# Delusion or Reality?

## Secret Hungarian Diplomacy during the Vietnam War

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> Unfortunately, we have a strong reason to tolerate the American aggression . . . , in fact, this strong reason is called "Beijing."
>
> *János Kádár, 13 October 1966*

In an article published in 2003, James Hershberg presented archival evidence from Budapest and Warsaw concerning the role that Hungary and Poland played as intermediaries between Washington and Hanoi during the 37-day pause in the U.S. bombing campaign against North Vietnam in December 1965–January 1966.[1] According to Hershberg, the bombing moratorium contributed significantly to Vietnam War diplomacy because it lasted long enough to allow serious discussions to take place and provided a real opportunity for U.S. and North Vietnamese officials to make direct and indirect contacts.

Hershberg's account of the Hungarian peace attempt begins in the fall of 1965 when, he argues, Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter began to drop hints that Hanoi would respond positively to a bombing halt. On 7 October 1965, Péter told U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk the same thing during a meeting. On 23 December, Rusk called János Radványi, the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Washington, to his office to present him with twelve basic points concerning the U.S. position. Rusk asked Radványi to bring these points to the attention of Péter and anyone else he chose. This set off a series of meetings and exchanges of messages in which Budapest tried to arrange direct talks between the United States and North Vietnam, but on 15 January

1. James G. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause: Hungarian and Polish Diplomacy during the Vietnam War, December 1965–January 1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 32–67.

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1966 Hanoi officially rejected the U.S. offer, thereby ending the Hungarian mediation effort. Hershberg's article concluded that although the new evidence revealed no "missed opportunities" for the opening of direct peace negotiations, it did cast doubt on earlier accounts that had dismissed Hungary's and Poland's efforts as entirely insincere and deceptive.

Hershberg's findings are exceptionally important and his argument is sound, but some of his conclusions need to be refined in light of the unpublished Hungarian (and partly unpublished U.S.) sources I present in this article. Hershberg described his own article as a "preliminary inquiry" that should be supplemented by further investigation in Warsaw, Budapest, and other Warsaw Pact capitals, as well as in Moscow and Hanoi. Accordingly, he identified but left open crucial questions in all three areas he examined: the role of Hungary, the role of Poland, and the role of Moscow and Soviet-bloc coordination during the bombing pause. Drawing chiefly on Hungarian archival evidence, I seek in this article to provide answers to some of these questions, primarily concerning Hungary's role and Soviet-bloc coordination, by looking at the roots and immediate aftermath of the Hungarian mediation attempt.[2] Although my article adds important missing details to the story as outlined by Hershberg, it is not meant to reiterate from beginning to end the actual process of the mediatory action that took place in late December 1965 and early January 1966.

By answering some of the questions Hershberg left open, my article also underscores the importance of the Hungarian archives in shedding light on the international history of the Vietnam War. Three factors account for this significance. First, the Hungarian People's Republic maintained close, friendly relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) throughout the war. By pursuing a cautious policy, Hungary was able to preserve its intimacy with the DRV even when the latter's relationship grew cold with one or the other of its two most powerful patrons, the Soviet Union and China. Hungarian sources contain numerous references to the DRV's frequently expressed view that Hungary was second only to the USSR as North Vietnam's "best European ally."[3] This status enabled Hungarian diplomats to obtain sensitive

2. All Hungarian archival sources cited in this article are stored in the Magyar Országos Levéltár (National Archives of Hungary; MOL) in Budapest. These include the minutes of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) Politburo and Central Committee (CC) and the declassified "Top Secret" archival records of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

3. Although North Vietnamese statements should be treated with extreme caution, even high-ranking Soviet diplomats confirmed to their Hungarian colleagues that whenever the question of the support of European Communist countries came up, the North Vietnamese had always mentioned Hungary as their leading supporter after the Soviet Union. See, for example, Memorandum of Conversation between Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi and Soviet Ambassador to Hungary Georgi Denisov, 14 September 1965, in MOL, Soviet Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 101, SzU-146/004522/1965, XIX-J-1-j. For an early reference, see Hungarian Chargé d'Affaires in Hanoi

information and achieve special diplomatic goals promoting both the "common cause" of the Soviet bloc and Hungary's own political interests.[4]

Second, although Hungary was always one of the most faithful and willing allies of the Soviet Union, the regime headed by János Kádár started in the mid–1960s—mainly out of economic necessity—to improve its political relations with the leading Western powers, including the United States.[5] This positioned Hungary as a potential mediator between East and West even in conflicts such as Vietnam,[6] a role that has not received proper examination to date.[7]

The third reason is that the Hungarian archival material provides an

László Kovács to Foreign Minister János Péter, "SUBJECT: Summary of the DRV's Foreign Policy [in 1961]," 1 February 1962, in MOL, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 3, 002180/1/1962, XIX-J-1-j, p. 6. For a later reference, see the cable from Hungarian Ambassador to North Vietnam Imre Pehr, "SUBJECT: The Visit of KPM [Ministry of Transport and Post] Delegation to the DRV," 22 April 1968, in MOL, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 89, 001268/3/1968, XIX-J-1-j, p. 5.

4. On the exceptional value of the Hungarian archival material in this respect, see also Balázs Szalontai, "Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955–56," *Cold War History,* Vol. 5, No. 4, (November 2005), pp. 395–426. The key Soviet-bloc player in Vietnam was Poland. Poland's membership in the International Control Commission (ICC) elevated its role in the diplomacy of the Indochina conflict above that of any other Communist country. The ICC—or, more formally, the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam, or ICSC—was a three-country peace monitoring force established in 1954 to oversee the implementation of the Geneva Accords that ended the First Indochina War. The two other members of the ICC were Canada and India. The Polish government played an active part in peace initiatives aimed at solving the Southeast Asian conflict and also shared with its closest allies whatever useful information it had obtained in both Hanoi and Saigon. However, the Hungarians seem to have had their own high-level contacts in Hanoi (different from those of Poland) and were therefore also able to share privileged information with the Soviet Union and other friendly countries.

5. The most telling evidence of this is the fact that the elevation of their respective diplomatic missions to embassy status and the mutual accreditation of ambassadors between the United States and Hungary took place at the height of the war in Vietnam in 1966–1968. Hungary made good use of its "presentable" status not only in Hanoi but also in Washington to supply its allies with confidential information. See, for example, Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), p. 86. For details on U.S.-Hungarian relations during the period, see László Borhi, "'We Hungarian Communists are Realists': János Kádár's Foreign Policy in the Light of Hungarian-U.S. Relations, 1957–1967," *Cold War History,* Vol. 4, No. 2 (January 2004), pp. 1–32.

6. The other most important chapters of Hungary's involvement in Vietnam were its 1966 mediation attempt within the Warsaw Pact aimed at rationalizing the chaotic and uncoordinated Soviet-bloc economic and military assistance to the DRV, and its participation (and rather controversial conduct) in the peacekeeping mission of the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS; not to be confused with the ICSC) in South Vietnam from January 1973 to May 1975. See, for example, Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1977), esp. pp. 89, 325–326, 381, 398, 431, 446, 466, 497. See also William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), esp. p. 128; and Richard Hale, "A CIA Officer in Saigon," *Vietnam Magazine,* Vol. 16, No. 1 (June 2003), pp. 26–32.

7. On Hungary's foreign policy in the Kádár era, see, for example, Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986); and Csaba Békés, "Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Soviet Alliance System, 1968–1989," *Foreign Policy Review* (Budapest), Vol. 3, No. 1 (2004), pp. 87–127. On the period from 1956 to 1968, see Csaba Békés, "A kádári külpolitika 1956–1968" [The Kádárian Foreign Policy, 1956–1968], *Rubicon* (Budapest), Vol. 9, No. 1 (1998), p. 22.

abundance of new evidence showing that Vietnam was not at all a "typical" Cold War conflict, let alone a proxy war. The Hungarian sources suggest that the defeat of the United States in Vietnam was only a side effect of the "little cold war" within the Communist camp; that is, the Sino-Soviet split.[8]

One of the main conclusions of this article, based on the Hungarian archival evidence, is that the Sino-Soviet split was also the most important reason for the failure of Hungary's mediation attempt. Paradoxically, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies wanted to win Hanoi over to a negotiated solution, but in the meantime—in order to distance Hanoi from Beijing and strengthen the DRV's bargaining position against the United States—they poured war matériel and civilian aid into North Vietnam. Instead of strengthening Hanoi's desire for peace, these contradictory policies prepared the North Vietnamese for a protracted war and reinforced their conviction that they could win the war regardless of what the United States did. As a result, no outside party—neither the United States, nor the Soviet Union, nor their allies—could persuade the DRV to start negotiations until North Vietnamese leaders realized that the war was going to last longer than they thought. Nor could anyone persuade them to sign a settlement until they realized that the war could not be won until the United States pulled out entirely.

Thus, by 1965, both Washington and Hanoi had chosen escalation as a seemingly viable alternative to a negotiated solution.[9] But the stakes were high on both sides. The experience of World War II had led U.S. strategists to believe that they could not win a war from the air, but the Korean War had made clear that land wars in Asia were undesirable. DRV leaders, for their part, made bellicose public statements but in fact were reluctant to expose their country to the devastating effects of U.S. firepower.[10] Accordingly, Ha-

8. The war in Indochina was in many respects a result of the Cold War rivalry between the superpowers. As George C. Herring puts it, "Had it not been for the cold war, the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union would not have intervened in what would likely have remained a localized anti-colonial struggle in French Indochina. The cold war shaped the way the Vietnam War was fought and significantly affected its outcome." See George C. Herring, "The Cold War and Vietnam," *OAH Magazine of History,* Vol. 18, No. 5 (October 2004), pp. 18–21. This outcome, however, cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the effects that the "little cold war" between Moscow and Beijing had on the way the war was fought. Had it not been for the Sino-Soviet split, China and the Soviet Union (especially the latter) would not have intervened in what likely would have remained what Herring calls "a localized anti-colonial struggle," a civil war between North and South Vietnam and a revolutionary war against native feudalism, Western capitalism, and imperialism. As a result, the United States likely would not have felt obliged to commit itself directly, and therefore the conflict would have remained a local "containment" war fought by proxies.

9. For details on Washington's reasons, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

10. See, for example, Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 40–57; and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies,* Vol. 1, No. 1–2 (2006), pp. 20–21.

noi showed signs of willingness to talk as early as August 1964—mere weeks after the first U.S. air strikes against DRV targets. U.S. policymakers showed little interest, however.[11] On 8 April 1965, soon after the beginning of the U.S. Rolling Thunder bombing operation and the landing of the first U.S. ground forces at Da Nang, DRV Premier Pham Van Dong publicly declared Hanoi's conditions for a political solution. The notorious "four-point" formula, however, could hardly be interpreted as a sign of Hanoi's readiness to compromise. Only after the first months of direct military engagement, which provided sufficient opportunity for the warring parties to test each other's strength and determination on the battlefield, did both Hanoi and Washington show readiness to probe the other side's willingness to achieve a political settlement. Thus, the military escalation of 1965–1966 coincided with the peak period of secret Vietnam War diplomacy.

The Warsaw Pact countries that sought to forge an early political settlement were not acting out of altruism. Even so, from late 1964, when the situation in Vietnam seemed to begin a sharp deterioration, the Soviet Union and its allies made every effort to keep Hanoi from siding with Beijing and to persuade DRV leaders to start negotiations with the United States.[12] However, until 1967 the USSR, anxious about its credibility as the leader of the world-

11. The first concrete sign of Hanoi's willingness to hold talks after the Gulf of Tonkin incident has become known as the "U Thant episode" of late 1964. On 6 August 1964, United Nations (UN) Secretary General U Thant suggested to U.S. officials that direct bilateral talks should be started between Hanoi and Washington. By mid-September, Thant, through Soviet channels, obtained explicit North Vietnamese agreement to take part in talks with the United States, but no clear response had come from Washington. For detailed accounts of the U Thant episode, see, for example, Logevall, *Choosing War,* pp. 210–212; and David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 95–104.

12. The Hungarian records contain many indications that until the early 1960s the DRV was considered an integral part of the Soviet bloc. Most Hungarian Foreign Ministry documents from that period describe North Vietnam as a socialist country whose "internal and foreign policy is in absolute harmony with the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union" and whose "political line" was "entirely identical" to that of Hungary. See, for example, "The 1958 Annual Report of the Hanoi Embassy," 10 January 1959, in MOL, 1959, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 3, 5/a-001499/1/1959, XIX-J-1-j; Report of the Hanoi Embassy, "SUBJECT: Summary of the Foreign and Internal Policy of the DRV," 25 October 1960, in MOL, 1960, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 3, 007700/1960, XIX-J-1-j; Foreign Ministry Directive on "The Development of Relations between the Hungarian People's Republic and the DRV," 16 January 1961, in MOL, 1961, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 2, 006992/1/szig.titk., XIX-J-1-j; and Hanoi Embassy to Foreign Minister Péter, "SUBJECT: Summary of the Foreign Policy of the DRV," 1 February 1962, in MOL, 1962, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 3, 002180/1/1962, XIX-J-1-j. Hanoi had needed serious "reorientation" after the DRV publicly sided with China at the 22nd CPSU Congress in October 1961. Keeping North Vietnam on the "right track" was undoubtedly a coordinated Soviet-bloc effort, however. A report of Hungary's ambassador in Pyongyang on a meeting of the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Mongolian, and North Vietnamese ambassadors and a Soviet embassy staffer states: "The purpose of the meeting with the Vietnamese ambassador . . . was to draw him closer to the ambassadors of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries. To let him know our position on the unresolved questions and to feel out the Vietnamese ambassador's opinion regarding these problems." See Report of the Hungarian Ambassador in Pyongyang to Foreign Minister Péter, "SUBJECT: The Presentation of the Vietnamese Ambas-

wide struggle against imperialism, was reluctant to mediate directly or to press North Vietnam too hard, for fear of playing into Chinese hands. The Soviet Union therefore encouraged its close East European allies, such as Poland and Hungary, to do the job. Most of this story has been well known since the appearance of Ilya Gaiduk's revealing work on the Soviet Union's policy toward Vietnam.[13] Contrary to earlier approaches referring to a "Nobel Prize syndrome," to personal scheming, or to fraudulent diplomatic maneuvering by certain Communist states acting at Moscow's behest to facilitate North Vietnamese infiltration of the South, Hungary's mediatory attempt was a complex, systematic political action designed by the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP). The Hungarian mediation, which started as early as January 1965 and ended almost two years later, around the beginning of the "Marigold affair,"[14] was a good-faith effort aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Although Gaiduk's book was a major contribution to the international history of the conflict, Hershberg's article played an equally important role in explaining the Soviet-bloc diplomatic efforts of the time. My article fleshes out the big picture by clarifying the controversial role that Hungary played in 1965–1967. The article adds to and revises Hershberg's findings and directly addresses the views of the former Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Washington, János Radványi, whom Hershberg also discusses at some length.

## Background

The question in the title of my article refers to Radványi's 1978 book *Delusion and Reality,* in which he discusses Hungarian diplomacy around Vietnam. The central element of his narrative is the "bombing pause diplomacy" of 1965–1966, which, he says, finally led to his own defection.[15] Radványi

sador," 24 January 1963, in MOL, 1963, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 4, 002089/1963, XIX-J-1-j;

13. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War.* The Soviet Union's unpublicized approach to Vietnam had earlier been touched on by Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in his memoir, published in 1995: Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), esp. pp. 128–140.

14. "Marigold" was the U.S. codename for Poland's secret peace attempt in the second half of 1966, which, according to some authors, came closest to bringing about direct U.S–North Vietnamese negotiations. For details, see James G. Hershberg (with the assistance of L. W. Gluchowski), "Who Murdered 'Marigold'?—New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland's Secret Initiative to Start U.S.–North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966," CWIHP Working Paper No. 27, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, April 2000.

15. János Radványi, *Delusion and Reality: Gambits, Hoaxes, and Diplomatic One-Upmanship in Vietnam* (South Bend, IN: Gateway Editions, 1978.)

claims that Foreign Minister Péter lied in late 1965 when he assured Secretary of State Dean Rusk that North Vietnam would negotiate if the United States stopped the bombing.

Surprisingly, even now, more than thirty years after Radványi's account was published, it is still the most important work on Hungary's role in the Vietnam conflict. Until the appearance of Hershberg's article, the bulk of the importance attached to Radványi's book—aside from the fact that he was the senior Hungarian diplomat in Washington from 1962 to 1967 and that he defected and told his version of the story to U.S. officials, something that was not an everyday occurrence[16]—derived from its solitary, even unique nature. Radványi's account has always been a one-witness case. No other analyses by Hungarian authors have appeared about Hungary's involvement in Vietnam. Hence, questions regarding the obscure background and seriousness of Hungary's mediation efforts have remained unanswered since 1978.

When Radványi defected in 1967, senior White House and State Department officials accepted his claims of the dishonesty of the Hungarian mediation attempt between Hanoi and Washington even though his references were dubious and hard to verify.[17] Hungary's Communist leaders, the only people who knew the entire story as it happened, had ample reason not to criticize Radványi's book and to remain silent about the whole issue. The continued silence after the end of Communism in Hungary is more difficult to explain. Documents available at the Hungarian national archives since the early 1990s provide valuable evidence on the topic, but some recent studies of the Communist powers and the Vietnam War, such as those by Gaiduk and Lorenz Lüthi, do not even mention the Hungarian initiative.[18] Others, including Qiang Zhai and Ang Cheng Guan, cite Radványi's book.[19]

16. According to *Time* magazine, when Radványi defected to the West he was the highest-ranking Communist diplomat ever to have done so: "Though a Romanian minister and another Hungarian head of mission defected to the U.S. in the '40s, neither was as high in his own government as Radványi, who held the coveted rank of career ambassador." See "Crossing the Potomac," *Time,* Vol. 89, No. 21 (26 May 1967), p. 22. See also "Some Notes on Radványi's Defection," HSWP CC Foreign Department Informational Material for Members of the Politburo and the Secretariat (No. 18) (Strictly Confidential), 7 June 1967, in MOL, Records of HSWP, 1967, M-KS 288.f.11/2145.ő.e., pp. 12–15.

17. The introduction to Radványi's book was written by former undersecretary of state George W. Ball, who states, "I find Professor Radványi's book particularly fascinating, since he provides *definite answers* to questions that were the subject of intense speculation at the upper reaches of the Johnson Administration." See George W. Ball, Introduction to Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. xv; emphasis added. Others, like Dean Rusk—as Hershberg points out in "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 2—cited Radványi's book when they dismissed the Hungarian initiative as completely "fraudulent."

18. Lüthi's book on the Sino-Soviet split is one of the latest works touching on the subject. He makes various references to the Polish and Soviet missions to Hanoi in early 1966 but does not mention the simultaneous Hungarian diplomatic action. See Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 302–339.

19. See, for example, Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University

Hungarian scholars for many years did not regard the Vietnam War as a subject relevant to Hungary's history.[20] Not until twenty years after the appearance of *Delusion and Reality* did the first serious challenges to Radványi's credibility surface in the form of a brief reference to a crucial archival record found by the historian Csaba Békés. In a 1998 article on the foreign policy of János Kádár (the long-time First Secretary of the HSWP), Békés called attention to a report concerning the visit of a Hungarian delegation led by Kádár to Moscow on 23–29 May 1965.[21] The report was discussed at a meeting of the HSWP Politburo on 8 June 1965. Both the report and the discussion placed Hungary's mediation role in a fundamentally new perspective.[22] Commenting on the Soviet position reflected in the source, Békés suggested that "the views concerning the nature of the Vietnam War, surviving up to the present day, according to which it should be regarded, in the first place, as a Soviet-American superpower conflict appearing in the form of a local war, should be significantly reconsidered."[23] But he also noted that Kádár's visit to Moscow was the starting point of an "almost entirely unknown" Hungarian peace initiative in which Hungarian officials carefully put out feelers in the East and the West before contacting the Americans or North Vietnamese themselves and engaging in a mediation attempt during the bombing pause.[24] Békés subsequently published the whole Politburo minutes in the yearbook of the 1956 Institute in Budapest.[25] In his introduction to the source, he outlined a subtle chronology pointing out that the first steps were taken in January 1965 when, according to Radványi's account,[26] Brezhnev "popped up" in Budapest along with Soviet Politburo member Nikolai Podgornyi to discuss

of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 254–255; and Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 32–33, 38–39.

20. Two rare exceptions are László Borhi, *Iratok a magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok történetéhez, 1957–1967* [Documents to the History of U.S.–Hungarian Relations, 1957–1967] (Budapest: Ister, 2002), pp. 43–47; and Csaba Békés, *Európából Európába: Magyarország konfliktusok kereszttüzében, 1945–1990* [From Europe to Europe: Hungary in the Crossfire of Conflicts, 1945–1990] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2004), pp. 23–24, 237–256. The analysis I present here is part of my larger effort to change this situation. See also Zoltán Szőke, "Magyarország és a vietnami háború, 1962–1975" [Hungary and the Vietnam War, 1962–1975], *Századok* (Budapest), Vol. 144, No. 1 (2010), pp. 47–97.

21. Békés, "A kádári külpolitika 1956–1968," pp. 19–22.

22. Békés quotes from the record but does not provide an exact reference. The original document, "Memorandum to the Politburo on the Negotiations of János Kádár, Antal Apró, and Béla Biszku in the Soviet Union, 23–29 May 1965," can be found in the Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ö.e., pp. 78–87. Later in the article Békés refers to the Politburo meeting of 22 June by date, describing it as another meeting at which crucial decisions were made.

23. Békés, "A kádári külpolitika," p. 22.

24. Ibid.

25. Csaba Békés, "Magyar-szovjet csúcstalálkozók, 1957–1965" [Hungarian-Soviet Summit Meetings, 1957–1965], in György Litván, ed., *Yearbook of the 1956 Institute,* Yearbook No. 6 (Budapest: Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, 1998), pp. 143–183.

26. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 38.

with Kádár the coordination of Soviet-bloc policy toward Vietnam, among other things. The "pop up" expression used by Radványi implies that the Soviet visit was a surprise; Békés demonstrates that it was not. That aside, January 1965 makes a natural starting point for any chronology concerning the secret and not-so-secret Hungarian diplomacy during the bombing pause and the remaining years of the conflict.

The voluminous archival evidence reinforces Békés's findings and yields a depiction of Hungary's diplomatic mediation fundamentally different from the account in Radványi's book. Radványi insists that Hungarian leaders were completely ignorant and negligent of Vietnam until 1965, that the whole mediation effort was a sham, that the Hungarian foreign minister's personal scheming played a key role in the deception, that U.S. officials were mistaken in believing "Moscow was 'interested' in helping Washington extricate itself from the war," that U.S. peace efforts were entirely sincere, and that Hanoi's "obsessive determination to carry out its aggression and win the war" is what made a peaceful settlement inherently impossible.[27] None of these claims is borne out by the evidence. A study of the Hungarian government's moves immediately before and right after the bombing pause sheds crucial light on Soviet-bloc diplomacy vis-à-vis Vietnam not only during this interlude but throughout the war.

## The Myth of Soviet "Pressure" to Support Vietnam

Hershberg's article on the Hungarian mediation constituted a breakthrough in at least two respects. Relying on primary sources, he was the first to show that, besides Poland, Hungary was the other East European Soviet-bloc country that was deeply involved in diplomatic activity aimed at a political resolution of the conflict.[28] Second, by cautious reasoning, he successfully disproved

27. Nine years after *Delusion and Reality* was published, Radványi reaffirmed his claims in János Radványi, "Vietnam War Diplomacy: Reflections of a Former Iron Curtain Official," in Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown, eds., *Assessing the Vietnam War: A Collection from the Journal of the U.S. Army War College* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1987), pp. 57–66. In a 2005 interview by András Heltai, an emblematic figure of Kádár-era Hungarian journalism, Radványi reiterated that Péter had been "bluffing" for a year. See András Heltai, "A diplomata halálos ítélete" [The Death Sentence of a Diplomat], *168 óra* (Budapest), Vol. 17, No. 50 (2005), pp. 40–41.

28. On Poland's extensive role in Indochina, see Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," pp. 50–58; Hershberg, "Who Murdered 'Marigold'?"; and Margaret K. Gnoinska, "Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the 'Maneli Affairs,'" CWIHP Working Paper No. 45, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, March 2005. From January 1973, Poland and Hungary were also fellow members in the ICCS set up by the Paris Peace Accords. Despite the top-secret nature of the talks, some details of the Hungarian mediatory action leaked to the press immediately. See, for example, Murrey Marder, "Diplomats Doubtful Step

the earlier views on the subject, which almost without exception dismissed Hungary's and Poland's mediation efforts as completely insincere and deceptive.[29] This unanimous dismissal originated, for the most part, from the statements Radványi made in his book. Among other things, Radványi asserted that Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter *personally* orchestrated the alleged fraud, partly in order to improve his own political prestige and partly "to encourage bombing pauses that would enable North Vietnam to speed up its infiltration and the resupply of its forces in the South."[30] The archival evidence cited by Hershberg raises serious questions about these claims. "Despite Radványi's allegation that the Hungarian initiative was completely 'fraudulent,' the evidence suggests that Péter did in fact have genuine contacts in Hanoi and did receive at least some indication . . . of a willingness to establish contact with the United States."[31] However, entirely absent from Radványi's account and appearing only superficially in Hershberg's analysis is the idea that Péter was not motivated by Hanoi's "willingness"—which, at least until early 1968, was better defined as Hanoi's "reluctance." Rather, Péter was motivated by the strong and sincere willingness of Moscow to find a political solution to the conflict and by Hungary's own interest in a negotiated solution. Although Hungary's motivation had a slightly different basis from that of Moscow, both were real and Péter's personal ambitions did not have much to do with them. The same applies to Hanoi's interests. The Hungarians cared little about what the Vietnamese used the bombing pause for in terms of military strategy. Subsequently, when they knew their diplomatic effort had proved essentially unsuccessful, the Hungarian leaders and their Soviet counterparts took little comfort in knowing that Hanoi had been able to use the pause to speed up the infiltration and resupply of its forces in the South, an outcome that was definitely not among Budapest's or Moscow's main objectives. Radványi had claimed that Soviet leaders "expressed real anxiety about

Will Lead to Conference Table," *The Washington Post,* 24 December 1965, p. A1; and Chalmers M. Roberts, "Silence Greets Queries on Pause in Bombing," *The Washington Post,* 28 December 1965, p. A1. In 1968, these pieces of information along with data collected from sporadic statements of participants on both sides (U.S. and Hungarian) were put together and published by two American journalists. See Kraslow and Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam,* pp. 144–145, 151, 151–152 n. Nevertheless, Kraslow and Loory quote a Radványi press statement in which he claimed that "the whole [Hungarian] move was without any basis." British historian R. B. Smith also mentions the Hungarian contact in his authoritative work on Vietnam, but because of a lack of reliable sources he deems it unclear whether Budapest acted as an intermediary with North Vietnam. R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War,* Vol. III, *The Making of a Limited War, 1965–66* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 253.

29. Csaba Békés was the first (in 1998) to call attention—even if implicitly—to the fundamental discrepancy between Radványi's basic concept and the Hungarian archival evidence. See Békés, "A kádári külpolitika 1956–1968."

30. Ball, Introduction to *Delusion and Reality,* p. xv.

31. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 65.

the Vietnam situation" (i.e., the heavy damage inflicted by the intense U.S. bombing and the badly shaken morale of the North Vietnamese populace as a result) and mobilized their allies as mediators to extract bombing pauses from the United States because "time was needed . . . to build air defense systems, to repair communication lines, and to supply the armed forces and the civilian population."[32] In fact, the main source of Moscow's anxiety was the increasing Chinese influence over Hanoi. Soviet leaders were convinced—not without good reason—that by pushing the DRV toward an exclusively military solution Beijing's ultimate purpose was to force the Soviet Union into a direct conflict with the United States,[33] an outcome that inevitably would have led to a third world war. This concern led Moscow to mobilize its allies as mediators, and Budapest was not only willing to play the role but had its own ideas about effective ways of peacemaking. As Békés sarcastically remarks, Kádár and his colleagues "exceeded the plan."[34]

## Prelude to Mediation

The Hungarian mediation attempt did not come out of the blue. Radványi, in his explanation of the "sudden shift" in Soviet policy in late 1964 and early 1965, divides the Hungarian leaders' approach to the Vietnam conflict between the period before Brezhnev's visit to Budapest in January 1965 and the period following it.[35] According to Radványi, the visit marked the end of Budapest's total indifference toward Southeast Asia. Until then, Hungarian indifference had been so deep that even the Tonkin Bay incident caused "hardly a ripple" in Budapest, proving that the Hungarian party leaders were unable to grasp that the clash between U.S. and North Vietnamese naval vessels portended a change in the character of the war. Radványi goes further, claiming that, up to that point, *no one* in the Hungarian capital seemed to care about the war or its role in the U.S. presidential campaign. Neither of these claims seems to pass the probe of comparative analysis. Moreover, in the light of the archival evidence, Radványi's statements prove to be a rough distortion of the facts.

32. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 52.

33. See, for example, Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 74.

34. Békés, "A kádári külpolitika," p. 22.

35. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 37. Actually, Moscow's shift was rather gradual. According to Gaiduk, Soviet leaders began to search for a way out of the Vietnamese trap during the Khrushchev era: "Changes in the Kremlin only intensified this process; they were not its starting point. This explains why Soviet policy shifts toward the Vietnamese conflict appeared so soon after the new 'collective leadership' came to power." See Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 18–19.

From August 1959 to March 1965, Hungarian decision-making bodies—the Central Committee (CC), the Politburo, and the Secretariat of the HSWP (commonly referred to as the "central leading organs")—discussed the Vietnamese situation on 42 occasions, especially during the last eight months of 1965.[36] The matter was being considered by HSWP leaders at a time when Vietnam was not yet considered a central issue in Moscow. Vietnam appeared nineteen times on the HSWP Politburo's agenda and three times on the CC's agenda in 1965. In that one year—when the Politburo held meetings every two weeks and the CC every two to three months—the highest leaders discussed Vietnam-related questions at almost every meeting. Given the "change in the character of the war" in 1965, these findings are hardly surprising, but they also provide little support for Radványi's claim that before 1965 Budapest was completely oblivious to Southeast Asia.

Like China and the Soviet Union, Hungary in February 1950 established cordial diplomatic relations with the DRV, and these ties remained unbroken for the next 40 years.[37] Almost immediately after the signing of the Geneva Accords, which brought the end of armed conflict in North Vietnam, Hungary established its embassy in Hanoi (January 1955). The DRV's embassy in Budapest opened a year later. Radványi mentions some of the highlights of

36. The source of all quantitative data in this paragraph is Karola Vágyi et al., eds., *The Agenda Register of the HSWP Central Leading Organs' Meetings, 1956–1989,* Vol. I–IV (Budapest: National Archives of Hungary, 1995). August 1959 and March 1965 accord with (1) the first appearance of the Vietnam issue in the HSWP CC minutes after the May 1959 decision of the Vietnam Workers Party (VWP) Politburo to launch an armed struggle for the liberation of the South; and (2) the landing of the U.S. 9th Marines at Da Nang, marking the beginning of U.S. escalation.

37. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was not merely a symbolic act. The DRV, as the first "socialist" country in the region, was considered the Southeast Asian outpost of the Communist camp. Accordingly, by 1957, 40 percent of the DRV's national budget was covered by the aid of "fraternal" Communist countries. During the war against the French, Hungary provided the Vietminh with considerable medical supplies and other civilian aid. One of the outstanding issues of this period was the (forced) repatriation of Hungarian citizens who served in the French Foreign Legion, including some captured by the Vietminh and others who had deserted or changed sides and were redeployed by the Vietminh against their former fellow legionnaires. Some of these latter, as a reward for their outstanding service, were promoted to officer of the Vietnam People's Army. Both sides (Hungary and the DRV/Vietminh) took advantage of the diplomatic transactions concerning the former legionnaires, seeing them as a useful means to develop bilateral relations. As the war ended, Hungary started to send more substantial economic aid to Hanoi (8.5 million rubles in 1955, 10 million rubles in 1958). In return, from late 1956 through early 1957, when Hungary itself essentially became a war zone, the DRV provided modest economic aid to Budapest. Ho Chi Minh's visit to Hungary in early August 1957 was important for the Hungarians. The practically illegitimate regime desperately needed the recognition of any foreign state that was willing to provide it, and Ho was not just any Communist head of state. By that time, he had become a legendary figure not only within the Communist movement but throughout the world. His personal visit was considered a great success in Budapest and was evaluated as "the eloquent testimony of [his] backing to the Hungarian workers and the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government." For Ho, however, the visit to Hungary was not just a courtesy call. He came to find answers to his own regime's problems and handed over a long list of concrete and complex questions covering practically every aspect of Hungary's political, social, and economic life. Primary sources covering these issues can be found in MOL, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, 1945–1964, Boxes 1–9, XIX-J-1-j.

the two countries' diplomatic relations before the alleged "revelation" to the Hungarian leadership of Vietnam's importance—for example, the visit by Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich (who was also a Politburo member) to Hanoi in 1959[38]—while omitting many others, including Ho's 1957 visit to Budapest. Evidence shows that from time to time, and especially after 1962, Hungarian officials played an active diplomatic role in North Vietnam and that Hungarian diplomats, through their intimate, high-level party and government contacts, were able to obtain insider information in Hanoi.[39] Thanks to reports sent home by the Hungarian missions in Hanoi, Moscow, and Pyongyang, leaders in Budapest possessed detailed and timely information regarding Vietnamese affairs and the Indochina conflict as a whole. This does not mean that the Hungarians also possessed exact, detailed information on internal power struggles and decision-making in Hanoi, but the Hungarians did know, however, that VWP leaders disagreed about some issues such as the problems within the international Communist movement (i.e., the Sino-Soviet split) and the proper balance between political and military struggle. By the time of Brezhnev's and Podgorny's visit in January 1965, the Hungarians were fully prepared to take an even more active diplomatic role in both Hanoi and Washington. The way they did so shows that their moves were based on profound knowledge that could not have been acquired overnight.

## Preparation

As early as 1962 the Hungarian Foreign Ministry instructed its envoys in Hanoi to pay close attention to DRV foreign policy so that Hungary could react to those steps as quickly as necessary to take account of three key political factors.[40] First, North Vietnamese leaders had become deeply concerned by the

38. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* pp. 16–27.

39. Several embassy reports provide clear evidence of this. In one top secret report, the Hungarian chargé d'affaires in Hanoi, László Kovács, notes that during a meeting with Soviet Ambassador Tovmassian, the Soviet diplomat expressed surprise at the information his Hungarian colleague had obtained from his high-level North Vietnamese contacts. Tovmassian said he himself had been unable to learn anything from the North Vietnamese because they either evaded the main issues or kept repeating their public statements. This exchange of information stemmed from a Hungarian promise at an earlier meeting to share with the USSR valuable information obtained from North Vietnamese contacts. Apparently during this period the Poles' contacts with the DRV were also better than the Soviet Union's contacts, but in at least some cases the Hungarians were better informed than even the Poles. See Hungarian Ambassador in Hanoi to Foreign Minister Péter, "SUBJECT: Visit to Soviet Ambassador Comrade Tovmassian," 1 February 1962, in MOL, 1962, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 5, 002191/1962, XIX-J-1-j. See also Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* p. 126; Mieczysław Maneli, *War of the Vanquished* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 164; and Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 28–29.

40. Foreign Ministry Instruction on "The Revision of the 'Directives' Concerning the DRV," 6 Febru-

divergence within the socialist camp that surfaced following the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1961. The DRV government was taking care to avoid any negative consequences of this division in its bilateral relations with other socialist countries. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry ordered its diplomats to be considerate of the North Vietnamese approach and to use the high-level personal contacts of the ambassador to acquire more detailed information on the DRV's position, the reasons for Hanoi's reservations, and North Vietnam's efforts to play a mediatory role between Moscow and Beijing. Second, as a result of imperialist intervention, South Vietnam was becoming volatile. The United States seemed determined to use every means to suppress the intensifying armed resistance in the South. Third, because the DRV's political and geographic situation meant it played a key role in Southeast Asia, the Hanoi embassy was responsible for following with attention the internal and foreign policy events of South Vietnam, as well as Laos and Cambodia.

The Hungarian embassy in Hanoi started sending home greater numbers of analytic reports and briefs on events in both parts of Vietnam and in the wider region. These top secret reports, as with most secret reports from key embassies, were directly addressed to Foreign Minister Péter.[41]

The same applies to the reports on the Tonkin Gulf incident later on. The incident caused more than a "ripple" in Budapest and left Hungarian diplomats alarmed and HWSP leaders cautious in their judgments regarding Hanoi's trustworthiness and intentions.[42] One of the embassy reports from

ary 1962, in MOL, 1962, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 2, 001731/1962, XIX-J-1-j. According to Radványi this happened three years later as a result of the Soviet Union's for "united action." See Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 40.

41. In the Hungarian administrative system, addressing an official document (letter, report, memorandum, etc.) to a certain official by name is the equivalent of the U.S./U.K. "eyes only" handling instruction, except that in Hungary this does not necessarily mean that such documents cannot be copied, stored, reproduced, transmitted, or shared with other parties. In this period, Hungarian embassies and other organizations subordinate to the Foreign Ministry used two forms of address when they created and sent documents to the Budapest headquarters: "Foreign Ministry, Budapest" and "To Comrade Foreign Minister, Budapest." The latter meant, "(to Péter's) eyes only." At the same time, as in all the Communist systems, the state administration was duplicated, in many cases even triplicated, by the party apparatus (i.e., almost every key government agency had its equivalent within the party organization), where the real decisions were made. In Hungary, the HSWP CC had its own foreign department, and the foreign minister reported directly to the Politburo, which in most cases required his personal presence at the Politburo meetings. In addition, János Kádár simultaneously held the positions of HSWP First Secretary (1956–1985) and prime minister (1956–1958; 1961–1965). Thus, whether Foreign Minister Péter (1961–1973; and a member of the HSWP CC from 1966 to 1980) reported to the head of government or to the party chief, he was reporting to Kádár, who was famous for personally directing Hungary's foreign policy.

42. Radványi asserts that only one "so-called protest meeting" occurred in Budapest a week after the Tonkin incident and that HSWP leaders' indifference was reflected in the fact that no Politburo member spoke at the rally. See Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 271 n. 12. But the evidence shows (1) that the mass demonstration was directly ordered by the Politburo and that *two* Politburo members (Dezső Nemes and Sándor Rónai) were present; (2) that the government was represented by three members of

this period indicates that although Soviet-bloc countries publicly denounced the U.S. "provocation" as "America's aggression against the peaceful people of North Vietnam," they were not certain that Hanoi was innocent in the outbreak of open hostilities.[43] Private conversations of Soviet-bloc diplomats in Hanoi following the Gulf of Tonkin incident reveal that they seriously contemplated the question of "Cui prodest?" and included the DRV as a probable beneficiary. The report of these conversations puts forth several possible explanations, including the argument of some DRV officials that the Tonkin Bay events made clear that the time to resolve the South Vietnamese question—that is, to start a general uprising in the South—was at hand. The report concludes that, regardless of who started the incident, the three parties who were chiefly concerned—Washington, Beijing, and Hanoi—each made good use of it.

Regarding Radványi's remark on Budapest's failure to notice that Vietnam was becoming a domestic issue in the United States, the Hungarian Politburo's subsequent discussions and decisions indicate that the detailed reports on Vietnam-related events and opinions that Radványi and his colleagues sent home from Washington were thoughtfully and thoroughly examined by the party leaders. Radványi, unlike his well-informed colleagues in Hanoi, based most of his reports on indirect, secondary, and public sources until he became personally involved in the bombing pause mediation.[44] Nonetheless, his reports might have contributed to the perception in Budapest that both Washington and Hanoi had acted under strong pressure from their allies and their internal opposition and therefore that both would be willing to listen to voices promoting negotiated solutions.[45] In a report on

the Kádár cabinet (Deputy Prime Minister János Pap, Foreign Minister János Péter, and Minister of Labor József Veres); (3) that the meeting was chaired by CC member Árpád Szakasits; and, (4) that the DRV's ambassador was present and gave a speech. The head of the National Council of Labor Unions, Sándor Beckl, and Foreign Minister Péter addressed the crowd. The Politburo even sent a "solidarity telegram" to Ho Chi Minh on behalf of the "demonstrators." The drafting of the speeches and the text of the cable were overseen by Nemes and fellow Politburo member Zoltán Komócsin. Only Kádár's, Ho Chi Minh's, or Nikita Khrushchev's personal presence could have provided higher-lever Communist Party representation at the event. (The mass media were ordered to provide "appropriate publicity" for the event. Accordingly, the demonstration occupied the next day's front pages.) See Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 11 August 1964, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/341.ő.e., pp. 3, 37; and *Népszabadság* [People's Freedom; the daily paper of the HSWP], 13 August 1964.

43. Report of the Hungarian Ambassador in Hanoi to Péter, "SUBJECT: The Tonkin Provocation and Its Effects," 26 October 1964, in MOL, 1964, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 4, 004977/1/1964, XIX-J-1-j.

44. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality*, pp. 43–44.

45. According to this image, which was not entirely groundless, Beijing and the VWP's own pro-Chinese faction forced Hanoi toward an exclusively military solution, and Washington, as the staunch leader of the free world, was under international pressure to take resolute steps to stop Communist aggression in Vietnam. The internal pressure in Washington's case came, for the most part, from Republican hawks such as Senator Barry Goldwater, Johnson's opponent in the 1964 presidential elections, who attacked the Johnson administration for its "weak and indecisive" foreign policy and called for

conversations with influential representatives of the U.S. and international press dated 21 August 1964 (i.e., less than twenty days after the Gulf of Tonkin incident), Radványi practically summarizes what Logevall calls the "inevitability thesis" as the general opinion in Washington.[46] He adds, however, that, according to his sources, if the recent U.S. military and political measures stopped the worsening of the situation in South Vietnam and if Lyndon Johnson were to win the election, the United States would consent to the convening of a fourteen-power conference on Southeast Asia.

Radványi makes the dubious cliam that reports from Hanoi, Washington, and elsewhere did not make their way to the HSWP leaders. The evidence shows that the January 1965 visit of Soviet leaders happened at Kádár's invitation.[47] At the meeting, where the Vietnam War was also discussed, Kádár and Brezhnev agreed that a Hungarian party delegation led by Kádár would pay a return visit to Moscow later that spring.[48] The Hungarians used the interval between the two top-level meetings to gather information on current foreign policy issues, including Vietnam as a stand-alone topic.[49] A report to the HSWP Politburo noted that Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany fully endorsed the Soviet Union's policy, although their opinions regarding China's possible future conduct and its impact on Hanoi varied.[50] Hungarian diplomats in Hanoi reported that after Kosygin's February visit to the DRV, the North Vietnamese started to remove pro-Chinese Foreign Ministry staff from key positions.[51] The Hungarian ambassador, along with

the use of more force in Vietnam. See Radványi to Péter, "SUBJECT: Information on the Situation in South Vietnam," 21 August 1964, in MOL, 1964, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 6, 005074/1964, XIX-J-1-j.

46. Ibid., and Logevall, *Choosing War,* p. xvii.

47. Békés, however, states that the Budapest meeting was initiated by Brezhnev. Békés, "Hungarian-Soviet Summit Meetings," p. 148. Although Brezhnev and Podgornyi mentioned in general as early as November 1964 that they would be glad to visit Hungary, Kádár had to invite them twice before they accepted his invitation. See, for example, Kádár's invitation and Brezhnev's reply letter, in Records of Kádár's Personal Secretariat, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.47/735.ő.e., and Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 1 December 1964, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/353.ő.e., p. 3.

48. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 38; and Békés, "Hungarian-Soviet Summit Meetings," p. 148.

49. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: Proposal on Foreign Ministry Consultations with Socialist Countries on the Vietnam Question," 5 March 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-144-49/1965, XIX-J-1-j. This memorandum, with reference to the increasing U.S. involvement and the requests of the DRV's Foreign Ministry for intensified political support, suggests completely separate discussions on Vietnamese affairs at the deputy foreign ministerial level. At the same time, the memorandum warns that the DRV's ambassador in Budapest and the first secretary of the Vietnamese embassy are pro-Chinese and, therefore, their views on a possible political settlement should not be considered as Hanoi's official position.

50. Foreign Ministry Report, "Consultations with the Foreign Ministers of Certain Socialist Countries," in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., pp. 106–113.

51. Report of Hungarian Ambassador in Hanoi, Gusztáv Gogolyák, to Péter, "SUBJECT: The Second Plenum of the DRV's National Assembly," 17 May 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, IV-212-001791/1/1965, XIX-J-1-j. According to the

"friendly" diplomats, evaluated this as a possible sign of change in Hanoi's political line.

At the end of April, the Hungarian Politburo, in full knowledge of the results of Kosygin's talks in Hanoi and the other crucial political and military events that had happened in Vietnam (and the United States), as well as the results of bilateral consultations with Soviet-bloc countries, considered the time ripe to propose that Soviet leaders discuss "some questions" along informal party lines, with the complete omission of diplomatic protocol.[52] According to the Hungarian proposal, the agenda of the informal "exchange of views" consisted of two main points: (1) current foreign policy affairs and problems of the international Communist movement, with Vietnam as the first item in the list; and (2) the main problems of the implementation of Hungary's economic plan for the period 1966–1970 and Hungary's requests with regard to these problems.[53] (The latter portion of the second agenda item involved a request for a 400-million ruble loan, a 300-million ruble supply of material commodities, and a 70,000-kilogram gold reserve for the Hungarian National Bank. The letter containing these "suggestions" was personally signed by Kádár and directly addressed to Brezhnev. Kádár closed the letter by emphasizing the urgency of the issue, explaining that because of the incomplete state of preliminary talks on the Soviet contribution to Hungary's next five-year plan the Hungarian economic planning mechanism had already become paralyzed.

The Hungarian Politburo was fully aware that the situation in Vietnam was getting more "complicated" and also understood the extent of inconvenience this caused Moscow. Most likely Brezhnev had told the HSWP leaders about Moscow's concern during the January talks and broached a possible solution. Tthis information gave them the idea to link their economic request to the question of "supporting Vietnam."[54] This scenario seems to be supported by the fact that Budapest launched exploratory talks—beginning with its closest allies—shortly after the January summit and by the fact that throughout March and April Péter and other high-ranking Hungarian officials, besides routinely condemning the "shameless American aggression" in Vietnam,

report, the highest-ranking pro-Chinese official to be removed was the foreign minister. On the removal and 1968 rehabilitation of Xuan Thuy, see Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 157.

52. On Kosygin's talks, see Report of Ambassador Gogolyák to Péter, "SUBJECT: Comrade Kosygin's Visit to the DRV," 6 March 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 109, 001330/28/1965, XIX-J-1-j; and Minutes of HSWP CC, 11–13 March 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.4/73-74.ő.e., pp. 8–13.

53. Kádár to Brezhnev, in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., pp. 95–96.

54. So far, no Hungarian archival record of these discussions has been located.

started to issue a series of public statements stressing the necessity of a negotiated solution.[55] At the beginning of April Péter visited Austria. During his 9 April press conference in Vienna, reacting to President Johnson's Baltimore speech on Southeast Asia, he said that Hungary could give a "positive" response to the president's proposals if the United States ceased its bombing of North Vietnam.[56] Also, on 11 May 1965, ten days *before* the Hungarian party delegation left for Moscow, the Politburo decided to start preliminary consultations with the VWP CC about sending Hungarian officials to Hanoi "at the earliest possible date."[57] If Kádár anticipated that during his return visit Brezhnev would make a direct request and ask him to help Moscow to convince Hanoi about the necessity of a political solution—and that, therefore, the USSR would be more receptive and lenient toward Hungary's appeal for financial assistance—his calculation proved correct.

The informal exchange of views between the Soviet and Hungarian delegations led by Brezhnev and Kádár took place in Moscow on 24–25 May 1965.[58] In the first part of the discussions Brezhnev briefed the Hungarians on the internal situation in the Soviet Union. He then turned to the international situation, discussing Moscow's bilateral relations with the countries of the socialist camp and with the leading Western powers. Remarkably, Brezhnev depicted the Vietnam issue as an integral part of the Soviet Union's bilateral relations with China, starting with the statement that the debate with Beijing was expected to be a long one and that in the short term prospects for the normalization of the two country's relations were dim. Then, with a sudden turn, he added that China's position on the Vietnam question prevented the Soviet Union from effectively assisting the DRV. According to Brezhnev, China's behavior created the impression that Moscow was not making every possible effort to help and that China was using the war in Vietnam to force the Soviet Union into a direct conflict with the United States. Brezhnev com-

55. See, for example, U.S. Legation in Budapest to State Department, Joint Weeka No. 12, 21 March 1965, "Political: 3. Hungarian Regime Solidarity with North Vietnamese," National Archives II, College Park, MD (NARA), General Records of the Department of State, Central Files, Record Group (RG) 59, Hungarian Relations, POL2-1 HUNG 3/121/65, Box 2275.

56. U.S. Legation in Budapest to State Department, Joint Weeka No. 16, 18 April 1965, "Political: 2. Vienna Visit of Foreign Minister April 7–10/US-Hungarian Relations: Foreign Minister's Comments," NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL2-1 HUNG 4/18/65, Box 2275. Johnson, in his "Peace without Conquest" address at Johns Hopkins University on 7 April 1965, sought to answer Vietnam critics by offering "unconditional discussions" in pursuit of peace and a billion-dollar development project along the Mekong River, but he also reaffirmed his determination not to withdraw.

57. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 11 May 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., p. 6.

58. See Kádár's oral report in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, pp. 18–25, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e; and "Memorandum to the Politburo on the Negotiations of János Kádár, Antal Apró and Béla Biszku in the Soviet Union, May 23–29 1965," in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., pp. 78–87.

plained that the USSR was unable to get a clear picture of the situation because the Chinese and North Vietnamese refused to speak with them, and therefore their supportive actions had to be taken at random. As to the Americans, Brezhnev said they were searching for a way out themselves. They realized that the bombing of the North had led nowhere and that a sustained bombing campaign would result in the escalation of the war and, at worst, direct conflict with China and the Soviet Union. Brezhnev told the Hungarians that the Americans wanted to avoid this, which is why they had suspended the bombing and why Rusk had proposed negotiations to Andrei Gromyko in Vienna.[59]

Brezhnev then came to the point. He said that the Soviet Union would provide full support for Vietnam but would prevent the conflict from growing into a world war. Achieving this goal, however, would require the coordinated diplomatic effort of socialist countries. They, too, would need to send delegations to Hanoi in order to counter Chinese influence. Brezhnev added that because the situation in Vietnam was a determinative element of U.S.-Soviet relations Moscow would, in the meantime, show strength and resoluteness and "increase the effectiveness of its warnings" to Washington by starting a worldwide propaganda campaign to "reveal American imperialism."

Brezhnev's next, seemingly insignificant remark, this time in regard to Soviet-British relations, proved to be of crucial importance to subsequent Hungarian diplomatic activity. Brezhnev briefly noted that Soviet relations with Britain had deteriorated and that by calling off Kosygin's visit to London the USSR wanted to indicate its disapproval of British nuclear strategy and the British government's support of Washington's Vietnam policy.

As for Hungary's appeal for economic aid, the Soviet Union provided 250 million of the 400-million ruble loan requested by Budapest and 120 million of the 300-million ruble supply of material commodities. Instead of providing a 70,000-kilogram gold reserve for the Hungarian National Bank, Soviet leaders promised to increase from $60 million to $85–90 million Hungary's credit limit at Moscow's Western banks.[60]

On 8 June, Kádár briefed the HSWP Politburo on the results of the Moscow talks, starting with what Brezhnev had said about Vietnam: "Since the establishment of the Soviet Union they have never taken part in such a struggle,

59. Brezhnev evidently was referring to the five-day "Mayflower" bombing pause, which lasted from 13 to 17 May 1965. For details of the proposed negotiations, see Secretary of State Rusk to Department of State, 15 May 1965, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1964–1968, Vol. II, pp. 664–665 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS,* with appropriate year and volume numbers).

60. Memorandum to the Politburo on the Negotiations of János Kádár, Antal Apró and Béla Biszku in the Soviet Union, May 23–29 1965," in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., pp. 84–85.

where they did not know what the tactics, the strategy or the objective was. This is the first time, for they have no idea what the Vietnamese and the Chinese are trying to achieve, and this has a very bad effect."[61] At the same time, according to Kádár, Moscow believed that the U.S. bombing pause was not merely a tactical ploy and that the Johnson administration's intention to negotiate should be taken seriously. Brezhnev repeated the Soviet "opinion" that not only the CPSU but other Communist parties should send delegations to Hanoi—partly to drive the DRV in the "right direction" and partly to obtain first-hand information about the situation. Regarding Budapest's request and the measure of aid granted by Moscow, Kádár said he had stressed that although Soviet help would not entirely resolve Hungary's problems it would be enough to base Hungarian economic planning on realistic grounds. Finally, he reported that he had assured Soviet leaders that the Hungarians, in initiating the Moscow meeting, had not meant to blackmail the Soviet Union. They were simply compelled by the force of circumstance. In Communist rhetoric this was the equivalent of confessing that the HSWP, having recognized Moscow's awkward situation, wanted to make a simple deal: diplomatic assistance for economic aid. Kádár, ever the faithful ally, not only was warning of the economic peril facing his regime but was also offering something more than mere survival in return for Soviet aid, possibly to take the edge off his "request." At the same time, Kádár did not have to make a sacrifice. He was well aware that Hungary itself had an interest—even without Moscow's request—in finding a solution to the Vietnam conflict, and the sooner the better. Having an opportunity to take part directly in the resolution would have been the icing on the cake for Budapest. Even U.S. officials saw this very clearly:

> [A]ny hopes of the leadership of developing Hungary's self-reliance and of seeking advantageous relations with the capitalist West, including the U.S., were complicated by the rise of East-West tensions over Viet-Nam and by the accompanying increase in differences and pressures within the communist camp. Hungary's involvement in all of these problems served to bring into sharp relief the regime's heavy dependence on the Soviet Union, a dependence all the more problematic at a time when Soviet leadership and policies were in uncertain transition.[62]

Not surprisingly, the HSWP Politburo agreed to send a party delegation to Hanoi as soon as possible and instructed the HSWP CC's Department for Foreign Affairs to start immediate preparations. In addition, the Politburo agreed to receive a DRV delegation at the end of June, to convene an inter-

61. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, pp. 18–25, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., p. 18.

62. U.S. Legation in Budapest to the State Department, "SUBJECT: Hungary: Trends and Prospects," 5 January 1966, NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL2-HUNG 1/10/66, Box 2275.

agency meeting to evaluate past and future assistance to Hanoi, to approve the Foreign Ministry's report on "consultations with certain socialist countries' foreign ministers,"[63] and, finally, to accept in principle the invitation extended by the British foreign secretary to János Péter.

The HSWP Politburo held its next meeting two weeks later, on 22 June 1965, the day before the arrival of a North Vietnamese delegation led by Le Thanh Nghi, deputy prime minister of the DRV. Vietnam was second on the Politburo's agenda, followed by discussion of the guiding principles of Péter's coming London talks.[64] Kádár began the discussion of Vietnam by disclosing some "strictly confidential, internal information" on a communication between Soviet and North Vietnamese leaders at the end of May. Without specifying his source, he told the HSWP Politburo that "certain" DRV leaders were convinced that the bombing of Hanoi was imminent and that they apparently were seeking a political settlement. They believed that a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam might provide an opportunity to start negotiations with the United States at the ambassadorial level and identified Warsaw as a possible venue. But, Kádár said, they also felt the war in the South should continue during the negotiations. The VWP CC had not yet endorsed the initiation of such talks but would discuss the idea in the near future. Kádár emphasized that the North Vietnamese had not informed the Chinese about their intention to negotiate because the Chinese would have been opposed.

It is unclear where Kádár's information came from and whether it was real or just another one of his tactical moves, perhaps inspired by Moscow. However, his report did contain a faint allusion to Polish sources (apart from his mention of the possible venue): Kádár noted that the North Vietnamese had attempted to request help from friendly countries to organize the meeting and had thought of Moscow first but then decided that contacting the Poles would be more "expedient."[65] Although this information might have reinforced Budapest's commitment to a peace initiative and its hope for success, the main motivation for its diplomatic efforts lay elsewhere. What makes Kádár's information about an alleged secret North Vietnamese inquiry remarkable and, for that matter, more credible is its striking similarity to the initial circumstances of the "Marigold affair" more than a year later. The information also seems to corroborate the faint indications of a possible (temporary) shift in Hanoi's negotiating stance in response to the "Mayflower" bombing halt.[66] If the alleged May 1965

63. Foreign Ministry Report, "Consultations with the Foreign Ministers of Certain Socialist Countries," in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 8 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/367.ő.e., pp. 106–113.

64. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 22 June 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/368.ő.e., pp. 10–15.

65. Ibid., p. 11.

66. See, for example, Kraslow and Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam,* p. 123; R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War,* Vol. III, pp. 133–134; Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quag-*

overture of "certain" DRV leaders was an authentic North Vietnamese attempt to start direct talks with Washington at the ambassadorial level, it was the first known instance of its kind and the first mention in archival sources of the notion of a bombing pause as *Hanoi's* condition for starting talks.[67] Unfortunately, determining the source and authenticity of this secret information will require further research in Hanoi, Budapest, Warsaw, and Moscow. What is beyond doubt, however, is that from mid-1965 onward events accelerated and turned serious.

## Implementation

When the machinery of Hungarian diplomacy was finally set in motion to promote a negotiated resolution of the Vietnam conflict, the first move was taken not in Hanoi or Washington but in London. During Kádár's May 1965 Moscow meeting, Brezhnev mentioned Britain's contradictory role in Vietnam and the negative impact on Soviet-British bilateral relations. Kádár and his colleagues listened carefully. In April and May 1965, Hungarian leaders learned about friendly government's views on international affairs. One of the conclusions they reached was that concern was growing in the Soviet bloc about London's "reactionary" foreign policy, particularly its backing of U.S. "aggression" in Vietnam.[68] As a result of these bilateral consultations, a consensus was reached that Hungary and its allies should maintain at least some lower-level contacts with London—instead of completely isolating Great Britain—to help shift British policy in a more favorable direction. In light of the open invitation from British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, the Hun-

*mire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 141–143.

67. The first indication of Hanoi's intention to talk was the "U Thant episode" of late 1964.

68. The other main reason for concern was the rapid rapprochement between Britain and West Germany. We now know that Vietnam was at this time a constant source of tension between Washington and London. The depth of the tension, however, was not known to Soviet-bloc countries and therefore did not alter their negative perception of London's approach. (Hungarian sources reveal that Budapest knew about both the public and "alleged" secret British efforts to change the course of U.S. Vietnam policy, but, based on Soviet and other "friendly" opinion, Hungarian Foreign Ministry officials also assumed that British Prime Minister Harold Wilson's allusions to such moves were intended to mislead the public. See "Evaluation of the Situation in South Vietnam from the British Point of View," London, 5 March 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, III-1-001330/9/1965, XIX-J-1-j. The source of U.S.-British tension was a series of "understandings" about Vietnam, the most important of which was that London would provide no direct military assistance but would publicly endorse U.S. policy. In return, Washington would accept Britain's attempts to promote a negotiated settlement. For details see, for example, Rhiannon Vickers, "Harold Wilson, the British Labour Party, and the War in Vietnam," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 41–70; and Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

garians concluded that London was the ideal place to start exploratory talks.[69] Hungarian leaders took for granted that whatever they told the British about Vietnam would immediately be relayed to the U.S. State Department. This was the fundamental consideration behind Péter's visit: to let Rusk know that Budapest had direct contacts with Hanoi and had an important message to convey. Péter's calculation proved to be correct. British officials promptly informed the State Department about the Hungarian initiative, and Rusk found the information intriguing enough to initiate a personal meeting with Péter. Because the Hungarians could not be entirely sure of the U.S. response, they reckoned that by first contacting the British they could avoid a possible rebuff. They also believed that this approach would usefully contribute to the joint effort of Soviet-bloc countries to seek positive change in British policy.

In the meantime, Hungarian Foreign Ministry officials reported unusual North Vietnamese diplomatic activity in Budapest. In June 1965, Hanoi's outgoing ambassador Hoang Bao Son initiated a series of farewell meetings with Hungarian party and government representatives, including Kádár. Although farewell meetings are part of the diplomatic routine, Son's behavior seemed exceptional in two respects. First, he asked certain officials for more than one farewell meeting; second, instead of the polite formalities commonly exchanged on such occasions, he repeatedly asked his Hungarian partners the same concrete questions about U.S.-Hungarian relations, including Hungarian contacts with the U.S. embassy in Budapest, British-Hungarian relations and the British approach to Vietnam, and U.S.-British, French-Hungarian, and West German–Hungarian relations. The reporting Hungarian officials did not comment on Son's behavior. They simply stated that they provided all the information he requested. Among other things, they told him about the increased activity of U.S. diplomacy in Budapest in the previous six months. Deputy Foreign Minister Béla Szilágyi explained that U.S. officials wanted to probe Hungary's point of view about the war in Vietnam and its possible effects on U.S.-Hungarian bilateral relations.[70] In a report dated 22 June 1965,

69. The Hungarian regime carefully prepared for its first independent diplomatic move regarding Vietnam. In the spring and summer of 1965 the Foreign Ministry requested and received several detailed reports from the Hungarian embassy in London on the British approach to U.S. Vietnam policy. See, for instance, "Evaluation of the Situation in South Vietnam from the British Point of View," London, 5 March 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, III-1-001330/9/1965, XIX-J-1-j; Information on the Vietnamese Situation, London, 26 March 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, III-1-001330/17/1965, XIX-J-1-j; Information on the Situation in South Vietnam, London, 8 April 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, III-1-001330/32/1965, XIX-J-1-j;

70. See, for example, Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: The Visit of Ambassador Hoang Bao Son," 19 June 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-146-73/Sz.B./1965, XIX-J-1-j.

Szilágyi also mentions, though without providing details, that he informed Son about his talks with Raymond E. Lisle, the director-designate of the Office of Eastern European Affairs in the State Department, who had visited Budapest on 17–21 June.[71] According to the U.S. record of the Szilágyi-Lisle meeting, the Hungarian diplomat said that the Vietnam crisis and the resultant East-West tension had unavoidably made U.S.-Hungarian normalization talks more difficult but that the talks should continue.[72]

On 22 June, a week before Péter's departure for London, during an HSWP Politburo meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi informed Son about Péter's planned visit. He assured the North Vietnamese ambassador that Hungarian leaders clearly understood that the British government wanted mainly to promote U.S. objectives in the region and that Wilson's recent "peace plan," which was immediately welcomed by Washington, was incompatible with Pham Van Dong's "four points." Then, on behalf of Péter, he asked Son whether Péter should raise any particular issues during his talks with the British. Son promised to ask his government about this. Although the available records give no indication whether Hanoi gave a concrete reply to the Hungarian offer, an HSWP CC progress report from later that year states that the Hungarian government, during its diplomatic action against the "delusional" policy of the United States, was in constant touch with Hanoi. Before Péter's London discussions, Kádár also talked with the departing North Vietnamese ambassador. According to the CC report, Kádár made the same offer to convey any message to the British that Hanoi considered important.[73] Thus, the report says, Péter's London talks would "take into consideration the point of view of the Vietnamese comrades," according to which "the British Commonwealth should travel not to Hanoi, Moscow ,[and] Beijing but to Washington [because] it is the government of the United States that should be persuaded to decrease its acts of war [by] putting a stop to the bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as the first step."[74] Mean-

71. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: Conversation with Ambassador Hoang Bao Son," 22 June 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-146-74/Sz.B./1965, XIX-J-1-j.

72. U.S. Legation in Budapest to State Department, Joint Weeka No. 26, 27 June 1965, "Political: 2. Deputy Foreign Minister Receives Departmental Representative," NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL2-1 HUNG 6/27/65, Box 2275.

73. Minutes of HSWP CC, 18–20 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.4/76-77.ő.e., p. 15. This document also reveals that Kádár's ambiguous allusion to "Péter's visit" referred to his London trip and not to any secret Hanoi meetings. (On Kádár's allusion, see Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 9 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/379.ő.e., p. 18.; Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 41.; and Yvette Chin, Gregory Domber, Malgorzata Gnoinska, and Mircea Munteanu, "New Central and East European Evidence on the Cold War in Asia," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin,* No. 14/15 (Winter 2003–Spring 2004), p. 441.

74. Minutes of HSWP CC, 18–20 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.4/76-77.ő.e., p. 18.

while, the HWSP Politburo approved the guiding principles for Péter's London negotiations, thus formally initiating Hungary's "bombing pause diplomacy" of 1965–1966.

The following day, 23 June, during a private conversation, Le Thanh Nghi told Kádár that although the DRV's main objective was to achieve military victory, Hanoi did not exclude the possibility of negotiations. At present, he said, they did not speak about the reunification of the country; their main political priorities were the neutralization of South Vietnam and the strengthening of the National Liberation Front (NLF). Kádár acknowledged Hanoi's decision to pursue military and political solutions simultaneously and repeatedly emphasized the importance of political struggle because, as he put it, "the enemy should not be given an advantage in that field, either." He reminded Nghi that "one should not allow the impression to prevail that while one side is ready to negotiate, the other one does not even want to know about it."[75]

Péter's London talks took place from 30 June to 3 July. He met with Prime Minister Wilson and Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart. According to Péter's report, the main topic of his discussions with both Wilson and Stewart was Vietnam.[76] Péter told Wilson that Hungary expected the UK to play the role of intermediary and convince the United States to suspend the bombing of the DRV unconditionally. This, explained Péter, would create a favorable atmosphere in which to start negotiations. Wilson replied that he had listened to the Hungarian proposal with great interest but that the suspension of bombing would be possible only if the DRV first stopped its military support to the Vietcong and provided guarantees about its intention to negotiate. Stewart's reply to Péter's proposal was somewhat more receptive. He insisted only that Péter promise that Hanoi indeed wanted to negotiate. Péter reported to Kádár that both Wilson and Stewart were convinced that the conflict had no military solution. Stewart looked surprised and visibly edgy when Péter "informed" him that the DRV had good prospects to achieve overall military victory. Péter sensed that the British were in continuous, direct contact with Washington throughout his London visit because they repeatedly asked him whether he had authorization from Hanoi (or from the socialist camp in general) to mediate.[77] He deliberately did not give an unequivocal answer, emphasizing instead that some days earlier a high-ranking

75. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: The Visit of DRV Deputy Prime Minister Le Thanh Nghi, Leader of the Vietnamese Government Delegation, to Comrade Kádár," 24 June 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, 003677/2/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

76. Foreign Minister's Report, "The London Negotiations (30 June–3 July 1965)," in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 6 July 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/369.ő.e, pp. 87–92.

77. According to Péter, this contact was confirmed by U.S. officials before his meeting with Rusk on 7 October.

North Vietnamese delegation had visited Hungary and adding that before his departure he had consulted the DRV's ambassador in Budapest and would shortly be meeting with Gromyko. Wilson and Stewart expressed their readiness to mediate, reminding Péter of their earlier initiatives such as their proposal to convene an international conference for the neutralization of Cambodia and their launching of a Commonwealth Peace Mission. To Wilson's complaint that the Commonwealth mission had been rejected by all parties, Péter replied that in the eyes of the international community the British were staunchly supportive of the U.S. war in Vietnam and that they might have received a more positive response if they had first persuaded the United States to suspend air strikes and thereby demonstrated the sincerity of the peace initiative. The same statement was later cited at the CC meeting as "the point of view of the Vietnamese comrades."

The British record of the Hungarian foreign minister's talks in London essentially corroborates Péter's account but with a few minor differences.[78] According to the Foreign Office report on the Péter-Wilson meeting, the British were not disappointed with their Commonwealth Peace Mission *in general.* They were disappointed because China and the Soviet Union had refused to receive the mission. Also, in the British record Péter's tone is not as strict as he implied in his own report. Instead of condemning Britain as "an unquestioning moral supporter of the American aggression," he simply asked whether the mission might visit Washington to convince U.S. officials that a stop to the bombing was necessary. In reply, Wilson did not state his own (or Britain's) position on conditions for talks. Instead he expressed his doubts about Washington's possible reply to such a British initiative. He told Péter that if the British went to Washington the U.S. administration would doubtless tell them the mission should (first) persuade Hanoi to stop the infiltration of arms, men, and supplies into the South. Péter insisted that if the bombing stopped the atmosphere would be much more favorable for a settlement of the problem, but Wilson argued that the mission was not itself trying to achieve a settlement; it was trying to find out the conditions in which a conference could be held to promote a settlement.

According to the minutes of the 22 June Hungarian Politburo meeting, the discussion of the principles of Péter's London talks was not recorded in

78. Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Janos Peter, in the Prime Minister's Room at the House of Commons at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 30 June 1965, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), UK-Hungary Relations, PREM 13/1571; Visit of the Hungarian Foreign Minister, 30 June to 4 July 1965, "Viet-Nam, Talking Points," in TNAUK, London, UK-Hungary Relations, PREM 13/1571. Documents obtained and provided by James Hershberg.

writing. Therefore we do not know whether Péter was given concrete instructions to bring up the idea of a bombing pause as a condition for negotiations. The HSWP CC Foreign Department's draft resolution, approved by the Politburo, contains only the general instruction that Péter must discuss with the British the question of U.S. "aggression" in Vietnam. Nothing about this instruction was unusual. The mediation was kept strictly confidential. Even when CC members were selectively informed about it, they were warned that Hungary's fundamental political interests were at stake and that complete secrecy was of overriding importance. No information could leave the room.[79] Indirect evidence suggests, however, that Péter had received explicit authorization from the HSWP Politburo. The initial references to a bombing pause as a condition for talks came directly from Kádár. Moreover, the report Péter submitted after returning from London was approved by the Politburo without objection, and the Politburo's oral presentation at the next HSWP CC meeting, on 18 November 1965, also referred to the bombing pause as Hanoi's primary condition for talks.

Arriving home, Péter did not waste time. On 7 July, he summoned Ambassador Son to his office, informed him of the results of the talks, and offered to help the North Vietnamese if they wanted to contact the British ambassador in Budapest directly.[80] Son promised he would immediately convey Péter's written report and oral comments to Hanoi and asked Péter about the British and U.S. perspectives on the military situation. Péter told him that when he spoke about the DRV's good chance to win the war, the British "showed no sign suggesting that the Americans wanted to win the war at all costs." That, Péter added, was an "essentially positive sign."[81]

This was to be the pattern of subsequent Hungarian mediation: Péter and his colleagues would talk to the various representatives of both sides (sometimes secretly and sometimes half-secretly to let the other side know or suspect the meetings had occurred); try to convince the North Vietnamese about the importance of negotiations and offer to convey any messages they might have to Washington; and try to convince U.S. officials that Hungary knew precisely what the North Vietnamese wanted—namely, talks but not until the United States stopped bombing. Péter claimed that in return for the (indefinite) suspension of bombing, the North Vietnamese would enter into

79. Minutes of HSWP CC, 24 February 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.4/79.ő.e., p. 9.

80. The HSWP Politburo on 6 July gave Péter concrete instruction to offer help. See the Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 6 July 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/369.ő.e., p. 4.

81. Memorandum of Conversation between Péter and DRV Ambassador Hoang Bao Son, 8 July 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-146-18/Pé/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

negotiations (although without specifying an exact timetable, something that was of key importance to the United States); that they would not demand the immediate reunification of the country; and that, if they saw sincere intentions on the U.S. side, they would be willing to discuss further concessions. No doubt, this was in accordance with the conditions the North Vietnamese had repeatedly mentioned to Hungarian officials throughout this period. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the Hungarians believed they could best represent Hanoi's interest only by avoiding any mention of conditions for a possible truce until the primary condition for starting talks—that is, the suspension of bombing—was fulfilled.[82] But Péter's first opportunity to speak directly to Rusk about Hanoi's conditions (as the Hungarians understood them) did not occur until October 1966, by which time the atmosphere had significantly changed.[83]

Meanwhile, in 1965, when Radványi arrived in Budapest to spend his annual summer vacation at home, he reported to senior HSWP and Foreign Ministry officials. About the general atmosphere in Budapest he writes: "The Vietnam War was still a minor topic in Budapest and was generally regarded as a headache because of the diversion of money it was causing under the Moscow-sponsored 'united action' concept. Otherwise the outcome of the war, the victory or defeat of Ho Chi Minh, did not yet seem a critical concern to anyone there."[84] This laconic, slightly sarcastic statement raises the question: Did Radványi know about the HSWP Politburo's mediatory action, which had been in progress for several months? If he knew about the mediation attempts but deliberately omitted them from *Delusion and Reality,* the book's depiction of Péter's "fraudulent" scheming and deceit—is called into question. Radványi might still have considered Péter's actions insincere and deceptive, but he would have known that Péter was not acting on his own. If Radványi indeed knew that the secret overtures had been authorized by the HSWP Politburo, he also had to know the motives behind them and that those motives were not incompatible with his own aspiration to achieve

82. For example, Politburo member Jenő Fock, while informing his colleagues of Hanoi's conditions, suggested that "we should promote this question—*although not in this explicit form*—in our diplomatic activity and in our press." Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 9 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/379.ő.e., p. 16; emphasis added. See also, Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 41.

83. Radványi relayed some of Hanoi's conditions (an independent, neutral South Vietnam; no reunification in the short run) to lower-ranking U.S. State Department officials in February 1966. See Memorandum of Conversation between Raymond E. Lisle (Director, Eastern European Affairs), Christopher A. Squire (Officer in Charge, Hungarian Affairs), and János Radványi, 11 February 1966, NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 2/11/66, Box 9, p. 1. Document obtained and provided by James Hershberg. On the changed atmosphere, see, for example, Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 88–89.

84. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 50.

"peace and better understanding in this troubled world."[85] If, however, Radványi did not know about the Politburo's role, his book's appraisal of Hungary's mediation, was based on incomplete information.

According to Péter's official reports on his 7 October meeting with Rusk, Radványi knew what was going on.[86] Péter began both of his accounts by emphasizing that before the meeting, U.S. officials had let him know they had received detailed information on his London talks; that his statements concerning Vietnam had been relayed to the highest level in Washington; and that this was the reason Rusk wanted to talk to him.[87] In a Foreign Ministry report, Péter explained that U.S. officials had already informed him of these details *through Radványi,* whom Péter had entrusted to make the preliminary arrangements. This raises a series of additional questions. For example, why are these details absent from both Radványi's and Rusk's personal accounts, *Delusion and Reality* and *As I Saw It?*[88] The fact that Péter went to London and discussed Vietnam with Wilson and Stewart is hard to question. It is hard to imagine that the British did not immediately inform Washington about Péter's statements.

The next prominent North Vietnamese leader with whom the Hungarians had the opportunity to talk was Le Duc Tho. During an unofficial visit to Budapest on 3 August 1965, Tho informally discussed the Vietnamese situation with Mihály Korom, an HSWP CC Secretary, and Frigyes Puja, head of the HSWP CC Foreign Department (and Péter's successor as foreign minister in 1973). As a hardliner and one of the most influential members of the "pro-Chinese" faction in the Lao Dong party's CC, Tho was not someone whom

85. Ibid., p. 238.

86. "SUBJECT: Péter-Rusk Meeting in 1965," 13 October 1965, in MOL, 1965, USA Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 13, 4-135-004912/1965, XIX-J-1-j; and "The First Session of the XX. U.N. General Assembly and the Meeting with Secretary of State Rusk," 25 October 1965, in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 26 October 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/378.ő.e., pp. 115–120. For the U.S. record of the meeting, see *FRUS,* 1964–1968, Vol. III, pp. 431–436.

87. Arrangements for a Péter-Rusk meeting started as early as 23 August 1965, but the meeting did not actually occur until 7 October. A possible explanation for the delay is that Hungarian officials wanted to give more credibility to Péter's initiative and to sound out (and possibly influence) Hanoi's opinion beforehand. If so, they may have wanted the Péter-Rusk meeting to take place during or even after the Hungarian delegation's talks in Hanoi and after Péter's UN speech scheduled for early October. As it turned out, the Péter-Rusk meeting took place the same day the Hungarian delegation arrived in Hanoi. Péter did not forget to stress the significance of this to Rusk during their conversation.

88. One might argue that Rusk did not attach enough importance to this episode to include any mention of it in his memoirs (which were based on his oral, and therefore inevitably imperfect, recollections), but this explanation is belied by the fact that Rusk considered Radványi's "fraudulency" statements important enough to include in *As I Saw It* and even recalled such details as Radványi's somewhat dubious assertion that at one meeting he had tried to convey the duplicity of Péter's dealings with Rusk by using facial expressions. See Dean Rusk and Daniel S. Papp, *As I Saw It* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 466; and Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview II, 26 September 1969, in Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (LBJL), 74–245, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/rusk/rusk02.pdf, p. 14.

the Hungarians could easily convince about the desirability of negotiations. Rather than try to persuade him, they simply asked about "the DRV's current opinion" on possible solutions to the war. Tho echoed Le Thanh Nghi's view of Hanoi's immediate political objectives and the combined application of talks and arms: no reunification in the short run; an independent, neutralized South Vietnam as the first step; the simultaneous use of military, political, and propaganda means. His presentation might have reinforced Budapest's assessment that in the wake of Kosygin's February visit to Hanoi the North Vietnamese had started to see things "in a more realistic way."[89]

Less than a week later a secret report from Hanoi summarizing the Warsaw Pact countries' assessment of the DRV's latest communiqué stated that the North Vietnamese seemed to admit that official declarations claiming that "the more fiercely the Americans attack, the greater defeat they will suffer" did not correspond to reality and that DRV leaders were apparently alarmed by the implications of Johnson's 28 July press statement in which he announced that the United States would deploy an additional 50,000 troops to Vietnam by year's end.[90]

At the end of August 1965 the Hungarian embassy in Hanoi reported on a "surprising event." On 25 August, Le Duan, the VWP First Secretary (i.e., the party's leader), unexpectedly received Ambassador Imre Pehr.[91] After expressing gratitude on behalf of the VWP for receiving Le Thanh Nghi in Budapest and for Hungary's "invaluable material, moral and political support," he told Pehr that a possible political settlement depended on U.S. behavior and intentions; that is, on whether the United States further escalated the war or withdrew from South Vietnam. Le Duan stated that, although the DRV considered the Geneva Agreement a basis for negotiations, Hanoi had already made some concessions and would be willing to make further compromises if the United States showed a sincere, honest intention to achieve a peaceful settlement. (The North Vietnamese kept repeating this statement to the Hungarians over the next two years.) But Le Duan said that as yet he saw no sign of honesty on the Americans' part, only diplomatic maneuvering. Although

89. See Hungarian Ambassador to Péter, "SUBJECT: The Moscow Visit of the Vietnamese Delegation Led by Le Duan," 8 May 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 109, IV-576-003679/1965, XIX-J-1-j. See also, Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 78–79.

90. Hungarian Embassy in Hanoi to Péter, "SUBJECT: Vietnamese Reactions to President Johnson's July 28 Press Conference," 9 August 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 108, 001330/67/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

91. Pehr explained that the invitation took him by surprise because he had repeatedly been told by the Hanoi Foreign Ministry that Le Duan, because of his busy schedule, still could not receive heads of foreign missions, a continuation of the pattern over the previous six months when he had refused even the introductory visits of the new Bulgarian and Romanian ambassadors.

U.S. officials spoke about peace, he said, they continued bombing the DRV and had increased their troop strength in South Vietnam.[92]

The Hungarian delegation, officially commissioned by the HSWP Politburo in early August and led by the deputy prime minister and Politburo member Jenő Fock, arrived in Hanoi on 7 October 1965. From then on Hungary's "bombing pause mediation attempt" happened more or less as Hershberg outlined it in his article. By the end of the summer of 1965, Hungarian leaders possessed sufficient information to formulate an overall negotiating strategy for the coming Hanoi talks. The Hungarian approach was laid out in a decision the HSWP Politburo reached on 21 September, less than three weeks before the Fock delegation's departure. The party leaders decided to inform NLF representatives then visiting Budapest that Kádár, on account of his busy schedule, could not receive them.[93] Under the circumstances, this was intended to convey a palpable message: Although Hungary publicly supported the struggle of the South Vietnamese "patriots" by every means possible, it did not entirely identify itself with their political (and military) strategy, which, in Hungary's view, was closer to Beijing's political line than to Hanoi's and, as such, was apparently against basic Soviet-bloc interests.[94]

Citing Fock's oral presentation to the HSWP Politburo,[95] Hershberg expresses his skepticism about Radványi's statements concerning the Fock delegation's discussions in Hanoi. According to Radványi, the discussions covered military and economic aid as well as the internal debate of the socialist camp but did not address North Vietnamese conditions for a negotiated settlement. Hershberg points out that Fock also referred to negotiations in terms that seemed consistent with Péter's statements to Rusk. However, Hershberg also mentions that a "lengthier" report on Fock's visit, to which Fock alluded in his oral presentation, had not been located at that point, and thus one could not be sure about the actual and complete contents of the negotiations. Fock's official report of his delegation's trip to the Far East is indeed a "lengthier" piece, and its chapters covering the Hungarian delegation's visit to Vietnam alone amount to 41 pages.[96] Yet, the whole document contains no more than

92. Pehr to Péter, "SUBJECT: Visit to Comrade Le Duan," 15 September 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, 004901/2/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

93. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 September 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/378.ő.e., p. 3.

94. Hungary sought to keep the NLF at a distance in order to make clear that Hungary's official partners in Vietnam were Hanoi and the VWP, not the NLF. In accordance with a previous HSWP Politburo decision, official relations with the NLF were maintained only through the so-called Patriotic Popular Front, a mass organization without individual membership meant to "unite all classes and layers of the Hungarian society." See Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 14 September 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/374.ő.e., p. 118.

95. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 9 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/379.ő.e., pp. 12–18.

96. Fock to Foreign Ministry, "SUBJECT: The Far Eastern Trip of the Delegation Led by Comr. Fock

a single paragraph on military or economic aid.[97] The rest of the report details political questions, including a word-for-word record of the shockingly fierce exchange between Fock and Le Duan over the "importance of political and diplomatic struggle" in Vietnam. Fock's unusually sharp tone makes clear that the Hungarians had not come to beat around the bush. They wanted to make sure the Vietnamese understood Hungary's view that the DRV must strengthen its ties to the Soviet bloc and strive for a political settlement. That the Hungarians would have permitted themselves such atypical behavior without Moscow's expressed backing is highly improbable. Nonetheless, these were empty threats because neither Moscow nor its allies were in a position to press Hanoi too hard. The Soviet bloc's only trump was its military and economic aid, but in this period playing that card would have risked driving Hanoi into Beijing's arms.[98] In Moscow's view, there was a real danger that the DRV would get into a "completely different kind of war." Nevertheless, the Hungarians went to the utmost limits.

That Le Duan led the North Vietnamese delegation was not necessarily bad news for the Hungarians. Although in Budapest he had been known since the early 1960s as the main proponent of the Chinese line, his participation signaled that the North Vietnamese took the Hungarians' visit seriously. As Fock pointed out, the geographic proximity and overall political influence of China were clearly felt throughout the negotiations. The Hungarians sensed that the North Vietnamese were hesitant and wrestling with themselves all the time. In many cases, the DRV officials even appeared glad that the Hungarians expressed certain opinions that they, because of their delicate situation, could not. Nevertheless, much to the Hungarians' surprise, the North Vietnamese on the first day "provided a more detailed, more analytic, more straightforward and more sincere summary of the Vietnamese situation and the main political line of the Vietnamese Workers Party" than ever before.[99]

Fock began his report by stating that the delegation was given an unexpectedly warm welcome. This friendly atmosphere did not last long, however. According to Fock, the initial "sincere voice" of the Vietnamese "stiffened" when Le Duan responded to the Hungarian delegation's comments and ques-

(October 1965)," MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-130-005834/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

97. The explanation for this is simple: At the request of the Vietnamese, the negotiations on military and economic issues were held separately in Haiphong. See ibid., p. 4.

98. Moscow did try to use its "economic leverage" as a supplement to political pressure. See, Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 79.

99. Fock to Foreign Ministry, "SUBJECT: The Far Eastern Trip of the Delegation Led by Comr. Fock (October 1965)," MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-130-005834/1965, XIX-J-1-j, p. 1.

tions. Fock was convinced that this was closely connected to Pham Van Dong's negotiations in Beijing, which had ended the previous day. Fock does not mention that his presentation of the "Hungarian position" provided just enough reason for the North Vietnamese to "stiffen."

When explaining "the main line of revolutionary policy of the party," Le Duan again stated that the DRV was offering a compromise by no longer stressing the immediate reunification of the country. "This means," he said, "that we have the socialist DRV on the one hand, and the neutral, peaceful South Vietnam, led by a coalition government, on the other hand." But he said that the DRV's ultimate objective remained the liberation of the South and the realization of the Geneva Accords. The DRV's conditions for a political settlement, said Le Duan, were laid out in the "four points," on which basis the DRV would never reject any proposal for peace talks. Nevertheless, experience had shown that peace talks could not be started until Hanoi achieved a decisive military victory in the South. At this point, Fock lost his patience and bluntly told Le Duan that "this does not make any sense." He explained his reasons by first summarizing Le Duan's position:

> 1. Creating communism in South Vietnam is not on your agenda; 2. You postpone the reunification of the two parts of the country; 3. You want to reach a compromise based on the 4 points. This is one part of [your] opinion. The other part is that armed liberation is feasible and you want to achieve it. This does not make any sense. Once you achieve military victory why would you wait with reunification and Communism?[100]

Fock's last sentence proved to be prophetic and shows that Fock knew Communist methods too well to believe that the North Vietnamese, upon achieving full victory, would contemplate anything less than immediate "integration" of the South in every sense of the word. He continued:

> Our sincere opinion is that the USA can keep the coastline under occupation for a long time; they are strong enough for that. To make them leave by defeating them—as we do not want to deploy the atomic bomb—does not seem probable, which means that U.S. imperialism can not be defeated in this part of the world. . . .
>
> The 4-point compromise must be considered a real compromise, and so we can win over public opinion to our cause.[101]

Fock also expressed dissatisfaction with the draft of the communiqué the North Vietnamese planned to publish on the DRV-Hungarian discussions

100. Ibid., pp. 29–30.

101. Ibid., p. 30.

because it did not mention the importance of political and diplomatic struggle—a topic that had been given a great deal of attention during their talks. Fock added that although the disingenuousness of U.S. peace slogans should be exposed, the communiqué should at the same time emphasize that the DRV had initiated the proposed political settlement. (Here Fock referred to Pham Van Dong's four points.)

Le Duan did not seem to lose his temper, but he made no secret of his dislike of Fock's approach. He reiterated that not stressing reunification and Communism in the South was an important part of the DRV's strategy. By forcing the issue, the North Vietnamese might alienate representatives of the many political groups in the South that took part in the struggle against the United States but did not want Communism. Le Duan also reiterated that although Hanoi adhered to the parallel use of political and military means, it was convinced that the United States *could* be beaten by military force. Vietnam, he claimed, could fight on for four or five years even if the United States deployed as many as 400,000 troops. After that, China and other countries would join in and the conflict would become a different type of war. (This latter remark shows that Le Duan indeed had taken Fock's attack to heart. Just before Fock's rebuke, Le Duan had explained at length that "there is nothing in the Vietnamese conflict that would lead to a world war."[102]) The VWP leader added that the DRV was not against achieving peace in a short time. As he put it, "Peace in one year would be good. This is why we combine political and military struggle."

In his report, Fock concluded that the North Vietnamese did not actively aspire to take the political initiative. They would not even use the very limited freedom of political and diplomatic action they enjoyed. During the negotiations, the Hungarian delegation emphasized this point in numerous ways and reminded the North Vietnamese of the assistance that other socialist countries could provide in this respect. Fock ended his report by saying that Hungary should make every effort to initiate a political settlement but that in the meantime Hungary should step up its military and economic assistance to North Vietnam to strengthen Hanoi's negotiating position

In mid-November 1965, when Zoltán Komócsin, an HSWP Politburo member and HSWP CC Secretary, informed the CC about the Fock delegation's experiences, he provided a significantly different interpretation, stating that the delegation

> had the strong impression that the Vietnamese comrades would indeed like to see a quick end to the war; that they know that this demands negotiations; and that they welcome our political-diplomatic activity. Recently they are more ac-

102. Ibid., pp. 19–20.

> tive themselves, but they do not wish to negotiate, especially not to take the initiative, under military pressure.[103]

Whether his wording was merely wishful thinking or was the synthesis of the opposing opinions of the "pro-Chinese" and "pro-Soviet" factions within the Hanoi leadership is uncertain. Whatever the case may be, Komócsin at the end of his presentation endorsed Fock's conclusions as a proposal for the CC regarding Hungary's future tasks in Vietnam. The CC fully endorsed the proposal.

The Fock delegation was more successful in accomplishing its other goal—that is, in tightening the political-diplomatic relationship between Hanoi and Budapest (and, more broadly, the Soviet bloc), partly in order to obtain timely, first-hand information about the situation in both the North and the South and partly to counter Chinese influence. Hungary's efforts, in Budapest's view, had the effect of driving Hanoi further away from a military solution and toward a political settlement. Fock gave the North Vietnamese a package of proposals consisting of eight items, six of which directly served this latter objective. Most importantly, Fock suggested (1) that the next VWP delegation to visit Budapest (expected later that year) should be led by a member of the VWP Politburo in order to "further increase the effectiveness" of the exchange of views started in Hanoi;[104] (2) that, in order to tighten contacts with Hanoi, Hungary should enlarge its embassy staff by appointing a military attaché and deputy attaché; (3) that on an annual basis the two countries should exchange study groups comprising two to four party leaders; (4) that, in order to "increase the unity of the international communist movement" and the effectiveness of intra-bloc coordination, Hanoi should continuously provide information through all existing bilateral channels (e.g., personal meetings, exchanges of letters, and exchanges of messages through the ambassadors) about the war's progress; and (5) that the two parties should discuss the forms, methods, and organizational framework needed to make Hungary's economic aid more effective. The following day Le Duan informed the

103. Minutes of HSWP CC, 18–20 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.4/76-77.ő.e., p. 15.

104. This Hungarian proposal also suggests preparations for further mediatory steps by inviting high-ranking DRV officials partly in order to influence the VWP Politburo through them and to use them as influential messengers. The tactics proved effective. When the suggested visit of the Vietnamese Politburo member Le Thanh Nghi took place in December—just as the bombing pause came into effect—the Hungarians were able to use him both ways. In this sense, contrary to Hershberg's assumption, Le Thanh Nghi's presence in Budapest was not accidental. See Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 43. The minutes of the 4 January 1966 HSWP Politburo meeting also indicate that before Fock informed Nghi and the DRV's Budapest ambassador about Rusk's twelve-point initiative on 24 December 1965, Komócsin telephoned CPSU CC Secretary Yuri Andropov to ask for his approval. Andropov agreed. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 4 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/384.ő.e., p. 11.

Hungarian delegation that the VWP Politburo had discussed and endorsed the Hungarian proposals with great pleasure.

In October and November 1965 the Hungarians picked up other bits of information regarding Hanoi's opinion on peace talks. On 19 October, Deputy Foreign Minister Erdélyi received Hoang Luong, the DRV's new ambassador in Budapest. Notes from the meeting indicate that the purpose of the visit, which Luong had requested, was to discuss practical matters concerning Hungary's military shipments. Toward the end of the conversation, however, the North Vietnamese ambassador remarked that "the USA is already contemplating a ceasefire, but only if South Vietnam remains under occupation." He insisted that "this condition is unacceptable because it is meant only to strengthen the puppet army."[105] This was a remarkable moment in the history of North Vietnamese-Hungarian consultations of the period: it was the first time a DRV official overtly stated that U.S. intentions to talk could be taken seriously. Less than two weeks later, on 30 October (i.e., three days after Péter briefed Luong on his talks with Rusk), the North Vietnamese ambassador made an even more surprising statement, this time to Péter himself. Recounting the conversation, Péter writes: "They [the North Vietnamese] are ready to respect the seventeenth parallel. They respect the Geneva agreements and, provided that the United States withdraws, they would accept [a] neutral regime in South Vietnam."[106] Hershberg comments that Luong interpreted this as a useful means of "tactical" propaganda.[107] In fact, what Luong had said is that DRV leaders "think that there are many tactical elements in their four-point demand that could be used *with* propaganda."[108] We cannot know for sure whether the ambassador meant that the four points themselves (or certain elements of them) should be used only as propaganda or that nothing in the four points would suggest that Hanoi was willing to accept a "neutral regime" in the South. Indeed, Hanoi's third point explicitly states that the internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled in accordance with the NLF's program.

On 23 November, the Vietnamese desk of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry's Far Eastern Department submitted a top-secret memorandum about the

105. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: The Visit of Vietnamese Ambassador Hoang Luong," 19 October 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-146-62/E.K./1965, XIX-J-1-j.

106. Péter, Memorandum of Conversation with Vietnamese Ambassador, 30 October 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-146-23/Pé-1965, XIX-J-1-j.

107. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 40.

108. Péter, Memorandum of Conversation with Vietnamese Ambassador, 30 October 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-146-23/Pé-1965, XIX-J-1-j; emphasis added.

"DRV's opinion on the Vietnam question."[109] The five-page document summarized Hanoi's views on possible resolutions of the conflict and included the Fock delegation's experiences. The memorandum explained that the North Vietnamese saw three probable scenarios—two military and one political. In Hanoi's view, if U.S. troops stayed in the South, they could be defeated in four or five years, and if the United States escalated the war to the North, then China and other countries would enter the conflict, an outcome that, according to Hanoi, was also a feasible solution. (This was also Moscow's worst nightmare.) On the political side, the document stated, the North Vietnamese were convinced that the United States must and could be defeated militarily, but they also believed that an escape route—that is, a route back to Geneva—should be left open. According to Hanoi, U.S. officials had already begun to make statements suggesting an interest in returning to Geneva, but because Washington wanted to negotiate from a position of military strength the DRV should sufficiently weaken the U.S. position before starting negotiations. This point in the summary reveals that the subtle change in Hanoi's approach to U.S. intentions had not escaped the Hungarians' notice.

## Questions and Answers

Meanwhile the Hungarians took their first direct steps on the other end of the "channel" in the United States. As Hershberg points out, on 7 October 1965, the same day the Fock delegation arrived in Hanoi, Rusk, Péter, and Radványi were sitting together at the headquarters of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations (UN) in New York City, discussing Vietnamese matters in light of Péter's speech at the UN General Assembly the day before.[110] Péter had made the first public reference to the diplomatic framework the Hungarians had been secretly promoting since the beginning of the year: If the United States were to suspend the bombing of North Vietnam, Hanoi would agree to start negotiations. At this point, one can answer the first crucial question posed by Hershberg on the background of Péter's statement and the Hungarian mediation attempt in general: "What [did] Foreign Minister Péter [have] in mind when he [began] to drop hints in the fall of 1965 that Hanoi would respond positively to a bombing halt?"[111]

The most obvious answer is that Péter was acting on instructions from

109. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: The DRV's Opinion on the Vietnam Question," 23 November 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, IV-10-245/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

110. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 37.

111. Ibid.

the HSWP Politburo to drop those hints and arrange a meeting with Rusk. Péter had begun his overtures not in the fall but in the spring and summer of 1965 in Vienna and London. Moreover, he had not been the first to drop hints. The U.S. record of Péter's talks in London indicates that an editor of Hungary's national news agency leaked the first *concrete* information about the Hungarian peace initiative on 29 June, a day before Péter's departure for London. The editor, "a close friend of Kádár," told *Newsweek*s Vienna bureau chief, Yorick Blumenfeld, in Budapest that Foreign Minister Péter

> will not only discuss trade and [the] expected other matters but will also act as a representative [of the] entire communist bloc (excluding China, North Korea and Albania but including North Viet-Nam, which has had a delegation in Budapest) to sound out Wilson and Stewart on [the] possibility [of] ending [the] bombing [of] North Viet-Nam. If Wilson can get assurances from Washington that [the] bombing will stop, [the] Commonwealth delegation will be received in Moscow and [the] air will be cleared for more general talks on [the] Viet-Nam problem.[112]

The British Foreign Office kept the U.S. embassy in London informed on a day-by-day basis about Péter's discussions with British leaders.[113] Thus, historians are in the position of also being able to see how the British interpreted the events to the Americans. According to the U.S. record, the British confirmed that Vietnam dominated the talks with Péter. The Hungarian foreign minister told Foreign Secretary Stewart: "It is my impression that if [the] bombing stopped Hanoi would agree to talks."[114] Although the British saw no new elements in Péter's initiative and were uncertain about his motives or "[the] extent to which he might be regarded as [a] vehicle for any significant communication from Hanoi," they emphasized that Péter cut short his visit, "by his own admission, in order to return to Budapest in time to see [the] North Vietnamese ambassador before [the] latter departed for Hanoi."[115] Péter also indicated that he would be having talks with Gromyko in Moscow the following week. Both the Foreign Office and the U.S. embassy emphasized that the Hungarian government appeared conscious of its role as the representative of the Soviet bloc on the Vietnam issue. The Hungarians viewed European security, the German question, disarmament, the UN, and bilateral

112. U.S. Embassy in Vienna to State Department, 30 June 1965, NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL7-HUNG 6/30/65, Box 2276.

113. See, for example, U.S. Embassy in London to State Department, "Hungarian Foreign Minister on Vietnam Initiative," 1 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL7-HUNG 7/1/65, Box 2276.

114. U.S. Embassy in London to State Department, "Hungarian Foreign Minister Discusses Vietnam," 2 July 1965, NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL7-HUNG 7/2/65, Box 2276.

115. Ibid.

relations as secondary subjects for Péter's talks in London. Péter himself "frequently expressed the view that no progress could be made on any of these issues . . . without a peaceful resolution of the Vietnam crisis."[116]

Radványi's account of the preparations for the Péter-Rusk meeting on 7 October 1965 and the background of Péter's moves makes no mention of Péter's desire to meet Rusk (or vice versa) to talk about Vietnam. Radványi relates that on 20 September, after Péter's briefing to the staff of Hungary's UN mission in New York, the foreign minister invited him for lunch. While they were sipping their drinks, Péter abruptly asked him how the arrangements for his meeting with Rusk were progressing.[117] Radványi then explains that *a few weeks earlier* he had already reported to Péter about the preliminary steps he had taken *as early as 23 August* to arrange a meeting between Rusk and Péter. This date is the key to the real sequence of events. Later Radványi "reveals" that Rusk became interested in meeting Péter because the Hungarian foreign minister had given reason to believe that during his September trip to North Korea he had stopped over in Hanoi. Radványi here makes a mistake. He admits noting that when he suggested in August to his State Department contact a meeting between Péter and Rusk, "Lisle was not unprepared." But the reason Lisle was interested is not that Péter was going to be making a future stopover in Hanoi; rather, Lisle had received detailed information about Péter's London talks, which had taken place a month earlier.

We now know—although not from Radványi—that Péter was certain that Rusk knew about his London initiative. To answer Hershberg's question, in October 1965 Péter had in mind Moscow's "request" to do everything possible to counter Chinese influence over Hanoi, the best means of which from Hungary's standpoint was to support the "pro-Soviet" leaders in Hanoi who adhered to the idea of a negotiated solution or at least had a genuine intention to combine military and diplomatic means, as opposed to the "pro-Chinese" hardliners who stressed an exclusively military solution and regarded diplomacy as nothing more than a propaganda tool.[118] Péter also had in mind what

116. Ibid.

117. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 62.

118. The available evidence suggests that Soviet-bloc countries closely monitored Hanoi's internal power alignments. The USSR had direct contact with a dissident group of North Vietnamese politicians who had opposed the policy adopted by Hanoi in the early 1960s. See Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 67–68. Although factionalism and power struggles within the VWP leadership remain a murky subject, the available evidence indicates that "power struggles, regional rivalries, institutional competition, and even personal vendettas may have plagued the party leadership." Nguyen, "The War Politburo," p. 9. Although Nguyen here claims that the adoption of certain aspects of Soviet or Chinese policies by Hanoi did not mean divided loyalty or a lack of Vietnamese nationalism (certainly not within the VWP Politburo), and that "the ultimate goal was always to promote Vietnamese interests and ambitions," she indicates that members of the "pro-peace," "pro-Soviet," or "North-first" opposition were labeled and treated by "hawkish" Politburo members as "traitors." She

Brezhnev had told Kádár in May 1965 about the sincerity of U.S. diplomatic efforts to "find a way out" of Vietnam (i.e., that those efforts were to be taken seriously). In addition, Péter was aware that Hanoi had repeatedly claimed to detect Washington's growing inclination toward a ceasefire, and that Le Duan had told Ambassador Pehr in August that the DRV would be willing to make serious compromises if U.S. intentions to talk proved sincere. Last but not least, Péter knew that Hungary, because of its economic situation and its plans for large-scale modernization, desperately needed the international prestige it would gain by bringing about direct talks between the main adversaries in the Vietnam conflict.

We can now also answer the other crucial question asked by U.S. and British officials and the international press at the time, and by James Hershberg nearly four decades later: Did Péter have direct authorization from Hanoi to mediate? The answer is yes and no, depending on what was seen as the real opinion of Hanoi. The Hungarians had two, almost entirely opposite, points of view to choose from. Not surprisingly, they chose the one they liked better (and that best served their own needs). On the one hand, every available Hungarian report, study, and analysis of Hanoi's views of a political settlement emphasizes that the DRV was apparently acting under strong, continuous Chinese pressure and therefore never overtly gave completely sincere or unambiguous replies to questions about possible negotiations. As Fock pointed out in his report, in light of Hanoi's "delicate" situation, it would have been pointless to expect the DRV to take the political initiative. On the other hand, throughout 1965 Hungarian officials received numerous direct and indirect indications of Hanoi's willingness to talk, including Pehr's 25 August conversation with Le Duan and, most significant of all, the secret Soviet-North Vietnamese communication that Kádár presented at the 22 June meeting of the HSWP Politburo. If these indications, especially Péter's "Commonwealth" statement, were authentic North Vietnamese overtures, then Budapest had direct authorization from Hanoi to get the message to Washington.

Putting these three factors together—that Hanoi would probably never "speak out," even if the more sober-minded DRV leaders realized that military victory could not be achieved until U.S. forces were no longer present in the South; that being rid of the Vietnamese conflict altogether was in the Soviet bloc's basic interest; and that Washington, too, seemed to be searching for a way out—Budapest might well have felt authorized to speak on behalf of Hanoi, even if "Hanoi" in this case meant the "pro-Soviet" faction of the VWP leadership and its supporters among dissident North Vietnamese politi-

also confirms that personal rivalries existed within the VWP Politburo, though, as she explains, instead of "purges at the Politburo level, the removal of midlevel officials to coerce or intimidate their patrons in the Politburo was the normal practice in the VWP and proved just as effective" (p. 30).

cians and intellectuals.[119] Whether this manipulative method could be effective and lead to negotiations between Washington and the "official" Hanoi is open to doubt, but under the circumstances the Hungarians had no choice. Because consensus within the VWP leadership over the question of peace talks seemed impossible, the Hungarians, if they wanted to complete what they had started, had to find a way to tip the balance in Hanoi toward the "pro-peace" approach. For a brief while in December 1965 the factional struggle in Hanoi, aggravated by Hungary's mediation, seemed to have been won by the "pro-Soviet" side. The Hungarian method of creating a fait accompli proved, at least initially, surprisingly effective.

At the same time, Hungary's persistence, Fock's unprecedented bluntness, and Péter's confident determination (which corresponds to the unusual persistence of the Poles during their parallel diplomatic efforts)[120] had a lot to do with a phenomenon of Communist philosophy called "internationalist solidarity" or "proletarian internationalism." This principle underlay the Brezhnev Doctrine, the term coined in the West a few years later in referring to official Soviet justifications of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The doctrine was also retrospectively applied to justify earlier Soviet military interventions, such as the invasion of Hungary in 1956. The Kádár regime, which had come to power in 1956 through the Hungarian invasion and in 1968 sent troops for the joint invasion of Czechoslovakia, sincerely believed in the idea of internationalist solidarity. Hungarian leaders believed that Hungary had an international obligation to do whatever it could to resolve the Vietnam conflict, but they also believed—in line with the Soviet bloc's view that not just the internal concerns of the DRV but the common cause of the "socialist camp" was what mattered—that North Vietnam was also obliged to find a solution that was best for Vietnam's true allies.[121] Hungarian lead-

119. Although speaking about "pro-Soviet" and "pro-Chinese" *factions* may not adequately address "the nuances within the various factions or take into account the fluid nature of these divisions" (Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo," p. 38 n. 13), the Hungarians definitely perceived them as factions, identifying Le Duan as the "main proponent of Chinese policies" and "the leader of the pro-Chinese wing" within the VWP CC, other members of which were identified as Le Duc Tho, To Huu, and Hoang Van Hoan; Vo Nguyen Giap, Ung Van Khiem, Pham Van Dong, and others were identified as pro-Soviet leaders. See, for example, Ambassador Gogolyák to Péter, "SUBJECT: Developments in Vietnam's Political Life," 6 May 1963, in MOL, 1963, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 3, 004323/1963, XIX-J-1-j; Ambassador Martin to Péter, "SUBJECT: The Vietnam Background of Liu Shaoqi's Visit to the DRV," Beijing, 17 June 1963, in MOL, 1963, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 3, 005076/1/1962, XIX-J-1-j; and Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: Comrade Gogolyák's Vietnam Experiences," 24 September 1965, in MOL, 1965, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 107, 004615/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

120. See Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 56.

121. Archival sources give many indications that the North Vietnamese themselves clearly felt this obligation and were ready to accept it, although they emphasized that every Communist party must de-

ers were convinced that they had the right and authority to interfere in the DRV's affairs and that Hanoi's internationalist obligation was to accept this interference—especially because without the economic and military aid of Soviet-bloc countries the DRV could not even think of waging a war against the world's most powerful capitalist state. The North Vietnamese were well aware of this last point and never ceased to emphasize the crucial importance of the assistance provided by Soviet-bloc countries. The Kádár regime's misfortune was that Hanoi was very skillful in playing China and the Soviet Union off against one another. The North Vietnamese thus enjoyed a relatively wide range of freedom to wage the war as they pleased. Until early 1968, and to some extent even as late as 1972, leaders in Hanoi harbored little doubt that the war could be won on the battlefield irrespective of the amount of force the United States deployed—just as a decade earlier the war had been won against France.

In light of the archival evidence, the easiest of Hershberg's questions to answer concerns his doubts about the surprising level of flexibility on Hanoi's part regarding reunification and negotiation.[122] On 9 November 1965 Fock informed the Hungarian Politburo that the North Vietnamese "not only consider a return to the Geneva Agreement as the basis for negotiations, but they even made significant compromises compared to that. And they certainly do not demand the reunification of the country for the time being."[123] This is precisely what DRV leaders such as Le Duc Tho, Le Duan, and Le Thanh Nghi had been telling their Hungarian negotiating partners throughout 1965. But why did they do so? Were these specific conditions, and were negotiations in general simply part of their "revolutionary strategy," "an extension," as Qiang Zhai argues in his book on China's role in the conflict, "of warfare, rather than an alternative to it"?[124] The fact that these statements were made by Hanoi's known hardliners (other than, perhaps, Le Thanh Nghi) suggests that VWP leaders, including the most militant members of the VWP Politburo, had never completely ruled out the possibility of talks. The crucial point on which the positions of Hanoi's hawks and doves differed was the question of timing. The moderates called for an immediate end to the war and for negotiations with the United States, whereas the Politburo hardliners insisted that talks could not begin until a decisive military victory had been achieved.[125]

cide for itself how to fulfill the obligation. But they also emphasized that internationalist solidarity was the reason that *all* Communist countries were obliged to support their war efforts.

122. See Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 41.

123. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 9 November 1965, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/379.ő.e., p. 16.

124. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* p. 168.

125. Nguyen, "The War Politburo," pp. 20–21.

The original Hungarian peace initiative seems to have been intended to support this pro-peace position or "tendency" in general by presenting Chinese and North Vietnamese hardliners with a fait accompli. It also seems highly probable that factional struggle played a decisive role in Hanoi's abrupt backdown during the actual "bombing pause mediation" in the middle of January 1966. Unfortunately, apart from occasional allusions to the Hungarian embassy's "high-level contacts" with "certain members" of the DRV leadership as the source of secret information about the outlook and intentions of the VWP, only a very limited number of Hungarian documents indicate direct secret cooperation between North Vietnamese officials and the Hungarian embassy in Hanoi. One of these documents is a secret report from Hungary's ambassador in Hanoi, Gusztáv Gogolyák, dated May 1964 and concerning, as he put it, "the way in which the DRV's widely publicized official policy is discussed, interpreted and implemented at internal, confidential meetings."[126] The significance of the report (which describes a sarcastic, even slanderous reiteration by Luu Quy Ky, the director of the VWP CC Propaganda Department, of Chinese views of the Soviet Union's "deviationism") comes not from its content but from its source. According to the Hungarian ambassador, the material was a compilation of notes taken by the participants in a meeting held behind closed doors. This suggests that the VWP apparatus had leaks through which "certain" party officials, for reasons of their own, passed along confidential information to the Hungarians.

## Endgame and Epilogue

This section might well have been titled "Comrade Kádár Gets Hot under the Collar." That was his reaction when, at the HSWP Politburo meeting of 21 January 1966, he learned from Foreign Minister Péter that Hungary's mediation attempt had proven abortive.[127] What irritated Kádár was not just the fact but the circumstances of the failure. The depth of disappointment and anger that he and the other Hungarian Politburo members expressed indicates that Hungary's attempts to mediate in the war were expertly conceived, carefully executed, and, most importantly, carried out in good faith. Their efforts promoted the interests of Hungary and the wider Soviet bloc but were also meant to offer the United States a real opportunity to get out of the Vietnamese trap gracefully. This was in accordance with the seemingly absurd basic

126. Memorandum from Hungarian Ambassador in Hanoi to Péter, "SUBJECT: Submission of Informational Material," 15 may 1964, in MOL, 1964, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 9, 27/f-004058/1964, XIX-J-1-j.

127. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., pp. 13–27.

principle of Kádárian foreign policy, a particular Soviet-bloc interpretation of détente: Communist countries, according to this view, were simultaneously engaged in a ruthless struggle against capitalist imperialism and in peaceful coexistence with those same capitalists and imperialists.[128] Although Kádár took principles seriously, economic considerations dominated. Preparations for reforming Hungary's socialist economic system were in their final phase (the plan of the "New Economic Mechanism" was approved by the 9th Congress of the HSWP in November–December 1966). According to Békés, the Hungarian economic reform "proved to be the most significant structural change of economy since the establishment of the Stalinist-Leninist-type communist system and thus, it was essential to reassure the Soviet leadership that the reforms applied solely to the sphere of the *economy* [emphasis in original]. Hence, Hungarian foreign policy vis-à-vis Hungarian-Soviet relations aimed to apply the policy of 'constructive loyalty.'"[129]

The proposed economic reform required Western loans and advanced Western technology (in Hungary, jokes about the backwardness of Soviet technology were common throughout the Communist era). From the Hungarians' point of view, North Vietnam's disregard of the rules of the game was all the more irritating because this recalcitrance threatened the incipient détente that might lead to improved East-West economic ties.

The record of the HSWP Politburo's discussion on 21 January 1966 answers Hershberg's ultimate question about the authenticity of Hanoi's intention to talk and the sincerity of Hungary's efforts to bring about those talks: Were "the initial faint indications of a willingness in Hanoi to hold direct talks in the event of a bombing halt . . . genuine or merely a chimera or invention all along"?[130] The answer is that Hanoi's initial indications of willingness were indeed genuine—or at least the Hungarians thought they were genuine and proceeded on that basis. When, in mid-January 1966, DRV leaders suddenly seemed to change their minds, the Hungarians could not overcome their feeling that the North Vietnamese had let them down.[131] Worse than the

128. The great majority of HSWP party members understood—or at least accepted—the basics of realpolitik. Nevertheless, the Vietnam issue constituted an exception. Because of the escalation of the war, Hungarian leaders faced a dilemma. By the end of 1966 the obvious discrepancy between the party's verbal bellicosity and its actual political line had become so great that party cadres could hardly explain it to the rank-and-file. At lower-level party organization meetings, participants began to demand that Hungary immediately send volunteers to Vietnam to support the Vietnamese struggle against U.S. aggression. Hundreds signed up as volunteers. The situation became so serious that Kádár urged CC officials to convey thecomplexity of the problem to the party rank-and-file and to the public. See Minutes of HSWP CC, 13 October 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.4/83.ő.e., pp. 36–42.

129. Békés, "Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Soviet Alliance System," p. 88; emphasis in original.

130. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 67.

131. Although the DRV Foreign Ministry released a bellicose statement as early as 4 January 1966, dismissing the bombing pause as a "trick" and reiterating the old four-point demands, the statement

letdown, however, was Hanoi's threat that any further steps by Hungary would have "regrettable consequences." Kádár's colleagues had a hard time convincing him that instead of taking offense and hitting back hard the more expedient response would be to leave the door open to further attempts.[132]

The meeting opened with Péter's oral report summarizing the fruitless visit to Moscow, Beijing, and Hanoi by Jerzy Michałowski, Poland's special envoy, on 30 December 1965 to 16 January 1966, and Péter's own visit to Warsaw on 7 January 1966, during which Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki invited him to discuss the situation. According to Rapacki, the process had come to a deadlock because each side was expecting the other to take the first official step. Rapacki told Péter that the Poles and Hungarians could move things on from the present stalemate by recommending, separately or jointly, to both the United States and the DRV that each party contact the other directly and that Budapest and Warsaw could help to arrange a meeting. The Hungarians agreed, but by the time Péter arrived in Warsaw, the Poles had received a gloomy report on Michałowski's discussions in Hanoi, which, in their view, brought an end to Poland's involvement. But the Poles were in no hurry to inform the United States about the lack of success because they felt they should wait and see whether any new momentum could be generated via the Hungarian connection. Moreover the Poles had already decided to approach Gromyko about holding a trilateral—Soviet-Polish-Hungarian—meeting to discuss further steps once a Soviet Politburo member, Aleksandr Shelepin, returned from Hanoi.[133]

Péter then turned to the series of messages exchanged by Washington and Hanoi via Budapest from 23 December to 4 January, explaining that after some dispute and misunderstanding about the nature and possible venues of direct talks, both sides had agreed to start negotiations. Then, on 15 January,

was played down in Budapest (and in Washington, for that matter),because Hungarian leaders were well aware of the overriding importance Hanoi placed on avoiding any sign of weakness. In addition, on 4 January Budapest received a secret message from Hanoi stating that the DRV would accept meetings with anyone who asked, including the Americans, because these were "normal diplomatic actions." For details on both 4 January events, see Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 47.

132. Both the overall content of Kádár's comments and his specific word choices suggest he was upset. Despite the repeated objections of his colleagues, he insisted on putting an immediate end to Hungary's diplomatic action and giving a "resolute" response to both the Vietnamese and the United States. Eventually Kádár admitted that perhaps he "got hot under the collar" and had gone too far in demanding the complete termination of the mediatory process, but, as he put it, his "minimum program" remained that the Vietnamese offense could not be left without a clear response.

133. Shelepin was sent to Hanoi as Moscow's special envoy just after Michałowski's talks ended. Part of his mission was to try to persuade Hanoi to take the U.S. initiative seriously. For details on Shelepin's Hanoi trip, see Ambassador Pehr to Péter, "SUBJECT: Soviet Party and Government Delegation in Hanoi," 3 February 1966, in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 114, I-001408/1966, XIX-J-1-j; Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 84; and Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," pp. 52–63, 65.

North Vietnam had delivered its "official" reply that essentially denied having agreed to negotiate. The six-point memorandum addressed to Péter reiterated all the usual slogans on U.S. aggression and the earlier statements on Hanoi's four-point conditions for peace talks. But the fifth point of the memorandum contained concrete references to Radványi's conversation with Rusk on 5 January and to Péter's final message to Hanoi on 7 January in which he had summarized the Radványi-Rusk conversation. Rather than rejecting all possibility of peace talks, DRV leaders had erroneously surmised that a willingness to talk would require acceptance of the U.S. conditions. Point 5 of the memorandum reads as follows:

> The content of the message that the Hungarian chargé d'affaires told Rusk and which forms the subject of your January 7 communication involves the risk of creating the mistaken impression that the present peace initiative of the USA is acceptable and that it was favorably received on the Vietnamese part. At present, the USA is devoting all its efforts to putting a false color on its steps and deceiving the public with its peace offensive. It is very likely, that they will make the content of the discussions between the Hungarian chargé d'affaires and Rusk public in order to confuse public opinion and to create distrust within the socialist camp. In that case, the matter will have regrettable consequences.[134]

If the Hungarians harbored any doubts that the Vietnamese were refusing not the idea of negotiations but simply the U.S. conditions for negotiations, North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh dispelled those doubts when he summarized the written memorandum before handing it to the Hungarian ambassador:

> As for Comrade Péter's message of 7 January . . . Comrade Péter's question to Rusk could make the Americans believe that the government of the DRV is inclined to accept the American proposals as a basis for negotiations. If the Americans want to talk, they can initiate it in any one of the countries in which the DRV has foreign representation, but only if they accept the demands of the DRV government.[135]

By contrast, Péter's question to Rusk ("We are asking you whether the government of the United States is ready to take part in such type of meeting")[136] referred to the *type* of negotiations (i.e., direct talks between represen-

134. Péter to Politburo, "SUBJECT: Diplomatic Steps in the Vietnam Conflict," 17 January 1966, in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e, pp. 69–70.

135. Ibid., p. 68.

136. János Radványi, Chronology of Conversations 23 December 1965 to 20 January 1966, Enclosed with Radványi to János Péter, 22 January 1966, in MOL, 1966, USA-Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 15, IV-135-001131/1966, XIX-J-1-j, p. 29.

tatives of the two parties as opposed to the exchange of formal documents that was already occurring in Rangoon) and had nothing to do with conditions. On the basis of Hanoi's earlier messages the Hungarians believed that this part of the issue was settled (i.e., that no conditions would be set for peace talks) and that only technical questions remained. The Hungarians had come to this conclusion after hearing Trinh's summary of his memorandum on 15 January 1966 ("If the Americans want to talk, they can initiate it in any one of the countries where the DRV has a foreign representation"), which used phrasing nearly identical to the written message the Hungarians had received from Hanoi on 31 December 1965. (The 15 January memorandum did not specifically mention the NLF, whereas the 31 December message did: "If the Americans want something, they should approach the DRV and the NLF directly.")[137] At this point (15 January) the North Vietnamese for some reason backed out of the deal and laid the blame on the Hungarians. One likely reason for the DRV's withdrawal was Chinese interference. This possibility seems to be strongly supported by a remark made by HSWP Politburo member Dezső Nemes that between Hanoi's second (29 December 1965) and third (31 December 1965) messages the Hungarians had received "various reports" that "[the Vietnamese] had engaged in a struggle with the Chinese."[138] A second possibility is that the North Vietnamese were so determined to avoid the risk of either U.S. propaganda tricks or Chinese intervention that they simply changed their minds and sought to do without the assistance of intermediaries. However, the subsequent unfolding of "Marigold" suggests that the second possibility should be seen as the less likely of the two explanations.

What upset Kádár most was Hanoi's mention of "regrettable consequences" if the United States used the secret talks for propaganda purposes. But he claimed that the North Vietnamese had a point:

> Comrade Péter . . . could tell [U.S. officials] that we had the faint hope that there was also honest intention there, and we proceeded accordingly. Subse-

137. Péter to Politburo, "SUBJECT: Diplomatic Steps Concerning the Vietnam Conflict," 31 January 1966, in MOL, IV-14-1/PJ/1966, in "Exchange of Messages between Comrade Péter and the Foreign Minister of the DRV," in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 111, IV-14-001409/1966, XIX-J-1-j.

138. Minutes of the HSWP Politburo, 4 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/384.ő.e., p. 21. Although no direct evidence of this has yet turned up in the Hungarian archival material, alarming "news" about Chinese interference was continuing to come from Hanoi (and Warsaw) in early January 1966. Hershberg indicates that on the false pretext of fears of U.S. bombing the Chinese delayed Michałowski's mission to Hanoi by a day (so that it began on 4 January 1966) in order to send an emissary ahead of him to pressure the North Vietnamese to reject the Polish proposals. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 23; and Hershberg, "Who Murdered 'Marigold'?" p. 11.

> quently, you broke the discretion by trying to achieve I do not know what, through 56 governments, which made it clear even to the non-expert, that your seriousness on the issue ceased to exist.[139]

Kádár was convinced that *both* the DRV and the United States had double-crossed Budapest. After analyzing the possible motives behind North Vietnam's rejection, however, Hungarian leaders concluded that the Chinese were ultimately to blame. Kádár even called the critical point 5 of the memorandum the "Beijing point."

Whatever the cause, the Hungarians understood that their mediation attempt had come to an end, at least for the time being. Kádár insisted that Hungary had "played fair and square" during the diplomatic action starting on December 23 and that Hungary had done what was necessary and had nothing to regret. Only one question remained: what kind of reply should Hungary give to Washington and Hanoi? (That the Hungarian government *should* send an official written reply to both parties was not questioned. A failure to do so would leave the impression that Hungary accepted responsibility for the failure). Kádár believed that the "Beijing point" could not be left without an unambiguous response: "Let our Chinese brothers fool their grandfather, not us!"[140] Others, such as Zoltán Komócsin, took a more moderate position, reminding the Politburo of the long way they had come since Péter's London talks and of the diplomatic structure that had emerged, which he called the "Hungarian channel." The main question, he said, was whether they should now close this channel altogether or leave a small door open. He argued that although closing the channel would be the easier option, doing so would leave Hungary further from its objectives than when it started and would be of no help either to the North Vietnamese or to the common cause. Later in the debate, Komócsin added that because the Chinese were manipulating the situation behind the scenes, closing either the North Vietnamese or the U.S. end of the channel would serve only Chinese interests.[141]

In the end, a compromise solution was reached whereby Péter sent a letter to his North Vietnamese counterpart simply offering Hungary's further political and diplomatic assistance (and including only a brief reference to the "Beijing point," stating that "we will come back to it later when the French translation of the text arrives from Hanoi"); and a second letter to Rusk condemning the hypocritical behavior of the United States but also ex-

139. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., p. 22.

140. Ibid. László Borhi translates the comment as "Next time our Chinese friends should take their own grandfathers for fools and not us." Borhi, "'We Hungarian Communists Are Realists,'" p. 4.

141. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., p. 22.

pressing interest in further U.S. negotiating plans in light of the new situation.[142]

Even though the letters were restrained, Hungarian leaders felt offended. Even the moderate Komócsin stressed that "there is no doubt this is a Chinese point" and that "this is undoubtedly a rude offense." According to Frigyes Puja, head of the HSWP's Foreign Department, point 6 of the memorandum was even worse, practically stating that "Vietnam is our own business, do not poke your nose into it!"[143] He conceded that "formally, this is the case" but insisted that "to fling this here like that is not exactly the right way."[144] Nonetheless, Puja warned Kádár against responding in kind to the DRV. Kádár himself, before he finished his outburst and passed the discussion to Komócsin, said cryptically: "Besides, the story is not yet over regarding future steps. I do not want to go into behind-the-scenes details, but there are bizarre things around here."[145] What he meant by this is unclear. In any event, the HSWP Politburo agreed that instead of abandoning the matter, the best response to both the DRV and China would be to put further pressure on Hanoi. Accordingly, the Politburo sent Péter to Hanoi in mid-September 1966 to stress once again the importance of political struggle.

Meanwhile, the Hungarians received news from Washington suggesting that the Hungarian salvage operation had been successful. On 20 June Undersecretary of State George Ball—in reference to Rusk's (reply) letter to Péter—told Radványi that the United States greatly appreciated the diplomatic efforts Hungary had made during Washington's Vietnamese peace offensive and would be glad to receive any new peace proposals and ideas from Budapest. Ball even suggested that he and Radványi should meet to exchange their views about "this question."[146]

142. In February 1966, Radványi confirmed to U.S. officials that Péter "had purposefully left the door open for further use of the Hungarian channel to Hanoi." U.S. Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, Lisle, Squire, and Radványi, 11 February 1966, NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 2/11/66, Box 9, p. 2. Document obtained and provided by James Hershberg.

143. Point 6 of the memorandum reads, "Our opinion is what we told you last time: making decisions in the Vietnam question concerns Vietnam [alone]. If you consider necessary to give an answer to the Americans, emphasize to them once again our position and point of view, which is known to you, and which you used to support." See Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., p. 70.

144. Ibid., p. 22.

145. Ibid.

146. Radványi to Péter, "SUBJECT: Conversation with U[nder] Secretary Ball on the Vietnam Question," 30 June 1966, in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 112, IV-43-00549/34/1966, XIX-J-1-j. Washington expressed its gratitude to Budapest as early as 3 February 1966. See Radványi to Péter, "SUBJECT: Conversation with Hungarian Desk Officer Squire," 3 February 1966, in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 112, IV-43-00549/12/1966, XIX-J-1-j.

In Hanoi Péter talked to Nguyen Duy Trinh, Pham Van Dong, and Ho Chi Minh. He explained that the "deceptive" U.S. peace offensive had created a paradoxical international situation in which the aggressor Americans appeared as champions of peace and the North Vietnamese, the actual victims, as warmongers. The DRV leaders acknowledged that this might be how things looked and asked Péter to specify their mistakes, but they assured him that both the political and the military initiative had remained in their hands and that they would, when the time for diplomacy arrived, come forward themselves.[147]

Péter's mission, however, did not end there. On 6 October 1966, before he took part in the UN General Assembly in New York, he again met with Rusk, telling him for the first time what Le Duan and other DRV leaders had repeatedly told high-ranking Hungarian government and party officials over the past two years, namely, that Hanoi was not insisting on immediate reunification and would accept a neutral South Vietnam led by a coalition government (i.e., Hanoi was not interested in occupying the South "by force" and was willing to respect the seventeenth parallel) if the United States would completely and definitively withdraw its forces from the South and stop all military action against the North. Rusk was surprised and replied that this was the first time he had heard of these conditions.[148] According to the U.S. record of the meeting, Péter added that if the bombing of the North stopped, even Beijing could go along with a settlement in the South. Rusk replied that Beijing had no legitimate interest in South Vietnam and did not have sufficient power to impose its will there. If Beijing was solely interested in its security and the removal of U.S. bases from the South, Rusk said, this was acceptable, but if the Chinese were intent on changing the nature of South Vietnam's government, this was unacceptable. Péter said that he thought Beijing could accept the neutralization of South Vietnam if this meant no

147. Péter to Politburo, "SUBJECT: Visit to Hanoi," 26 September 1966, in MOL, 1966, Secretariat, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 10, 1/PJ/1966, Document "G," XIX-J-1-r (document obtained and provided by László Borhi). As was customary, the Hungarians had informed both Moscow and Warsaw about Péter's planned trip. Moscow approved the plan without objection, but the Poles apparently tried to discourage Budapest from sending Péter to Hanoi, pointing out to the Hungarians the possible negative consequences such an endeavor might have, adding that it was "rather improbable that the Vietnamese comrades would say anything new beyond their well-known point of view." "Memorandum on the Preparation of Comrade János Péter's Hanoi Trip," 13 September 1966, in MOL, 1966, Secretariat, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 10, 1/PJ/1966, Document "G," XIX-J-1-r.

148. Both the U.S. and the Hungarian records of the conversation confirm this. Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Memorandum of Conversation on 6 October 1966 between Secretary of State Rusk and Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter, Secret/Nodis, in NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 10/18/66, Box 3010, p. 4 (document obtained and provided by James Hershberg); and Memorandum by Radványi to Péter, "SUBJECT: Talks between Foreign Minister János Péter and Secretary of State Rusk," 10 October 1966, in MOL, 1966, USA Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 15, IV-135-005244/1966, XIX-J-1-j, p. 13.

U.S. bases there. In *Delusion and Reality,* Radványi, who was present at the meeting between Rusk and Péter, quotes Péter as saying, "Peking would also accept a neutralized South Vietnam, if American troops were withdrawn and the American bases discontinued"—a reconstruction of the conversation that essentially matches the U.S. record. However, Radványi then dramatically adds: "I could hardly credit my ears."[149] In Radványi's official written report of the meeting, however, Péter makes no concrete statements about Beijing's approach. The omission is curious because the cover note of the report says Radványi compiled it and checked the text against the notes taken by Rusk's assistant. Radványi's report quotes Péter as saying only: "Perhaps Beijing would, under certain conditions, also be interested in the settlement of the issue"—to which Rusk replied: "If Peking is anxious about its security because of the American bases in South Vietnam, we understand this, and we can assure them that we do not threaten them."[150] This is an important distinction because the U.S. version of the conversation has Péter saying something that he could hardly have heard from either the Chinese or the North Vietnamese. Why Radványi omitted the critical parts remains unclear. (One possible explanation is that Péter instructed him to do so.) As for the rest of the conversation, Péter did not tell Rusk anything that Hungarian officials could not have heard from the North Vietnamese in 1965–1966—that is, other than his claim to have authorization from Hanoi to mediate. By October 1966, however, the question of authorization was almost entirely irrelevant to him. His mission was based on "higher considerations": to press Hanoi toward negotiations, even against its own (meaning, Beijing's) will; to make sure that the U.S. end of the "Hungarian channel" remained open; and possibly to "punish" the United States for its double game and indiscretion during Budapest's bombing pause mediation.

On 20 October, at a press conference in New York, Péter crowned his efforts. He started by lashing out at the Americans and paying Hanoi a compliment with the assertion that "with full and authentic knowledge of the opinion of the DRV government . . . I can state that, up to now, no genuine, effective peace offer has been made by the United States." But he then applied "pressure" on Hanoi and made the Americans an offer: "If and when the proposals of the United States will . . . meet the conditions of the DRV government and that of the NLF, peace can be restored."[151] That "Péter's answers to

149. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 222.

150. Memorandum by Radványi to Péter, 10 October 1966.

151. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: International and Vietnamese Reactions to Comrade Péter's Speech at the UN General Assembly and His Answers to UN Correspondents' Questions," 28 October 1966, in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 111, IV-14-003325/15/1966, XIX-J-1-j. The U.S. record of Péter's press conference is U.S.

questions . . . constituted a virtual word-for-word replay of almost everything he had told Rusk in confidence"[152]—no doubt causing some annoyance in the U.S. State Department—suggests that Péter was also using the press conference to complete his Politburo's "revenge." According to Radványi, after the press conference Péter even told him, with a "sarcastic smile" on his face, that his comments at least "will cause a disturbance in the conference now going on in Manila."[153] Péter's remarks did cause some disturbance, mainly in the press. But did they, as Radványi claims, ruin Péter's and Radványi's reputation, as well as Hungary's international prestige, with all parties?[154] Evidence suggests otherwise. In *Delusion and Reality* Radványi claims that by January 1967 Péter lacked any credibility as a mediator.[155] However, when on 26 April 1967 (i.e., less than four weeks before Radványi's defection) Radványi took part in President Johnson's annual reception for the diplomatic corps and had a conversation with, among others, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, he not only successfully defended the Hungarian point of view but even lectured Bundy about the disingenuousness of U.S. policy toward Vietnam. If this conversation indeed took place and Radványi really meant what he said, it casts further doubt on the reliability of his memoir and raises serious questions about his real reasons for defecting:

> Bundy said that in their view the greatest obstacle was that Hanoi did not understand the American side and did not want to negotiate. I noted that he could tell these arguments to journalists, but not to me. Both of us knew very well that this was not the case, and he should rather tell me whether the government of the United States wants to resolve the Vietnamese question solely by force or by means of diplomacy?! W. Bundy replied that Hanoi refused to speak with them, and they could not accept [Hanoi's] condition that they unilaterally halt the bombing of the DRV. Even if they did—he said—there would be no negotiations because Hanoi would then demand that they withdraw their forces from South Vietnam. It would be best—he went on—if the situation developed in a way once again that Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter could help before

Delegation to the UN, New York (USUN) to State Department, in NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 10/21/66, Box 3010 (document obtained and provided by James Hershberg).

152. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 225.

153. Ibid., p. 226. The Manila conference was a three-day meeting on 23–25 October 1966 to discuss the situation in Vietnam. Participants included heads of state and foreign ministers from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand. An astonishingly detailed analysis of the conference and its international context, including the public reactions to Péter's New York statements, can be found in Memorandum from Hungarian Embassy in Rome to Péter, "SUBJECT: The Manila Conference and the Visit of Harriman and Martin to Rome," 1 December 1966, in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 113, IV-43-005618/1966, XIX-J-1-j.

154. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 228.

155. Ibid., p. 224.

> the situation would further deteriorate. In my reply, I noted that throughout the years, whenever a peace initiative got to a more serious phase, the American side always responded with bombing and escalation of the war. As far as I was concerned, I could say only that if, by any chance, he had anything to say officially, he knew where and how he could contact me.[156]

Arguably, if you were preparing for defection, you would not send home reports detailing that you had confessed to the enemy of your country a belief that your superiors had lied all along (especially if they had not been lying in the first place). On the contrary, you would send home exactly the kind of report cited here that demonstrates your unquestioning loyalty. Even so, it seems unlikely that Radványi's report was merely a cover. In *Delusion and Reality* Radványi speaks only about his brief conversation with Rusk at the reception, where, according to Radványi, Rusk asked half-seriously, half-jokingly whether Péter had any new proposals for settling the Vietnam conflict, adding that he was always ready to listen. "When I reported the Secretary's remark to Budapest, Péter nervously ordered me to forgo any Vietnam discussion for the time being."[157] But Radványi's official report makes no mention of a conversation with Rusk. He notes having spoken with Bundy, W. Averell Harriman, Walt Rostow, and even Johnson, but gives no hint of any conversation with Rusk. How could Péter have nervously reacted to something he had no knowledge of? Did Radványi also report to Péter by telephone or send Budapest another written report about the same event?[158] Neither scenario seems probable. Instead, Radványi likely had reasons other than those he cites in *Delusion and Reality* (and elsewhere) to interpret the events as he did.[159] He seems to be asking us to believe that a highly intelligent, experienced career diplomat—a man strongly committed to the im-

156. Memorandum from Radványi, "SUBJECT: President Johnson's Reception in the White House for the D[iplomatic] C[orps]," enclosed with Radványi's Memorandum to Head of Department Házi, 27 April 1967, in MOL, 1967, USA Relations, Foreign Ministry Records, Top Secret, Box 12, IV-132-002691/1967, XIX-J-1-j.

157. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 229.

158. Although it is possible that Radványi merely misremembered and confused Rusk with Bundy, circumstances make this rather improbable. In his report, Radványi mentions that Rusk was present but carefully indicates the names and positions of his talking partners during the reception; for example, "William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State, head of the Far Eastern department in the SD." Memorandum from Radványi, 27 April 1967.

159. In this article I analyze the background of Radványi's defection only to the extent that seems necessary to support my argument. In a conversations with U.S. officials after his defection, Radványi frequently complained that the Hungarian secret service (ÁVH) and Péter had personally humiliated him and that Péter had at times treated him "like a dog." See, for example, Memorandum of Conversation, Janos Radvanyi and Leslie C. Tihany, "SUBJECT: Hungarian Chief of Mission Asks for Refuge in US," 16 May 1967, in NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL30-HUNG 5/16/67, Box 2182; and Memorandum of Conversation, Janos Radvanyi and Leslie C. Tihany, "SUBJECT: Conversation with Former Hungarian Charge d'Affaires Radvanyi: Hungarian Personalities," 16, 20 May 1967, in NARA, RG 59, Hungarian Relations, POL15-1-HUNG 5/16–20/67, Box 2182.

provement of his home country's relations with the United States—could harbor a completely false picture of the political-diplomatic setting in which he himself played a central role. However, Radványi undermines this picture in his book when he stresses his real (and largely correct) opinion of why Hungary undertook its mediation campaign: "I volunteered my theory [to Péter] that, because of the Sino-Soviet divergencies, the Soviet Union could not risk a mediation role in Vietnam, but that Hungary, as a small country, could do so and assume the risk of minor complications."[160]

Radványi was also well aware of what he described as "the selfish reasons from Hungary's point of view" for the mediation efforts. In February 1966, during a private conversation with a high-ranking State Department official, he said that Hungary had attempted in good faith to contribute to a dialogue that might lead to a solution of the Vietnam question, "because he thought some sort of a solution was necessary for a resumption of progress in matters [of U.S.-Hungarian relations] such as trade, in which Hungary was vitally interested."[161] At one point in *Delusion and Reality,* Radványi—almost contradicting his own argument—even reveals the basic *Soviet* consideration behind the coordinated Soviet-bloc peace efforts of 1965–1966. Discussing Péter's stopover in Moscow on 6 September 1965 en route to North Korea, he writes that Gromyko was convinced that a bombing pause was essential because it would show Hanoi that "contrary to the Chinese view, diplomacy could be as effective as guns in forcing the Americans out of Vietnam."[162]

160. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 229.

161. Department of State Memorandum of Conversation between Deputy Assistant Secretary Horace G. Torbert, Jr., and Hungarian Charge d'Affaires ad Interim Janos Radvanyi, 25 February 1966, NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 2/25/66, Box 9, p. 2 (document obtained and provided by James Hershberg). This conversation does not contradict Radványi's subsequent assertions, because it took place before the summer of 1966 when, he says, he learned the "truth" about Péter's moves. See Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 142. In a conversation with Harry Schwartz (an editorial writer for *The New York Times* and a specialist in Soviet and East European affairs) in *late* 1966—that is, apparently *after* his alleged revelation—he said essentially the same things. Schwartz seems to have noticed this, too, insomuch as a week after Radványi's defection Schwartz published a brief article noting the discrepancy between Radványi's statements directly preceding and following his defection. According to Schwartz, in late 1966, Radványi not only praised Hungary's secret peace efforts but also deplored the U.S. government's reluctance to negotiate with the Vietcong and to halt the bombing of North Vietnam. When Schwartz brought up the Hungarian government's evident anti-Americanism, Radványi replied that it was not to be taken seriously and did not reflect his government's real position or impugn its interest in helping to end the war in Vietnam. In addition, Schwartz asserts that Radványi leaked details of the top-secret Hungarian peace initiative to him as early as November 1965. Harry Schwartz, "Conversations Recalled," *The New York Times,* 21 May 1967, p. 15. This latter remark by Schwartz seems to corroborate a secret ÁVH report on the circumstances of Radványi's defection suggesting that one of Radványi's main reasons for defecting might have been that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had compromised him by systematically collecting and turning against him "his careless political indiscretions." Ministry of Interior Memorandum on Radványi's Defection, Records of Kádár's Personal Secretariat, 20 May 1967, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.47/740.ő.e., p. 128.

162. Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* p. 54.

Apart from personal accounts, conscience, and life strategies, nothing had really changed (excepting the permanent address of a Hungarian diplomat): Péter's prestige remained intact and even seemed to have been improved.[163] The "Hungarian channel" remained open, and through it the same old slogans were circulated between the parties concerned. This pattern might have been repeated forever had the failed Tet Offtensive not intervened. The bad news for the would-be mediators was that when the North Vietnamese were finally ready to start negotiations, they pointedly eschewed mediation channels and simply made an announcement on the radio.[164]

## Conclusions

Hungary's mediation in the Vietnam War was a dual-target, three-phase, political-diplomatic effort that started in January 1965 and ended in October 1966. In the first phase (January to June 1965), the HSWP Politburo set the framework of its peace initiative by making a series of important foreign policy decisions. The Politburo launched exploratory talks partly to get a clear picture of the current situation and partly to secure the support of Hungary's allies—particularly, to make sure that any planned maneuvers were in accordance with the general Soviet-bloc approach toward the Vietnam conflict. In the second phase (slightly overlapping the first, June to September 1965) Hungary made the first indirect contacts with both Hanoi and Washington, conveying "messages" tailored to each of the warring parties: to Washington, that negotiations were now possible; to Hanoi, that negotiations were now desirable. In the third phase (October 1965 to October 1966), Hungary made direct contacts with both Hanoi and Washington by sending top-ranking officials to both capitals, partly in order to add more emphasis and credibility to the "message" and partly to sound out the two governments' respective opinions. The highlight of this phase was the actual "bombing pause mediation" (from 23 December 1965 to 31 January 1966), when Hungary not only served as a messenger between the two parties but also seriously influenced the course of events by urging the combatants to clarify their positions and give definite answers to the questions raised, so that each side would clearly understand the other's terms and conditions. In addition, Hungary ac-

163. Although the tone of official U.S. communication with the Hungarians remained cordial through the rest of the 1960s, U.S. officials privately never ceased doubting the sincerity of Polish and Hungarian peace efforts of the time. However, that mistrust did not prevent high-level U.S. officials from occasionally encouraging Péter to let them know if he had "anything new to say" about Hanoi's approach.

164. See, for example, Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars,* p. 172.

tively supported the U.S. effort to persuade Hanoi to move beyond the exchange of messages and make direct contact.

Hungary failed to meet the first of its two main objectives in undertaking the mediation attempt of 1965–1966. That much has been known almost since the time of the events because no direct negotiations between U.S. and North Vietnamese officials occurred during this period. It has also long been known that by the mid-1960s Hungary enjoyed a certain degree of leeway in foreign policy. In return for unconditional loyalty to the Soviet Union, Hungary had an appropriate, though carefully circumscribed, freedom of action to pursue independent diplomatic goals. In this respect Budapest's mediation achieved its second aim.

The details of Hungary's mediation effort have only gradually been emerging. It is now clear, for example, that the effort started as early as January 1965 and lasted much longer than the 37-day bombing pause. In light of the archival evidence presented in this article—and contrary to what Radványi claimed—Hungary's peace effort was not a one-man (János Péter) show. Rather, it was an integral part of a wider context, the final phase of a meticulously designed and systematically implemented policy, contrary to Hershberg's assumption that the Hungarians—and in all probability the Poles too—were acting "strictly at Moscow's instigation."[165] "Instigation" is the right term, however, because the Soviet Union was far from "forcing" its allies to mediate. Because a peaceful settlement to the conflict would have been in the common interest of all Soviet-bloc countries, the USSR needed only to "ask" them to drive Hanoi in the right direction—that is, to draw Hanoi closer to the bloc and away from China. Asking is exactly what Brezhnev did in May 1965. He asked the Hungarians—and possibly other East Europeans—to go to *Hanoi* rather than to Washington. In this respect, the Hungarian efforts, especially those of the Fock delegation, were also successful, and the brief "friendly debate" in October 1965 did not seriously affect the traditionally "fraternal" North Vietnamese–Hungarian relationship. By all indications, however, the actual *mediation* was Hungary's own idea, approved by Moscow only after it was already in progress. Evidence for this conclusion

165. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 65. Information about the Soviet Union's role has been available since the publication of Csaba Békés's 1998 article "A kádári külpolitika 1956–1968." At a conference in Budapest in 2003, László Borh referred specifically to the May 1965 Brezhnev-Kádár conversation in asserting that Budapest's mediatory effort had been inspired by Moscow. A few months later, Borhi's oral statement also appeared in print:,"When the Soviet-inspired Hungarian efforts to mediate in the Vietnam crisis broke down, Kádár was disappointed." See Borhi, "'We Hungarian Communists Are Realists,'" p. 4. The Hungarian sources seem to contradict Logevall's statement (*Choosing War*, p. 335) that by the early spring of 1965 the Soviet Union had lost interest in promoting a settlement. Because archival records of the January 1965 Brezhnev-Podgorny visit to Hungary have not yet been released, we have only indirect evidence regarding the origins of the Hungarian initiative.

can be seen both in the diplomatic steps taken by Hungary long before Brezhnev's May request and in a meeting of Gromyko and Péter on 12 May 1965 at which Gromyko said "the Soviet Union would not discuss the settlement of the Vietnamese question with either one of the Western states. Conducting such negotiations must be left to the Far Easterners themselves."[166] A longer version of the report states that "the Soviet Union will expose the Americans' activity, will explain its position to the governments of various countries, but will not negotiate about the settlement of the Vietnamese question because no one has asked it to do so. Neither have the Vietnamese comrades. This is their [own] business."[167] Although the Hungarians could hardly have interpreted this as encouragement from Moscow to mediate—even if some weeks later Brezhnev explicitly referred to an apparent U.S. willingness to negotiate—Gromyko's statements likely reinforced their impression that the Soviet Union was in an inconvenient position and would not mind if "someone else" helped to bring about negotiations.

Some researchers, notably Békés and Hershberg, have suspected that Hungary's attempt at mediation was—contrary to Radványi's claims—a good-faith effort based on the illusion that Moscow and Washington were interested in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict and that the (seemingly) ever vacillating DRV could be forced to the negotiating table by the joint effort of the two superpowers.[168] The claims put forth by Radványi and others that Poland and Hungary abused the Americans' "naïveté" and "goodwill" by trying to lengthen the bombing pause in order to give Hanoi more time to recover and speed up its infiltration of the South can now be put to rest. These charges, borrowing Gaiduk's simile, "resemble a reflection in a mirror, where left becomes right and right becomes left."[169] Neither the Poles nor the Hungarians wanted to prolong the pause just to give Hanoi more time for infiltration. When Michałowski's Hanoi mission failed, the Poles wanted to wait in giving an answer to Washington until they could see how the Hungarian efforts worked out. Then both Poland and Hungary wanted to wait until they could see the results of their scheduled trilateral consultation with the

166. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "SUBJECT: Talks with Foreign Minister Gromyko," 13 May 1965, in MOL, 1965, Soviet Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 101, SzU-135/1965, XIX-J-1-j.

167. Foreign Ministry Memorandum, "The Main Talking Points of the 12 May 1965 Meeting of Comrades A. Gromyko and János Péter," n.d., in MOL, 1965, Soviet Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 101, SzU-135/1965, XIX-J-1-j;

168. This was not mere illusion. The United States and the Soviet Union shared an interest in preventing the conflict from getting out of control and desired ultimately to get rid of it altogether. Until 1968, however, neither superpower would fully commit itself to a negotiated settlement.

169. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* p. 255.

Soviet Union. These were practical considerations undertaken in light of the rules of close intra-bloc coordination.

As for the Hungarian attitude toward a possible extension of the bombing halt, the Hungarian sources give no indication that Budapest "argued forcefully against a resumption of the American bombing."[170] One can hardly be surprised that in debates with the Amerian "enemy" over the DRV's misuse of bombing pauses the Hungarians sided with their ally even if privately they, too, condemned Hanoi's military strategy as "unrealistic."

In his discussion of the less-than-candid behavior of Budapest, Moscow, and Warsaw after mid-January 1966—when Hanoi made clear that "it was not seriously interested in talks with the United States" (something that was not quite the case)—Hershberg quotes Péter's comprehensive "Diplomatic Steps" report to the HSWP Politburo and Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister Károly Erdélyi's memorandum describing his 24 January 1966 conversation with the Polish ambassador in Budapest, Jan Kiljanczyk.[171] Both documents show that at the trilateral meeting in Moscow (which took place on 24–25 January 1966), the Hungarian, Polish, and Soviet foreign ministers agreed to put pressure on Washington to extend the bombing pause. Erdélyi's memorandum, however, reveals the real reason for this coordinated effort. Kiljanczyk told Erdélyi that upon returning from Hanoi to Warsaw on 16 January 1966, Michałowski talked to U.S. Ambassador John Gronouski, who confirmed the "rumor" that the North Vietnamese regular forces stationed in South Vietnam had suspended all combat activities at the moment the bombing pause had taken effect. U.S. sources indicate that although the guerrilla forces remained active and the North Vietnamese infiltration continued, military contact with NVA regulars fell sharply during the pause. On 13 January, President Johnson told reporters: "The number of incidents have dropped off markedly. I don't say there is any connection with that and our peace moves, but that is a fact."[172] Similarly, in a secret memorandum dated

170. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 64.

171. Péter to Politburo, "SUBJECT: Diplomatic Steps in the Vietnam Conflict," 17 January 1966, in Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., and Memorandum by Erdélyi, "SUBJECT: The Visit of Polish Ambassador Kiljanczyk," 25 January 1966, in MOL, 1966, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 112, IV-43-4/E.K./1966, XIX-J-1-j.

172. Kraslow and Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam,* p. 147. A secret U.S. memorandum seemingly contradicts the other secret and public evidence I have cited here: A memorandum sent on 2 February by the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Budapest, Elim O'Shaughnessy, to Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister Béla Szilágyi summarizes the U.S. intelligence assessment of North Vietnamese infiltration and general military activity within South Vietnam during the 37-day bombing pause. See Memorandum by O'Shaughnessy to Szilágyi, 2 February 1966, in MOL, 1966, USA Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 15, IV-135-001131/2/1966, XIX-J-1-j. The memoran-

24 January, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy wrote to Johnson that "there has not been any important military action by Hanoi in the South, and until there is, we can easily say to our friends in Saigon that the suspension of bombing has in fact lowered the rate of aggression."[173] According to Erdélyi's memorandum, the Poles could not tell whether Hanoi's suspension of military activity was meant to express a desire for a (mutual) moratorium or whether the North Vietnamese had something else in mind. (Nor could the Poles explain why Hanoi was trying to keep U.S. officials in the dark.) The Poles proposed that if the extensive fighting in the South did not recommence and the United States did not resume bombing DRV territory by 25 January, then the three foreign ministers should discuss at their Moscow meeting possible ways of putting pressure on the United States to extend the bombing suspension. However, the Polish proposal also makes clear that this should be done in order to see how the DRV would use a further extension of the bombing pause. As we now know, none of the three Soviet-bloc countries was interested in a protracted war in Vietnam. All three considered Hanoi's military strategy (i.e., defeating the United States on the battlefield) to be "unrealistic." Therefore, they believed that achieving a prolongation of the bombing pause simply to give Hanoi a military advantage was against their interests. They wanted talks and they acted accordingly by putting continuous and coordinated pressure on Hanoi throughout the pause. When they contem-

dum concludes that "in all major respects the pace of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese activity in the South was at the level of previous or higher during the suspension." Why did the U.S. government send this memorandum to Szilágyi and potentially override its own earlier (secret and public) statements. The explanation seems to be that Gronouski and Johnson had made their statements during the pause, when hope still existed (or at least the U.S. "peace offensive" was still in progress), whereas O'Shaughnessy's memorandum was delivered to the Hungarians after the pause failed to produce results, the bombing had resumed, and the time had come to find someone to blame. Two other Hungarian-related U.S. documents reveal that the question of NVA activity during the pause was considered a critical issue by both sides and was hotly debated by American and Hungarian officials as late as one year after the actual events. Following his defection, Radványi told William Bundy that shortly after the U.S. bombing resumed Polish diplomat Bohdan Lewandowski had told him in New York that Hanoi had in fact withdrawn a division from the South during the pause. However, the Pentagon had refused to admit this, and thus the Americans had missed the signal. See William P. Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, "SUBJECT: Disclosure by Janos Radvanyi Concerning Vietnam Negotiations—PART I" (Top Secret), 29 May 1967, in LBJL, National Security Files—Intelligence File, Box 2, p. 5. The second document, recording the 6 October 1966 meeting between Péter and Rusk, shows that Péter told Rusk that military activity had declined in South Vietnam during the 1965 pause and that this indicated Hanoi's readiness to talk. Rusk rejected Péter's claims, but referred only to the increased level of infiltration and incidents in general (without distinguishing between U.S.-ARVN/NLF and U.S.-ARVN/NVA encounters) during the pause, claiming that the latter had continued at pre-pause level. Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Memorandum of Conversation on between Secretary of State Rusk and Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter, 6 October 1966, Secret/Nodis, NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 10/18/66, Box 3010, p. 7 (document obtained and provided by James Hershberg).

173. Bundy to Johnson, "SUBJECT: Pros and Cons of Immediate Resumption of the Bombing," *FRUS,* 1964–1968, Vol. IV, pp. 124–125.

plated the possibility of persuading Washington to extend the bombing halt, they did so to give more time to diplomacy.[174] The failure of diplomacy was a disappointment to all three, but it was not such a disappointment that they shed any tears for the United States when it turned out that Hanoi and the NLF had taken advantage of the bombing suspension to infiltrate the South.

Perhaps the figure most disappointed by the outcome was Kádár. Instead of arguing forcefully for an extension of the bombing moratorium, at the HSWP Politburo meeting on 21 January 1966, he argued passionately for putting an immediate end to Hungary's diplomatic action. He repeated this view in many different forms, using expressions such as "the time has come for us to finish this somehow," "let us get out of this right now," and "there are 56 other channels besides us, anyway." This is the context in which Kádár's bitter remark reflecting his disappointment over Hungary's failed mediation attempt must be evaluated: "Perhaps the USA will decide anyway, regardless of what we do, not to bomb the DRV, but I think, if we contributed only one ten-thousandth to making them refrain from bombing, and by that we saved at least two children's lives, then we played an enormous part in the whole issue."[175] Even more surprising is the degree of empathy Komócsin expressed for Washington's opinion and conduct. Kádár was convinced that the United States had tricked Hungary, but Komócsin tried to explain that the U.S. behavior did not necessarily reflect insincerity:

> I think they indeed wanted to negotiate, in their own way. They cannot simply come over and admit—as we think they should do—"we are defeated, let's talk." In the beginning Vietnam, too, showed an inclination toward negotiations, but neither of them wants to be the first to say that "let's sit down [to talk]." This means that, . . . whether we like it or not, there is a factor in the Americans' be-

174. On 25 February 1966, Radványi told Horace Torbert (former U.S. chargé d'affaires in Budapest) that if the ceasefire had lasted only a couple of weeks longer, peace efforts "might have gotten somewhere." Although he added that was just his personal impression and that he had nothing concrete to back it up, he must have been aware that Torbert would report the comment to his State Department superiors, an action Torbert apparently did take. See Department of State Memorandum of Conversation between Deputy Assistant Secretary Horace G. Torbert, Jr. and Hungarian Charge d'Affaires ad Interim Janos Radvanyi, 25 February 1966, NARA, RG 59, POL27-VIETS 2/25/66, Box 9, p. 3 (document obtained and provided by James Hershberg).

175. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., p. 22. The wording of this statement is so strikingly similar to the one quoted by James Hershberg ("If the Hungarian effort resulted only in the bombing being suspended for a few more days, this at least saved a few North Vietnamese lives"; Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause," p. 64), that it probably was the original. According to Hershberg, Radványi recalled this statement to Bundy as Péter's sardonic remark to Kádár expressing a degree of satisfaction over the extension of the bombing pause even though Hanoi's negative response had reached Budapest long before the end of January 1966.

havior we cannot help but take into consideration. Their prestige is at stake in this case.[176]

Although the Hungarian diplomatic efforts of 1965–1966 caused greater (albeit temporary) tension in North Vietnamese-Hungarian relations, the impact on U.S.-Hungarian bilateral relations was even more detrimental. But the reason for this has nothing to do with Washington's alleged discontent with the Hungarian foreign minister's "fraudulent" actions. After the failure of Hungary's mediation efforts, the HSWP temporarily reoriented its foreign policy and took a hard line in bilateral relations with Washington, faithfully following the Soviet example.[177] But this in itself does not explain Hungary's exceptionally harsh and outspoken line at the time.

Archival evidence suggests that for a while most of the Hungarian leaders could not forgive the United States for its "double game" during the bombing pause. The circumstances of the failure of Poland's "Marigold" mediation only added to their discontent regarding U.S. bargaining strategy. Throughout 1967, Hungarian officials missed no opportunity during their talks with U.S. representatives to condemn U.S. military efforts in an exceptionally sharp tone. In late 1967, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs John Leddy, upon his return from an East European round trip, complained to an Associated Press diplomatic correspondent that the Hungarians' outbursts against U.S. policy in Vietnam had taken him by surprise. He said he had talked to three high-ranking Hungarian officials in Budapest, and every one had brought up Vietnam with greater vehemence than he had encountered in any other East European country, including the Soviet Union.[178]

The main reason that Hungary's mediation efforts failed has long been known to historians. Like the other Soviet-bloc countries interested in bringing closure to the Vietnam conflict, Hungary fell into a trap of its own design, as a bizarre interlude from 1968 illustrates. In May 1968, one of the numerous North Vietnamese delegations that visited Hungary during the war held talks with Hungarian party and government leaders in Budapest. As usual, the

176. Minutes of HSWP Politburo, 21 January 1966, in MOL, M-KS 288.f.5/385.ő.e., p. 24.

177. Ilya Gaiduk provides a detailed explanation of the background of the USSR's foreign policy reassessment, including his own interpretation of why Ambassador Dobrynin was summoned home in April 1967 and the statements of Soviet military attaché Meshcheryakov at the 27 April reception of at the Soviet embassy in Washington. See Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War,* pp. 118–124. Strikingly absent from his explanation is the factional struggle in the Kremlin that Radványi averred was the last straw in his decision to seek political asylum in the United States. See Radványi, *Delusion and Reality,* pp. 233–237.

178. Washington Embassy to Péter, "SUBJECT: SD Assistant Secretary Leddy's Budapest Trip," 7 December 1967, in MOL, 1967, USA Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 12, 004036/1/1967, XIX-J-1-j.

North Vietnamese had come to request more aid, but this time—apparently referring to the Paris talks—the delegation's leader, Le Thanh Nghi, boasted that the DRV was simultaneously fighting and talking. At the end of the negotiations Nghi paid an official visit to Kádár and Fock and, "as a symbol of the fraternal cooperation of the Hungarian and Vietnamese peoples, Comrade Le Thanh Nghi handed over an AK-63 submachine-gun made in Hungary, with which, during the great offensive of 31 January, a single Vietnamese freedom-fighter had annihilated 20 American aggressors."[179] In the first half of 1968, Hungary had supplied the DRV with 11,000 AK assault rifles and other hand weapons, as well as tons of ammunition and other types of war matériel.[180]

The Hungarians' primary mistake (one made in common with their allies) was to give the North Vietnamese a large quantity of dangerous tools and full-scale political support and then try to persuade them not to use those tools. Hungary's attempt to mediate also failed because the other concerned parties made their own fundamental mistakes. The DRV made the mistake of underestimating U.S. military power and the skillfulness with which the Johnson administration could deal with U.S. domestic opinion. Secretary of State Rusk, for his part, made the mistake of "overestimat[ing] the patience of the American people, and . . . underestimat[ing] the tenacity of the North Vietnamese."[181] Finally, the Hungarians made a second mistake, if it can be called a mistake, in not knowing—or at least not believing—that both Hanoi and Washington, long before Hungary started to make plans for a political solution, had each made the same choice based on their own two miscalculations: they had chosen war.

179. Foreign Ministry Report, "SUBJECT: The Visit of the Vietnamese Economic Government Delegation Led by Le Thanh Nghi," 1 June 1968, in MOL, 1968, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 88, 00516/44/1968, XIX-J-1-j.

180. Foreign Ministry Report, "SUBJECT: Military Shipments to Vietnam" 28 November 1968, in MOL, 1968, Vietnamese Relations, Foreign Ministry Documents, Top Secret, Box 88, 00516/79/1968, XIX-J-1-j.

181. Rusk and Papp, *As I Saw It,* p. 497.