The telegram sent to Hanoi was identical with parts of the note from Molotov to the CC CPSU in mid-May 1955. It contained direct orders to the Soviet ambassador, who was told to visit Ho Chi Minh and inform him first of the decisions made in Moscow, and then make him understand that it would be expedient to make better use of the developing situation in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese should continue the work to strengthen the parts of the population that already were, or could possibly become, sympathetic to the DRV. Moscow indicated its desire to assist Hanoi at that stage through a direct question to Ho Chi Minh about "which additional measures the Vietnamese friends considered necessary to carry out and whether they would require any assistance from our [the Soviet] side."⁸²

The telegrams show that Molotov's policy suggestions were accepted

in Moscow and subsequently carried out by the Soviet Ambassador to Hanoi. The interesting question is whether Moscow initiated the policy or whether Molotov's proposals were only a follow-up of policies already initiated in Vietnam by the Lao Dong. If we go back to Molotov's note, he referred to the resolution passed by the Central Committee of the Lao Dong on April 1 that year. The resolution referred to is most likely the one that was discussed at the 7th Plenum of the Lao Dong CC, held in March 1955. The discussion concerning a change of strategy in the South, (or at least an intensification of parts of the strategy) had been a topic within the Lao Dong for some time. In the Spring of 1955, however, the plans for a new strategy, which among other things included a widening of the front and an intensification of the work among the people of the South, was still only an idea. The fact that the strategy had not yet been specified in the form of concrete goals could be the "serious deficiencies" the Soviets were referring to in their comments to the resolution.⁸³

The consultations for the general elections had been scheduled to start in July 1955. According to the provisions in the Final Declaration, they would "be held between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from July 20, onwards."⁸⁴ As Hanoi took the initiative to start consultations with the Diem government in the early summer of 1955, the North Vietnamese were confronted with a regime in the South that was highly unwilling to participate. Likewise the North Vietnamese also had to face the fact that in the international climate of May 1955 there was every reason to expect, despite the provisions in the Final Declaration, that the partition of Vietnam would continue.

The similarities with Germany and Korea were striking, and the general optimism in international affairs, implying possibilities for general disengagement and détente, made it unlikely that any of the big powers would want to do anything to upset the status quo in Vietnam. Considering the South Vietnamese, and American, reluctance to enter into consultations, an insistence on consultations from the Soviet and North Vietnamese could endanger the current status quo. In Europe as well as in Asia the atmosphere was less tense than it had been for years. The allied occupation of

West Germany had ended on May 5, 1955, and in June the first steps toward establishing diplomatic relations between Bonn and Moscow were taken. On May 14 the Warsaw Pact, the Eastern equivalent to NATO, was created. The day after on May 15 the occupation of Austria ended and the state was declared neutral.⁸⁵

The easing of tensions was evident both in East-West relations, and also within the Communist camp. In late May and early June 1955, the most prominent Soviet leaders left for Belgrade to visit Marshal Tito. That was the first meeting between Soviet and Yugoslav leaders since Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform in 1948-49. The final event in the sphere of détente was the "Big Four" summit conference in Geneva in mid-July, which led to a further reduction in East-West tensions.⁸⁶

Just before the deadline on May 16, 1955, the regrouping of forces on each side had been almost completed, which meant that the military terms of the cease-fire had been fully implemented. The next challenge for the governments of the two Vietnams was the preparations for nationwide elections in 1956. Hanoi was ready to start consultations with the Diem government, and on June 6 the DRV Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pham Van Dong, issued a statement concerning the DRV's willingness to hold a consultative conference. Yet the DRV initiatives were not welcome in the South. Diem and his American advisors were unwilling to enter into any negotiations, and continued to ignore Hanoi's appeals for consultations.⁸⁷

Ho Chi Minh in Moscow

From July 12-18, 1955, shortly before the stipulated deadline for consultations, President and Premier Minister of the DRV, Ho Chi Minh, led a DRV governmental delegation to Moscow. Almost one year had passed since the conclusion of the Geneva conference, yet this was the first time Ho was properly received in Moscow as the leader of a fellow Socialist country. The aim of the visit was to discuss the international situation, and the further development of political, economic, and cultural relations between

the Soviet Union and the DRV.⁸⁸ From a North Vietnamese point of view the trip had enormous symbolic significance, regardless of whether it was successful in securing future assistance or not. By receiving Ho Chi Minh in the same manner as other Socialist leaders, the Soviet Union signalled their acceptance of the DRV as a member of the Socialist bloc. Such an acceptance was imperative to the North Vietnamese, as it, at least in principle, promised future backing in the international arena.

Ho Chi Minh's trip to Moscow had two main purposes: to secure economic assistance from the Soviet Union for reconstruction and to achieve Soviet backing for the DRV's policies on consultation.⁸⁹ With regard to economic assistance the mission was a success. During Ho's stay in Moscow the two countries signed their first formal economic assistance agreement. It was mainly an aid program under which the Soviet Union promised to assist the North Vietnamese in a large number of projects. The amount of aid, and its role in the relationship, will be discussed below. However, if his purpose with the trip was also to secure support for an immediate challenge to the partition, by military means if necessary, Ho left Moscow without success.

Ho's visit in 1955 formalized the relationship. A Soviet document entitled "Instructions for negotiations with the government delegation from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam" shows that the question of economic aid was only one of the themes discussed during the visit.⁹⁰ The policy outlined in this document would become the basis for the Soviet engagement in Vietnam in the years to come, and its main contents will be discussed on the following pages. The instructions touched upon political, economic, military, and cultural relations between the Soviet Union and the DRV and outlined the Soviet position in most areas of the relationship through suggestions on how to respond to requests forwarded by Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues. In general terms the Soviet negotiators had been given clear instructions, support would be given within the framework of the Geneva agreement, and the Soviet Union would raise the question of political regulation in Vietnam at the next Big Four meeting in July 1955.

In the introduction to the document it was stated that the fundamental

goal of the negotiations with the DRV delegation was to

...further develop the friendly political, economic and cultural cooperation between the USSR and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. To give assistance to the Vietnamese friends, and with all the means at one's disposal strengthen the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and its international position. [To assist in] the reunification of Vietnam on a democratic foundation, and [to assist in] a full implementation of the Geneva agreements on Indo-China, and [to assist in] a fast recovery of the national economy of the Republic.⁹¹

Another aim of the negotiations was to assure comrade Ho Chi Minh that the Soviet government was also ready to provide, in cooperation with the Chinese friends "the necessary support to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the struggle for independence and reunification of the country, as well as in the case of the economic and cultural construction of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."⁹²

On several issues the Soviet negotiators had received very specific instructions. It is not clear to what extent these instructions were open for discussion. However, judged by the form of the document and the way the instructions had been formulated, the Soviet leaders had made their definite decisions on how to conduct their policy toward Vietnam. The strength of the Soviet delegation that negotiated with the DRV representatives may also indicate the seriousness behind the recommendations given from the Soviets to the Vietnamese. It was an impressive group of Soviet officials who conducted the negotiations with Ho Chi Minh's delegation. It consisted of the top Soviet leadership, Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Molotov, and Khrushchev.⁹³ As both the content of the Instructions and the Soviet representation indicate, there were many important questions to discuss.

All in all, the Instructions provide much information about how the Soviets saw their future relationship with the DRV and what kind of policy the Soviets wanted the DRV leaders to follow in regard to South Vietnam

and the question of reunification. At the next Big Four meeting, the Soviet leaders promised to suggest more assistance on behalf of the Great Powers for the political regulation in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, in accordance with the Geneva Agreement.⁹⁴ The Soviets were also positive to the DRV suggestion of establishing a broader common front with the French and pro-French elements against the Americans in South Vietnam. It seems clear that rather than letting the Americans in, the Soviets preferred that the North Vietnamese kept up a good relationship with the French.⁹⁵

"to counter the American influence" - "to broaden the front and create a mass organization"

In spite of earlier recommendations, the Soviets were still not satisfied with how the North Vietnamese treated the situation in South Vietnam in the summer of 1955. Moscow continued to advise Hanoi on how to prevent increased American influence in the South. In the Instructions the question was raised again, this time under the subtitle "On opposition to the plans of the United States with regard to Indochina." The main argument was a follow-up on Molotov's suggestions from mid-May. In the Instructions, however, the argument was even stronger. It was no longer merely a question of strengthening different groups in the southern society in order to activate and unite the patriotic and anti-imperialistic forces in the southern part of Vietnam. The propaganda work would now be aimed directly at the enemy. According to the Soviet government the Vietnamese friends should direct all efforts "to activate the work among all sections of the population in South Vietnam in order to counter the American influence."⁹⁶ In other words, it was no longer a question of joining the democratic forces without a specific target. At this point the Soviet leaders had outlined the target, namely the rapidly growing American influence.

In the period preceding Ho Chi Minh's visit to the Soviet Union, there had been an increase in U.S. activity in South Vietnam. From late 1954 and during the spring of 1955, the Americans became gradually more visible in South Vietnam. On December 13, 1954, the Ely-Lawton Collins Agreement

on the U.S. role in training South Vietnamese armed forces (ARVN) was signed. In early February the Americans established a Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) in South Vietnam, and following that they took over financial and training responsibilities in South Vietnam from France. In May the first U.S.-Cambodia military assistance agreement was signed, and in June the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Cambodia was inaugurated.⁹⁷ Moscow saw the rapid increase in U.S. influence as the beginning of an American take-over of South Vietnam. In order to prevent the Diem government and his U.S. advisors gaining complete control in the southern region, the North Vietnamese would have to organize their countermeasures properly.

The establishment of a mass organization was the solution. The documents reveal that in the summer of 1955, the negotiators were told to "underline the importance of broadening the Unified National Front at the expense of founding new organizations of this front, not only in the liberated areas, but also in South Vietnam."⁹⁸ The Soviets were positive to a broadening of the Lien-Viet (Unified National Front), and the suggested organization was a follow up of the strategy mentioned in Molotov's note, where the emphasis was on increasing the work among the population of South Vietnam. On the question of where and how such a mass organization should be organized, the Soviet recommendations were straightforward

Recommend comrade Ho Chi Minh to consider the question of the expediency and possibility of creating a mass organization for the fight to reunify Vietnam that could attract the wider patriotic and democratic forces in the South and the North, and that at the same time would not be formally associated with the Unified National Front [Lien-Viet]. From a tactical point of view it would be preferable if the initiative to create such an organization was developed in the South and if the first organizations of that kind originated in South Vietnam.⁹⁹

From the summer of 1955 the question was no longer how to activate the

people but how to organize their activities into a mass organization. The organization would originate in the South and have no official connection to the North. It would be reasonable to assume that from the Soviet point of view a southern organization which was formally associated with the Party leadership in Hanoi, would not be equally effective in activating the southern people.

There were several reasons why Moscow preferred a situation with no official connections between the organization developing in the South and the Lao Dong party in the North. One reason was the South Vietnamese government's attitude toward those suspected of working for or sympathizing with the Lao Dong. The summer of 1955 marked the start of Ngo Dinh Diem's so-called "Anti Communists Denunciation Campaign", which was designed to root out subversive elements throughout the country.¹⁰⁰ To *publicly* announce the formation of a southern mass organization that cooperated with the North would only intensify the hunt for communist sympathizers in the South, and complicate the founding of the organization even more.

Another important argument had more to do with to the international image of the Soviet Union. The creation of a larger organization in the South that had formal ties with the Lao Dong in Hanoi, could easily be seen as a provocation by the United States and thereby harm Soviet-American relations. North Vietnamese involvement in building such an organization in South Vietnam was likely to be seen as indirect Soviet involvement in the area. Such a move would legitimize an even deeper involvement on the part of the Americans. As we can see, there were both domestic Vietnamese and wider international reasons behind the Soviet proposal to preserve the construction of this organization as an ostensibly South Vietnamese project.

If we now turn to Hanoi, how were these suggestions received in the DRV capital? According to historian R.B. Smith "Ho Chi Minh's journey to Moscow and Beijing in July 1955 failed to secure support for any immediate challenge to the partition, leaving Hanoi only a limited range of options in the South."¹⁰¹ But Smith also stresses that in the following period "an attempt was made to devise a strategy which would combine the continu-

ing demand for "implementation" of the political settlement with a series of political and (clandestine) military moves."¹⁰² He claims that the period between the 8th and 9th Plenary Sessions of the Lao Dong Central Committee (from August 1955 to April 1956) stands out as a crucial time in the strategic planning for the South, and that at the 8th Plenum discussions took place regarding the possibility of broadening the Unified National Front (the Lien Viet) and renaming it the Vietnam Fatherland Front. As part of this, the Central Committee is also said to have approved use of 'tactical' violence in the South.¹⁰³

In the summer of 1955 Moscow and Hanoi agreed on a strategy toward South Vietnam. The Lao Dong discussions around the creation of a broad organization originating in the South fitted in well with the Soviet suggestions of July. It is, however, difficult to tell from Soviet documents to what extent Moscow continuously followed the ongoing Lao Dong debate over a new strategy toward the South. It is also difficult to say how Moscow responded to the North Vietnamese determination to increase the level of violence. What the documents do indicate is support and interest from the Soviet side.

How well did the Soviet leaders know the internal structure of Vietnamese organizations such as the Lien Viet? As we have seen in the previous chapter, contact with the mass organizations, and particularly the Lien Viet, was stressed in the 1954 instructions from Moscow to Ambassador Lavrishchev. Towards the end of January 1955, the Advisor at the Soviet embassy in Hanoi, Leonid Ivanovich Sokolov, discussed the Lien Viet with Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the Lien Viet Front, Hoan Quok Viet. During the conversation Sokolov received information regarding the front's history, organization, ideological foundation, its task in relation to the fulfillment of the cease-fire agreement, and the form of its work.¹⁰⁴ This may serve as an indication that already at an early stage the Soviet leaders saw the possibilities within this organization. When the North Vietnamese began discussing whether to broaden it the Soviet Union backed the proposal. In order to create an organization which would fit into their foreign policy strategy, Moscow presented the Lao Dong with

their own recommendations on how to organize it.

When the Lao Dong Central Committee convened its 8th Plenum from August 13-20, 1955, its major preoccupation was to set up a new united national front to lead the consolidation of the North and the political struggle in the South. The reasoning behind such a strategy indicated, according to historian Carlyle Thayer, a strong feeling among the Lao Dong leaders "that it was unlikely that the Geneva Agreements would be implemented within the time frame envisaged in July 1954."¹⁰⁵ In the following months the Vietnamese continued to emphasize to the Soviets the importance of a reunified Vietnam. Even though the Vietnamese claimed preference for a peaceful solution as the most satisfying option, they did not omit to mention that they had used force before, but still without expressing that they would be ready to use it again.¹⁰⁶

The China factor

From mid-1955 the Soviet Union both expanded and formalized their relationship with the DRV. As we see from the Instructions, the Soviet leaders had used the year that had passed after Geneva to develop the foundations of the relationship. The document covers most areas of the relationship, from cultural cooperation to the more sensitive questions of cooperation with the Chinese, and activities to counter the growing American influence in the southern part of Vietnam. The Soviet leaders used the year after Geneva to further elaborate policies towards Vietnam. By the summer of 1955 they signalled readiness to provide assistance to the North Vietnamese, but were at the same time cautious about giving too many promises or concessions.

In most areas Moscow and Hanoi agreed on how to handle the situation. There were exceptions however; and one was the discussion over the triangular relationship between Moscow, Hanoi, and Beijing, a recurrent problem in the Soviet-DRV relationship. If Ho Chi Minh raised the question of establishing a joint Sino-Soviet economic and military mission, he would be told that such a step would not be expedient as there had already been

established a practice of cooperation in these fields between the Vietnamese and the Chinese.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, this did not exclude the possibility that the DRV could receive technical aid from the Soviet Union. The question had also been raised earlier. In a telegram from General Antonov to Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs V.A. Zorin in early June 1955, the general underlined the inexpediency of establishing a joint Sino-Soviet military mission to coordinate questions related to the construction of the armed forces of the Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN) in Hanoi.¹⁰⁸

His argument was rooted in the Chinese military presence Antonov emphasized that "at present PAVN has Chinese military advisors. These advisors know the peculiarities of the country and its army. They have many years of experience in advising the Vietnamese friends on questions of constructing the armed forces, including the instruction and education of troops."¹⁰⁹ The military command in Moscow was not willing to engage in Vietnamese military affairs. It preferred the military mission in Hanoi to remain strictly Chinese, and responded negatively to the question of giving promises of military aid to the Vietnamese.

Moscow was also reluctant when discussing close economic cooperation with the Chinese in Vietnam. Economic aid has always been an important and effective way to gain influence in countries with weak economies. When evaluating Soviet aid to the DRV in the first period after the Geneva Agreement was signed, the most obvious question seems to be: Why did the Soviet Union not give more assistance to the DRV? One answer could be that they feared that a strong North Vietnam could be tempted to attack South Vietnam, a move that would not have fitted well with the general Soviet foreign policy line.

Soviet economic support for the DRV, in short, was very low key. The kind of assistance provided was identical to that given to other members of the socialist bloc, and by no means more important. It might even be that Soviet financial assistance to some non-socialist developing countries exceeded that given to the DRV, even though the Hanoi leaders had eagerly committed themselves to the ideals of the socialist world.¹¹⁰

The Soviet Union saw economic, as well as technical assistance to the DRV, as an important factor in the struggle for the reunification of Vietnam. Still Moscow had no intention to assist the DRV without any backing from the rest of the Socialist camp. The absence of a Chinese statement on aid to the DRV was viewed with special concern.¹¹¹ During the two first years after Geneva, the general policy of the Lao Dong seems to have made little difference in the economic relations between the Soviet Union and the DRV. Agreements like the one signed in July 1955 were usually automatically renewed every year, and there was no significant increase in the amount of aid given during the first years after Geneva.¹¹²

China was an influential factor in Soviet decision making with regard to Vietnam, and Moscow's often expectant attitude was a result of Chinese policies. In spite of some reluctance on both the Soviet and Chinese sides to institutionalize economic and military cooperation in Vietnam, the conclusion on both sides was that the DRV needed assistance in most fields. Moreover, the leaders in both Moscow and Beijing understood that cooperation was required in order to provide the DRV with the necessary assistance. The Soviet Union had the economic power, whereas China had the local expertise. Some tension will always exist in an alliance between two large powers, and the Sino-Soviet relationship was no exception. However, during the latter part of the 1950s both Soviet and Chinese leaders were inclined to cooperate with regard to Vietnam, in spite of the emerging differences between the two Communist powers.

While the economic relationship was fairly well established by the summer of 1955, the question of military relations between the two countries would become a much more delicate issue. One reason was the triangular relationship between the Soviet Union, China and the DRV. China has a long tradition of wielding influence in Vietnam, and the country was, and remains, an important factor in the bilateral relationship between the Soviet Union and Vietnam.¹¹³ With the growing ideological split between the Soviet Union and China in the latter part of the 1950s, and especially in the 1960s, China's importance in Soviet-Vietnamese relations increased rather than diminished.

Hanoi requested military assistance from the Soviet Union as soon as the Geneva Conference concluded its work in late July 1954. Moscow responded positively, but underlined the possibility of complications with the Chinese. Moscow's position was that the question of Soviet military presence should be brought up carefully, to avoid complications with the Chinese. Why was Moscow so eager not to provoke the Chinese over the matter of military assistance to the DRV? One reason was China's long experience in sending advisors, as well as military personnel and equipment, to both Vietnam and Korea.¹¹⁴ Not surprisingly Soviet references to the Chinese when discussing military relations with the Hanoi leaders were the norm rather than the exception in the mid-1950s. This experience was, as we have seen earlier, used by the Soviet general Antonov in June 1955 when he commented upon the Vietnamese proposal to establish a joint Sino-Soviet military mission to assist in rebuilding the PAVN.

The Soviet Union seemed ready to hand over the major part of the responsibility for military affairs to China. Why were the Soviet leaders willing to give away influence to the Chinese in such an important field? One reason could be that at the time, in spite of the growing Soviet interest in the country's political affairs, Vietnam was not of primary interest to the Soviet Union when it came down to active military engagement. The Soviets were much more concerned about the military situation in Eastern Europe.¹¹⁵ By handing over much of the military responsibility to the Chinese, the Soviet would retain their control within the Communist sphere without being directly responsible, and at the same time they would avoid the risk of getting too involved. Another reason can be traced to the state of Sino-Soviet relations in Vietnam in 1955. Although it has been claimed that tension between the two had started to surface, the further record of Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam indicates that with regard to Vietnam, the relationship between Moscow and Beijing was still functioning. The two powers agreed on the necessity of assisting the DRV. Beijing had long military experience in Vietnam, and it was therefore natural to both the Soviet Union and China that the present arrangement continued.¹¹⁶

In September 1955 the situation changed. Moscow received a report

from the Soviet Ambassador to Hanoi, informing that the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CC CCP) had decided to withdraw all Chinese political and economic advisors working in the DRV before the end of 1955. The Chinese decision worried both the North Vietnamese and the Soviets. Moscow turned to Beijing to prevent a total Chinese withdrawal from the DRV. However the situation must have been seen as somewhat delicate, since the decision was to present the Soviet discontent to Beijing in "a tactful way", and make them understand that the Soviets were in favor of more long-term assistance from China to the DRV.¹¹⁷ In early December 1955 the Chinese Ambassador to the DRV, Luo Guibo, informed the Soviets that the Chinese advisors would be allowed to stay only until the end of 1955.¹¹⁸

According to the Chinese scholar Chen Jian, on December 24, 1955 the Chinese Defense Minister, Peng Dehuai, informed his Vietnamese counterpart, Vo Nguyen Giap, about the decision to call back the Chinese Military Advisory Group. The group had been in Vietnam since July 1950, but by mid-March 1956 all members of the group had returned to China.¹¹⁹ It is difficult to say whether the Soviet leaders knew about the Chinese decision in advance. If so, it could explain why they emphasized the Vietnamese need for Chinese assistance, even before Beijing made the final decision to withdraw all military advisors. What does seem clear, however, is that the Soviets relied on the Chinese presence in Vietnam, politically and economically, as well as militarily. A Chinese withdrawal in any of these fields would complicate the situation for the Soviets and deprive the DRV of much needed resources. With no Chinese presence the Soviets would be forced to engage themselves more deeply in Vietnam if they wanted to maintain the current development in the country.

Defining a new strategy

Politically the autumn of 1955 was characterized by the continuous efforts of the DRV government to come to an understanding with the Diem government on both the consultation and the election issues. On July 19,

Pham Van Dong sent a message to Ngo Dinh Diem requesting him to nominate representatives for the consultations. There was no reply to this request, and in August the Saigon government declared that free elections in the North were impossible. At this point the North Vietnamese leaders turned to Moscow for advice. The Soviet leaders, who saw the importance in pushing for an implementation of the provisions of the Geneva Agreement, recommended that Hanoi raise the issue to the level of the two co-chairmen of the conference, which meant that the Soviet Union would discuss the matter with Great Britain.¹²⁰ This was followed by a letter from Pham Van Dong to the Geneva co-chairmen, seeking their intervention to secure the implementation of the political terms of the settlement.¹²¹

Why did the Soviet Union insist on going through the "Geneva-channel" rather than acting on its own, that is defending the rights of the DRV independently of the other states and the statutes of Geneva? By the fall of 1955 the DRV had already sent several complaints to the ICC and also to the co-chairmen of the Conference because Ngo Dinh Diem was unwilling to prepare for the consultations. At that point it was all up to Diem. Without his consent there would be no consultations, and most likely no elections. The Soviet Union was more ready to support the Vietnamese cause under the label of Geneva co-chairman than as the leader of the Socialist camp. As we have seen with regard to the ICC, the Soviet Union played safe. They expressed their readiness to assist in fulfilling the Geneva Agreement and offered to raise the question at the next meeting of the four Great Powers. In other words, they were ready to work through diplomatic channels but not, apparently, to support a return to armed struggle.

However, the prospects for consultations and an achievement of a solution through diplomatic means were not good. The French were getting ready to pull out completely, leaving no one in charge of implementing the provisions agreed upon. The Diem government, which was supposed to succeed the French and undertake their obligations with regard to the agreement, refused to participate, claiming that since South Vietnam was not a signatory of the Geneva accords it had no obligations whatsoever. During the autumn of 1955 Diem further consolidated his power. In

chapter one we have seen how he gradually eliminated or reached an agreement with all internal enemies, among them the three religious sects in South Vietnam who had all been funded by the French.¹²² To both the North Vietnamese and the Soviets, it was now clear that the government of Ngo Dinh Diem would stay in power for a while.

In Hanoi the party leaders still tried to achieve a solution within the framework of the Geneva Agreement. But despite all the efforts to arrange for consultations on elections, the DRV leaders had no success in approaching the South Vietnamese government on the issue. Before the two co-chairmen had come together to discuss the situation in Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem had gone one step further in his attempt to consolidate the state in the South. On October 23, 1955 he arranged a referendum in South Vietnam, by which he dethroned the former emperor Bao Dai and had himself elected president. Shortly afterwards he broke off economic relations with France, left the French Union, and finally proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) on 26 October 1955.¹²³

The referendum provoked no major protests from either the Soviet Union or China, indicating that the two communist powers accepted the idea of a divided Vietnam. In other words, during the autumn 1955 Hanoi was alone in protesting both against Diem's refusal to hold consultations and the referendum.

We have seen how Hanoi, parallel to the political and diplomatic efforts to secure a solution within the Geneva framework, had started to plan a supplementary strategy. The basis of this strategy was to increase North Vietnamese influence in the South and finally to establish a mass organization in favor of the northern regime. What was the Soviet role in this?

In order to evaluate Soviet influence on the new strategy, it is necessary to look back on Soviet moves during spring and summer of 1955. In the last months of 1955 there were no discussions of the new strategy and its implications in conversations between Soviet and Vietnamese officials. The Soviets seemed eager to promote a solution through diplomatic channels rather than to engage in support for any action inside South Vietnam. However, when looking back to the summer of 1955 and the suggestions

which came from Moscow during the July negotiations the Soviets had at least a certain degree of influence in the preparations for the new strategy. The fact that they during the following months, in the autumn of 1955, insisted on using their role as a co-chairman rather than following up their earlier suggestions shows how they deliberately tried not to get officially connected to the Lao Dong policy toward South Vietnam.

While the Lao Dong leadership continued to form their new strategy, the Soviet Union once again insisted on using the diplomatic channel. As a result the faith from the Vietnamese side in solving the problem of reunification by political means was gradually diminishing, and this was also reflected in talks between Soviet and DRV officials. Following the referendum in October, the relationship between the Republic of Vietnam and its American advisors became gradually tighter. In early January 1956 the North Vietnamese turned to the Soviets with another request for assistance. Diem and the Americans had developed a set of measures including extermination of the communists, the liquidation of the religious sects, provisions for both a new constitution and separate National Assembly elections for the South and entrance into SEATO. The North Vietnamese were concerned as a result of these measures, and asked the Soviets to assist them in promoting their cause of unification in the West, especially in France.¹²⁴

In order to counter the actions in the South, Hanoi suggested a new Geneva meeting with the same participants as in 1954, as well as the representatives of the ICC. The Soviet Union and China positively endorsed the suggestion, but the Soviets expressed a genuine worry that the proposal would not be welcomed by the other Geneva powers, especially Great Britain. Accordingly the Soviet Union suggested that a possible refusal to hold a new meeting should be used by themselves, the Chinese and the Vietnamese to unmask the policy of the Western Powers to disrupt the Geneva Agreement and prolong the division of Vietnam.¹²⁵

Had the North Vietnamese leaders lost faith in a diplomatic solution by early 1956? Hanoi knew that it had the support of Beijing. The Chinese leaders had suggested a reconvention of the Geneva Conference to over-

come Diem's disregard for the Agreement, and on February 14, 1956 Pham Van Dong sent another letter to the Geneva co-chairmen on the same theme. A report from the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi to Moscow in this period, underlined that the fulfillment of the Geneva agreement for the whole of Vietnam was seriously endangered. Its main argument was that "the events in Vietnam show that in the near future the fight around the fulfillment of the Geneva Agreement will be intensified."¹²⁶ On the North Vietnamese side the belief in a solution by diplomatic means was diminishing, if not already lost. In late February 1956 Secretary General of the Lao Dong Truong Chinh, stated that since there had been no consultations prior to the elections, they would not be held, at least not within the time schedule set by the agreement.¹²⁷ Such a statement cannot be seen as anything but a confession from the DRV leadership that they had lost faith in a diplomatic solution, at least for the foreseeable future.

Conclusions: a dual policy?

From late 1954 there was a significant increase in Soviet interest in Vietnam. In contrast to the first months following the Geneva conference, Moscow developed a more active policy toward Vietnam. This policy consisted of two different, but still interlinked parts. On the one hand, it promoted Soviet diplomatic initiatives aimed at the full implementation of the Geneva agreement, and on the other, its emphasis was on Lao Dong work in the South aimed at increasing the level of North Vietnamese influence in the southern part of the country.

The documentary sources often picture Moscow's policies toward Vietnam in 1955 as double-edged. Was that the aim of the policies? In its policy-making the Soviet Union had many factors to relate to, policies toward Vietnam were part of a much larger picture, namely Moscow's overall foreign policy. To evaluate Soviet policies toward Vietnam it is necessary to see the difference between the policy that was a concern of the Soviet Union and the DRV only, and the policy which was directed toward the rest of the world as well. The Soviet leaders had to relate to

two different kinds of audiences, first the international audience - the other great powers and world opinion at large - and secondly the audience in Vietnam and the rest of the socialist camp, also taking into account the relationship with China. The requests from the Soviet side in late 1954 to keep a low profile when referring to Ngo Dinh Diem and his government both in speeches and in the press, was a warning to the North Vietnamese in order to prevent them from upsetting the Americans, that is, a message in accordance with the official policy of the Soviet Union. The Soviet recommendations in spring and summer 1955, aimed at increasing North Vietnamese influence in the South, was directed toward the second audience, the Socialist camp.

Within a short period of time Moscow told the Vietnamese both to avoid strong criticisms of the South Vietnamese authorities in the press, and to extend their work among sections of the South Vietnamese people. From the outset Moscow seems to have been following two different tracks. Did the Soviet leaders intentionally follow a double-edged policy or was it the circumstances that made their Vietnam policy look inconsistent? It has been argued that in the Soviet period Moscow was "capable for the most part of distinguishing between propaganda and policy in its foreign relations, perceiving that its ideology and the national interest are not always synonymous."¹²⁸ In 1955 Soviet policies in Vietnam represented the conflict between the ideological dedication of the Soviet leaders, and their understanding of what was in the best interest of the Soviet Union at the time. We have seen, however, that prior to recognition contact between Moscow and Hanoi was based on a shared ideology. As relations grew closer, political interests became more important. The duality in 1955 illustrates the difficulty of simultaneously emphasizing the ideals of their common ideology, and the national interests of the Soviet Union.

Thus, at the same time this argument promotes a realist view on Soviet foreign policies based on the notion that national governments act purposefully and respond in a calculating manner to perceived problems. In other words, all choices are made rationally given the nation's objectives.¹²⁹ But what if decisions were not made "rationally"? What if decisions were made

by different constituencies within the CPSU that had their own reasons for wanting to play to different audiences with regard to Vietnam? Considering that Soviet representation abroad consisted not only of diplomats, but also of intelligence officers and party representatives, the potential for conflicting interests were tremendous. We do not yet have access to internal Soviet materials that might reveal competing factions within the Soviet bureaucracy, but the possibility of such a situation should remind us of the danger in simply rationalizing away the people within the foreign policy apparatus.

Chapter 3 - Growing differences (January to December 1956)

1956 was an important year in the politics of both the Soviet Union and Vietnam. In Moscow the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held its Twentieth Congress. At the congress Nikita Khrushchev introduced the new line in Soviet foreign policy, based on détente and peaceful coexistence, and held his famous secret speech denouncing Stalin and revealing the excesses committed during his reign. To the Vietnamese 1956 was the year their country was supposed to be reunited through general elections scheduled for July.

The events of 1956 would turn out to be decisive in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. There were no general elections in Vietnam, nor was there a formal protest from the Soviet side. As a result of the new situation in Vietnam individuals within the Lao Dong started to consider other strategies to achieve Vietnamese unification. The proposed strategies included military measures to support the political struggle, a change of policy not likely to correspond with the new Soviet course.

Five themes of particular importance to the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship in 1956 will be discussed in this chapter. The Twentieth Congress, the status of the Geneva Agreement and the all-Vietnamese elections, the results of the land reform campaign, the development of Hanoi's southern strategy, and Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam. The themes were closely linked and their combined results formed the basis for future relations between Moscow and Hanoi.

The Lao Dong and the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU

The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 had an immense effect upon the communist world, as well as on the domestic situation in

the Soviet Union. Khrushchev argued that war between the two world camps could be avoided and that a peaceful transition to socialism was possible. From 1956 the outspoken fundamental principle of Soviet foreign policy was peaceful co-existence. In a secret speech held at the end of the congress Khrushchev presented his criticism of Stalin which shocked communist parties all over the world.¹³⁰

For many party leaderships the revelations would cause serious problems when compared to the situation within their own parties. Vietnam was no exception in this regard. Like the other Soviet and foreign delegates the Lao Dong representatives at the congress, General Secretary Truong Chinh and Politburo member Le Duc Tho, were totally unprepared for the revelations during the Twentieth Congress.

In 1955, factions within the Lao Dong leadership began discussing the possibility of creating a new strategy towards the South. As we have seen, Soviet initiatives in the spring and summer of 1955 encouraged parts of this new strategy, but the new line in Soviet foreign policy introduced at the Twentieth congress would be difficult to combine with the new direction in Hanoi's policies.

The very first official DRV reaction to the Twentieth Congress was an editorial published in the Lao Dong daily "Nhan Dan" on February 28, 1956. It stated that the DRV fully supported the results of the CPSU congress, but it also added that the Lao Dong "would further endeavor to study Marxist-Leninist theory and to apply it creatively to the concrete situation in Vietnam, to combine this theory with the practice of Vietnam's revolution."¹³¹ Comments in the editorial indicate that the Lao Dong had not yet decided whether they wanted to accept the whole concept of this new Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Before committing themselves entirely, the Lao Dong leaders wished to find out how this new line could be applied to the specific situation in Vietnam.

In the spring of 1956 the Lao Dong leadership discussed the Twentieth Congress. On March 31, 1956, the Lao Dong Politburo issued a communique that fully supported the resolutions of the Twentieth Congress. However, the North Vietnamese still found it necessary to discuss the congress,

its resolutions and their impact on the situation in Vietnam. In the end of April, after the extended 9th Plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee, held from 19 to 24 April, 1956, member of the Lao Dong CC Nguyen Duy Trinh presented the results of the discussions, and the evaluations of its implications for the Vietnamese situation to Moscow. In a conversation with Soviet ambassador Zimyanin, Nguyen Duy Trinh stated that "the Plenum unanimously and warmly approves the decisions of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU".¹³²

When the Lao Dong presented its approval to Moscow it was the result of a long discussion within the Party. The background for this discussion can be found in the months preceding the 9th Plenum of the Lao Dong. In mid-March 1956 the Central Committee was evaluating a proposal from the Secretary of the Regional Party Committee in the South, Le Duan, containing suggestions for a new strategy in the South. This new strategy included preparations for a resumption of the armed struggle, and a 14-point plan for military consolidation of the Nam Bo region, the southern part of South Vietnam, including the surroundings of Saigon.¹³³

The Lao Dong Central Committee had extended its 9th Plenum to thoroughly discuss the resolutions of the Twentieth congress and their impact on the situation in Vietnam, both in the international and domestic aspect. At the Plenum the discussion was separated into two major parts. The first part was dedicated to the examination of questions related to the international situation in light of the decisions of the Twentieth congress, and the principal questions of the foreign and domestic policy of the DRV. The second part of the Plenum was dedicated to a discussion of questions related to the party work of the Lao Dong based on the resolutions of the Soviet congress, the report from the CC CPSU, and the speech by Khrushchev on "the cult of personality and its consequences."¹³⁴ Le Duan's suggestions for a new strategy towards the South could have been discussed in either of the two sessions.

The topics discussed during the plenum do shed some light on the development within the Lao Dong in this period. The North Vietnamese took seriously Khrushchev's revelations of misconduct within the Soviet

party, and immediately focused on their own internal party life to see if similar errors had been committed. When acknowledging that mistakes had been made also within the Lao Dong, Hanoi first of all referred to the position of Ho Chi Minh. A certain degree of personality cult had developed around Ho, but according to the discussions at the plenum, not to the same degree as around Stalin.¹³⁵

With regard to future policy toward the South the plenum did not provide the Soviets with much information. Most of the discussions centered on the domestic policies of the DRV, and the situation within the Lao Dong. The only remark targeted at the situation in the South concluded that the "general line of the Vietnamese people's fight to strengthen the DRV and reunifying the country by peaceful means, that had been outlined in the programme of the Fatherland Front, was the correct line to follow."¹³⁶ The decision to continue the political struggle indicate that those in favor of Le Duan's proposed strategy did not officially prevail in the spring of 1956, and that the further strategy of the Lao Dong would be at least close to the new Soviet line.¹³⁷ Thus, the discussion on southern strategy would continue through 1956, and while Soviet leaders steadily continued on a course indicating that they considered the accomodation of the U.S. more important than the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, Hanoi's hardliners promoting a more militant strategy gradually gained more influence within the Lao Dong politburo.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the Soviet Union aspired to influence DRV views at this juncture. In the beginning of April 1956, shortly before the 9th Plenum, Soviet Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan paid an official visit to Hanoi. Mikoyan's visit was the first by a senior Soviet official to Vietnam. At the time of Mikoyan's arrival the Lao Dong had issued a statement declaring support for the resolutions of the Twentieth Congress, but it had not explicitly stated its preparedness to commit itself completely to the policies outlined during the congress. The purpose of Mikoyan's visit has never been outlined by either the Soviets or the Vietnamese, and no official communique was issued during his stay.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, comment on his visit in the period following indicate that the

two main themes were the Twentieth Congress and the DRV's political and economic development.¹³⁹ With regard to the congress Mikoyan did give some advice to the Vietnamese regarding the issue of exclusion from the party. According to member of the Central Committee, Nguyen Duy Trinh, the Plenum agreed with the advice of comrade Mikoyan and decided to show more caution when excluding members from the party.¹⁴⁰

In 1956 the Vietnamese reaction to the Twentieth Congress cannot have been all that evident to the Soviet Union. Although they several times acknowledged the new Soviet foreign policy line, the Lao Dong leaders never said in detail how the resolutions of the Twentieth Congress would affect their own policy. In later political analysis the Soviets accuse the Vietnamese of sharing the Chinese point of view with regard to the Twentieth congress. According to a political report from 1961 "the leaders in the CC Lao Dong shared the points of view of the leaders in the CCP and the AWP [Albanian Workers Party] on the personality cult question. They did not agree with the decisions of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU condemning the personality cult of I.V. Stalin, but preferred to pass this over in silence."¹⁴¹

Parallel to the discussion of the Twentieth Congress the Lao Dong leaders laid all their efforts in preparations for the general elections scheduled to take place in July. Although the prospects were not good due to the reluctant attitude of Ngo Dinh Diem's government, Hanoi refused to accept the possibility that the elections should not be held. To prove the viability of the Geneva agreement the Lao Dong presented alternative plans to the Soviets and Chinese which would permit a solution within the Geneva framework.

The Geneva Agreement in 1956

In early 1956 China proposed to convene a second Geneva conference. In February the proposal was supported by the North Vietnamese who believed that a second Geneva meeting could help improve the political situation in Vietnam. The Soviets, although positive to such a meeting,

were not convinced that it would be possible to convene for as long as the Western powers were reluctant about the idea. Since at the time it was clear that there would not be any elections at the scheduled time in July, the North Vietnamese were searching for new solutions. The holding of a second conference on Indochina was often discussed between Soviet and DRV officials, and the Soviets were most of all interested in what the North Vietnamese would do in case there would not be a new conference.¹⁴²

While attending the Twentieth Congress in Moscow General Secretary of the Lao Dong, Truong Chinh, used the opportunity to discuss the future situation in Vietnam with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister V. V Kuznetsov. Encouraged to inform on the situation in Vietnam, Truong Chinh emphasised that the holding of elections was an often discussed topic at the meetings of the Lao Dong CC. But his comments indicate that the Lao Dong saw no possibility of holding elections unless the situation in Vietnam changed. According to Truong Chinh; "in the present situation the necessary conditions for conducting these elections do not exist. At the same time the CC has pointed to the necessity of using all forces in order to keep the initiative in the political struggle for the regulation of Vietnam's political problems."¹⁴³ Kuznetsov informed him that the Soviet Union supported the proposal forwarded by China and the DRV on the holding of a second conference on Indochina.¹⁴⁴

Hanoi's suggestion in order to keep the initiative was to postpone the elections. The Lao Dong leaders feared that disbanding entirely the idea of holding elections could provoke a strong reaction from the people of Vietnam. "To inform the people of this now, would" according to Truong Chinh, "result in a serious worsening of their spirits."¹⁴⁵ There are three possible reasons why the the Lao Dong leaders presented this argument to the Soviets. First, they might have feared that no elections could reduce the Party's support within the southern population, since they would no longer have anything to fight for. Secondly, it could also have been a way to force Moscow into giving more support by saying that they could not be too certain about the future situation in Vietnam unless the elections were held

as planned. As a third possibility the comments could be an indication that the strategy of the Lao Dong was under further revision, that is: a warning to the Soviets that the Vietnamese would not hesitate to approach the problem in their own way, an approach that would crash with Soviet wishes.

Moscow was positive to the idea of reaching a solution within the Geneva framework. Although the prospects for achieving a Geneva solution in Vietnam were not particularly promising, Moscow once again turned to the Geneva agreement as a means to ease tensions between themselves and Hanoi. Towards the end of March 1956, the Soviets encouraged the DRV leaders to fight more actively for a full implementation of the Geneva agreement.¹⁴⁶

The Soviet policy-makers suggested that the Vietnamese should again turn to the co-chairmen. The aim would be to underline the problems of the French departure and the fact that there were no successors to the French, a situation which would seriously endanger the prospect for a fulfillment of the agreement. As the situation was, Ngo Dinh Diem was taking over the French obligations and as one of the parties covered by the agreement Diem was not in a neutral position. It was also suggested that Hanoi send a letter to South Vietnam with proposals for peaceful regulations through political consultations and the carrying on of elections. However, if the North Vietnamese decided to take such a measure it had to be after the meeting of the two co-chairmen. This way they could exclude the possibility that the British would agree to the document before discussing it with the Soviet Union and thereby delay a common decision on Vietnam.¹⁴⁷ Moscow also referred to other countries' positions in Vietnam, and thereunder claimed that the "line of the imperialistic powers on the undermining of the Geneva agreement exacerbated the situation in Indochina, and especially in Vietnam ..."¹⁴⁸ The Soviet conclusion was that:

In these conditions it is especially important to the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the other People's Democracies to fully use the forces of the Geneva agreement, the disagreement between

*the imperialistic forces, the Indian position, and the increasing resistance among the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos against the American imperialism in order to strengthen the influence of the socialist camp in this area and strengthen peace.*¹⁴⁹

The prevalent Soviet attitude was that an implementation of the agreement was a necessity in order to achieve peace in Indochina. The Soviets were positive to the work of the ICC, and they emphasized the need for a strengthened ICC in the south. The main issue to Moscow was still a second Geneva meeting, a measure that would be even more important if the Saigon government again refused to enter into consultations with the DRV.

During the spring of 1956 the Lao Dong leaders were worried not only because of the reluctant attitude of the South Vietnamese government, but also by the French position in this matter. On April 3, 1956, the French gave formal notice of their withdrawal from Vietnam, and announced that they would dissolve their High Command by April 15. On April 9, DRV's Prime Minister Pham Van Dong sent a letter to the Geneva co-chairmen insisting that the Diem regime take over France's legal obligations in regard to the agreement.

In reality the French were forced out of Vietnam. Disagreements between the French and Diem over the French presence in Vietnam and the American readiness to take on the support of the South Vietnamese was the background for French withdrawal.¹⁵⁰ From a South Vietnamese point of view it would be more convenient to have Americans than French in the country. Both the Vietnamese and the Soviets were negative to the French withdrawal.¹⁵¹ As long as the French had formally been responsible, there had been a certain chance of a fulfillment of the Geneva agreement. With the French gone and the Americans gradually taking over their role, the hope for a peaceful solution was diminished.¹⁵²

The combination of the French withdrawal and the Republic of Vietnam's refusal to succeed the French made Hanoi rethink the situation in the country. Their position was presented to the Soviets in four points: 1) The

Geneva agreement should be respected and observed. 2) The French and Diem should carry the responsibility for their fulfillment and recognize their continuity. 3) The ICC should operate on the basis of a fulfillment and respect for the Geneva agreement in both zones. 4) In connection with the South Vietnamese violation of the agreement it would be necessary to ask for a summoning of a new Geneva conference. To prepare it the DRV government would agree to a meeting between the two co-chairmen.¹⁵³

The Vietnamese acknowledged the inherent problem in their position, and admitted that "to insist on a full implementation of the Geneva agreement will be difficult."¹⁵⁴ Accordingly the Vietnamese claimed that it from a tactical point of view would be necessary to "on the one hand, continue the fight for a fulfillment of the agreement, but on the other hand, to take new steps."¹⁵⁵ The new steps were presented to the Soviets in a plan with two alternatives. Both alternatives would provide a solution within the Geneva framework, and both were based on a postponement of the date for the elections to May 1957. In the first alternative, which was labeled "the maximum plan", the North Vietnamese expected the Diem government and the French to fulfill the provisions of the Geneva agreement, and they also expected Diem to take over the French obligations. The goal of the plan was to achieve a full implementation of the agreement by postponing the date for elections. The second option was to settle for "a minimum plan" or "modus vivendi". This plan implied that the opposite side would fulfill only the basic provisions of the agreement such as securing democratic freedoms, normalizing relations between the North and the South etc. The two plans were presented to both the Chinese and Soviet ambassadors.

In response to the two plans, the Soviets and Chinese agreed that Hanoi would eventually have to make concessions, but not when it came to questions of principle. Since a postponement of the elections would be a large concession, neither the Soviets nor the Chinese were unreservedly positive to such a suggestion. To make a concession like a postponement one should expect the opposite side to offer an equivalent concession. To get a result from the *modus vivendi* it would have to lead to the discussion of a new Geneva meeting. To voluntarily give concessions in questions of

principle would not be in the interest of the DRV.¹⁵⁶ It seems that in the spring of 1956 Soviet and Chinese leaders agreed that the best solution in Vietnam at the time, taking into account that there would not be general elections in the foreseeable future, would be to hope for a new Geneva conference. However, they were not eager to lay any pressure on the other powers that had participated at Geneva to obtain such a conference. As we shall see later, the eventual outcome was just some further meetings between the two co-chairmen of the conference.

Notwithstanding the developments in Moscow that spring, the Soviet Union was still pursuing its diplomatic campaign for the fulfillment of the Geneva Accords. On 8 May, a few weeks after the end of the extended 9th Plenum of the Lao Dong CC, Gromyko and Lord Reading met in London. The decisions of the meeting were made public in a message from the Geneva co-chairmen emphasizing the need to preserve peace in Indochina, also stating that the co-chairmen and the ICC would continue their responsibilities. The 8 May message left the world in no doubt that the communist powers would allow Vietnam to stay divided. Following the meeting Pham Van Dong sent a letter to Ngo Dinh Diem demanding the normalization of relations between the two zones.¹⁵⁷

No elections - no Soviet protest

The general elections scheduled to take place in Vietnam on July 20, 1956, were never held. According to official statements from the two co-chairmen of the conference, the Soviet Union and Great Britain, the circumstances in Vietnam had led them to believe that to prevent the resumption of armed conflict, the preservation of peace in Indochina was more important than carrying out on schedule the political provisions of the 1954 Geneva agreement.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the two co-chairmen recommended that the agreement they had assisted in designing should not be followed.

The Soviet Union never officially protested against the failure to conduct elections, and neither did China. On the date that had been officially chosen for the general elections, 20 July 1956, the election issue was not

even mentioned in a conversation the Soviet ambassador had with Ho Chi Minh. The topic was a quite different one, the situation in Laos and the organizing of a meeting between the two Laotian princes, Souphannavong and Souvanna Phouma.¹⁵⁹ Two days later, on 22 July, the North Vietnamese organised a protest rally in Hanoi to mark the two-year anniversary of the Geneva agreement.

To explain why Soviet protests were so remarkably absent after the election failure it is necessary to look both at the complex international situation the Soviet leaders had to deal with in 1956, and at the bilateral relationship between the Soviet Union and the DRV.

In 1956 the Soviet wish for détente with the Western powers, and first of all with the United States, was considered more important in Moscow than the holding of elections in Vietnam. Since the official announcement of the new line in Soviet foreign policy at the Twentieth Congress, Moscow had become more eager to pursue the idea of peaceful co-existence. To push for a holding of elections in Vietnam could jeopardize the improved relationship that had started to develop between the two superpowers. Soviet policy-makers were aware of the American fear that the holding of general elections in Vietnam could result in a Communist victory. This was a situation that U.S. policy-makers had tried to prevent for years through their support for the South Vietnamese government in its refusal to hold both consultations and elections.¹⁶⁰ The awareness was part of the reason why the Soviet Union did not stand more firmly behind the North Vietnamese demands for consultations and elections. Moscow would not allow the good relations developing with the West, and the United States in particular, to be ruined for the sake of the Vietnamese.

The lessons of the involvement in the Korean War, as well as the relationship between the Soviet Union and North Korea after the war ended, played an important role in shaping Soviet policies toward the rest of Asia.¹⁶¹ By the summer of 1956 North Korea was indeed a trouble spot in the eyes of the Soviet leaders. Following the revelations of the Twentieth Congress, Kim Il Sung, the North Korean leader, feared that de-Stalinisation would affect his own personality cult in North Korea. As a

result he tried to distance himself from Moscow and limit Soviet influence in North Korea. One part of that strategy was to limit the influence of the Koreans of Soviet origin. However, while planning how to limit the influence of that group, Kim Il Sung and his faction were attacked from a different side. The attack came from Koreans of Chinese origin, and during the summer of 1956 the first and only attempt to remove Kim Il Sung from power was made.

It was not until September 1956 that the Soviet Union and China decided to interfere in the inner-political struggle in Pyongyang. Both the Soviet Union and China expressed their worries about the situation within the North Korean party, and Kim Il Sung agreed under Sino-Soviet pressure to reinstate into the party those who had participated in the attempt to remove him from power that summer. The attempt to remove Kim Il Sung from power was not successful due to direct Soviet and Chinese interference. Moscow's and Beijing's aim was to stop the development of a Stalin-like personality cult around Kim, not to remove him as the leader of North Korea. In the end the winner was Kim Il Sung. When safely back in charge after the crisis of 1956 he took another decisive step toward absolute power.¹⁶²

Because of its length and seriousness the North Korean crisis influenced Soviet policy toward the rest of Asia. From a Soviet point of view the Korean crisis was solved successfully thanks to good cooperation with China. The Sino-Soviet verbal intervention in Korea was meant to emphasize to Kim Il Sung that they would not tolerate such tendencies of dictatorship as he had shown during 1956. It is not unlikely that Soviet and Chinese leaders felt the experiences from Korea had taught them a lesson that should be remembered when dealing with countries in similar situations, such as Vietnam. Experiences from Korea in the early 1950s, combined with developments during 1956, can be part of the reason why the Soviet leaders were not willing to insist on the holding of general elections in Vietnam. To give the Vietnamese communists such encouragement could fuel conflicts within the Lao Dong, and that way support groups within the party in favour of more violent reunification strategies.

Vietnam was certainly not a priority issue for Soviet foreign policy leaders in 1956. Events in other areas, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, demanded much of the Soviet leaders. The revelations at the Twentieth Congress, especially the attack on Stalin and Khrushchev's new definition of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, were viewed with suspicion in the West and were perceived negatively throughout the Communist bloc, especially in China and Eastern Europe. During the summer and fall of 1956 the East European reaction to the Twentieth Congress could be seen in a number of governmental reforms soon followed by a series of protest and riots. The first was the Poznan riot in Poland in June 1956, which was followed by subsequent unrest in Poland through the fall of 1956. In Hungary national reform led to riots and subsequently a Soviet invasion in late October to early November 1956.¹⁶³

Next to Eastern Europe, the Middle East was an area of tension in 1956. In July Egypt's President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company and thereby confiscated shares in the company mainly held by French and British investors. After several meetings it was clear that the crisis could not be solved by diplomatic means. As a result France and Great Britain reacted with military force, and in early November their forces jointly attacked Egyptian bases. Almost simultaneously with the French and British attacks on Egypt, the Soviet Union was busy crushing the Hungarian Revolution.¹⁶⁴

By July 1956 an important change had taken place within the Soviet leadership. Vyacheslav Molotov was dismissed from his post as Soviet foreign minister in June 1956, and replaced by Dimitriy Timofeevich Shepilov. Apparently Molotov was gradually pushed aside by Khrushchev already from 1955, although he remained in the position until the summer of 1956. One of the reasons why Molotov gradually lost his power was his disapproval of Khrushchev's foreign policies. Molotov was a true bolshevik and a revolutionary. He was not comfortable with the innovative approaches of the post-Stalin elites, and continued to worship revolutionary ideology, which was increasingly neglected by the new leaders. He was greatly angered by "the leaders' quest for some informal permanent truce

with the West, first of all with the Americans".¹⁶⁵

We have seen that Molotov played an important role as Soviet negotiator at the Geneva conference in July 1954. He was the Soviet leader most familiar with the Vietnamese situation and through 1955 he was the initiator of Soviet policy recommendations with regard to Vietnam. The decrease in Molotov's influence and his eventual fall in June 1956 might be another factor contributing to the lack of Soviet protest in July. Being a participant in formulating the Geneva agreement, Molotov was likely to have insisted that it was also implemented. His recommendations to the Vietnamese communists in 1955 also suggest that he might have been more likely than his successors to support a political struggle with elements of military actions.

Without access to more material on Molotov it is of course difficult to assess the possible effect his fall might have had on the Vietnamese situation. Based on what we know about his character and his reputation as a devoted Communist, it would not be bold to suggest that the situation in Vietnam would have developed differently after 1956 had he remained in his position.

In the early summer of 1956 the Soviet Union seems to have accepted the status quo in Vietnam, and the implied postponement of the electoral provisions of the Geneva Agreement. The foreign policy context of these developments has already been mentioned. Another, but equally important issue is the bilateral relationship between the Soviet Union and the DRV, first and foremost Soviet perceptions of the Vietnamese problem. To some degree the Soviet policy-makers did not realize how strongly the Vietnamese communists both in the North and in the South wanted to reunite the country, and how much they were willing to sacrifice to see a united Vietnam in the near future. In records of conversations during the spring and summer of 1956 the Vietnamese express their will to fight for reunification, and also warn the Soviets of the results if no measures were taken in order to see the elections through.¹⁶⁶ This was a clear indication that they were ready to launch a new strategy if the one within the Geneva framework failed.

In 1956 the two co-chairmen of the Geneva conference, the Soviet Union and Great Britain, had come to the conclusion that it was more important to preserve peace in Indochina than to carry out on schedule the political provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreement. According to Moscow and London, this was the only way to prevent the resumption of armed struggle in the area. Subsequent developments in Vietnam indicate that rather than preventing a renewal of conflict, the failure to hold general elections pushed the Vietnamese communists closer to a reunification strategy based not only on political measures, but also on a limited degree of military action. It may seem as if the Soviet leaders took no measures in order to prevent the North Vietnamese from entering onto a new course. Moscow was satisfied with the developments in Vietnam in the summer of 1956, and did not see any reason to push for the holding of elections. Although its behavior did not coincide with the wishes of the Lao Dong leaders, the Soviet Union expected Hanoi to accept the policies outlined in Moscow.

Land reform and the rectification of errors

The fall of 1956 was a turbulent period within the Lao Dong leadership. The time had come to disperse responsibility for the excesses of land reform, a process which also led to changes within the higher echelons of the party. In North Vietnam land reform grew more radical as it went on and by the spring of 1956 the Lao Dong leaders had started to realize the seriousness of the land reform excesses. Still it was not until the fall that the party leaders fully understood the consequences of the campaign. Since charges were being made against old cadres, and against men with whom party leaders were personally acquainted, they had begun to question the accusations.¹⁶⁷

The land reform and the errors committed during its implementation was one of the most important issues in the DRV in the fall of 1956. As soon as it had been admitted that serious errors had been committed, North Vietnamese leaders started to encourage criticism from below.¹⁶⁸ During the

10th Plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee (CC) in September 1956 the land reform was thoroughly discussed, and the North Vietnamese leaders announced that after careful studies of the materials of the Twentieth Congress, it was clearer to them which mistakes had been committed. Most of all were they blamed themselves for uncritically having followed the Chinese example.¹⁶⁹ At the 10th Plenum the party collectively assumed responsibility for the excesses during the campaign, but pointed out that certain comrades were personally responsible for what had happened. The plenum concluded that the instructions of the Lao Dong CC on the elimination of enemies within the party organization had been misunderstood, and as a result had led to massive repression and physical punishment.¹⁷⁰

Although the Central Committee and the Politburo of the CC assumed collective responsibility for the errors, some party officials also had to be sacrificed to demonstrate the Lao Dong leaders' sincerity in rectifying the errors committed. Several top officials within the Lao Dong were held personally responsible, the most prominent of these were the general secretary of the Lao Dong, Truong Chinh. He was removed from his post, but remained a member of the Politburo.¹⁷¹ Truong Chinh was known for being close to the Chinese Communist Party. The pseudonym he had chosen in his youth; Truong Chinh, means "long march" in Vietnamese.¹⁷² The North Vietnamese blamed themselves for having unconditionally followed the Chinese example on land reform, something which may have led them to choose Truong Chinh as the official scapegoat. He was the leader most Vietnamese associated with land reform, and a ruthless ideologue who had often emphasized the necessity of eliminating class enemies.¹⁷³

The dismissal of Truong led to changes within the Lao Dong top leadership. Ho Chi Minh himself took over the post as general secretary, and would therefore, until the next scheduled congress of the Lao Dong, be both chairman and general secretary of the party. At the same time, Vo Nguyen Giap, commanding general of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), was appointed deputy (second) general secretary of the Lao Dong CC. These rearrangements left the Politburo of the Lao Dong CC with the

following members: Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong, Truong Chinh, Vo Nguyen Giap, Hoang Quoc Viet, Le Duc Tho, Nguyen Chi Thanh, and "the comrades working in South Vietnam."¹⁷⁴

As for the development of a cult around Ho Chi Minh, available Soviet documents do not indicate that his position was in any way endangered by the revelations during the campaign. In the early spring of 1956 the Lao Dong acknowledged that a certain degree of personality cult had developed around their leader. This was soon condemned but did not lead to any practical consequences for Ho himself.¹⁷⁵

In addition to the changes within the party leadership the North Vietnamese also initiated a broader campaign in an effort to mend some of the damage caused by land reform. The Vietnamese variant of de-Stalinization was named the "rectification of errors campaign". One of the most important tasks of this campaign was, according to Politburo member Nguyen Duy Trinh, "to achieve unity within the ranks of the party."¹⁷⁶ The comment from Nguyen Duy Trinh confirmed that after the Twentieth Congress there had been serious disagreements within the Lao Dong top leadership. Lack of unity and the differences of opinion that existed among the leaders was a source of worry for Soviet officials, as well as for other DRV government officials. The reason for this lack of unity was, according to an official at the prime minister's office Buy Kong Chung, that the members of the Politburo were too preoccupied with theory.¹⁷⁷ When serious problems were raised all the Politburo members had different opinions, although they would rarely end in open disagreement. According to the DRV official there was no "ideological" unity among the members of the Politburo, because the party had yet to work out a general line or program.¹⁷⁸

During the fall of 1956 there was only one incident of revolt against the DRV government. It took place in the North Vietnamese province of Nghe An in early November. The incident may still have shaken the Soviet belief that the Lao Dong had full control over the situation after publicly admitting its errors. The major issue of these disturbances was religious discrimination against the local Catholic community that had increased during the

conduct of land reform. Members of the Catholic community were encouraged by an ICC Fixed Team to petition for regrouping to the South.¹⁷⁹ When villagers assembled to present their grievances to the Canadian member of the ICC FT, the local militia attempted to disperse the demonstrators. These attempts proved ineffective and reinforcements were called in. As a result violence broke out and shots were fired. All-attempts at mediation failed. Finally troops were sent in to control the demonstrators and arrest the leaders. The number of killed and injured remains unknown, but according to the official version "several persons were killed and many more were wounded."¹⁸⁰

When presenting the Nghe An incident to the Soviet chargé d'affaires, A.M. Popov, Nguyen Duy Trinh emphasized that the revolt was staged to undermine the rectification of errors campaign. He also accused the participants in the demonstration of being used by the reactionaries to spread false information with the purpose of undermining the people's government. The disorder this activity created enabled the reactionaries to make even more trouble. After the situation in Nghe An had calmed down Hanoi could reassure Moscow that in spite of the temporarily difficult situation in that province, the present conditions in Vietnam would not lead to events like the ones in Poland or Hungary.¹⁸¹ According to Carlyle Thayer the incidents in Nghe An were not related to the ongoing de-Stalinization process, but were a reaction to the arbitrary manner in which the land reform campaign had been conducted in that specific area.¹⁸²

The Soviet reaction to Hanoi's rectification of errors campaign and its rearrangements in the top leadership was expressed as follows in a note from Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to the CC CPSU

Taking into consideration that the questions related to the situation in the country was recently discussed at the 10th Plenum of the Lao Dong CC, and taking into consideration that it was the Plenum that took the decision to rectify the errors committed in the past by the Party, it seems to be inexpedient at the present time to give any advice to the Vietnamese friends on inner-political [domestic] questions from our side.¹⁸³

The rectification of errors campaign and the subsequent changes within the Lao Dong leadership do not seem to have had any direct influence on the bilateral relationship between the Soviet Union and the DRV. Moscow approved of Hanoi's efforts to mend the damages made during the land reform, but did nothing to interfere in the campaign itself. Nor does the Foreign Ministry material indicate any reaction to the changes within the party leadership.

The changes within the leadership would, nevertheless, become more important to the relationship in the years to come. From what we know based on both Vietnamese and Soviet sources the number of Politburo members known to be in favor of a more violent strategy towards the South increased from 1956 onwards. In March 1956 Le Duan suggested a new strategy in the South. As we have seen the proposal was defeated because the Politburo was in favor of reunification by political means. The changes in Vietnam had started in the spring 1956 and became gradually more visible throughout the fall. Two interlinked issues were particularly important; the changes within the top party leadership, and the development of a strategy towards the South.

Hanoi's southern strategy

Ever since the preparations for consultations collapsed in the summer of 1955 we have seen how the Vietnamese signalled their readiness to pursue a new kind of policy, a policy which would imply an increased level of violence compared to the first year after Geneva. From a Soviet point of view a change in Lao Dong policies in the South was a source of worry since it was unlikely to correspond with the new Soviet foreign policy line with its emphasis on a peaceful transition to socialism. A new Hanoi strategy would no doubt imply a more militant approach leading to severe reactions from both the South Vietnamese authorities and the Americans. We shall see in the following that despite the fact that the North Vietnamese, in the spring of 1956, gave several indications about their need to revise their southern strategy, they never outlined explicitly to the Soviets

what their plans were if a political solution were to prove impossible.

In April 1956 the 9th Plenum of the Lao Dong CC decided to continue the political struggle as the correct way to achieve reunification. Le Duan's March proposal was not officially approved. However, coming closer to the scheduled date for the elections Vietnamese communist leaders gave strong signals of their intentions to revise the policy toward the South. In late June 1956 Ho Chi Minh stated in a conversation with the Soviet ambassador Zimyanin that one could no longer count on the holding of general elections.¹⁸⁴ Referring to the present situation in Vietnam Ho gave the following characterization;

*...at this point one can no longer count on the holding of consultations with South Vietnam and general elections for Vietnam. Diem refuses to follow the Geneva agreement. In South Vietnam a referendum was held, and also separate elections. The armed resistance of the sects has been smashed. Diem has to some extent strengthened his armed forces. The French have left South Vietnam. As a result a new situation has arisen that one must take into account in the fight for the unification of the country.*¹⁸⁵

Ho Chi Minh also pointed to the new measures that needed to be taken as a result of the new situation, and said that the Lao Dong CC was preparing instructions for the comrades working in the South on the tasks and methods for the further struggle. Ho also underlined to the Soviets that the Communist networks in the South had not been completely destroyed in spite of Diem's repression. The Vietnamese people itself was another important factor that according to Ho had to be taken into consideration when planning the future of Vietnam. He claimed that some among the people had started to ask the question of what was necessary to do to obtain a reunification of the country under the present circumstances. Those who were most worried were the ones who had fled from the South to the North after partition.

To emphasize to the Soviets the importance of a fulfillment of the

Geneva agreement Ho Chi Minh used the respect for the people of Vietnam as an argument. It would be necessary to give the people an explanation of why the provisions of the agreement had not been fulfilled as planned. Thus, several meetings would be held to help the people of both the North and the South to understand the goals of the DRV's fight to reunite the country. The Lao Dong also acknowledged that they had not done enough in their fight for the fulfillment of the Geneva agreement. One of the problems was that they had underestimated the force of their opponents. Political fight was the correct option, but too many insufficiencies had surfaced when they had tried to follow this direction. One example was the programme of the Fatherland Front. It was a good programme, but it had been drawn up too late, at the time when the armed forces of the DRV had already left the South. To overcome these difficulties Ho Chi Minh recommended that one should study Diem's tactics more carefully, and react more seriously to them. He also underlined that it was now clear to Hanoi that the government in Saigon did not want to enter into any consultations.¹⁸⁶

Some have claimed that the Lao Dong leaders already in the fall of 1954 knew that there would not be any general elections on schedule in July 1956, or even at a later date for that matter.¹⁸⁷ However, according to available Soviet documents it was not until that late stage in June that Hanoi explicitly stated to Moscow that they knew for certain there would be no elections, and declared that the failure to hold elections could lead to serious trouble in Vietnam.¹⁸⁸

In a conversation with the Soviet ambassador Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem and member of the Politburo Pham Hung supported Ho Chi Minh's survey of the situation. Pham Hung informed that "at present it is necessary, ... to strengthen the fight in North and in South Vietnam for the fulfillment of the Geneva agreement,"¹⁸⁹ and to achieve that it is necessary to send another letter to the two co-chairmen. The Soviet ambassador, Zimyanin, said that both he and the Chinese ambassador, Li Zhimin, agreed with Pham Hung's idea on sending another letter to the co-chairmen, but that all emphasis should not be laid on calling a new Geneva conference.

There would be no elections in July, and no new Geneva conference in the near future. To remind people of the conference was good tactics, but not the purpose of the fight.¹⁹⁰

According to both Moscow and Beijing the struggle for preserving peace and reuniting the country was the just fight of the Vietnamese. The main task was to mobilize the whole people to struggle for a full implementation of the agreement. The fact that the elections had not been held should not be left unnoticed by people of the world. It should be emphasized in diplomatic documents. The Soviet and Chinese ambassadors then gave advice on the order in which to send the letters: one now, and the other after the date scheduled for elections. They also underlined that none of them should express any form of defeatism or pessimism, as that would undermine the basis task as it was seen from the Vietnamese side; that is, emphasis on mobilizing the broader masses of the people.¹⁹¹

Ho Chi Minh's and other Lao Dong leaders' opinion must be seen in connection with the 8 May messages from the Geneva co-chairmen emphasizing the need to preserve peace in Indochina.¹⁹² Nothing was said about the general elections scheduled to take place about two months later. At this stage Ho could not have been pleased with the behaviour of his communist allies. Moscow's lack of interest in the election issue implied their satisfaction with the then situation in Vietnam. By June the decision from April to support the new Soviet line, and to keep to the political struggle had already been modified. Sometime in late June 1956 a resolution was passed in which the Politburo decided that even though the struggle was mainly political it did not exclude the use of force in limited situations to secure the task of self-defense. In the resolution it was also underlined that it was necessary to strengthen the military and half-military units and create strong bases for them. At the same time it would also be necessary to strengthen the influence among the people which was the basic condition for the preservation and development of armed force.¹⁹³

A change in the Vietnamese communists' policy towards reunification came in the fall of 1956. A list of Lao Dong Politburo members from September 1956 refer to "the comrades working in the South".¹⁹⁴ Neither

Le Duan or Pham Hung were included in the list as members of the Politburo, whereas in December that year both of them were listed as Politburo members, and Le Duan singled out as working in the South.¹⁹⁵ Together with Le Duc Tho, Le Duan and Pham Hung was to become the leading advocate of an intensified struggle in the South.¹⁹⁶

The ascendancy of Le Duan and Pham Hung in the leadership coincides with a shift in policies towards the South. Sometime between the Lao Dong's 10th and 11th Plenums held respectively in September and December 1956, Le Duan presented another suggestion for policy revision in the document entitled *The Path of Revolution in the South (Duong Loi Cach Mang Mien Nam)*. The policy guidance incorporated in the document was aimed both at solving the Lao Dong leader's problems with the failure of their policy of reunification, and at the problems arising from the conduct of land reform in the North.¹⁹⁷

In December 1956 the Nam Bo Regional Committee met to discuss, among other issues, Le Duan's proposals in *The Path*. Considering the needs of the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam the meeting concluded that it to a certain extent was necessary to allow "military activities" to complement the political struggle. However, removing the restriction on the use of force did not imply that encouragement was given to its immediate employment. It rather suggested that force would be used at a future time, but not until circumstances were ripe. One small exception was made, and a secret document allowing a policy of limited violence known as "killing tyrants" was authorised for high level party members only. This was to prevent confusion among lower level cadres who were instructed to continue to build a mass-organisation as described in chapter two of this study.¹⁹⁸ Hence, with this approval of tactical violence the Vietnamese communists were embarking on a new strategy. The failure of the policy of reunification, the lack of support from their Communist allies, and finally the increase in Politburo members in favour of a policy review were important reasons behind this change.

Moscow's attitude to these changes is difficult to trace. References to changes within the party leadership indicate that the Soviets possessed

information on developments in Vietnam, but they do not say whether or not they regarded the situation as complicated. One way or the other the changes in Hanoi would influence the relationship. The Lao Dong leaders knew that their new line of policy was unlikely to be accepted by the Soviet party, thus they preferred to make their own decisions rather than consulting Moscow.

Only one area of the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship seems to have remained unchanged through 1956, the issue of economic and military assistance and Sino-Soviet cooperation in that regard.

The triangle - Hanoi, Moscow, Beijing

It has earlier been assumed that Hanoi's loyalty shifted between Moscow and Beijing depending on what best suited Hanoi's interest at the time. In general terms Hanoi has been said to look to Beijing for guidance, and to Moscow for material assistance. Hanoi has also been accused of exploiting Sino-Soviet differences for its own purposes.¹⁹⁹

Soviet archival sources provide a different picture. Moscow repeatedly emphasized the need for Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam. The situation in 1956 was no different from that of the preceding years. Moscow was willing to assist the Vietnamese but only in coordination with the Chinese. The failure to hold elections did not reduce Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam. Moscow and Beijing were still inclined to continue to cooperate in Vietnam, and in a comment on Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam Chinese ambassador to Hanoi Luo Guibo underlined that "the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China should continue to assist their Vietnamese friends in deciding important questions."²⁰⁰

However, the Soviet Union not only wanted to cooperate with China in Vietnam, Moscow also wanted China to play the leading role, especially in matters of a more practical character. In a conversation with the Charge d'affaires at the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi Li Zhimin, Soviet ambassador Zimyanin expressed that "what concerns aid and advice to the Vietnamese friends in deciding important questions in their foreign and domestic

policies...the Peoples Republic of China plays a leading role in organizing such assistance to the Vietnamese friends."²⁰¹ The Soviet Union and China might have had their differences over how to deal with the situation in Vietnam, but the two agreed that cooperation would be the best way to solve Vietnam's problems and restore its economy.

The Soviet Union's position as provider of material assistance was a vital part of the Soviet-DRV relationship. Soviet assistance started in the fall of 1954, and was formalized in the summer of 1955. Although the DRV was a fellow socialist state we have seen how Soviet aid was kept on a rather low level in 1954 and 1955. In 1956 the last tranche of Soviet economic assistance provided during and after the official DRV visit to the Soviet Union in July 1955 had already been spent, and in March 1956 the North Vietnamese asked for additional assistance. Hanoi underlined that it needed both military equipment to rearm the PAVN, and general economic assistance.²⁰² As for economic assistance the Vietnamese cleverly remarked that they knew how important the Soviets considered reconstruction of the North to be in the reunification process.²⁰³

The Soviets were however not unreservedly positive to the new pleas for assistance from Hanoi. The Soviet ambassador underlined that Moscow was willing to assist the Vietnamese in their perspectives for the economic development of the DRV, but one also had to take into consideration that Soviet opportunities were limited. As opposed to the Chinese specialists with long experience in Vietnam, Soviet specialists still did not possess enough knowledge about the conditions and opportunities in Vietnam.²⁰⁴ For the Soviets to refer the North Vietnamese to the Chinese was a bit peculiar at this time. The Chinese were, as we have seen in the previous chapter, in the process of withdrawing their specialists from the DRV, a fact the Soviet ambassador was fully aware of. If Hanoi were to pressure the Chinese into staying longer, it could possibly relieve the burden of the Soviet Union in Vietnam.

In Hanoi Soviet and Chinese officials had frequent meetings during the fall of 1956, and one of the main topics of these meetings was the degree and form of Sino-Soviet economic assistance to the DRV. In March 1956

Hanoi requested additional Soviet assistance of 40 million roubles, but the matter was not settled until November that year. The DRV wanted support for their Three Year Plan, covering the years from 1958 to 1960, but the Chinese and the Soviets agreed that until the plan had been finalized it would be premature to make decisions regarding credits. In November the final decision was made when Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko recommended that a credit of 30 million roubles should be given to the Vietnamese.²⁰⁵

Before the issue of assistance was settled, another little matter had to be straightened out between the Soviets and the Lao Dong leaders. In September 1956 ambassador Zimyanin asked Ho Chi Minh to explain the announcement made by DRV ambassador to the Soviet Union Nguyen Long Bang that the DRV would use parts of the requested Soviet assistance to buy equipment for the army. This was not mentioned either in Pham Van Dong's letter to the Soviet government or in conversations between the ambassador and Dong.²⁰⁶ Moscow seemed surprised that Hanoi had decided to spend the credit differently from their initial plan. The DRV decision did however not have a negative effect on further Soviet plans to assist Hanoi, and on September 13, 1956, the first agreement between the Soviet Union and the DRV on the reimbursement of expenses for housing and training in military institutions in the Soviet Union for servicemen in the PAVN was signed.²⁰⁷

Conclusions: growing differences

1956 was an important year in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship because the events of that year illustrate the distance between Moscow's and Hanoi's aims with regard to Vietnam. The Soviet Union was willing to sacrifice the Vietnamese general elections in order to strengthen its relations with the West. In 1956 the Vietnamese Communists had to face the fact that their big Communist ally was not as ready to support their cause as they had hoped. In contrast to the preceding year when Moscow was backing parts of the Lao Dong strategy, 1956 was the year when the two

states started to drift apart.

We have still not reached a full understanding of the effects of the Twentieth Congress either on the domestic Soviet situation or on international communism. In most communist states a certain cult had developed around the leader which made the revelations at the congress difficult to digest. The Vietnamese communists seem to have been very frank with regard to developments within their own party, and soon condemned the cult that had developed around Ho. But as opposed to the Soviet Union where previous leaders were blamed for the excesses, the Vietnamese went as far as to condemn those still in power.

The actual effects of the Twentieth Congress upon developments in Vietnam are difficult to assess. It is, nevertheless, possible to trace some effects of it in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. The introduction of the new line in Soviet foreign policy from 1956 was one factor leading to the Soviet decision not to insist on the implementation of the political provisions of the Geneva agreement. With regard to land reform and the rectification of errors campaign comments from Lao Dong leaders indicate that Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism did, to some degree, inspire the Vietnamese communists to reexamine some of their practices.

Nevertheless, in 1956 the interests of Soviet leaders and Vietnamese communist with regard to the future development in Vietnam diverged. Moscow was satisfied with a divided Vietnam, and would not assist the Lao Dong if such assistance could hamper the improvement of Soviet-American relations. Hanoi, on the other hand, still considered reunification as its main goal, and was slowly realizing that to achieve a unified Vietnam within the near future, Moscow would not be the place to seek support.

In 1956 the Vietnamese communists were promoting a political struggle as the best solution to achieve reunification. However, there were individuals within the party leadership, and also in South Vietnam, who were steadily losing faith in the political struggle and turned increasingly to a strategy in which limited military action complemented the political struggle. To those within the party in favor of a new strategy the Soviet bid for peaceful co-existence was a problem. In spite of the the new line in politics

outlined at the Twentieth Congress, and the Lao Dong statement fully endorsing it, Hanoi continued to discuss alternative routes towards reunification. The changes in the Lao Dong leadership had two effects: First it downgraded or removed those who had been in charge of land reform, with Truong Chinh as the most prominent example. Second, after the changes the Politburo would from late 1956 consist of more high ranking members likely to support a new strategy towards the South.

The one area in Soviet-Vietnamese relations which remained the same through 1956 was the economic and military relations between the two. The Soviets were still inclined to leave most of the practical assistance to the Chinese, and kept on insisting on the need for Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam. This tight cooperation which can be seen through the latter part of the 1950s was not without problems, but the overall picture shows that Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam was largely successful. This refutes the picture of Hanoi shifting between Moscow and Beijing depending on what best suited Hanoi at the time. The DRV had more to gain from cooperation between the two Communist powers. We shall see later that at times the Lao Dong leaders were clearly tempted to play the two powers off against each other in order to get more out of each. However, in the 1950s this practice did not escalate to a scale that would justify a picture of Hanoi exploiting differences between the two.

Chapter 4 - A two-state solution? (January 1957 to December 1958)

The Twentieth Congress and the new line in Soviet foreign policy created difficulties for the leaders in Hanoi. Elements within the Lao Dong, and groups within the population in both North and South Vietnam were becoming increasingly ready to pursue a policy based on limited military action to complement the political struggle. By the end of 1958 the Lao Dong Politburo had reached a consensus on the reunification question, and in January 1959 the decision to change the strategy for reunification was made.

This chapter will first discuss the Soviet proposal to admit both Vietnams into the United Nations as separate members, and the effects the proposal had on Soviet-Vietnamese relations. Secondly, it will show the North Vietnamese effort to revitalize the Geneva agreements and establish relations with the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Thirdly, I will discuss the degree of economic and military assistance from the socialist camp to the DRV, and Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam. And, finally, I shall discuss the background for the Lao Dong decision to launch a new strategy and attempt to define the degree of Soviet influence on Hanoi's planning.

The Soviet Union and the UN proposal

The first real test of the sincerity in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship after the failure to obtain elections in July 1956 came in January of the following year. On January 23, 1957, the United States proposed the acceptance of both South Vietnam and South Korea as independent members of the United Nations. The American suggestion immediately provoked a Soviet counterproposal on January 24, to admit North Vietnam and North Korea as well.

The Soviet proposal led to a quick North Vietnamese protest sent to all the members of the United Nations Security Council. This protest was signed by DRV Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong, and contained references to the Final Declaration of the Geneva Accords and its § 6: "the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."²⁰⁸ Thus, according to Pham Van Dong, South Vietnam could not be seen as a separate state, and could also not become an independent member of the United Nations. He also sought support in the declaration of the Bandung Conference of April 1955 where it was stated that "Vietnam could only become a member of the United Nations as a reunited Vietnam", meaning that none of the two parts of Vietnam could become a member of the United Nations as long as the country remained divided into two zones. Pham Van Dong's protest was dated January 25, the day after the Soviets forwarded their counterproposal.²⁰⁹ The protest was directed against the U.S. proposal, but also completely contradicted the Soviet counterproposal. With their counterproposal the Soviet Union was by many, among them Ngo Dinh Diem, seen as accepting a two-state solution for Vietnam.

There is no trace in available Soviet archival documents of any discussion on the topic between the Soviets and the Vietnamese prior to the announcement of the counterproposal. The prevailing understanding in the literature is that the Soviet counterproposal was a big surprise for the Hanoi leadership.²¹⁰ My reading of the Soviet documents confirms this. It is difficult to determine on the basis of available materials whether the American proposal was a surprise to the Soviet leaders. In an extract of a directive from the CC CPSU to the Soviet delegation at the Second Session of the UN General Assembly in late January 1957 the Soviet policy was outlined as follows: "The Soviet Union shall not take the initiative in posing the question of adopting as members of the United Nations the DRV and DPRK."²¹¹ However, in its second subsection the extract contained orders on how to proceed if a formal proposal of accepting only South Korea and South Vietnam was put forward. In that case "the delegation should come forward with a proposal of simultaneous admittance as United Nation

members North Korea, North Vietnam, South Korea and South Vietnam."²¹² The Soviets asserted that an acceptance of the two Korean as well as the two Vietnamese states as members of the United Nations would contribute to their reunification, while the acceptance of only one of the parties as a UN member would be an obstacle on their road to reunification. It was also underlined that if the question of admitting South Korea and South Vietnam was raised without any connection to the simultaneous admittance of North Korea and North Vietnam, the delegation should object, and vote against it in the Security Council, i.e. use their veto.²¹³

What was the background for the Soviet proposal? Historian Marilyn Young claims that Khrushchev made the proposal because he was anxious to strengthen détente, but also because of the difference in political and economic structure between the two states in Vietnam and the fact that they existed separately.²¹⁴ In the United Nations the Soviet representative argued that to admit only South Korea and South Vietnam would create the false impression that the whole of Vietnam and Korea were fully represented in the United Nations. To admit one state and not the other would discriminate the state left out and tend to aggravate, and perpetuate the division of the two peoples concerned.²¹⁵ Soviet attitudes in 1957 indicate that Moscow saw Vietnam as consisting of two independent states, although that was not an argument they used when explaining their action to their Vietnamese friends. However, time would show that the Soviet leaders thought increasingly of Vietnam as a permanently divided country.

Effects of the UN proposal

The Soviet counterproposal put the relationship to the test because it could be interpreted as an indirect recognition of the RVN. It was followed by accusations in the French and South Vietnamese press that there were inconsistencies between Hanoi's and Moscow's declarations regarding this question. These allegations were strongly denied by the Soviet ambassador to Hanoi in a conversation with his Chinese colleague. He underlined that "there were no inconsistencies", and that "the Soviet Union steadfastly

defended the fundamental interests of the DRV".²¹⁶

But of course there was an "inconsistency" which was taken seriously indeed both by the Chinese, and the Vietnamese themselves. In September 1957 the Chinese chargé d'affaires in Hanoi could inform the Soviet ambassador that some of the "Vietnamese friends" had expressed to the Chinese their disagreement with the Soviet proposal to admit the two states in Vietnam as independent members of the UN. He also said that he thought the Vietnamese friends were too concerned with details regarding any steps from the socialist camp that could be interpreted as an indirect recognition of South Vietnam.²¹⁷

From a domestic Vietnamese point of view it was the propaganda effect of the Soviet proposal that worried the North Vietnamese leaders. It would be necessary for the leaders to come up with a good explanation of the positions of both the Soviet Union and the DRV to refute the claims of "contradictions" in their positions.²¹⁸ If there were no such contradictions why was this seen as a problem? The denial of inconsistencies from the Soviet side rather indicate that in this specific question there were indeed serious contradictions between the two states. The Vietnamese were most probably offended by the fact that the Soviet Union had put forward their proposal without consulting Hanoi. To explain this to DRV Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem Soviet ambassador Zimyanin underlined that the position taken by the Soviet representatives in the UN defended the fundamental interests of the DRV and that there were no contradictions in the positions of the Soviet Union and the DRV. In their propaganda the Vietnamese friends aimed at achieving a reunification of the country on a democratic foundation. The Soviet position did not contradict such an objective. However it had to be taken into consideration that "the fight for a reunified Vietnam unquestionably would be long, and that there was no need to hold an illusion that the reunification may occur from one day to the next."²¹⁹ In other words, the Soviets underlined to the Vietnamese that the reunification would take time, and that what they had done in the UN question would have no negative influence on the question of an eventual reunification.

On January 30, 1957 the General Assembly's Special Political Committee approved a U.S.-backed resolution recommending that the Security Council reconsider the membership applications of the Republic of Korea and of Vietnam. The Committee also rejected the Soviet resolution to consider both Vietnams and Koreas as members. On February 28 the General Assembly carried the matter further when it voted 40 to 8 to recommend to the Security Council that the Republic of Vietnam and of Korea be admitted into membership.²²⁰

In conversations between Soviet and DRV officials in January Moscow had a hard time defending its stand in the UN question. The Soviets had to explain their behavior to several senior officials in Hanoi as well as to Chinese diplomatic representatives. In addition to explaining the situation to Chinese ambassador Luo Guibo and DRV Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem, Zimyanin also had to explain Soviet behavior to Ho Chi Minh. Once again he argued that the Soviet Union was defending the fundamental interests of the DRV, and that the Soviet position in the UN in no way contradicted the Geneva agreement and the Vietnamese people's fight for a peaceful reunification of the country. When explaining the Soviet position to Ho Chi Minh, ambassador Zimyanin described it as being "guided by principle while at the same time flexible."²²¹ The flexibility was explained by emphasizing that if the Soviet Union had been forced to veto the proposal to admit South Vietnam into the United Nations, the United States would have been forced to do the same with regard to North Vietnam. These facts should, according to ambassador Zimyanin, be thoroughly presented in DRV propaganda to show that there were no contradictions in the positions of the Soviet Union and the DRV.²²²

It has been argued that the Soviet Union withdrew the proposal after pressure from Hanoi.²²³ Due to the lack of documents reflecting internal Soviet discussions, it is hard to determine how the Soviets themselves evaluated the pressure from the Vietnamese side. The obvious North Vietnamese displeasure with the proposal can be part of the reason why it was withdrawn. Neither were the Chinese unreservedly positive to Moscow's position on this question. However, as long as the Soviet Union

remained a permanent member of the Security Council, it had the power to reject all proposals for admitting South Vietnam to the UN. Moscow continued to oppose South Vietnam's application for membership, and the Council was unable to recommend its admission.²²⁴

To the Vietnamese Communists the Soviet behaviour in 1957 was only another of those incidents that made them aware that Moscow could not be trusted to preserve the interests of the Vietnamese. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, did not see any reason why they should have consulted the Vietnamese in 1957. Its behaviour in alliances was generally rather self-centred, assuming that what was in the interest of the Soviet Union was also in the interest of its allies.²²⁵

The UN proposal also led to a renewed interest in the Geneva agreement. From Hanoi's point of view the UN proposal and the fulfilment of the Geneva agreement were closely linked. Did Soviet behavior in the United Nations imply that Moscow no longer had any interest in implementing the Geneva agreement? With their proposal that both Vietnams should be admitted into the UN as independent members the Soviet leaders indirectly said what the Vietnamese feared the most, namely that they had accepted the idea of two separate states in Vietnam. The events of January underlined to the Vietnamese that for the moment they were further away than ever from their goal of a united Vietnam under Communist leadership.

In early 1957 neither Hanoi or Moscow had completely abandoned the idea of a full implementation of the Geneva agreement - the holding of all-Vietnamese elections. From the Soviet point of view the implementation should be done in coordination with China. In response to Hanoi's insistence that one had to think of further steps to obtain fulfillment of the agreement, ambassador Zimyanin told the North Vietnamese that Moscow would have to discuss this question with the Chinese.²²⁶ The Soviet attitude show that in regard to Sino-Soviet cooperation the pattern from 1954-1956 continued. Despite signs of growing differences between Moscow and Beijing they agreed on the necessity to cooperate in Vietnam.

Moscow was positive to the DRV's chances for a fulfilment of the agreement. In March 1957 the Soviet ambassador stressed to Pham Van

Dong that the political position of the DRV was significantly stronger than the position of South Vietnam, and it was also likely that a weakening of the struggle for reunification within the Geneva framework would be beneficial to the United States (and its position in South Vietnam). According to the Soviets the strong position of the DRV and the danger that abandoning the Geneva agreement would benefit the U.S. were two good reasons for continuing the fight for implementation of the agreement. As a part of this Moscow continued to encourage the DRV leaders to call for a second Geneva meeting, an idea that has been discussed in earlier chapters. However, the Soviets were not only positive to such a meeting. Their opinion was that a second meeting could come to conclusions less beneficial than the ones from the Geneva agreement in 1954 and therefore could have unfavorable consequences. Still, on the other side, it should be possible during this meeting to expose the aggressive policies of the United States and its agents in Indochina.²²⁷

The Soviet ambassador also mentioned the need to preserve and support the work of the ICC, and stressed that the ICC should be used to unmask American intrigues in South Vietnam. Although the principal task of the ICC was not to fight the United States and their interference in the affairs of South Vietnam the Soviets emphasised that "to fight for peace in Indochina at present, and for the reunification of Vietnam, it is necessary to concentrate all forces on driving back American interference. The principal policy - is political struggle against the aggressive policies of American imperialism."²²⁸

Both Moscow and Beijing encouraged Hanoi to target their propaganda and their political anger against the United States while at the same time they should use all efforts to establish relations between North and South Vietnam.²²⁹ In 1957, as in earlier years, the Vietnamese were advised by the Soviet officials to direct their propaganda against the U.S. while simultaneously trying to establish well-working relations with Saigon. The idea of establishing relations between the two zones did not, however, come exclusively from the Soviet side, as the North Vietnamese themselves also knew the importance of keeping the door between the two states open.

The years 1957 and 1958 saw an increase in diplomatic exchanges between the DRV and the Soviet Union with the most significant increase in travel on the DRV side. Not only did the North Vietnamese leaders pay long visits to their largest allies, the Soviet Union and China, they also turned their attention to the East European countries and friendly countries in Asia. These visits may indicate that the North Vietnamese were working hard to gain more friends and allies within the Socialist camp, something that would make them more independent of the two major economic and military contributors, namely the Soviet Union and China.

The exchange of visits started with President of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, K. Y. Voroshilov's trip to Hanoi from 20 to 23 May 1957, followed by Ho Chi Minh's visit to the Soviet Union in July. Before Ho's visit Soviet ambassador Zimyanin urged the North Vietnamese to carefully plan questions related to material aid from the Socialist countries to the DRV.²³⁰ During this period Ho Chi Minh also went on a tour of Korea, China, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (July - August 1957), to Moscow for the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution (October - November (December) 1957) and to India and Burma (February 1958).²³¹ The main aim of these trips was to secure economic support for the DRV and also for the reunification of the country.²³²

These visits bring us to the issue of economic and military support from the socialist camp to the DRV. There were three main themes connected to support in 1957-58. The Three Year Plan (practical assistance in developing it, as well as money), the DRV's use of foreign specialists, and a reduction in the PAVN. All of these were connected to Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam.

Sino-Soviet cooperation

Exact numbers for Soviet and Chinese specialists employed in the DRV in the period from 1954 to 1961 have been difficult to establish. The Chinese specialists, however, seem to have outnumbered the Soviets. The pattern traced in earlier chapters with the Soviet Union leaving much of the practi-

cal responsibility for assisting the DRV with China continued in 1957-58. In the later years one reason may have been that the Chinese specialists were more easily integrated into North Vietnamese society than the Soviet specialists. Complaints over problems in the interaction between Soviet specialists and Vietnamese citizens support such suppositions. Difficulties of that kind also led to a Soviet wish to reduce the number of Soviet specialists in Vietnam.²³³

The DRV's two major aid providers were sceptical both of the DRV's extensive use of foreign specialists and to the DRV's dependence on aid from fraternal countries. In January 1957 the Soviet Union and China jointly criticised the DRV for relying on fraternal countries to help them raise over 50 percent of the budget.²³⁴ According to the Vietnamese Chinese Premier Chou Enlai was sceptical about using foreign specialists in Vietnam as he feared that the more specialists were involved, the more mistakes would be made.²³⁵ The Chinese reason for not wanting to send more specialists to the DRV could be the strong Vietnamese criticism of the Chinese following the land reform campaign. In late 1956, as a part of the rectification of errors campaign, Lao Dong leaders claimed that part of the mistake was that the Vietnamese had so strictly and uncritically followed the Chinese example when conducting their own land reform.

The Chinese also feared that sending more foreign specialists to the DRV could reduce the initiative among the Vietnamese. Vietnam should first of all rely on its own resources. This opinion could also be related to the question of Soviet assistance. According to Pham Van Dong, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had little faith in Soviet assistance to the DRV. In the spring of 1957 he underlined that the Vietnamese had to decide for themselves whether they should ask Moscow for assistance or not but that they had to bear in mind that the USSR had "many obligations".²³⁶ The North Vietnamese depended on the assistance of both the Soviet Union and China. Pham Van Dong's ulterior motive in revealing the Chinese attitude to the Soviets could have been to push Moscow into proving the Chinese wrong, by showing that the Soviet Union did care about the situation in Vietnam and would give aid to the Vietnamese.

During 1957 and 1958 Moscow seems to have been the force behind Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam, as well as the major promoter of socialist aid to the country. Beijing seemed at times more reluctant to give assistance. Although they both provided assistance to the DRV, Moscow's and Beijing's roles with regard to Vietnam differed. Moscow was the main provider of economic assistance, whereas Beijing took on most of the practical responsibility in the area. The main reason behind this Sino-Soviet division of labour was China's proximity to Vietnam, and its long experience in the country.

An essential part of Soviet advice to Hanoi was the need to elaborate detailed plans for the economic development of the country. In his conversations with the DRV leadership ambassador Zimyanin emphasised the need for careful planning in Vietnamese requests for economic assistance. Before Ho Chi Minh's 1957 visit to the Soviet Union the ambassador urged the North Vietnamese to have fully elaborated plans for material aid from the Socialist countries to the DRV.²³⁷ The fact that the Vietnamese had intended to use much more of the Soviet aid than announced for military purposes in 1956 meant that this time the fraternal countries wanted to see explicit plans for the use of the aid in order to avoid similar diversification.

By 1958 the trend within the Vietnamese armed forces was to reduce rather than enlarge the army. In February 1958 Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap could inform the new Soviet ambassador Leonid Ivanovich Sokolov that the Vietnamese military leaders had decided to reduce the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) to 160 000 troops before 1960. The ambassador responded by suggesting that the demobilized forces should be used in the national economy.²³⁸ During the years 1957-1959 PAVN underwent a process of technological modernisation, and at the same time party political controls over the military were instituted at all levels. As a result of decisions taken by the Party's 12th Plenum in March 1957, military units were assigned tasks in the civilian economy, and in 1958 the Army's involvement in this sector was increased as units assumed responsibility for running state farms.²³⁹ The consequence of détente was that it would be necessary to rely more on Vietnamese resources.

Despite the difficulties discussed above, the question of halting the socialist camp's aid to the DRV was not an issue. It was clear to the Soviet leaders as well as to the Chinese that the DRV would need continued assistance in order to reconstruct its economy, strengthen its political position, and finally secure the planned transformation into a socialist state. Such was also the advice sent by the Soviet embassy in the DRV to MID in mid-May 1958. Assistance would be given from the socialist camp.²⁴⁰

The Lao Dong debates its policy on reunification

In the fall of 1957 the Chinese revealed some scepticism concerning Soviet policies in Vietnam. In September PRC chargé d'affaires in Hanoi, Li Zhiminh, said in a conversation with Soviet ambassador Zimyanin that there seemed to be differences of opinion between the representatives of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee and the Vietnamese communists in regard to Vietnamese reunification. The Soviet ambassador rejected these allegations and said that the Soviet Union supported the political line for reunifying Vietnam within the framework of the Geneva agreement. He underlined that for the future the tactic of the struggle had to be carefully thought out, and one also had to be prepared to change it at any given stage if necessary. The fact that two different states existed in Vietnam at present had to be taken into consideration, as well as the likelihood that Vietnam would continue to be divided for a rather long time. What complicated the situation was, according to Zimyanin, that some Vietnamese friends sometimes did not understand this. To illustrate the situation the Soviet ambassador pointed to "independent Vietnamese friends, working in South Vietnam, who believed it was necessary organize separate attacks against the Diem regime as a means of inspiring the masses to fight. This manifested an oversimplified, un-marxist approach to the situation and to the question of armed insurrection."²⁴¹ These independent Vietnamese comrades were, according to Zimyanin, still not willing to bear in mind that the principal target in this political fight was the United States and that the best solution would be to stop criticizing Diem and to

start considering how to establish contact between North and South.²⁴²

In the course of 1957 officials at the Soviet embassy became gradually more aware of the growing Vietnamese impatience with the situation. Combined with the Soviet Union's apparent readiness to accept the idea of the existence of two separate states in Vietnam, this was likely to create a degree of tension in the relationship. From 1954 until the summer of 1956 the primary goal of the communist states had been a solution to the Vietnamese problem within the Geneva framework. The failure of South Vietnam to live up to its obligations as stated in the provisions of the Geneva agreement, and the lack of will on the Soviet side to insist on implementation, caused this strategy to lose much of its meaning. To some extent the situation in Vietnam was left in a vacuum when seen in the context of international politics.

In late 1956 members of the Lao Dong complained about the absence of a general line of policy and a lack of ideological unity. The Party had obviously faced the problem when, in June 1957, Politburo member Truong Chinh could inform Zimyanin that the Party saw it as one of its most urgent tasks to work out a general line in politics. It was especially important in the period of transition towards a socialist state, and in finding a direction for unification of the country. The basis for this general line would be to secure common views, and strengthen unity within the Party with special emphasis on ideology and politics. Truong Chinh referred to Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Congress, a speech that had been carefully studied within the Lao Dong, and had made them understand the importance of criticism, particularly from below. The speech also had grave consequences for the structure of the party leadership in the Lao Dong and the principle of collective leadership.²⁴³

During 1957-58 the Vietnamese gave numerous indications to Soviet officials in Hanoi of their intentions to change their reunification strategy. With some exceptions most of these indications were made very discreetly. In relation to the forthcoming Third Congress of the Lao Dong, held in the fall of 1960, Nguyen Duy Trinh, could reveal that since the historical conditions in Vietnam had changed, it was possible that during the con-

gress changes would be made in the program and statutes of the Party. Due to the present situation the Party was elaborating separate strategies for the Northern and Southern parts of the country. Such an approach had been chosen because the party leaders felt that the difference between the situation in the two parts was so important that separate tactics had to be worked out. At present the most important task was to develop the revolutionary line of the party in the whole of Vietnam under the new conditions.²⁴⁴

We have seen that in late 1956 a majority of the Lao Dong Politburo members were ready to allow a certain degree of violence to underpin the political struggle. However, the party leadership had not yet come to a consensus on how to proceed with this new strategy. The discussion evolving in 1957-58 would eventually lead to the decision of January 1959 which approved in principle the resumption of armed revolt in the South.

In conversations with Soviet officials the North Vietnamese leaders repeatedly underlined that the changes in the Vietnamese situation required a new strategy to achieve reunification. The Soviet reaction to the Vietnamese attitude is not all that evident. The archival documents indicate that Soviet embassy officials received enough information to see a change of attitude within the Lao Dong leadership. One example is how Hanoi informed of changes within the Politburo, which clearly indicated the ascendancy of individuals from the South or working in the South. The fact that southerners gained increasingly more power within the higher echelons of the party should have told Moscow that changes were being prepared.²⁴⁵

Although hinting on several occasions that changes in the southern strategy was underway, there is little evidence in available documents of the Vietnamese speaking to the Soviets in a direct sense of armed struggle or overthrowing the southern regime. The only such direct information can be found in a conversation between second secretary at the Soviet embassy in Hanoi G. Kadumov and official at the DRV Ministry of State Security "Thum" held on April 4, 1958.²⁴⁶ Thum informed that the DRV Ministry of State Security had concluded the discussion of two documents approved at the Moscow Conference of Communist and Workers Parties in

November 1957. In the course of the discussion a particularly animated debate unfolded over the question of Vietnamese reunification. The background for the heated debate was the high amount of regrouped southerners in the ministry, these so-called "regroupees" were regrouped Vietminh cadres who moved to the North after partition in 1954. As southerners in other ministries they had started to lose faith in the peaceful reunification of Vietnam in the near future. Some comrades declared that they did not believe in peaceful reunification, since the South Vietnamese government would never agree to such a solution. The regrouped Southerners did, however, realize that the only acceptable policy for the countries of the Socialist camp, - including the DRV, was a policy of deciding all vexed questions with peaceful means. The problem, according to Thum, was that this apparent insoluble contradiction worried some southern comrades who now believed the country would never be reunited. As a result, some comrades had come to the conclusion that it was necessary to decide whether or not to reunify the country through armed struggle, even if that meant sacrificing their lives.²⁴⁷ Thum could also inform that when some of the southern regroupees had volunteered to return to South Vietnam in order to activate underground work to overthrow Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, the response from the party leaders, particularly Le Duan, was negative. According to Le Duan the comrades in the South had their methods, and the southern regroupees in DRV were not updated on these. This refusal of their services apparently led to even more dissatisfaction among the Southern regroupees.²⁴⁸

The document presented above is impressive because of the frankness in the discussion. It is rare in the sense that such information was not often provided, and if so usually in a much vaguer tone. There seem to be two possible explanations as to why this Vietnamese official was so frank with a low-ranking embassy official. Thum may have been an informant from the DRV internal circle informing on the general mood among the regrouped and by doing so, implicitly warning the Soviets that the pressure on DRV policy-makers from the regrouped in favour of armed struggle was increasing. His information may also have been a test-case, implying

that he was a person used by the party leadership in order to find out how the Soviets felt about armed struggle to reunify Vietnam.²⁴⁹ Although Moscow continued to stress the need to follow a peaceful line in politics the lack of direct comments with regard to Vietnamese unification imply that the Soviet leaders had not yet grasped the seriousness of the ongoing debate on DRV policy toward the South.

While in Hanoi the debate of 1957-58 unfolded over future strategy towards the South, the Soviet leaders were still inclined to see a peaceful solution to the Vietnam problem. The preferred solution would be within the framework of the Geneva agreement. If that proved impossible Moscow seemed willing to settle for a two-state solution in Vietnam. In the instructions from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the new Soviet ambassador in Hanoi Leonid Ivanovich Sokolov three areas of priority were accentuated. First, Moscow emphasized the need to realize the peaceful initiative of the Soviet Union, in other words: no policy contradicting it should be allowed. Secondly, it stressed that the difficult situation due to the temporary partition of Vietnam was likely to continue for some time, and thirdly it expected the embassy officials to conduct a more thorough analysis of U.S. influence in the area. Embassy personell were instructed to send home reports on the situation in Vietnam, as well as suggestions on how to handle the situation.²⁵⁰

The Soviet instructions from 1958 indicate Moscow's changing view on the situation. In 1954 the emphasis had been on the reconstruction of the DRV in various fields, and only to a lesser extent on the international context of Vietnam's situation, and as a part of that Soviet aims in the region. After four years of experience in Vietnam, and as a result of the changing international situation the instructions of 1958 reflected to a larger degree Soviet aspirations in the region. The importance of peaceful co-existence, the growing American influence, and not least the long-lasting temporary partition of Vietnam were now integral factors in Soviet policy-planning towards Vietnam.

In 1957-58 the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated. Diem's move to further consolidate his regime led to a new wave of repression in both the

urban and rural areas. To the people of South Vietnam that meant another sequence of denunciation, encirclement of villages, searches and raids, arrests of suspects, plundering, interrogations, torture (even of innocent people), deportation, and "regrouping" of populations suspected of contacts with the rebels, and so on.²⁵¹ Ngo Dinh Diem's Anti Communist Denunciation Campaign initiated in 1956 continued and was supplemented by other campaigns aimed at opponents of the Diem regime including both communist and non-communist. The background for these campaigns was the continuing competition for rural legitimacy between Diem and the various opponents of his regime. The Republic of Vietnam had to devote a large amount of its resources to establishing and maintaining its authority in rural areas. From 1957 to 1959 Diem failed to cope successfully with problems in the rural areas, a situation the Lao Dong attempted to exploit.

American economic assistance to the Republic of Vietnam amounted to \$US 1.7 billion in the period from 1955-61. In May 1958 Saigon housed the largest U.S. aid mission in the world, and by 1961 the RVN was the third-ranking non-NATO recipient of American aid after Korea and Taiwan. The growing American influence in South Vietnamese affairs and the increased acceptance of the Republic of Vietnam on the world stage only served to convince party leaders that they had to redouble their efforts to reunify Vietnam before the southern Republic became too strong.²⁵²

Beijing's position

Recent studies focusing on the Chinese side, based on Chinese primary sources, indicate that the North Vietnamese leaders might have been more direct when asking for advice from Beijing than from Moscow. In the late 1950s the growing difference in the Soviet and Chinese attitudes toward revolutionary strategies was the underlying reason for such an approach. Chinese sources reveal that in the summer of 1958 the Vietnamese Politburo formally asked Beijing's advice about the strategy for the "Southern revolution".²⁵³ The Chinese neither hindered nor encouraged Hanoi at that stage. Beijing emphasised that Hanoi's most important task was "to pro-

mote socialist revolution and reconstruction in the North."²⁵⁴ At the current stage it would not be possible to realize a revolutionary transformation in the South, and therefore Hanoi should adopt in the South a strategy of "not exposing our own forces for a long period, build up our own strength, establishing connections with the masses, and waiting for the coming of proper opportunities."²⁵⁵ The Chinese position indicates that Beijing's leaders were not particularly enthusiastic about the Vietnamese initiative to start military struggles in South Vietnam from 1959-1960, a reluctance they shared with the Soviet Union.

The Chinese attitude may well have been rooted in the country's current situation. China was entering a difficult period both in the domestic and international sphere. Despite the Soviet emphasis on peaceful coexistence the international situation grew more tense through 1958. China was in the process of accelerating the Great Leap Forward, a radical domestic program aimed at a rapid industrialization of the country. The program was officially approved at the CCP's 8th Congress in May 1958. China's domestic radicalism soon spilled over into the foreign policy sphere. In mid-1958 it announced plans to liberate Taiwan, and on 23 August the Formosan Straits crisis was precipitated when mainland gunners opened fire on the Nationalist-held offshore islands of Jinmen and Mazu. The attack on the U.S. supported nationalists brought to the fore Sino-Soviet differences as China now adopted a more militant attitude than the Soviet Union towards the U.S.²⁵⁶

In the AVPRF there are no indications that the Lao Dong Politburo formally asked for advice with regard to the Southern strategy. If advice was sought, the natural place for such a document would be the Central Committee Archive for the post-1953 period, more precisely the International Department in charge of contacts with the international communist movement, which remains closed to scholars. It is not possible to determine whether or not such a request was forwarded. The reason for approaching China could have been the more radical Chinese attitude developing in 1957-58. Moscow was still promoting its line of peaceful coexistence, announcing that it would be difficult for the Vietnamese communists to obtain support for a more radical line towards reunification.

Conclusions: preparing for the 15th Plenum

Toward the end of 1958 the Vietnamese party leadership was unified in its decision to change the course of the struggle in South Vietnam. Between the 14th plenum held in November 1958 and the 15th plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee held from December 1958 to February 1959 Politburo member Le Duan made a trip to South Vietnam to evaluate the situation.²⁵⁷ The contents of his report are not known, but it must have concluded that the situation in South Vietnam demanded a new strategy allowing military actions to complement the political struggle. In sum, it was the growing desire for reunification both in the North and the South, combined with Le Duan's report, that prompted the Vietnamese communists into changing the strategy of reunification.

From 1957 to early 1959 the priorities of Moscow and Hanoi drifted even further apart. With the UN proposal the Soviet Union had announced its acceptance of a prolonged partition of Vietnam, and a more permanent consolidation of two states on Vietnamese soil. Despite the UN proposal Moscow had apparently not abandoned hope for a solution within the Geneva framework. The strategy the Soviets suggested to the Vietnamese was one of criticizing the American involvement while working to establish contacts with South Vietnamese authorities in all areas.

The Soviet attitude in 1957-58 shows how international priorities overshadowed the events in Vietnam. Growing Sino-Soviet differences did not interfere directly with economic and practical assistance to Vietnam. It did, however, influence Soviet foreign relations because China's foreign policies increasingly contradicted the Soviet line of peaceful coexistence. The Chinese attitude could possibly jeopardize the improving relationship between Moscow and the West. To Moscow promoting the Soviet line of peaceful coexistence had top priority in 1957-58, and if a two state solution was the most effective way to both preserve peace in Vietnam and advocate such a line of policy, the Soviet leaders were willing to postpone indefinitely a reunification of Vietnam.

Although Moscow had settled for a permanent partition of Vietnam, the

debate in Hanoi over what kind of policy to pursue to obtain reunification continued. The Lao Dong leaders had started to discuss alternatives to political struggle as early as 1956, but consensus was not reached until the end of 1958 when they made the decision to supplement the political struggle with military action. There are few signs indicating that Hanoi discussed the change of strategy with Moscow, since the Lao Dong leaders already knew the Soviet preference for a peaceful solution to the Vietnam problem. The party leadership repeatedly stressed to Soviet officials the need to revise the southern strategy and informed on measures the Party had taken in this regard. Soviet diplomats must have been aware of the ongoing debate within the Lao Dong, but whether they realized the seriousness of it is difficult to assess. The records of conversations between Soviet officials, the Party leadership, and Chinese representatives in the DRV show that the Vietnamese expressed, though not always directly, the need to make changes in the policy towards the South.

The continued Soviet emphasis on peaceful coexistence, and lack of reference to the changes in the Vietnamese Communists attitude on means of reunification, indicate that Soviet leaders refused to believe that Hanoi would embark on a new and more militant road to reunification if it stood in contrast to the general Soviet policy in the area. In the years 1957-58 one may say that it was ignorance rather than involvement which represented Soviet influence in Vietnam's decision to change the course of the struggle.

Chapter 5 - Toward a new revolution (January 1959- December 1960)

Two major political decisions were made in Hanoi during 1959 and 1960. The first, which approved in principle the resumption of armed revolt in the South, was made at the 15th Plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee held from December 1958 to February 1959, but not proclaimed officially until May that same year. The second decision, made at the Third Party Congress of the Lao Dong in September 1960, acknowledged the expansion of armed struggle in South Vietnam with the purpose to overthrow the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem.²⁵⁸ The main aim of this chapter will be to analyse the Soviet attitude to the Vietnamese decision made in 1959, and Soviet influence in Vietnam in the subsequent period, particularly with regard to the Third Lao Dong Congress in 1960.

The Fifteenth Plenum, January 1959

According to official histories published in Hanoi the 15th Plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee was an "extremely important milestone" in the struggle for Vietnamese national liberation. During the Plenum the decision was made to resort to force to achieve victory in South Vietnam. The decision was to a large degree based on Le Duan's report from his trip to the South in late 1958. The final resolution, referred to as Resolution 15, issued after the conference in May that year but not publicized until many years later, affirmed that final victory in the South could only be achieved through a protracted, difficult, and heroic struggle. It not only approved the development of armed forces, but also approved the use of violence to accompany the political struggle. Two years had gone since the party had started to implement the policies outlined in *The Path of Revolution in the South*, and in 1959 the majority of Central Committee members had come

to the conclusion that sufficient progress had been made in consolidating the North and winning the sympathy and support of the people of the world to start giving more attention to developments in the South.²⁵⁹

There is so far no evidence that the decision made in January 1959 had been thoroughly discussed with or approved by Soviet leaders in advance. Although they lacked direct information on the actual content of the plenum, officials at the Soviet embassy were, by early 1959, aware of Hanoi's wish to change its policies towards the South. The fact that no information can be found in the files of the Foreign Ministry does not preclude the possibility of data coming through other channels such as intelligence and party ties. When the Soviet ambassador and other embassy officials inquired about the plenum it could have been to find out what kind of information the Lao Dong leaders were willing to provide, as much as to obtain the actual information. A later Soviet account of the 15th plenum describes its decision as originating in the failure to secure a solution to the Vietnamese problem within the Geneva framework. As a result the plenum's decision was to "direct the underground organization in South Vietnam to strengthen the revolutionary battle in *any* form. Armed struggle was acknowledged as one such form, that in the appropriate situation could and should be applied."²⁶⁰ The report could also reveal that according to the Vietnamese two different organizations were developing in South Vietnam in the beginning of 1959; the military-political apparatus of Ngo Dinh Diem, and the South Vietnamese underground organization of the Lao Dong, numbering 30 000 active members and 150 000 sympathizers.²⁶¹

In the case of China recent studies indicate that the leaders in Beijing were not enthusiastic about the Vietnamese decision to launch a military struggle in South Vietnam, but it also seems clear that Beijing took no active steps to oppose a revolution in South Vietnam. The reason for this Chinese attitude was, according to Chinese scholar Chen Jian, a combination of the close relationship between the DRV and China in the late 1950s and early 1960s and Beijing's revolutionary ideology, which would not allow China to go so far as to become an obstacle to the Vietnamese cause of revolution and reunification.²⁶² The Soviet Union, like the Chinese,

seemed neither to approve nor disapprove of the new Vietnamese strategy, but left the planning of a strategy to the locals. This strategy was, as we have seen in previous chapters, developed over a long period of time. Many disagreements among the North Vietnamese leaders had to be solved before consensus on the future policy of reunification was reached.

Moscow, Hanoi and the means of reunification

In January 1959 while the 15th Plenum was still in session, a memorandum, most probably written by the Southeast Asia Department in MID, outlined the principal themes of Soviet policies toward Vietnam. In 1959 there was no longer any doubt among Soviet officials about the need to accept the existence of two states on Vietnamese soil. As long as South Vietnam continued to be dominated by the influence of the United States, a reunification of Vietnam on the basis of the Geneva agreement had to be considered as unreal in the present international situation. It was now necessary to wait for the ripening of the protracted revolutionary development in South Vietnam, or a change of relations between the camps on the international level. Only a changing situation in South Vietnam could weaken the American influence on the ruling circles in Saigon, and thereby create a more favorable situation which would promote the cause of the DRV.²⁶³

Moscow had a difficult task convincing Hanoi that a better relationship between North and South Vietnam would be beneficial not only to the DRV, but also to the rest of the socialist camp and suggested a change in policies towards South Vietnam. Normalization of relations between the two states was once again raised as an important theme together with the idea of establishing inter-governmental connections between the RVN and countries within the socialist camp. Such a move would counter the American influence in the South and prevent the possibility of South Vietnam being left alone with the U.S. too long, a situation that would only contribute toward harming the interests of the socialist camp strategically as well as in other ways. A change of policies might also allow the DRV to participate in

important international organizations and would make possible the simultaneous acceptance of both the DRV and South Vietnam as independent members of the United Nations. In a certain sense such a situation would also create a more acceptable basis for the South Vietnamese ruling circles for normalisation of relations between the two Vietnamese states. However, the Socialist camp would not be ready to change its policy in relation to South Vietnam until the Vietnamese friends laid the establishment of normal relations with the RVN as the foundation for their practical policy for the reunification of the country.²⁶⁴

There was, however, one factor that would obstruct Moscow's plans: the North Vietnamese insistence on the formal side of the Geneva agreements which made it impossible for countries in the socialist camp even to maintain economic and cultural relations with South Vietnam. Although the Soviets had repeatedly claimed that establishing such ties between the Socialist camp and South Vietnam would not in any way contradict the statutes of the Geneva agreement, Hanoi refused to accept the idea. The Southeast Asia Department in MID concluded in a memorandum to Deputy Foreign Minister G.M. Pushkin that "any kind of change in our policy with regard to South Vietnam depends first of all on the Vietnamese friends' position with regard to the South Vietnamese regime. The Southeast Asia Department thinks that it is necessary to take the initiative in formulating that question to the Vietnamese friends."²⁶⁵

The Twenty-first Congress of the CPSU in January 1959 outlined the following in Soviet policies with regard to Vietnam. In 1959, as in the two years preceding, the predominant Soviet view was that one should continue to work for a limitation of American influence in South Vietnam, fight to increase the DRV's international prestige, all this as a counterweight to the efforts of the South Vietnamese regime to discredit the DRV on the international arena. These measures should be prepared in coordination with both the Chinese and the Vietnamese friends.²⁶⁶ The congress did not give any formal approval to a change of strategy in South Vietnam. However, from a North Vietnamese point of view statements made by Khrushchev suggesting that "there had been a shift in the international

alignment of forces away from the capitalist toward the socialist camp²⁶⁷ indicated that an intensified assault on imperialism was now in order. Hanoi might have interpreted this as recognition of their plans for South Vietnam.

The Lao Dong's official communique with the resolutions of the plenum was presented on May 13, 1959. The communique did not specifically refer to armed struggle, but did outline a change in the course of the southern struggle. Prior to the announcement in May Soviet diplomats had repeatedly asked the Lao Dong leaders for information on the plenum resolutions. In January, during the plenum session Ho Chi Minh told Soviet ambassador Sokolov that the present situation in South Vietnam can be characterized as ripe for revolution.²⁶⁸ In March, when the embassy once again requested materials from the plenum the response was still negative. According to Nguyen Duy Trinh it was because the final resolution had not yet been edited, and the main speaker at the plenum Pham Hung had left for Indonesia with Ho Chi Minh.²⁶⁹ Barely a month before the official announcement, on April 15, records show that Le Duan informed Sokolov of the subjects of discussion at the 15th Plenum. However, Sokolov wanted more than just vague information. What he was most interested in was those decisions of the plenum directly concerned with the basic problems of the evolution of the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam and the fight for reunification of the country.²⁷⁰ Moscow never got a clear answer to that question in April. It was not until after the official communique was released on May 13 that the Soviet embassy was informed in some detail as to what the new strategy consisted of.²⁷¹

After the resolutions of the plenum had been officially released the Lao Dong leaders were more than willing to outline their future plans to Moscow. Truong Chinh could inform the Soviets that two ways of reunification had been discussed at the plenum, peaceful and not peaceful. Before they had arrived at that solution the Vietnamese had studied among other things the speech by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress with its emphasis on when the use of force was an acceptable means to achieve victory. A part of the speech which had been particularly underlined from the Vietnamese side was the idea that the proletariat should only use force

if the exploiting class was using it. After looking at the situation in Vietnam from that perspective the Vietnamese had made the decision to change the strategy for reunification.²⁷²

The reason why the resolutions of the 15th Plenum were not published until May 1959 was rooted in the internal situation of Vietnam. On May 6, 1959 Ngo Dinh Diem made yet another move to increase the scope of state terror in the Republic of Vietnam further by introducing Law 10/59. Through this law Diem was sure to embrace all his enemies, as well as all possible future enemies. Under the terms of the law "anyone charged with the crime of committing or attempting to commit acts against the security of the state would be arrested, tried by military tribunal, and executed within three days. There was no process of appeal."²⁷³ There is no evidence in available materials of the Vietnamese seeking approval from either the Soviet Union or China before going public with the results of the plenum.

To explain to the Soviet diplomats why the announcement came in May, Truong Chinh argued that the party leaders did not want the regime in the South to be fully aware of their plans, and as a result the communique contained no direct mention of armed struggle. However, an editorial printed in the party organ Nhan Dan on May 14, exposed the party's real plans, with special emphasis on achieving reunification through armed struggle, and struggle against the Diem regime. The editor of the paper, Hoang Tung, had according to Truong Chinh participated at all meetings of the plenum and the editorial had been printed without the prior approval of the Politburo. The situation was taken very seriously by the Party leadership since, as Truong Chinh formulated it

First, to formulate such a question, would not be in accordance with the general policy of the party, directed toward the reunification of the country first and foremost with peaceful means based on the Geneva agreement. Second, a too open tone in an editorial will give our enemies the opportunity to suspect that on the 15th plenum the question of preparations for an armed insurrection was seriously analysed [which also as a matter of fact did take place].²⁷⁴

The accusation against the Nhan Dan editor was a deliberate lie on behalf of Truong Chinh. Printing the discussions and results of the Plenum as an editorial was an effective way of communicating the message to the Southern regime. But more importantly Truong Chinh's revelations to the Soviet embassy official were designed to reassure the Soviets that Hanoi was not deliberately seeking to provoke either the South Vietnamese leaders or their American allies. The reasoning behind the North Vietnamese behaviour may indicate a fear within the leadership in Hanoi that Moscow would oppose the decision to launch a new strategy. By pretending to seek a solution without intentionally provoking the Southern regime, Hanoi hoped to gain Soviet acceptance of its plans.

From available material it does not seem as if the Soviets were in any way participating in the development of Hanoi's new strategy. Nor did they react in any way when the decision was made public on May 13, 1959. In December that year the first secretary at the Soviet embassy in Hanoi, Razumov, told the Deputy Head of the Polish delegation to the ICC, Cambodia, that the Soviet Union thought that the resolution of the Lao Dong's 15th Plenum underlined the importance of the socialist countries' fight for an implementation of the Geneva agreement and the reunification of Vietnam.²⁷⁵ When the Politburo in Hanoi decided to include armed struggle as part of their reunification strategy, Moscow made few efforts to halt the development, and Soviet behavior was probably interpreted as tacit approval by the leaders in Hanoi. In 1959, while the emphasis was still on political struggle, Moscow could accept the situation, but by 1960 the situation had changed. We shall see later how the Vietnamese communists' increasing emphasis on the armed struggle soon surpassed the level of violence acceptable to the Soviet Union.

Unrest in Laos

While the leaders in Hanoi were discussing the new southern strategy, the Soviet Union became increasingly involved in the affairs of its neighbour Laos. The situation in Laos deteriorated rapidly in the late 1950s. The United

States had been deeply involved in Laotian politics since 1954. Washington's main aim was to strengthen the Royal Laotian Government and Army and defeat the Pathet Lao, a guerrilla force led by Communists which had been established with the help of the Vietminh during the First Indochina War and remained closely linked to the DRV. The Americans worked hard to keep a U.S. backed government led by Phoui Sananikone, a government opposed to cooperation with the Pathet Lao, in charge, but their efforts proved insufficient. After the military seized power from the U.S. backed government in a coup d'état in August 1960, Souvanna Phouma could return to office. This marked the beginning of the civil war in Laos.²⁷⁶

The interest in Laotian affairs on the part of the DRV, as well as Moscow and Beijing started long before the events in the fall of 1960. Since the Geneva agreement was signed in July 1954 Moscow had carefully followed the internal development in Laos focusing on the position of the Pathet Lao.²⁷⁷ During the turbulent period starting with the government crisis in January to May 1957, the situation in Laos rapidly deteriorated.²⁷⁸ In February 1959 Ung Van Khiem could inform the Soviet ambassador that Beijing had urged Hanoi to take measures to assist the Laotians in the current situation. The Chinese were ready to provide the Pathet Lao with the necessary support, and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) underlined once again that "the Laotian friends ought to continue their legal struggle in combination with illegal activities..." and that it is necessary to be prepared in order "not to be taken unawares in case of a reaction, and be able to give a resolute response, if necessary, with arms."²⁷⁹

As a neighbouring country bordering on both North and South Vietnam Laos was of tremendous strategical importance to the Vietnamese communists. By 1959 there had already been lengthy discussions within the Lao Dong on whether to assist the Pathet Lao or not, and if they were to assist, what form the assistance should take. After a discussion of the Chinese points of view the majority of the Lao Dong Politburo did in principle agree with the Chinese.²⁸⁰ But despite the consensus between the Vietnamese and the Chinese on how to handle the situation in Laos, the situation seems to

have changed during 1959. In conversations with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, G.M. Pushkin in January 1960 Ung Van Khiem could inform that "the Vietnamese, after consulting the Soviet and Chinese comrades, had concluded that assistance to the Laotian friends should have the character of political support in an international scheme, since providing any other kind of assistance would not be in the interest of the common good and could lead to dangerous international consequences."²⁸¹ The Soviet Union agreed with that position.²⁸²

The course of events described above show that sometime between February/March 1959 and January 1960 the leaders in Hanoi changed their official views on how to handle the situation in Laos. The decision was apparently taken after advice from both the Soviet Union and China. In the spring of 1959, when presented with first the Chinese, and later the Vietnamese position, the Soviet Union did not express any disapproval. Almost one year later in January 1960, Beijing had changed its point of view and agreed with Moscow that solving the situation legally would prove to be the best way to achieve a peaceful situation in Laos. China's domestic situation must also have been part of the reason why Chinese leaders gave in on their initial plans to support a more militant struggle in Laos. During 1959 and 1960 the Chinese were fully occupied with the continuation of the Great Leap Forward Campaign which could possibly have drawn attention from their involvement other places.

Although the Lao Dong leaders' official stance was to support the Soviet and Chinese point of view in the matter of Laos, there are indications that they in fact gained more if the situation in Laos continued to deteriorate. In the late 1950s the Vietnamese communists used a route through its neighbouring country to ship supplies and manpower from the North to the South - the Ho Chi Minh trail. With a stabilized situation in Laos it would be more difficult for the Vietnamese to defend the use of the trail, and accordingly disturbances in Laos were to the benefit of the Vietnamese.²⁸³

How did Moscow's policies fit into the Laotian picture? From 1959 until the spring of 1960 Soviet policies in Laos coincided with the policy

towards Vietnam - Moscow did not wish to see an escalation of the struggle. In the fall of 1960 the situation changed when Souvanna Phouma regained his position and started to negotiate with the Pathet Lao, despite the American effort to dissuade him. He was soon attacked by troops led by the government ousted in August, and subsequently he started receiving military material from the Soviet Union and DRV.²⁸⁴ The Soviet attitude toward events in Laos may also have been an important factor in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. The lack of immediate response to strategy plans for Laos could have been interpreted in Hanoi as a silent approval. That, combined with the turn-around and military assistance from the the fall of 1960, could have led the Vietnamese communists to believe that their new strategy would eventually be approved by Moscow.

More unrest in the South

Through 1959 and 1960 the party gradually managed to rebuild its strength in South Vietnam, and there was a sharp increase in the number of guerrilla attacks in that part of the country. From May 1959 the Vietnamese communists started to infiltrate southern regroupees back to the South. These preparations were first made by two different groups. One was in charge of the inland area, the 559th transportation group, directly under the command of the party centre, and in charge of what has later been known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The other, group 759, a maritime unit, was based at the naval headquarters of Quang-Khe and given the responsibility for infiltration by sea. Before the end of 1960 these groups had succeeded in introducing some 4500 cadres into the South, a most valuable resource for the decimated underground party. The sharpest increase in assaults against RVN officials came in the last quarter of 1959, continuing into 1960. Gradually the party rebuilt its strength in the South, while the ARVN was cut off from rural areas where the party developed larger-sized military units.²⁸⁵

Hanoi's goal in 1959-60 was to penetrate the South from the south. To achieve that goal party bases were established and cadres from the Party

were present in all parts of the administration. According to the Lao Dong such a strategy would enable them to gradually take power in South Vietnam with a minimum of blood shed. According to Hanoi officials the southerners did not even need weapons from the North. It was also emphasized that in the present international situation a resumption of the partisan war in the south would be considered as unfavorable to the cause of peace, and was therefore undesirable. The most important task in the South was therefore to preserve peace at any price while simultaneously preserving and strengthening the revolutionary forces in the South in order to complete the national people's democratic revolution for the whole country.²⁸⁶

Meanwhile in Saigon the government and its American allies were worried about the decisions of the communist side in the spring of 1959. While the leaders in Hanoi had elaborated their new southern strategy the Americans had started to rethink their own military assistance to foreign governments such as the South Vietnamese. The eventual outcome of this thinking with regard to Southeast Asia was that the Communist military forces were unlikely to embark on a conventional war so long as the American commitment to its allies remained firm. The problem at the time, particularly in South Vietnam and Laos, "was how to deal with a revolutionary movement operating from political bases inside a "threatened" country and gradually acquiring a capability for anti-government violence."²⁸⁷ The solution to the problem was a new strategy; the doctrine of counterinsurgency, a solution based on the following concept: First a guarantee of the political and economic stability of the threatened government by means of increased aid, enabling an improvement of administrative efficiency at grassroots level. And secondly it was also important to provide counter-guerrilla assistance, to enable the armed forces of the threatened country to defeat rebel terrorist and guerilla units in the field.²⁸⁸

The Lao Dong and the Sino-Soviet split

Although relations between Moscow and Beijing rapidly deteriorated during the late 1950s, Sino-Soviet cooperation continued in Vietnam. The first

obvious signs of difference in the Sino-Soviet relationship came during the Jinmen and Mazu crisis in mid-1958 when China adopted a more militant attitude towards the U.S. than the Soviet Union. The first major crisis in the relationship came in 1959 when Khrushchev took a neutral stand during the Sino-Indian border dispute. When arriving for a diplomatic visit to Beijing after the crisis Khrushchev unsuccessfully attempted to act as an intermediary, a move Mao and the Chinese took as a sign of Soviet perfidy. Through the spring of 1960, especially after the U-2 incident in May, relations seemed somewhat better. However, by the summer relations collapsed completely. In June the Bucharest Conference, the Romanian Communist Party's Congress, was the scene of a bitter exchange between Khrushchev and the Chinese representative, and in July Khrushchev decided to withdraw all Soviet specialists from China.²⁸⁹

The Vietnamese Communists wanted to preserve a good relationship within the communist bloc, and between the Soviet Union and China. The growing differences between Moscow and Beijing worried the Lao Dong leaders, and efforts were made to bring the two together in order to settle the differences in privat. At the time of the Bucharest Conference in late June 1960 Ho Chi Minh wrote a letter to Nikita Khrushchev expressing his worries over the developing situation within the communist camp. The contents of the letter were presented in a conversation between Ho and Soviet Charge d'affaires N.I. Godunov on June 22. Ho Chi Minh emphasized the possible serious consequences of these differences being exposed in the press and underlined that the present development was not in the interest of the communist world. With regard to the effects of the conflict on the Vietnamese communists Ho Chi Minh said "within our party [...] we have already faced, in connection with these differences, perplexing questions, but we are trying to avoid raising them and call upon the members of the Lao Dong to wait and not to make any hasty conclusions."²⁹⁰

Watching the controversy which took place during the Bucharest Conference, Ho obviously feared a similar scenario could occur at his party's Third Congress scheduled for September that year. At a meeting with representatives of the socialist countries held in late August 1960,

shortly before the congress, the Lao Dong leaders presented the results of a Lao Dong Central Committee visit to the Soviet Union and China. The issue was once again Sino-Soviet differences and the discussion was based on a Four-point text containing the Lao Dong view on the conflict.²⁹¹ As will be shown later, the Lao Dong's Third Congress was not dominated by the escalating Sino-Soviet differences. However, to what extent Ho's pleas to mend the conflict saved the congress from becoming a victim of the differences is difficult to estimate based on available materials.

As the differences with Beijing intensified, Moscow devoted more attention to Hanoi's stand in the conflict. In October 1961 the Soviet embassy in Hanoi presented a report entitled "Some questions related to the activities of the CC Lao Dong after the Moscow meeting of Communist and Worker's Parties in 1960". The report underlined Chinese influence on the Vietnamese communists and the Lao Dong leader's preference for the CCP's points of view both in questions related to building socialism in the DRV and the Twentieth congress of the CPSU. Another insufficiency in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship was, according to the report, the lack of information from the Vietnamese to Soviet diplomats with regard to party plenums and policies towards the South. Lao Dong leaders had promised to inform on steps to be taken in South Vietnam, but according to the report no information was provided because "our friends evidently think that by openly presenting their views on how to solve the problem of South Vietnam they will not receive the necessary support from the Soviet Union."²⁹² Looking back at the situation in the spring of 1959, the Soviet attitude by 1961 can be explained as a result of years without receiving proper background information from the DRV authorities.

The Lao Dong Third Party Congress

The Third Party Congress was held in September 1960, and was the first Lao Dong congress convened since 1951. The main aim of the Congress was to "set the general policy of the "liberation" of the South - i.e., the overthrow of the Diem regime and the establishment of a coalition govern-

ment favorably disposed toward reunification with Communist North Vietnam."²⁹³ To achieve this two interrelated themes were discussed: First the realization of the Socialist revolution in North Vietnam, and second the liberation of South Vietnam from the predominance of American imperialism and their stooges, reunification of the country, and the fulfillment of a national peoples-democracies revolution in the whole country.²⁹⁴

The congress was held without any major outbursts from either the Soviet or the Chinese representatives. The principal Soviet representative, CPSU Central Committee Secretary and Member of the Presidium Nuritdin Akramovich Mukhitdinov, concentrated in his speech on issues such as strengthening the unity of the socialist camp, and praised the North Vietnamese people for their success in reconstructing their country. In his speech to the congress he made no comments on the new reunification strategy, but at a public rally celebrating the close of the congress, he reportedly expressed Soviet displeasure over some of the positions taken by the Lao Dong.²⁹⁵

While Mukhitdinov's speech at the congress did not contain any harsh attacks on the Chinese position, a report written by the Soviet embassy voiced heavy criticism of Chinese performance at the congress. It was emphasized that the Chinese Head of Delegation, planning chief Li Fuchun, had not mentioned Soviet aid to the DRV and totally overlooked the resolutions of the Twentieth and Twenty-first congresses of the CPSU. In the final part of his speech he had started to discuss dogmatism and revisionism within the Socialist camp. Li Fuchun also tried to rouse the anti-American feelings among the Vietnamese people, and he had assigned a considerable part of his performance to the fight against imperialism. According to the report the Chinese deliberately tried to flirt with the Vietnamese.²⁹⁶

In contrast to the resolution from 1959, the decision made at the Third Congress had been discussed with the Soviets and the Chinese in advance. From the fall of 1959 the Soviet leaders developed a new interest for the situation in Vietnam. During a visit to Beijing in early October 1959 Nikita Khrushchev evidently discussed the future strategy in South Vietnam with

Ho Chi Minh. The actual contents of the discussion is not known, but a note referring to the meeting was found in Soviet files on China.²⁹⁷ An analysis written by the Southeast Asia Department in 1961 may shed some light on what was discussed at the meeting in Beijing. The report shows that in the spring of 1960 the Soviet Union and China jointly advised the Lao Dong on how to proceed with the political preparations for the Third Congress. In May 1960 the Lao Dong Central Committee had consultations in Moscow with the Central Committees of the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties to discuss the thesis in the Lao Dong political account for the Third Congress. Of particular interest was the section of the thesis dedicated to the struggle for the reunification of Vietnam. It indicated an intention to expand armed struggle in South Vietnam with the purpose of overthrowing the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem and create liberated areas governed by the people in the South. From the Vietnamese side it was underlined that the new strategy was simply a continuation of the war of resistance (1946-1954), and the creation of liberated areas was "the form of gradually accomplishing the reunification of the Mother country."²⁹⁸

Neither the Soviet nor the Chinese leaders agreed with the offensive strategy proposed by the Vietnamese communists. In Moscow the Vietnamese comrades were told that due to the developing situation in Vietnam it would be inexpedient to deny the slogan of peaceful reunification of Vietnam on the basis of the Geneva agreement. According to the Soviet report "the friends agreed to this and the opening address of the Lao Dong CC at the Third Congress set forth a position envisaging a peaceful reunification of the country."²⁹⁹

Economic and Military Assistance

In the sphere of economic and military assistance the decision of January 1959 seems to have had no particular impact on the amount of assistance from the socialist camp to the DRV. Soviet estimates show that the development of the national economy of the DRV was fulfilled according to the Three Year Plan for 1958-60. The financial part of the plan had been fully

balanced due to the help of Soviet and Chinese experts and included Soviet credits of 100 million roubles and Chinese credits in the amount of 600 million yuan. Although the situation so far was favorable, it was not precluded from the Soviet side that Hanoi would ask for an additional credit from the Soviet Union. The Soviet attitude to that was positive, and it was underlined that if such a request came Moscow would consider assisting the North Vietnamese in developing their economy also beyond 1960.³⁰⁰ All in all, assistance from the Soviet Union to the DRV was kept on the same level as in previous years, implying a gradual increase, but no substantial change in 1959-60.³⁰¹

From 1960 onwards Hanoi again expressed a strong will to accelerate the tempo of their economic development, and to acquire the necessary assistance the leaders turned to the Soviet Union. The immediate background was that they were afraid of falling behind South Vietnam in economic development. If they could win the economic competition with the South, it would not only heighten their prestige in Southeast Asia, it would also have an important impact on the outcome of the fight to reunify the country. However, a more intensive development did, according to Pham Van Dong, also require more intensive assistance. This time Moscow was somewhat reserved when responding to the request. Pham Van Dong emphasized that he understood the Soviet Union could not constantly increase the amount of aid, neither did the DRV have any right to expect that. To accommodate Moscow Pham Van Dong suggested that they redirect the aid and use all forces to more intensively exploit it in order to increase the tempo of development.³⁰²

As a part of the Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese meeting in Moscow in May 1960 the DRV Minister of Defense Vo Nguyen Giap discussed military affairs with members of the Soviet Central Committee. There are no detailed accounts on his visit in available files, but the issue of these discussions was probably the question of military assistance to embark on the new strategy. The figures presented in appendix 2 indicate that Giap failed to secure Soviet military assistance for Hanoi's new course.

In September 1956 the Soviet Union and the DRV signed an agreement

on the training and housing of PAVN servicemen in Soviet military institutions. From the implementation of the agreement in the first half of 1957 until the first half of 1960 the amounts steadily increased. As we can see from the figure in the second half of 1960 the sum was reduced to less than 1/6 of what it had been the year before, and the pattern continued into the first half of 1961. The sharp decrease coincides with the triangular discussions on Vietnamese reunification strategy between Moscow, Beijing and Hanoi in late spring 1960. The reduction of amounts spent on training PAVN personell could have been Moscow's way of signalling Soviet disapproval of Hanoi's new course.

Toward a new revolution: the foundation of the NLF

On December 20, 1960 the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF(SV)) was formally established. The front was designed to exploit all patriotic forces opposed to the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. The creation of the front had a positive effect in developing widespread political work among all layers of the southern population. The main task of the work was to eventually overthrow Diem's regime and found an independent, peaceful, and neutral state in South Vietnam under the governance of a national democratic coalition government. However, the activities of these patriotic forces created an immediate threat to the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem which troubled the U.S. in its effort to preserve South Vietnam as an American outpost in Southeast Asia.³⁰³ Thus, the front was a formalization of the work we have seen in South Vietnam in the years after 1955 but did now take on the role as a more active opponent to the southern regime.

In a report from the Soviet embassy in Hanoi it was stated that the establishment of the NLF was a "another important step in the development of the national-liberation movement in the south of the country." The initiator was, according to the embassy report, the Lao Dong, and until a permanent Central Committee of the NLF was in place all orders came from the leadership in Hanoi. In addition the report indicated that the activities of the organization also in the future would to some extent be influenced by

directives from the Lao Dong. As companions in the South the NLF had a number of organizations sympathetic to the cause of the DRV.³⁰⁴ Although not positive to a stepped-up armed struggle in Vietnam, Moscow apparently took no immediate action to discourage the formation of the NLF.

In Hanoi the Lao Dong leadership continued to work with a radicalized strategy for reunification. Despite the advice from both Moscow and Beijing, the Vietnamese Communists were still convinced that armed struggle represented the only successful way to Vietnamese reunification. A Soviet report from late 1961 conclude that the Vietnamese friends had "not without influence from the Chinese friends in 1961 taken a course toward the activation of an armed struggle."³⁰⁵ Due to the work of the front the situation developing in the South was favorable, and as we have seen previously the unstable situation in Laos provided an open road connection from the DRV into South Vietnam via the southern part of Laos. To exploit the situation fully the Vietnamese had, according to the report, used Soviet aircraft originally provided to the DRV in order to assist Laos, to fly in equipment for their own bases in South Vietnam. The measures taken by the Vietnamese to organize large-scale aid to the patriotic movement in South Vietnam also show how Hanoi influenced the regulation of the Laotian problem, indicating that the Vietnamese aimed at preserving the unstable situation in Laos to keep the supply route to South Vietnam open.³⁰⁶

The period up to late 1958 has shown that the decision to start and subsequently expand the armed struggle in South Vietnam was made by the Vietnamese communists without any active involvement from the Soviet Union. In the early part of 1959 Moscow did little to either encourage or stop the change in the Vietnamese course of reunification, but in the fall of that year Soviet interest in the Vietnamese situation was strengthened. Hanoi's policies clearly contradicted the Soviet line of peaceful coexistence, and together with the Chinese leaders the Soviets intervened. To the

Soviets it seemed as if the Lao Dong had accepted the Soviet and Chinese advice, as the party leaders set forth a policy envisaging a peaceful reunification of the country.

By late 1960 the Soviet leaders had expressed clearly to the Vietnamese communists that they would not support an armed struggle for reunification of Vietnam. Moreover, Moscow expected the Lao Dong leaders to respect its opinion and proceed with the political struggle. However, the Vietnamese communists did not feel committed to follow the Soviet line. They continued to build up their military force in the South and by 1961 the situation had changed significantly. The rapid escalation of the South Vietnamese struggle worried the Soviet leaders who felt that the situation, if not contained, "could lead to a significant complication of the political situation in the region and transform South Vietnam into a critical center of international tension."³⁰⁷

Epilogue and conclusions

During the first half of the 1960s the Soviet Union continued to be sceptical toward an escalation of struggle in Vietnam. There was even a certain cooling in Soviet-Vietnamese relations at the time when the war started to escalate in 1964-1965. The chill was partly caused by the growing differences between the Soviet Union and China, the two major contributors to Hanoi's struggle against the Saigon regime, but was also a result of the relatively moderate stance adopted by the Soviet government under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev. With the Cuban Missile Crisis fresh in his memory Khrushchev strongly emphasized the need to improve relations with the U.S., and wanted to avoid deeper Soviet involvement in the Vietnam conflict which could lead to future clashes between it and the United States. In addition, the Moscow leaders feared the radical views of the North Vietnamese leaders, who, by that stage, had a clearly pro-Chinese orientation.³⁰⁸

The important turning point came with the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964. For reasons that are not yet known, the new leadership abandoned the policies of the early 1960's and oriented itself toward closer cooperation with North Vietnam. This turnaround meant that the Soviet Union from late 1964 emphasized moral and political support for what it referred to as the Vietnamese people's war against American aggression. The National Liberation Front opened a permanent mission in Moscow, and the Soviet media often presented official Soviet statements denouncing U.S. aggressive policies in Southeast Asia. Thus, to the North Vietnamese the vital part of the Soviet turnaround was expanded Soviet economic, and above all military assistance to the DRV and the NLF. In the late 1960s Soviet aid to the DRV grew constantly and by 1968 it exceeded the aid from China to the DRV.³⁰⁹

In 1968-69 Moscow was, although reluctantly, closely involved in the

political settlement of the war. But as the four-power negotiations began, it reduced its involvement in these and concentrated instead on improving its own stand with the DRV aiming at turning Vietnam into the Soviet representative in Southeast Asia, all as a means toward increasing Soviet influence in the area. Moscow's new and more active role in the relationship accelerated after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. Despite the signing of the peace agreement the fighting continued between the North and South after 1973 and both parties continued to receive outside support.³¹⁰

On April 30, 1975, Vietnamese communist forces captured the city of Saigon and renamed it Ho Chi Minh City. The North Vietnamese victory marked the end of fighting in Vietnam and the country was united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The same year also marked the start of a new era in Soviet-Vietnamese relations as the two nations moved into a far more intimate relationship than they had ever had before. Twenty-one years earlier the Soviet Union had played an active role in negotiating a peace in Indochina which only turned out to be the prelude to another longer war in the region. Over these years the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship had changed significantly. From being a reluctant ally in the 1950s, Moscow now saw an alliance with Vietnam as serving Soviet strategic objectives. It would enable the Soviet Union to better counter China, both militarily and psychologically, by diminishing its influence in the region. The alliance would also give Moscow a certain claim of legitimacy for its involvement in regional affairs.³¹¹

In the 1950s Moscow promoted a political solution to the Vietnamese problem and was reluctant to form a too close relationship with the DRV. The background for this attitude was the Soviet wish to improve relations with the West, and in particular the United States. In the mid-1970s an alliance with Vietnam would serve Soviet objectives and enhance its influence in the region. From the very beginning Moscow's relationship with Vietnam was chiefly based on what would best serve Soviet interests. The aims and wishes of the leaders in the two countries often differed and led to conflicts and misperceptions of the other party's intentions. This

study of the relationship in the latter part of the 1950s has aimed at showing how the different perceptions of how to handle the situation in Vietnam made the Soviet Union and the DRV drift apart in this period. The Vietnamese communists were inclined to reunify their country with whatever means necessary, whereas the Soviets were mostly concerned about how the situation in Vietnam could influence the international situation in general and the Soviet role in it in particular.

Vietnamese perceptions of the relationship

The Vietnamese decision of January 1959 to resume the armed struggle as a means of reunification was made exclusively by the Central Committee of the Lao Dong. It was not a move initiated by either the Soviet Union or China, although the actions of the two were important parts of the Lao Dong's decision to embark on a new and more militant strategy. Both the Soviet Union and China had failed to give Hanoi the necessary support to ensure the holding of elections and thereby reunification within the framework of the Geneva agreement. Seen from a Vietnamese communist perspective there was only one other option left - reunification through armed struggle. The Lao Dong asked the CCP for advice on how to handle the situation, but as far as we know the CPSU was never directly confronted with a similar question. Based on Soviet attitudes and behavior in the preceding years - Moscow's urge to promote détente and the emphasis on a peaceful transition to socialism - there was no reason at all for the Vietnamese to believe the Soviet Union would support them in, or even encourage them to launch an armed struggle to achieve reunification. From 1960 onwards the Vietnamese communists pursued their strategy of armed struggle against the advice of Moscow. The Vietnamese communists were determined to see a unified Vietnam, and might have hoped that in the long run the Soviet Union would change its mind and support the Vietnamese struggle as it had eventually supported the Pathet Lao.³¹²

Vietnamese perceptions of the relationship with the Soviet Union stemmed from experiences of previous years. Soviet behaviour from 1954

to 1958 had manifested to the leadership of the Lao Dong that in the matter of reunification they could trust nobody but themselves.

There is little doubt that the settlement at the Geneva conference brought the North Vietnamese less than they had hoped for. In 1954 the Viet Minh state in North Vietnam depended upon its two closest communist allies, the Soviet Union and China. As long as both Moscow and Beijing preferred a fast solution to the Indochina problem - partition with provisions for general elections within two years, the North Vietnamese could do little but to accept. In the first months after partition reconstruction of the DRV was the main issue of the relationship. We have seen how the Lao Dong leaders concentrated all their efforts around two issues, rebuilding the country, and preparing for the consultations to be held in the summer of 1955. But without South Vietnamese cooperation there would be no consultations, and in turn no elections. Despite the fact that consultations seemed out of reach, the leaders in Hanoi continued to appeal to the southern regime, on their own and through the two co-chairmen of the Geneva conference, Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

In 1955, when realizing that the chance for a reunification through diplomatic means was rapidly diminishing, the Lao Dong started to consider a strategy that could complement the political struggle. The basic idea of the new strategy was to expand the already existing Lien Viet Front, and thereby intensify the work among the southern population. We have seen how Moscow, simultaneously with this development within the Lao Dong, encouraged the North Vietnamese to lay more emphasis on work among the people in the south. Hanoi must have regarded Moscow's encouragement as an approval of North Vietnamese plans. Subsequent developments in the Vietnamese situation suggest that Soviet behavior in 1955 was more conclusive as to how Hanoi perceived Moscow's attitude than Soviet policymakers were aware of.

From 1956 the priorities of the two states started to diverge. Khrushchev's new line in foreign policy, emphasizing peaceful coexistence between the two world camps, was seen as a possible obstacle in the fight for Vietnamese reunification. After the failure to hold elections in July

dissatisfaction within the leadership, and among some groups of the northern population increased. At the same time the rectification of errors campaign following the land reform led to changes within the leadership. Those changes combined with the growing dissatisfaction led to a new strategy which was eventually adopted in 1959.

Thus, after the events of spring and summer 1956, the Lao Dong leaders felt neglected by the Soviet Union, as well as sacrificed as a part of the Soviet rituals of détente and improved relations with the West, and in particular the United States. It was in 1956 that Ho Chi Minh came to understand that within the foreseeable future he could not count on Soviet assistance to reunite Vietnam. He was disappointed with their lack of force in diplomatic matters, and, looking at the new Soviet foreign policy line, he could not expect any kind of assistance if he chose a strategy based on protracted military struggle.

During 1957 and 1958 it became even clearer to the Vietnamese communists that Soviet interests in Vietnam differed from their own. The most striking example was the unease following the Soviet proposal of January 1957 to admit both Vietnams as independent members of the United Nations. Moscow apparently never consulted Hanoi on the matter, and the proposal was a shock to the Vietnamese. Yet even more shocking than the proposal itself was the indirect Soviet recognition of the Republic of Vietnam, and accordingly the notion that Moscow was willing to accept a permanent division of Vietnam. From that point onwards the Vietnamese communists expressed their dissatisfaction with developments in Vietnam, and in both parts of the country a wish dating back to 1956 to use military action to supplement the political struggle received increasing support. The dissatisfaction was evident both among ordinary people and within the higher echelons of the Lao Dong.

By late 1958 the Vietnamese communists were convinced that reunification could only be achieved through a protracted struggle similar to the resistance war from 1946 to 1954. The Soviet Union was not willing to push for implementation of the Geneva agreement, hence a political solution within the Geneva framework was out of the question. Through

its actions Moscow had repeatedly stressed the Soviet acceptance of two separate states on Vietnamese soil, further accentuation that it did not consider unified Vietnam as a possibility in the nearest future.

Soviet perceptions of the relationship

The developments from 1954 to 1960 illustrate how Soviet priorities with regard to Vietnam changed. During this period Moscow increasingly focused on what Vietnam could do for the Soviet Union, rather than on what the Soviet Union could do for Vietnam.

The Soviet Union was satisfied with the results of the Geneva conference. The Vietnamese had settled for partition of the country and general democratic elections within two years, that is, if the southern regime would last until the scheduled date for elections. We have seen that in the first months after Geneva Moscow showed little interest in Vietnam, but the situation was soon to change.

From late December 1954 Moscow became more deeply involved in developments in Vietnam. The reason for the change was Hanoi's strong criticisms of the South Vietnamese regime in the press. Hanoi's conduct provoked Moscow, and the Lao Dong leaders were told to avoid negative comments in the mass media. Such behavior could provoke the U.S. and endanger both the preparations for consultations and the general elections. However, in the spring of 1955 Moscow, being aware of the DRV's need to keep up contacts and gain support in South Vietnam, supported the establishment of a mass organization in the South. The main task of this organization was to increase the DRV's support among all layers of the southern population. Thus, in this period the Soviet Union both suggested care with regard to criticisms of the South, and encouraged Hanoi to strengthen North Vietnamese influence in the area. These different approaches illustrate the Soviet position with regard to Vietnam in the early period.

In the two first years after Geneva a full implementation of the agreement was the obvious goal of Soviet policies in Vietnam. But did the Soviet

Union really want consultations and general elections in Vietnam? Moscow laid great emphasis on the diplomatic struggle for the reunification of Vietnam. However, when the actual time for elections came, no action was taken from the Soviet side. On the contrary the election date was passed in diplomatic silence. The lack of reaction from Moscow, as well as from Beijing, suggest that both of Hanoi's allies accepted a permanent division of Vietnam.

There are several possible explanations as to why the elections were passed in silence. At the Twentieth Congress in February 1956 Khrushchev announced peaceful coexistence as the fundamental principle of Soviet foreign policy. This new policy was part of the reason why Moscow let the election date pass without any form of protest. As long as the Diem government refused to participate in consultations there would be no elections, and as long as the United States continued to support the South Vietnamese point of view, Moscow would not jeopardize their improving relationship with the West for the sake of the North Vietnamese.

Another factor that played a part in Soviet reasoning in 1956 was the lessons from the Korean War and the character of Soviet-North Korean relations after the war. Kim Il Sung's efforts to eliminate all his enemies led to a serious crisis within the North Korean Communist party. The crisis in North Korea was at its height by the summer of 1956, and its results were most likely part of the reason why the Soviet leaders were reluctant to insist on elections on behalf of Hanoi. That kind of support from Moscow could fuel conflicts within the Lao Dong, as well as support those groups within the Party in favor of more violent strategies.

Finally, the revelations at the Twentieth Congress led to disturbances in several East European countries. The ongoing conflicts, and the possibility of similar situations occurring in other areas, directed Soviet attention away from developments in Vietnam. We have seen how, in spite of numerous hints, Moscow underestimated the importance of the elections. By not realizing the strength of the North Vietnamese wish to reunite the country, the Soviet Union made clear to Hanoi that it had no intention of risking anything on their behalf.

From 1957 Moscow openly signalled its readiness to accept a permanent division of Vietnam. Despite efforts by both Moscow and Hanoi to revive interest in the Geneva agreement, both parties had come to realize that a reunification within the Geneva framework was no longer realistic. In January 1957 the United States backed South Vietnam's application for membership in the United Nations. The Soviet Union countered the proposal by suggesting that both Vietnamese states become independent members of the UN. In other words, Moscow indirectly recognized the Republic of South Vietnam and signalled its acceptance of two independent states in Vietnam. The episode also illustrates the general Soviet attitudes toward Vietnam in the period. By forwarding the proposal without consulting the Vietnamese first, Soviet leaders showed how they were ready to make decisions with serious implications for the Vietnamese without letting Hanoi participate in the process.

Soviet behaviour in 1957 was not unique. In 1956 Moscow ignored the scheduled elections in Vietnam, and let other, from a Soviet point of view, more important issues prevail. Before forwarding the UN proposal, the Soviet leaders did not see a need to consult the Vietnamese. Moscow's manners in alliances was often self-centred. Decisions were made in Moscow, and the Soviet leaders saw no need to consult the other implicated parties.³¹³

The Soviet policymakers' handling of the Vietnamese situation often seemed to have a double edge. Moscow promoted a diplomatic line, but supported it more in words than in action. It encouraged the North Vietnamese to establish contacts with and gain influence in the South, but insisted that such efforts should not be traced back to the Lao Dong. The Soviets were aware of U.S. fears of Communist domination in Southeast Asia and used them as an argument to restrict North Vietnamese aggression. The documents also suggest that Moscow was aware of developments within the Lao Dong. When the Lao Dong leaders finally agreed on their strategy for reunification, there was little the Soviet Union could do to stop them. Hanoi agreed in principle when both Moscow and Beijing asked them to downplay the aggressive tone of the resolutions of the Third Con-

gress, but subsequent developments, especially with regard to Laos, show how Hanoi chose to ignore its allies' advice.

Although the Soviet leaders did not approve of Hanoi's new reunification policy, it did not seem to influence the financial relationship between Moscow and Hanoi. As we have seen throughout the period from 1954 to 1960, economic assistance from the Soviet Union to the DRV stayed the same. However, with regard to military assistance the picture is somewhat different. In second half of 1960, after the Lao Dong Third Congress, the Soviets cut the amounts used in training PAVN military personnel in the Soviet Union to 1/6 of what it had been in previous years. In general the level of economic assistance was sustained, whereas there was a reduction in parts of Soviet military assistance to the DRV.

The China factor

China was an important factor in Soviet thinking with regard to Vietnam. We have seen how Moscow constantly emphasized the significance of Sino-Soviet cooperation in Vietnam in the economic as well as in the military field. The Soviet attitude toward close cooperation in the political field is harder to determine. Still, the overall impression is that Moscow preferred a situation where the Chinese took on most of the responsibility for practical matters, whereas the Soviet Union would assist the Lao Dong in matters of a political nature.³¹⁴

Moscow's decision to grant China much of the responsibility for practical assistance to Vietnam was rooted in several factors. China had a common border with Vietnam and could therefore control events in the area. Militarily the Chinese already had long experience as advisors during the First Indochina War, as well as in the Korean War. In culture and traditions the Chinese were also closer to the Vietnamese than the Soviets were, and to some degree it was easier for Chinese to integrate in Vietnamese society. Moscow was also more concerned with military developments in Europe than in Southeast Asia. By handing over much of the military responsibility to the Chinese, the Soviet Union would maintain its control

within the Communist sphere without being directly responsible, and at the same time they would avoid taking the risk of getting too involved.

We have seen how Sino-Soviet cooperation was important for the success of the Vietnamese. However, some have argued that the Vietnamese benefited from the Sino-Soviet split, and that the split enabled them to obtain more assistance than would otherwise have been possible.³¹⁵ In official histories the story of Hanoi's relationship with the two Communist powers has been colored by the situation at the time of the writing.³¹⁶ Soviet documents give the impression of a good Sino-Soviet relationship with regard to Vietnam, indicating that the alliance lasted longer in Vietnam than has been previously assumed. The motivation behind this cooperation was a combination of Hanoi's preference for independence in decisions as well as actions, plus Soviet and Chinese fears of leaving the other party with sole responsibility for the area. To assist North Vietnam was a tremendous burden, and instead of competing for influence the Soviets and Chinese ended up competing to alleviate their burden by pushing responsibility over to the other. This observation contributes to the idea of a more complex history of the Sino-Soviet alliance, and it also underlines the importance of studying independently smaller fragments in the history of the Cold War.³¹⁷

The conclusions of this study show the need for further inquiries into the complex triangular relationship between Moscow, Hanoi, and Beijing. China was without doubt the most important single factor in Soviet decision-making with regard to Asia. However, scholars have yet to determine how and to what extent Soviet policy-makers' perceptions of China role in the area influenced their policy-making.

Solidarity and national revolution

Douglas Pike characterizes Moscow's thinking with respect to Soviet-Vietnamese relations under Khrushchev as dualistic. The Soviet leader saw Indochina as representing "a potential advantage to be exploited, perhaps extensively, but it was also a dangerous quagmire." Khrushchev's policies

followed a strategy of riding "two horses at the same time", implying that the Soviet leader tried to achieve détente with the United States while simultaneously supporting the DRV in a war for reunification which would eventually lead to collision with the U.S.³¹⁸

The discussion in this thesis suggests a more complicated picture. In general, Soviet policy toward Vietnam in the 1950s was influenced by Moscow's attempts at peaceful coexistence with the West. However, in addition to self-interest and political strategies, Soviet policy toward Vietnam was strongly influenced by factors such as ideology, the role of personalities within the bureaucracy, and not least the experiences of previous adventures in Asia. The situation in Vietnam placed the Soviet leaders in an awkward position. Raised and educated within the Soviet Communist system, the elements of Marxism underlined by Lenin and Stalin were an integral part of their world view. Solidarity with other Communist parties was one inherited factor in the manner in which the Soviet elite saw the world, another was their belief that the ultimate victory of socialism was inevitable. Finally, in the 1950s Soviet leaders saw contradictions among capitalist countries as the main cause of war, and they expected the effects of this rivalry to favor the cause of left-wing parties and movements.³¹⁹

In Vietnam the Soviet Union was pulled between the ideological solidarity with the Vietnamese communists and its emerging need to improve relations with the West. This was particularly apparent in the first two years after Geneva. Through 1955 the Soviet Union encouraged the Vietnamese to elaborate a policy toward South Vietnam based on enhancing the support for the communist regime in the North among the population in the South. Parallel to this the Soviets stressed a non-provocative policy emphasizing a political solution within the Geneva framework. The initiator on the Soviet side was Foreign Minister Molotov. Being a true Bolshevik and a revolutionary, Molotov was not entirely comfortable with the innovative approaches of the post-Stalin elites. He belonged to the Soviet tradition of promoting domestic revolution, but at the same time he saw the importance of advocating a non-provocative policy to avoid a deeper American

involvement in the region. As a result Moscow faced the difficult task of combining support for the Vietnamese communists' urge for reunification with the growing Soviet need to accommodate the West.

From 1956 this picture started to change. Moscow's desire for peaceful coexistence with the West prevailed over its solidarity with the Vietnamese communists. As a result the priorities of the Lao Dong and the Kremlin leaders started to drift apart. By 1960 the Vietnamese communists embarked, contrary to Moscow's advice, on a strategy of armed struggle to reunify the country. The duality in Soviet policies gradually faded away as international priorities triumphed over communist solidarity.

Appendix 1: Politburo and Secretariat of the Lao Dong Central Committee

1954 (*pr. 11 June 1954*)³²⁰

Politburo

Ho Chi Minh
Truong Chinh
Le Duan
Hoang Quoc Viet
Pham Van Dong
Vo Nguyen Giap
Nguyen Chi Thanh
Le Van Luong

Candidates for membership in the CC

Nguyen Khang
Nguyen Van Tran
Ha Huy Giap
Ho Viet Thang
Van Dien Dung
Nguyen Van Kinh (DRV Ambassador to the Soviet Union 1957 -)
To Huu
Nguyen Chanh
Hoang Anh

Members of the Central Committee

Ton Duc Thang
Phan Ding Khai
Nguyen Long Bang (DRV Ambassador to the Soviet Union 1954 - 1957)
Chu Van Tang
Hoang Van Hoan
Tran Dang Ninh

Tran Quoc Hoan
Le Thanh Nghi
Nguyen Duy Trinh
Pham Thien Hung
Ung Van Khiem

1956/1

*Politburo: (pr. 7 September 1956)*³²¹

Ho Chi Minh (President, Chairman, General Secretary)
Pham Van Dong
Truong Chinh
Vo Nguyen Giap (Commander General PAVN, and Deputy General Secretary)
Hoang Quoc Viet
Le Duc Tho
Nguyen Chi Thanh
"the comrades working in South Vietnam"

1956/2

*Politburo: (pr. 10 December 1956)*³²²

Ho Chi Minh
Truong Chinh
Pham Van Dong
Vo Nguyen Giap
Nguyen Chi Thanh
Le Duan (working in South Vietnam)
Le Duc Tho
Hoang Van Hoan
Pham Hung
Nguyen Duy Trinh
Le Thanh Nghi

1957

*Politburo: (pr. Juni 1957)*³²³

Ho Chi Minh, president/chairman of the party and general secretary.
Truong Chinh, in charge of rectification of errors campaign, ideological questions, and the agitation and propaganda department of the CC Lao Dong.

Pham Van Dong, the work of the government and economic questions.
Vo Nguyen Giap, military questions, assisting Ho Chi Minh in his work.
Nguyen Duy Trinh, permanent secretary of the Secretariat, together with Vo Nguyen Giap assisted Ho Chi Minh in his work.

Pham Hung, occupied with questions concerning South Vietnam, allocating and organizing people in the South, and also with the leadership's questions regarding the fight for reunification of the country.

Le Thanh Nghi, Pham Van Dong's aid in the CC's economic committee.
Hoang Van Hoan, currently recovering in Moscow, but normally in charge of work in the ational Assembly.

Nguyen Chi Thanh, assisting Vo Nguyen Giap in the CC's military committee. In charge of political work within the PAVN.

Le Duan, recently back from South Vietnam. Currently preparing a report on the situation and work in Nam Bo.

Pham Van Dong, Pham Hung, and Nguyen Duy Trinh also part of a commission within the CC working with questions regarding the organization of the governments work.

Members of the Secretariat

Ho Chi Minh
Truong Chinh
Pham Van Dong
Vo Nguyen Giap
Nguyen Duy Trinh

1959

*31 members of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong (including those abroad and in South Vietnam)*³²⁴

Politburo

Ho Chi Minh
Pham Van Dong
Vo Nguyen Giap
Le Duan
Truong Chinh
Pham Hung
Hoang Van Hoan
Le Duc Tho
Le Thanh Nghi
Nguyen Chi Thanh

Secretariat

Le Duan
Nguyen Duy Trinh
Pham Hung
Hoan Anh
To Huu

The Committee of South Vietnam

Le Duan (Chairman)

Appendix 2: The cost of training PAVN military personnel in Soviet institutions



The numbers show the total expenses in roubles of training PAVN personnel in Soviet military institutions split into six-month periods from 1957 to the first half of 1961. The DRV share of the expenses is 20 %. All figures are from the Vietnam fund in the AVPRF from 1957-1961.

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Fund 021 Secretariat of Deputy Foreign Minister Valerian A. Zorin
Fund 022 Secretariat of Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey A. Gromyko
Fund 026 Secretariat of Deputy Foreign Minister Vasilii V. Kuznetsov
Fund 079 Referentura po Vietnamu - all available files from 1954 to 1961
Fund 0100 Referentura po Kitaiyo (opis 52, papka 442, delo 5, page 52)
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Fund 84 Anastas I. Mikoyan, First Deputy Premier

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Notes

- 1 See "National Security Council Paper No. 64, 1950. The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina" in McMahon 1990: 80-82. In addition a number of scholars have described and analyzed the American decision to support the French in Vietnam, see Young 1990: 332; Herring 1979: 10-14.
- 2 Mastry 1996.
- 3 Zubok and Pleshakov 1996; Gaddis 1997.
- 4 Weathersby 1993; Weathersby 1996; Mansourov 1996; Lankov 1995.
- 5 Chen Jian 1994; Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue Litai 1993.
- 6 Gaiduk 1996b: 35-36.
- 7 Ulam 1974: 698.
- 8 Ibid. 699. My emphasis.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Pike 1987: 1.
- 11 Smith 1983.
- 12 Kolko 1985; Duiker 1981; and Duiker 1995.
- 13 Thayer 1989.
- 14 A fund is a larger collection of documents. A geographical fund is called referentura, a minister or deputy minister fund is called secretariat. Other funds are called by the name of the conference, commission etc. their documents cover, f.ex. the Geneva Conference fund. Each fund is built up chronologically, and the opis indicates the year (opis 1 is the year the fund was established). Each opis consists of a number of papkas (boxes), which again contain the delas (files). The contents of the delas are thematical, and documents within each dela come in a chronological order.
- 15 Ulam 1974: 698.
- 16 For an account of pre-1950 contact between the Soviet Union and Vietnam see Pike 1987: Chapter 1-2; and McLane 1966.
- 17 Karnow 1991: 146-221.
- 18 Randle 1969; Noguee and Donaldson 1988: 110-111; Cameron 1970: 189-196; Zhai Qiang 1992: 113.
- 19 Cameron 1970: 198.
- 20 Zhai Qiang 1992: 107-110, 121.
- 21 Ibid. 111-112; Li Haiwen 1996.
- 22 Zhai Qiang 1992: 121.
- 23 The following sub-chapter is based on Randle 1969: 389-427 and Young 1991: Chapter Three. Quotations from the agreement is taken from Randle 1969: 569-

- 610.
- 24 The abbreviation SVN (State of Vietnam) will be used for South Vietnam to the referendum and proclamation of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) on 23 October 1955.
- 25 Vietminh was the name of the Vietnamese patriots fighting the French from 1946-54, which was in effect the Communist armed forces. After the Geneva Conference the armed forces of the DRV were organized into the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). In 1960, when the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was founded many of its founding members were former Vietminh soldiers. Kutler 1996: 565
- 26 Randle 1969: 596. Article 14 (a) in the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet Nam.
- 27 Randle 1969: 570-571. Article 6 and 7 in the Final Declaration.
- 28 The Final Declaration was positively agreed to by four out of the nine participants at the conference, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and China.
- 29 Young 1991: 41-42.
- 30 Cameron 1970: 196-197.
- 31 Ibid. 197.
- 32 Ibid. 197-198.
- 33 Confucianism is a system of thought and belief based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, who lived during the sixth century B.C. The Chinese introduced Confucianism to Vietnam in 111 B.C., and although Buddhism remained the dominant popular religion, Confucianism became the basis for politics, government, and formal education in Vietnam. See Kutler 1996: 145.
- 34 Duiker 1995: 254ff; for an account of the origins of Vietnamese communism see Huynh Kim Khanh 1982.
- 35 Lacouture 1968: 190; Duiker 1995: 24.
- 36 Duiker 1995: 26-27.
- 37 Ibid. 39, 254ff.
- 38 Ibid. 65.
- 39 Kutler (ed.) 1996: 565.
- 40 Buttinger 1969: 415-429; Kolko 1985: 22-71. According to a report from the Komitet Informatsii in late December 1954 Ho Chi Minh had many supporters in the South. Information gathered from different news-correspondents reporting from Saigon and foreign press releases, indicated that Ho would receive 90% of the votes in South Vietnam if there was to be general elections at that time. Komitet Informatsii to Novikov, 29 December 1954, fund (f.) 079, opis (op.) 9, papka (p.) 7, delo (d.) 16, page(s) (pp.) 117-130, Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii (AVPRF).
- 41 Young 1991: 45.
- 42 Herring 1979: 47-48.

- 43 Herring 1979: 48.
- 44 Ibid. 51; Thayer 1989: 21-22.
- 45 Buttinger 1969: 417.
- 46 Ibid. 418.
- 47 Moise 1983: 4.
- 48 Buttinger 1969: 418-419.
- 49 Moise 1983: 5.
- 50 Young 1991: 50; Karnow 1991: 240-241; Buttinger 1969: 425-427.
- 51 The most careful estimate indicating between 3000 and 15 000 executions is made by Moise 1983. Bernhard Fall (1963) on the other hand operates with a much higher figure; 50 000 executions. Young 1991: 50.
- 52 Moise 1983: 237ff.
- 53 Molotov to Lavrishchev, 30 September 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 8, pp. 23-26, AVPRF.
- 54 The Lien Viet (Unified National Front) was founded in 1946, reorganized in 1951, and in 1955 renamed the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VNFF). Smith 1983: 62-64. For the development of the VNFF see Thayer 1989: 27-32, 40-43, 46-48. For a further discussion of the broadening of this Front see Chapter two of this thesis.
- 55 Molotov to Lavrishchev, 30 September 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 8, pp. 23-26, AVPRF.
- 56 Ibid. pp. 23-26, AVPRF. The emphasis on "the policy of establishing, as well as strengthening already established relations" with different organizations in South Vietnam corresponds both with advice given in 1955, and the programme of the NLF in 1960. See chapter two and five of this study.
- 57 Pike 1987: 41.
- 58 Novikov to Molotov, 29 July 1954, f. 06, op. 13a, p. 35 d. 156, pp. 1-2, AVPRF.
- 59 Record of conversation, Novikov and DRV Ambassador to the USSR Nguyen Long Bang, 28 October 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 5, p. 78, AVPRF.
- 60 An account of the Soviet role and also Molotov's role at Geneva can be found in Cameron 1970.
- 61 Record of conversation, Novikov and Pham Van Dong, 27 July 1954, f. 06, op. 13a, p. 35, d. 158 p. 46, AVPRF.
- 62 Novikov to Molotov, 29 July 1954, f. 06, op. 13a, p. 35 d. 156, p. 2, AVPRF.
- 63 Record of conversation, Novikov and Nguyen Long Bang, 28 October 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 5, p. 78, AVPRF; MID to the CC CPSU, 29 October 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 8, p. 10, AVPRF.
- 64 Buttinger 1969: 423.
- 65 Novikov to Molotov, 29 July 1954, f. 06, op. 13a, p. 35 d. 156, p. 2, AVPRF;

- Molotov to Lavrishchev, 30 September 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 8, pp. 23-26, AVPRF.
- 66 Novikov to Molotov, 29 December 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 8, p. 51, AVPRF.
- 67 Record of conversation, Novikov and DRV Charge d'affaires to the USSR To Kyang Day, 23 December 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 5, p. 86, AVPRF.
- 68 Randle 1969: 571.
- 69 Kahin 1986: 93.
- 70 Novikov to Molotov, 29 December 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 8, p. 51, AVPRF.
- 71 V.V. Kuznetsov to Molotov, 19 March 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 8, p. 4, AVPRF.
- 72 Randle 1969: 552. This work contains a thorough analysis of the legal aspect of the 1954 Geneva Agreement.
- 73 Record of conversation, temporary Chargé d'affaires Soviet Embassy in Hanoi, Leonid Ivanovich Sokolov and member of the Lao Dong CC, spokesman of the high command of the PAVN, in charge of questions on the fulfillment of the cease-fire agreement, Hoang Anh, 5 September 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 5, p. 137, AVPRF.
- 74 Molotov to the CC CPSU, 19 May 1955, f. 06, op. 14, p. 12, d. 170, pp. 1-2, AVPRF.
- 75 Soviet intelligence reports on U.S. plans «to establish military, political, and economic control over Indochina, and to exclude the influence of France there in the interest of American monopolies» can be traced back to mid-1953. See Zubok 1992: 24.
- 76 Molotov to the CC CPSU, 19 May 1955, f. 06, op. 14, p. 12, d. 170, p. 1, AVPRF.
- 77 The meeting referred to must be the 7th Plenum on the Lao Dong Central Committee held in March 1955, see Thayer 1989: 26-33.
- 78 Molotov to the CC CPSU, 19 May 1955, f. 06, op. 14, p. 12, d. 170, p. 1, AVPRF.
- 79 Ibid. p. 1 AVPRF.
- 80 Ibid. pp. 1-2, AVPRF. The background for this note can probably be found in the yearly report from the Soviet ambassador to MID. I have not had access to such reports for 1954-60.
- 81 Duiker 1981: 174.
- 82 MID to the Soviet Ambassadors to Hanoi and Paris, 18 May 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 8, pp. 12, 14, AVPRF. The telegram to Hanoi contains a question from MID on whether the Vietnamese need any help from the Soviets in this matter.
- 83 Molotov to the CC CPSU, 19 May 1955, f. 06, op. 14, p. 12, d. 170, pp. 1-2, AVPRF.
- 84 Final Declaration of the Geneva agreement § 7, see Randle 1969: 571.
- 85 Smith 1983: 20.
- 86 Ibid. 20-21.

- 87 Anderson 1991: 124-126.
- 88 *Diplomatičeskii Slovar'* 1986: vol. III, 128.
- 89 Thayer 1989: 35-36.
- 90 *Ukazaniya k peregovoram s pravitel'svennoy delegatsiyey Demokratičeskoj Respubliki V'etnam* [Instructions for negotiations with the governmental delegation from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam]. June/July 1955, f. 022, op. 8, p. 117, d. 30, pp. 12-21, AVPRF. [Hereafter Instructions June/July 1955].
- 91 Instructions June/July 1955: 12.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 A. Gromyko, I. Kabanov, G. Shukov and K. Koval to the CC CPSU, 27 June 1955, f. 06, op. 14, p. 12, d. 172, p. 13, AVPRF.
- 94 Instructions June/July 1955: 13.
- 95 *Ibid.* pp. 13-14; telegram from MID to the Soviet Ambassador to Beijing, May 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 8, p. 28, AVPRF.
- 96 Instructions June/July 1955: 14.
- 97 Smith 1983: 37.
- 98 Instructions June/July 1955: 16. For the Vietnamese discussion see Thayer 1989: 27-32, 40-43, 46-48.
- 99 Instructions June/July 1955: 16.
- 100 Thayer 1989: 49.
- 101 Smith 1983: 62.
- 102 *Ibid.*
- 103 *Ibid.* 62-64.
- 104 Record of conversation, Adviser at the Soviet embassy L.I. Sokolov and Vice Chairman of the Lien Viet CC Hoang Quoc Viet, 30-31 January 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 5, pp. 19-26, AVPRF.
- 105 Carlyle Thayer 1989: 43.
- 106 Record of conversation, L.I. Sokolov and Hoang Ahn, 5 September 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 5, pp. 135-138, AVPRF.
- 107 Instructions June/July 1955: 12-21.
- 108 General Antonov to Deputy Foreign Minister V.A. Zorin, 10 June 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 8, p. 32, AVPRF.
- 109 *Ibid.* 32, AVPRF.
- 110 For an estimate of Soviet assistance to India see Thakur and Thayer 1992.
- 111 V.V. Kuznetsov to Molotov, 11 January 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 10, d. 15, pp. 1-2, AVPRF.
- 112 For an estimate of Soviet assistance to the DRV see Thakur and Thayer 1992: 189-192.

- 113 For a classical work about the triangular relationship between the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and China see Zagoria 1967; for Chinese influence in Vietnam see Chen Jian 1993; and Chen Jian 1995.
- 114 For the Chinese role in Korea see Chen Jian 1994.
- 115 Ulam 1974: 558-560.
- 116 Zagoria 1967.
- 117 V.A. Zorin to the CC CPSU, 23 September 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 8, p. 57, AVPRF.
- 118 Record of conversation, L.I. Sokolov and Chinese Ambassador to the DRV, Luo Guibo, 8 December 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 9, d. 5, AVPRF.
- 119 Chen Jian 1995: 357-358.
- 120 Molotov to CC CPSU, 10 August 1955, f. 06, op. 14, p. 12, d. 170, p. 16, AVPRF. "In the connection that the South Vietnamese government not yet has answered the suggestion from the DRV proposed on 19 July this year to start consultations for the elections in Vietnam, MID USSR thinks it expedient to and opportune for the DRV government to turn to the two co-chairmen with this question."
- 121 Smith 1983: 62.
- 122 Thayer 1989: 21-23, 37-40, 48-49.
- 123 Kolko 1985: 85; Anderson 1991: 125-128; Thayer 1989: 48-49.
- 124 Record of conversation, Head of the SEAD in MID, Boris Mikailovich Volkov and Charge d'affaires at the DRV Embassy in the USSR, To Kyang Day, 19 January 1956, f. 06, op. 15a, p. 28, d. 100, pp. 1-3, AVPRF.
- 125 Note to the CC CPSU, 31 January 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 14, d. 16, pp. 27-29, AVPRF.
- 126 Soviet Embassy in DRV to MID, 10 February 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 14, d. 16, pp. 41-50, AVPRF. Quote from page 49.
- 127 Record of conversation, V.V. Kuznetsov and Lao Dong General Secretary Truong Chinh, 28 February 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 2, p. 3, AVPRF.
- 128 Ulam 1974: 9.
- 129 For an introduction to the realist approach to Soviet foreign policy, see Fleron and Hoffmann 1991.
- 130 Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 149-150; Ulam 1974: 572-599; Noguee and Donaldson 1988: 119-126; Kort 1990: 239-241.
- 131 Smyser 1980: 6.
- 132 Record of conversation Soviet Ambassador Aleksandr Andreevich Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 27 April 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, pp. 84-95, AVPRF. [Hereafter Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 27 April 1956] In this conversation

Nguyen Duy Trinh presents the discussion during the 9th Plenum of the Lao Dong, quote from p.93; see also Smyser 1980: 5-12. These pages contain a discussion of the Hanoi's reaction to the 20th Congress of the CPSU.

133 Thayer 1989: 57-59.

134 Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 27 April 1956: 95.

135 Ibid. 90-91.

136 Ibid. 85.

137 Thayer (1989: 67-68) indicate that parts of the proposal was approved and would allow a consolidation of the party's forces and provide a basis for 'political violence' should that ever become necessary. However, such steps were only to be undertaken by cadres in the south using their own resources, in other words a strategy coinciding with the Fatherland Front's program referred to in chapter two of this thesis.

138 Anastas Mikoyan allegedly made full reports from all his trips abroad. Records of his visit to Hanoi have not yet been localized, or declassified. There are also no records of the conversations he obviously had with DRV leaders among the documents I have had access to.

139 Record of conversation, M.V. Zimyanin and Pham Van Dong, 18 May 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, pp. 117-118, AVPRF. Pham Van Dong reveals that he has not completely understood Mikoyan's ideas on the tempo of the DRV's transition into a socialist state. According to the ambassador this would be worked out as soon as the Three-Year plan for the DRV's national economy was ready.

140 Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 27 April 1956: 95. A later reference can be found in; record of conversation, M.V. Zimyanin and Truong Chinh and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 16 August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 55-58, AVPRF. In August the Vietnamese once again raised the question of problems with Stalin's theories. During his visit Mikoyan had remarked that some of the theoretical thesis developed by Stalin were wrong. The Vietnamese wanted to know more details on what areas the Stalin theories had been wrong, as it was important both to their propaganda work and their theoretical work.

141 Ambassador Suren Akopovich Tovmasyan to MID, 17 October 1961, f. 079, op. 16, p. 31, d. 3, p. 44, AVPRF. To exemplify the Vietnamese attitude the report underlines that the Vietnamese did not want to show a Soviet film critical to Stalin. According to Politburo member Le Duc Tho showing such a film could lead to new discussions on the errors committed during land reform. Neither did the Lao Dong share the opinion of the Soviet Union and other fraternal countries with regard to Albania. According to officials at the Soviet embassy Ho Chi Minh gave the impression of feeling sorry for Enver Hoxha. The political letter is concluded by

underlining that "Ho Chi Minh is, despite his weaknesses, a friend. The embassy recommends that the contact between the two countries be strengthened in all fields."

142 Record of conversation between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister V.V. Kuznetsov and General Secretary of the Lao Dong Truong Chinh, 28 February 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 2, pp. 3-4, AVPRF. [Hereafter Kuznetsov and Truong Chinh, 28 February 1956]

143 Kuznetsov and Truong Chinh, 28 February 1956: 3.

144 Ibid. 3.

145 Ibid.

146 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Pham Hung, 23 March 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, pp. 36-38, AVPRF; Soviet Embassy in the DRV to MID, 2 April 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 14, d. 16, pp. 57-62, AVPRF. [Hereafter Soviet embassy in the DRV to MID, 2 April 1956]

147 Soviet embassy in the DRV to MID, 2 April 1956: 57-62.

148 Ibid. 58.

149 Ibid.

150 Thayer 1989: 71-73.

151 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Pham Hung, 23 March 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, pp. 36-38, AVPRF.

152 K nolozheniyu s vypolnieniem zhenevskikh soglasheniy o V'etname - kratkaya spravka [On the situation of fulfilling the Geneva Agreement - short information], 11 (13) August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 14, d. 16, p. 98, AVPRF.

153 Record of conversation between Zimyanin and Pham Ung, Ung Van Khiem and Than Hum Truon, 20 April 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, p. 75, AVPRF. [Hereafter Zimyanin and Pham Hung etc., 20 April 1956]

154 Zimyanin and Pham Ung etc., 20 April 1956: 75.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid. 75-77.

157 Smith 1983: 64-67.

158 Thayer 1989: 73.

159 Record of conversation between M.V. Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 20 July 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, pp. 12-13, AVPRF.

160 "On the situation of fulfilling the Geneva Agreement" (short information), 11 (13) August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 14, d. 16, pp. 88-98, AVPRF. According to Kahin (1986: 93) U.S. support had helped Diem avoid international pressures for face-to-face consultations with the Vietminh on all Vietnamese elections.

161 According to documents from Russian archives Kim Il Sung wanted Stalins

approval for his plans to launch a military attack on South Korea. Stalin was reluctant, but in spring 1950 he turned around and approved Kim's reunification plan and provided the necessary military support. This was, however, only after repeated appeals from Kim and only after having been persuaded that the United States would not intervene in the conflict. See Weathersby 1993. On Stalin's change of mind, and a link to the situation in Vietnam in the mid-1960s. see in particular pp. 23-25. See also Mansourov 1996.

162 Lankov 1995: 105-118.

163 Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 149-150, 158.

164 Ibid. 166-167.

165 Zubok and Pleshakov 1996: 81, 108.

166 See part "Hanoi's Southern Strategy".

167 Moise 1983: 237.

168 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 10 August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, pp. 38-40, AVPRF.

169 Landreform in North Vietnam was based much on the experiences made in China, and had also to some degree been supervised by Chinese advisors. Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 28 August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 79, AVPRF; See also Moise 1983. Moise's book compares land reform in China and Vietnam and is the most extensive study in its area.

170 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 28 August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, pp. 75-85, AVPRF; see also Moise 1983: 238.

171 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 7 September 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 93, AVPRF.

172 His real name was Dang Xuan Khu.

173 Honey 1963: 43-46. Edwin Moise has modified the view that the DRV went disastrously wrong due to slavish imitation of the Chinese land reform. He argues that Chinese influence is real, and that the Vietnamese reform was based on Chinese models, but the Lao Dong did not copy these models precisely and that the mistakes made was due to misconduct of the reform not because they imitated the Chinese. See Moise 1983: 234-236.

174 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 7 September 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 93, AVPRF. For a list of Lao Dong Politburo and Central Committee members based on Soviet information see Appendix 1.

175 Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 27 April 1956: 84-95.

176 Record of conversation, Soviet Charge d'affaires A.M. Popov and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 25 October 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 8, p. 54, AVPRF.

177 The member in question was most probably Truong Chinh.

178 Record of conversation, Sulinov and representative in charge of economic and financial questions at the PM's office, Buy Kong Chung, 29 October 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 8, pp. 57-60, AVPRF. The Soviet official Sulinov has no title in the document, or any organisational affiliation. His inquiries into the internal affairs of the DRV, and the fact that he has no title or organization may indicate that he represents either the GRU or the CPSU.

179 The ICC Fixed Teams were groups with members from all the three countries participating in the ICC, Poland, India and Canada. These groups travelled around in both Vietnamese zones to supervise and control that the provisions of the Geneva agreement were followed, especially the ceasefire agreement.

180 Thayer 1989: 94-95. Quote from 95.

181 Record of conversation, A.M. Popov and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 19 November 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 8, pp. 75-76, AVPRF.

182 Thayer 1989: 94.

183 A. Gromyko to the CC CPSU, 17 October 1956, f. 022, op. 9, p. 134, d. 56, p. 1, AVPRF.

184 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 21 June 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, pp. 129-133, AVPRF. [Hereafter Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 21 June 1956]

185 Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 21 June 1956: 129.

186 Ibid. 129-133.

187 After the signing of the Geneva agreement in July 1954 DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong allegedly said that he did not think there would be any elections. See Honey 1963: 15; Thayer 1989: 6-7.

188 Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 21 June 1956: 129-133.

189 Record of conversation, Zimyanin, Ung Van Khiem and Pham Hung, 23 June 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, p. 137, AVPRF. [Hereafter Zimyanin and Ung Van Khiem etc., 23 June 1956]

190 Zimyanin and Ung Van Khiem etc. 23 June 1956: 137-140.

191 Ibid.

192 Smith 1983: 64.

193 The Great Vanguard 1981: 115.

194 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 7 September 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 93, AVPRF.

195 Extract from the journal of Soviet Charge d'affaires in DRV A.M. Popov, 10 December 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 8, pp. 93-99, AVPRF.

196 In a June 1957 reference to the Lao Dong Politburo members Le Duan is listed as recently back from South Vietnam, currently preparing a report on the situation

in Nam Bo. Pham Hung is listed as occupied with questions concerning South Vietnam, allocating and organizing people in the South, and in charge of the leadership's questions regarding the fight for reunification of the country. See record of conversation, Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 12 - 14 June 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 220-235, AVPRF. Le Duc Tho's role and his strengthened position in 1956 is underlined by R.B. Smith. See R.B. Smith 1983: 66. Tho is however not mentioned as Politburo member in 1957, but reappears in 1959. See Appendix 1.

197 Carlyle Thayer 1989: 92.
 198 Ibid. 104-106.
 199 Zagoria 1967: 102.
 200 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Luo Guibo, 11 August 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, pp. 41-42, AVPRF.
 201 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Li Zhimin, June/July 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, p. 149, AVPRF.
 202 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap, 17 March 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, pp. 13-15, AVPRF.
 203 V.V. Kuznetsov to Molotov, 11 January 1955, f. 079, op. 10, p. 10, d. 15, pp. 1-2, AVPRF.
 204 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap, 17 March 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 5, p. 15, AVPRF.
 205 Gromyko and Koval to the CC CPSU, 10 November 1956, f. 022, op. 9, p. 134, d. 56, pp. 20-21, AVPRF. It is somewhat difficult to find a certain date on this document. It was first dated 10 October, then 10 November, but seen and signed by Gromko on 30 October. I have chosen the last printed date 10 November.
 206 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 9 September 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 96, AVPRF.
 207 Record of conversation, Head of SEAD in MID B.M. Volkov and DRV Ambassador to the Soviet Union Nguyen Long Bang, 24 September 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 3, pp. 11-12, AVPRF; record of conversation, Employee SEAD in MID G.P. Djokarev and First Secretary at DRV Embassy in Moscow Tyeng, 29 October 1956, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 4, p. 51, AVPRF.
 208 The Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, Document 1, § 6, see Randle 1969: 570.
 209 Pham Van Dong's protest letter of 25 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 3, pp. 4-5, AVPRF.
 210 Duiker 1981: 182; Duiker 1995: 115; Thayer 1989: 159-160.
 211 Extract of directive from the CC CPSU to the Soviet delegation to the Second Session of the UN General Assembly, 29 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 18, d. 18,

p. 6, AVPRF. [Hereafter Extract 1957].
 212 Extract 1957: 6.
 213 Ibid.
 214 Young 1991: 53.
 215 Yearbook of the United Nations 1956: 110-112.
 216 Record of conversation, Soviet Ambassador Zimyanin and Chinese Ambassador Luo Guibo, 30 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, p. 48, AVPRF.
 217 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Li Zhimin, 18 September 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 6, p. 70, AVPRF.
 218 The Russian word for contradictions had quotation marks in the original text. See record of conversation, Zimyanin and DRV Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem, 30 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 50-51, AVPRF.
 219 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ung Van Khiem, 30 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 50-51, AVPRF.
 220 Carlyle Thayer 1989: 160; Yearbook of the United Nations 1956: 112.
 221 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 30 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, p. 52, AVPRF.
 222 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, 30 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, p. 52, AVPRF.
 223 Duiker 1981: 182; Pike 1987: 42.
 224 Yearbook of the United Nations 1957: 111-113.
 225 For a discussion of Soviet alliances with Third World countries see Light 1993.
 226 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Pham Van Dong, 18 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 14 (-15), AVPRF.
 227 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Pham Van Dong, 7 March 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 91-97, AVPRF; Thayer 1989: 157.
 228 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Pham Van Dong, 7 March 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, p. 96, AVPRF.
 229 Ibid. 5, pp. 91-97, AVPRF.
 230 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Vo Nguyen Giap, 29 May 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 182-183, AVPRF.
 231 Thayer 1989: 165-166, 169-173.
 232 Said about the visit to Burma and India, see record of conversation, Soviet Charge d'affaires A.M. Popov and Ung Van Khiem, 31 January 1958, f. 079, op. 13, p. 20, d. 8, pp. 18-22, AVPRF.
 233 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ung Van Khiem, 27 January 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 41-43, AVPRF.
 234 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Luo Guibo, 22 January 1957, f. 079, op.

- 12, p. 17, d. 5, p. 26, AVPRF.
- 235 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Pham Van Dong, 27 April 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 156-161, AVPRF.
- 236 Ibid. 159, AVPRF, in the Russian text the word many obligations had been put in quotation marks "mnogo nagruzok".
- 237 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Vo Nguyen Giap, 29 May 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 182-183, AVPRF.
- 238 Record of conversation, Soviet ambassador Leonid Ivanovich Sokolov and Vo Nguyen Giap, 25 February 1958, f. 079, op. 13, p. 20, d. 8, pp. 31-33, AVPRF.
- 239 Thayer 1989: 177.
- 240 L.I. Sokolov to MID (Gromyko), 12 May 1958, f. 079, op. 13, p. 20, d. 4, pp. 1-18, AVPRF.
- 241 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Li Zhimin, 18 September 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 6, p. 69, AVPRF.
- 242 Ibid.
- 243 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Truong Chinh, 8 June 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 199-206, AVPRF.
- 244 Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 12 and 14 June 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 220-235, AVPRF. This document contains information on the different members of the Politburo and their tasks. Compared to earlier accounts of Politburo and Central Committee members it shows that leaders known to be in favour of a new, and more aggressive strategy towards the South are gaining more power in the top party leadership. For a detailed list of Lao Dong Politburo and Central Committee members based on Soviet sources see Appendix 1.
- 245 On 15 April 1958 Pham Van Dong informed Soviet ambassador Sokolov that the party had appointed two additional deputy prime ministers to strengthen the government. The two appointees were members of Politburo Truong Chinh and Pham Hung. With regard to Pham Hung's appointment Dong said: "It has to be taken into account that the appointment of Pham Hung, who is a Southerner, and has worked for a long time in South Vietnam, call for certain political consequences in the plans of the fight for a peaceful reunification of the country." See record of conversation, Sokolov and Pham Van Dong, 15 April 1958, f. 079, op. 13, p. 20, d. 8, p. 95, AVPRF.
- 246 The word Thum is not a Vietnamese name. The closest English translation of the Vietnamese word "thum" is "stinking" or "smelling bad".
- 247 Record of conversation, Second Secretary at Soviet embassy G. Kadumov and official at the DRV Ministry of State Security «Thum», 4 April 1958, f. 079, op. 13, p. 20, d. 10, pp. 202-203, AVPRF.

- 248 Ibid., 203.
- 249 Thum was most probably either an informant or a message-deliverer. He might have been one of the Southern regrouped himself with a preference for armed struggle. The ideas of Thum's possible role in this record of conversation originates from an e-mail correspondence with Vietnamese historian Nguyen Vu Tung on September 24, 1996.
- 250 MID (Deputy Foreign Minister) to Soviet ambassador L.I. Sokolov, 16 April 1958, f. 079, op. 13, p. 20, d. 3, pp. 15-19, AVPRF.
- 251 Young 1991: 60-61.
- 252 Thayer 1989: 123, 128-129.
- 253 Chen Jian 1995: 358.
- 254 Ibid.
- 255 Ibid.
- 256 Chang 1990: 184, 204-205; Thayer 1989: 180.
- 257 According to Soviet documents the 15th Plenum was held from December 1958 to February 1959, but the general assumption in the literature of when it was held is January. See «K polozheniyu v Yozhnom V'etname» [On the situation in South Vietnam], an analysis of the situation in South Vietnam by Acting Head of the SEAD in MID Nikolai Moljakov, 22 December 1961, f. 079, op. 16, p. 32, d. 20, pp. 102-108, AVPRF. [Hereafter On the situation in South Vietnam] At the last page of the document it was added: «The report has been based on materials from MID, the General Staff of the Soviet Army, and KGB by the Council of Ministers.» For Le Duan's report, see Thayer 1989: 183-185; King C. Chen 1975: 244-246.
- 258 On the situation in South Vietnam: 108. For Hanoi's decisions in 1959/60 see also King C. Chen 1975: 245-250.
- 259 Duiker 1995: 120-121; Thayer 1989: 183-185; in an overview of Lao Dong Central Committee and Politburo members from 1959 a reference is made to members abroad and in South Vietnam and the first separate committee of South Vietnam with Le Duan as chairman is also listed. See record of conversation, Sokolov and Le Duc Tho, 6 June 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 130-133, AVPRF. For more details see Appendix 1.
- 260 On the situation in South Vietnam: 104. The word "any" was underlined in the original Russian text.
- 261 On the situation in South Vietnam: 104.
- 262 Chen Jian 1995: 358.
- 263 Voprosy dlya besedy s kitayskimi i v'etnamskimi druz'yami [Questions for conversations with our Chinese and Vietnamese friends], SEAD, 23 January 1959, f. 079, p. 14, p. 24, d. 13, pp. 6-13, AVPRF.

- 264 *Questions for conversations with our Chinese and Vietnamese friends*, SEAD, 23 January 1959, f. 079, p. 14, p. 24, d. 13, pp. 6-13, AVPRF.
- 265 Maksimov to Pushkin, 20 March 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 24, d. 13, pp. 38-39, AVPRF.
- 266 "Plan pervootcherednykh meropriyatiy po vypolneniyu resheniy XXI s"ezda KPSS" [Plan for the immediate measures to implement the decisions of the 21st Congress of the CPSU], 28 February 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 24, d. 13, pp. 28-29, AVPRF.
- 267 Adelman and Palmieri 1989: 151.
- 268 Record of conversation, Sokolov and Ho Chi Minh, 16, 17, 19 January 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, p. 24, AVPRF.
- 269 Record of conversation, Soviet embassy advisor A.M. Popov and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 12 March 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 24, d. 7, p. 168, AVPRF.
- 270 Record of conversation, Sokolov and Le Duan, 15 April 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 102-107, AVPRF.
- 271 Record of conversation, A.M. Popov and Truong Chinh, 21 May 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 24, d. 7, pp. 265-268, AVPRF. [Hereafter Popov and Truong Chinh, 21 May 1959]
- 272 Popov and Truong Chinh, 21 May 1959: 265-268.
- 273 Young 1991: 62.
- 274 Popov and Truong Chinh, 21 May 1959: 265-268. The parenthesis was in the original Russian text.
- 275 Record of conversation, First Secretary Soviet embassy in the DRV I. Razumov and Deputy Head of Polish delegation to the ICC Cambodia Andreev, 12 December 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 24, d. 9, pp. 186-189, AVPRF.
- 276 Anderson 1991: 191.
- 277 For the period from 1954-60 the Vietnam fond in the AVPRF contain much information on the situation in Laos. This continued also after a separate Laos fond was opened in 1955.
- 278 Smith 1983: 111.
- 279 Record of conversation, Sokolov and Ung Van Khiem, 28 February 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 68-73, AVPRF; in late May the same year Pham Van Dong could inform the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi that if necessary the DRV was ready to support Laos with arms and other supplies needed for war. See record of conversation, Sokolov and Pham Van Dong, 26 May 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 123-126, AVPRF.
- 280 Record of conversation, Sokolov and Ung Van Khiem, 28 February 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 68-73, AVPRF; record of conversation, Sokolov and

- Ung Van Khiem, 9 March 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 74-77, AVPRF.
- 281 Record of conversation, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister G.M. Pushkin and Ung Van Khiem, 12 January 1960, f. 079, op. 15, p. 28, d. 4, p. 1, AVPRF.
- 282 Ibid. 1-3.
- 283 On the situation in South Vietnam: 107.
- 284 Anderson 1991: 191.
- 285 Thayer 1989: 187-187; Smith 1983: 168.
- 286 From Sokolov's journal. Record of information presented in MID DRV by deputy foreign minister Ung Van Khiem for the heads of diplomatic representation from the Socialist countries, 15 April 1960, f. 079, op. 15, p. 28, d. 6, pp. 91-97, AVPRF.
- 287 Smith 1983: 184.
- 288 Ibid. 184-185.
- 289 Chang 1990: 184, 204-205; Thayer 1989: 180; Zubok and Pleshakov 1996: 230-233; Zagoria 1962: 325-327.
- 290 Record of conversation, Charge d'affaires N.I. Godunov and Ho Chi Minh, 22 June 1960, f. 179, op. 15, p. 28, d. 6, pp. 160-162, quote from p. 161, AVPRF.
- 291 Record of meeting, Soviet advisor Godunov and representatives from the Socialist countries, 24 August 1960, f. 079, op. 15, p. 29, d. 9, pp. 179-180, AVPRF. The Lao Dong Four-point text was not in the file, and no further comments to the four points were made.
- 292 Soviet ambassador Suren Akopovich Tovmasjan to MID, 17 October 1961, f. 079, op. 16, p. 31, d. 3, pp. 35-57, quote p. 48, AVPRF.
- 293 King C. Chen 1975: 240.
- 294 Soviet embassy in the DRV to MID, 26 September 1960, f. 079, op. 15, p. 28, d. 3, pp. 35-37, AVPRF.
- 295 Ibid.
- 296 Ibid. 27-29.
- 297 Zimyanin to Malin, 16 October 1959, f. 0100 (China fond), op. 52, p. 442, d. 5, p. 52, AVPRF. The note confirms that a meeting between Khrushchev, Mao, Kim Il Sung and Ho Chi Minh took place in Beijing on October 2, 1959, and that the discussion was on the future strategy in South Vietnam. See also Pravda, October 1, 1959.
- 298 On the situation in South Vietnam: 104.
- 299 Ibid.
- 300 Voprosy, kotorie mogut byt' postavleny v besedakh v'etnamskimi dryz'yami [Questions that might be posed during conversations with the Vietnamese friends], draft, SEAD, 30 January 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 24, d. 13, pp. 14-16, AVPRF.

301 *There is still some uncertainty with regard to the exact numbers of Soviet economic and military aid to the DRV in the period 1954-60. Files from the AVPRF provide some numbers but do not give a complete account of economic and military aid. One exception is the Soviet-DRV agreement on training and housing of PAVN personnel starting from 1957 shown in the figure below. Available estimates of Soviet economic and military assistance to the DRV in the period show a stable level of assistance with only smaller variations from one year to another. For the exact estimates see Pike 1987: 139; Thakur and Thayer 1992: 117.*

302 *Record of conversation, Sokolov and Pham Van Dong, 3 May 1960, f. 079, op. 15, p. 28, d. 6, pp. 101-104, AVPRF.*

303 *On the situation in South Vietnam: 104.*

304 *The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Soviet embassy in Hanoi to MID, 14 November 1961, f. 079, op. 16, p. 32, d. 20, pp. 84-92, AVPRF. Quote from page 84.*

305 *On the situation in South Vietnam: 107.*

306 *Ibid.*

307 *Ibid. 104.*

308 *Gaiduk 1996a: 232, 250-258. For a more detailed account on the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship during the Vietnam War see Gaiduk 1996b.*

309 *Gaiduk 1996a: 232, 250-258.*

310 *Gaiduk 1996b: 246-249.*

311 *Pike 1987: 180-181.*

312 *For the notion that Hanoi would not have approved armed struggle if it contradicted Soviet and Chinese wishes see Ulam 1974: 699.*

313 *For a discussion of Soviet conduct in alliances see Light 1993; Porter 1984; and Zagoria 1967.*

314 *For a discussion of the Sino-Soviet relationship see Smyser 1980; and Zagoria 1967.*

315 *Honey 1963: 77-78.*

316 *The history of the Lao Dong and its relationship with the Soviet Union and China has been rewritten several times. The Lao Dong's preference for one or the other often reflected the current relationship between the three states.*

317 *In a forthcoming work the complex history of the Sino-Soviet alliance is discussed based on recently released Soviet and Chinese sources. See Westad (forthcoming).*

318 *Pike 1987: 38, 44.*

319 *For a discussion of the role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy see Westad 1997.*

320 *Attached list, 11 June 1954, f. 079, op. 9, p. 6, d. 7, AVPRF.*

321 *Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Ho Chi Minh, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 6, p. 93, AVPRF.*

322 *Record of conversation, A.M. Popov and Ho Chi Minh, f. 079, op. 11, p. 13, d. 8, pp. 93-99, AVPRF.*

323 *Record of conversation, Zimyanin and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 12-14 June 1957, f. 079, op. 12, p. 17, d. 5, pp. 220-235, AVPRF.*

324 *Record of conversation, Sokolov and Le Duc Tho, 6 June 1959, f. 079, op. 14, p. 23, d. 5, pp. 130-133, AVPRF.*