

The Origins of the Vietnam War from the East- and West German Perspective, 1960-1965

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

This thesis is 80.000 words in length and does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the History Degree Committee.

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Abbreviations

ADN	General German News Service
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDU/CSU	Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
ICC	International Control Commission
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MfAA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLF	National Liberation Front of South Vietnam
NSDAP	The National Socialist German Workers' Party
PLA	Party of Labour of Albania
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTBT	Partial Test-Ban Treaty
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SED	Socialist Unity Party
UN	United Nations
U.S.	The United States of America
VWP	Vietnamese Workers' Party
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

We live in a wondrous time, in which the strong is weak because of his scruples and the weak grows strong because of his audacity. – Otto von Bismarck

Introduction

On 30 November 1977, the leader of the German Democratic Republic and General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, Erich Honecker, boarded an *Interflug* aircraft to embark upon his tour of the Far East. His first port of call was the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. *Neues Deutschland*, the party press organ, proudly informed its readers that Hanoi had put on a “festive dress” for the occasion. An atmosphere of friendship and camaraderie was palpable. All the way from Gia-Lam Airport to the presidential palace, the streets were draped with multi-coloured flags and banners. National newspapers cited Honecker’s mantra “Solidarity with Vietnam - Now More Than Ever!” and reminded readers of East Berlin’s fraternal assistance during the American War.¹

After a brief layover in Tashkent, the GDR delegation landed in Hanoi the next day. Waiting for his guests, flanked by several central committee members, was Le Duan, the principal figure of the newly-created Vietnamese nation. Embraces were exchanged and, after the traditional military ceremony, both statesmen made their way to the presidential palace. Looking out of the motorcade, Honecker saw tens of thousands of beaming Hanoians waving enthusiastically back at him. The convoy drove over the historic Long-Bien Bridge, a symbol of Vietnamese resilience; past the “hospital of GDR-Vietnamese friendship,” built by German engineers; and, finally, reaching Ba-Dinh Square, the spot where Ho Chi Minh had proclaimed national independence thirty-two years before. Walking side-by-side, the two leaders entered the ceremonial hall to a raucous standing ovation. “I warmly welcome you and all the party- and state comrades of the GDR,” Duan declared. “I wish you good health and great victories during your official friendship visit to our country.”²

The next morning, at 8:40 a.m., Vietnamese and East German decision-makers congregated to discuss foreign political affairs. After thanking Honecker for his fraternal support, as well as heralding their two countries as the “Eastern and Western outposts of socialism,” Le Duan began to reminisce about the origins of the Vietnam War. Placing the event within a wider context, he blamed the communist world’s lack of unity for American escalation. “Already in 1960 there were disagreements,” he recalled. “If the socialist camp had

¹ Neues Deutschland Archiv (hereafter, ND-Archiv), Nr.283/1977, ‘Delegation der DDR reist heute in die SR Vietnam und in die KVDR, 30. November 1977,’ p.1; ND-Archiv, Nr.284/1977, ‘Hanoi steht im Zeichen der Freundschaft mit der DDR, 1. Dezember 1977,’ p.1

² ND-Archiv, Nr.284/1977, ‘Hanoi steht im Zeichen der Freundschaft mit der DDR, 1. Dezember 1977,’ p.1; ND-Archiv, Nr.285/1977, ‘Erich Honecker in Vietnam von Le Duan brüderlich empfangen, 2. Dezember 1977,’ p.1; ND-Archiv, Nr.286/1977, ‘Tausende grüßten auf dem Weg von der “Long Bien” zur roten Zitadelle, 2. Dezember 1977,’ p.3

remained strongly united, then the USA would never have dared come to Vietnam. When the USA came to us, there was the dispute, the conflict of opinion.”³ Duan was referring to the ideological split inside the Marxist-Leninist world. He was convinced that if the other side had faced a cohesive socialist camp, then Vietnamese history would have been different. No intra-bloc split. No military escalation.

Le Duan’s hypothesis hints at a crucial strand in the conflict’s origins, a strand which has not gained the historiographical attention it deserves. Scholars have conventionally claimed that the Vietnam War was a “logical” (if not inevitable) outcome of the struggle between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism, that the Cold War’s “powerful spell” precipitated armed conflict.⁴ This dissertation proceeds from a different premise. Rather than draw a straight line between the post-war world and military escalation, it uses the East- and West German perspective to argue that the Vietnam War had its roots in a distinct and particular moment, a moment which presented unfamiliar challenges and new possibilities on either side of the Iron Curtain. It takes seriously Le Duan’s statement to Honecker all those years later that disagreements within the socialist camp were decisive in the outbreak of war. But this dissertation goes further. By focusing on the beliefs and appraisals of two diametrically opposed states, it argues that between the spring of 1960 and the summer of 1965 rapid changes inside both the socialist- as well as the capitalist world changed the meaning of Vietnam. Its principal concern is to delineate this evolving change in the minds of East- and West German officials, as well as explain how and why the global shift from bipolarism to polycentrism shaped their behaviour in the run-up to military escalation.

This thesis, then, is a study of the crucial years leading up to the Second Indochina Conflict, an exploration of the period when the Cold War transformed from two cohesive blocs,

³ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (hereafter, SAPMO-BArch), DY30/11496, ‘Stenografische Niederschrift der offiziellen Gespräche der Partei- und Staatsdelegationen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam am Freitag, dem 2. Dezember 1977 in Hanoi,’ p.15

⁴ G. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975, Fifth Edition* (New York, 2014), p.xii; R. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York, 1998), p.334. For scholars, who similarly trace the Vietnam War back to the Cold War struggle between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism, see, for instance, P. Kattenberg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-1975* (New Brunswick, 1980); D. Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (London, 1965); J. Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975* (Lawrence, 2009); M. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York, 1991); R. Divine, ‘Vietnam: An Episode in the Cold War,’ in L. Gardner (ed.), *Vietnam: The Early Decisions* (Austin, 1997), pp.11-23; Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Oxford, 1995); M. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War: America’s Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York, 1996); H. Jones, *How the Assassination of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War* (Oxford, 2003). For a more radical interpretation, see G. Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States and the Modern Historical Experience* (London, 1985)

competing in an existential battle, to a decentralised geopolitical structure that was no longer united by a common adversary, nor advocating identical objectives. It treats the international order as fluid rather than static and situates Vietnam within an evolving context. It explores the moment when Bonn and East Berlin realised, simultaneously, that developments in Indochina were incongruous with their own assessment of the post-war world. It opens up for discussion the vital story of how structural changes to the international order shaped and reshaped both the FRG's and GDR's response to the crisis.

An explanation is warranted as to why a joint appraisal of the two German states' contributes to our understanding of the war's inception. In a sense, it might seem a strange choice. Neither had any special ties with Southeast Asia, nor were they principal protagonists in the struggle. Still, the adoption of what Tony Smith describes as a "pericentric" framework - meaning from the standpoint of junior actors, rather than from the superpowers - offers several advantages.⁵ First and foremost, the East- and West German perspective provides an invaluable opportunity to chart the conflict's origins from both *above* as well as *below* the 17th parallel. Ralph Smith expressed well the central flaw in evaluating past events from one side of the international spectrum: "One would not [...] try to write the history of a game of chess, move by move, recording and analysing only the moves of 'black'."⁶ Smith is surely right. When trying to understand the intricate nature of the crisis, it is crucial to appreciate that "America was merely one participant in a complicated, decidedly international dynamic in which other governments usually held the initiative and set the agenda."⁷ An analysis of both the FRG's and the GDR's vantage point, then, shifts the focus away from the White House and towards a more multilateral and interrelated account of the conflict's origins.

A further advantage of examining the outbreak of war from Bonn's as well as East Berlin's perspective is that it places Vietnam in a global milieu. The Cold War initially began with the question of a postwar settlement on Germany, Germany was at the epicentre of the postwar world. In the minds of FRG and GDR decision-makers, the Cold War came to signify

⁵ T. Smith, 'New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War, *Diplomatic History*, Volume 24, Issue 4 (October 2000), pp.567-591. See also J. Gaddis, 'New Conceptual Approaches to the Study of American Foreign Relations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,' *Diplomatic History*, Volume 14, Number 3 (summer 1990), pp.405-423. For further examples of a pericentric perspective, see, H. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton, 2005); M. Gnoinska, 'Poland and the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia, 1949-1965' (Ph.D. Dissertation; George Washington University, 2010)

⁶ R. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War. Volume I, Revolution Versus Containment, 1955-61* (London, 1983), p.6

⁷ M. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, 2005), p.5

an existential battle between a Capitalist- and Marxist-Leninist Bloc, with secular power residing in Washington and Moscow. Because of the universal nature of the Cold War, the fates of Germany and Vietnam intertwined. Both states were carved by the superpowers into two disparate ideological entities. Both were crucibles of the post-war world. And both formed the outer rampart of their respective blocs. Participants on either side were judged part of a zero-sum game, in which two social systems were competing in an irreconcilable struggle. It is moreover apposite that U.S. executives explained the decision to escalate in global terms. “Both at the time and later,” Fredrik Logevall points out, “these officials claimed that the demands of American “credibility” necessitated standing firm in Vietnam, even if that meant committing U.S. ground troops to fight and die there.”⁸ Sure enough, between 1960 and 1965, the defence of Saigon was, again and again, compared to the defence of Berlin. Failure to uphold their international commitment, American policymakers insisted, would have detrimental repercussions on the German people.

But what is most exciting about the appraisals in Bonn and East Berlin is that they draw our attention to a curious paradox. Quite simply, the Vietnam War broke out at a time when global tensions were *receding*, rather than intensifying. If history had been different, if military escalation had crystallised in 1961, instead of 1965, then the conflict’s origins would have been a logical by-product of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the peaceful denouement of the Cuban Missile Crisis, together with the subsequent ratification of the Partial Test-Ban Treaty in August 1963, were interpreted as initial steps towards *détente*. On either side of the Berlin Wall, there was a consensus that the ideological battle had reached its apogee, that the likelihood of an international conflagration between East and West had diminished.⁹ In fact, policymakers considered it nothing less than the end of the post-war era. From this it would follow that the Vietnam War was not the consequence of longstanding tensions, but of short-term shocks to the geopolitical system. At the heart of this thesis, therefore, is the belief that the Vietnam conflict needs to be examined *outside* the bipolarity of the Cold War, that only by

⁸ F. Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (London, 1999), p.xiv. See also F. Logevall, ‘America Isolated. The Western Powers and the Escalation of the War,’ in A. Daum, L. Gardner and W. Mausbach (eds.), *America, the Vietnam War, and the World. Comparative and International Perspectives* (Cambridge, 2003), pp.175-196

⁹ For scholarly works on the reduction of Cold War tensions, see, for instance, A Stephanson, ‘Liberty or Death: The Cold War as US Ideology,’ in O. Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London, 2000); A. Stephanson, ‘Cold War Degree Zero,’ in J. Isaac and D. Bell (eds.), *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War* (Oxford, 2012), pp.21-44; J. Hershberg, ‘The Cuban Missile Crisis,’ in M. Leffler and O. Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 2: Crisis and Détente* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.65-87; J. Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, 1997); M. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, 1999)

charting the collapse of the dualistic framework is it possible to understand the outbreak of hostilities in Vietnam.

This emphasis on structural forces, however, does not mean a disregard of individual actors. Quite the opposite. The conception of what we call “history” is a product of *both* structural forces and human agents. East- and West German decision-makers are crucial to the story. It was their concerns, their purposes and their choices, which determined the two nation’s respective agenda. Throughout, this dissertation attempts to illustrate how and why individual statesmen connected Vietnam with broader objectives. It charts the shifting appraisals not only within the higher echelons of power, but also inside the diplomatic missions. As will become clear, assisting either Hanoi or Saigon mattered far less than more proximate and personal objectives. GDR and FRG onlookers did not judge the conflict as an end in itself. Instead, they confronted Vietnam with their own interests in minds.

This thesis, then, runs counter to the conventional interpretation of the conflict’s origins. The initial debate revolved around the behaviour of one particular country - America.¹⁰ George Herring, who emerged as the dean of the orthodox school, provided the academic framework in which the conflict’s origins have, for the past forty years, been understood. Herring treated escalation as a consequence of the doctrines assembled at the outset of the Cold War. The system itself, rather than individual policymakers, was to blame.¹¹ Successive American governments, he argued, had misapplied the strategy of containment on the Indochinese peninsula and overestimated the significance, as well as the character, of the conflict. “The Cold War and the American War in Vietnam,” Herring concluded, “cannot be disentangled.”¹²

It is only since the turn of the century that scholars have begun to decentralise the scope of analysis and examine the behaviour of other nation-states. The conceptual prism through which chroniclers had, hitherto, examined the Vietnam War was enlarged and magnified. Perhaps the greatest single contribution to our understanding was the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe and the USSR. All of a sudden, scholars had direct access to declassified archival records and were presented with exciting new opportunities to interpret

¹⁰ The attempt to explain the Vietnam War, has a history of its own. On the historical literature, see J. Kimball, *To Reason Why: The Debate About the Causes of U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War* (London, 1990); G. Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America’s Lost War* (Oxford, 2009)

¹¹ R. Dallek, ‘Historiography. Vietnam Reconsidered,’ *Diplomatic History*, Volume 12, Number 1 (January 1988), p.84; G. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1979), p.x

¹² G. Herring, ‘The Cold War and Vietnam,’ *OAH Magazine of History*, Volume 18, Number 5 (October 2004), p.18

the conflict in different ways.¹³ Indeed, one of the great benisons of the GDR archives is that they contain transcripts and records from other socialist countries. As a result, East German documentation has principally been used to explain other aspects of the conflict. In his work on Britain's foreign policy between 1961 and 1963, Peter Busch employed GDR documents to chart the atmosphere in Hanoi, as well as North Vietnamese appraisals of the armed struggle.¹⁴ Martin Großheim seized upon East German sources to shed light on the internal debates of the DRV leadership and outline its campaign against "revisionism."¹⁵ Whilst Lorenz Lüthi took advantage of GDR archival records to chronicle the Sino-Soviet conflict over Vietnam.¹⁶

Recently, however, historians have begun to investigate particular aspects of East German policymaking. Given the state's notorious reputation for intrusive surveillance, it is unsurprising that espionage and propaganda have been at the forefront of this work. Gerd Horten's article *Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War* contends that the conflict provided a "golden opportunity" for the GDR government to enhance its domestic-, as well as its international reputation.¹⁷ In a similar vein, Peter Busch's work on the "information war" highlights East Berlin's endeavour to spread false stories about the FRG's active involvement and fuel fears of a resurgent German fascism.¹⁸ Martin Großheim's essay, *Fraternal Support*,

¹³ For the Soviet perspective, see I. Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996); I. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy towards the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Washington, 2003); M. Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949-1964. Changing Alliances* (New York, 2006); L. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Oxford, 2008); S. Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Stanford, 2009). The Chinese perception of the war is discussed in Q. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (London, 2000); C. Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (London, 2003) and K. Yang, 'Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973,' *CWIHP Working Paper Series, #73* (February 2002), pp.1-143. For the British standpoint, see P. Busch, *All the Way with JFK? Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War* (Oxford, 2003); S. Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War* (London, 2004); N. Tarling, *The British and the Vietnam War: Their Way with LBJ* (Singapore, 2017); R. Steiniger, 'Großbritannien und der Vietnamkrieg 1964/65,' *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 45. Jahrgang, 4. Heft (October 1997), pp. 589-628. Surprisingly, the French perspective of the Second Indochina War remains somewhat of a lacuna in the historiography. For some interesting arguments, see M. Vaisse, 'De Gaulle and the Vietnam War,' L. Gardner and T. Gittinger (eds), *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968* (College Station, 2004), pp.162-165; F. Logevall, 'De Gaulle, Neutralization and American Involvement in Vietnam, 1963-1964,' *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 61, Number 1 (February, 1992), pp.69-102; Y. Torikata, 'Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War,' *Diplomatic History*, Volume 31, Number 5 (November 2007), pp.909-938

¹⁴ P. Busch, *All the Way with JFK?*, p.57, pp.59-60, p.65, p.127

¹⁵ M. Großheim, "'Revisionism'" in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: New Evidence from the East German Archives,' *Cold War History*, Volume 5, Number 4 (August 2006), pp.451-477. See also M. Großheim, 'The Lao Dong Party, Culture and the Campaign against "Modern Revisionism": The Democratic Republic of Vietnam Before the Second Indochina War,' *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 1 (2013), pp.80-129; M. Großheim, *Ho Chi Minh, Der geheimnisvolle Revolutionär* (München, 2011)

¹⁶ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, pp.302-339

¹⁷ G. Horten, 'Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the "Vietnam Bonus" of the Early 1970s,' *German Studies Review*, Volume 36, Number 3 (October 2013), pp.557-578

¹⁸ P. Busch, 'The "Vietnam Legion" - West German Psychological Warfare against East German propaganda in the 1960s,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 16, Issue 3 (summer 2014), pp.164-189

correspondingly addresses the role of the Stasi, maintaining that its bestowal of modern equipment, as well as its willingness to train Vietnamese cadres, were decisive in the expansion of Hanoi's surveillance apparatus.¹⁹

In contrast to the rather small body of literature on the GDR, several studies have appeared on West Germany and the conflict in Vietnam. The central bone of contention has been whether the FRG championed or opposed American involvement. The earliest chroniclers portrayed the government as a fervent enthusiast. No doubt the most ruthless criticism came from the East German scholar, Horst Rennhack. Rennhack was not so much interested in explaining the "origins" of the conflict, but rather in appropriating blame. His provocatively entitled book, *BRD-Imperialismus: Komplize der USA-Aggressoren in Indochina*, was careful to depict Bonn's fraternal assistance for South Vietnam as a continuation of Nazi dogma, advising his readers to think of the struggle as part of a lineage, which included both world wars and German military support for General Franco.²⁰ In 1986, Volker Berresheim provided a more objective evaluation of FRG policymaking, yet, he too, concluded that Bonn had unequivocally endorsed American involvement. As a business graduate, Berresheim was more concerned with narration rather than explanation, with an emphasis on cliometrics, instead of human decision-making. It was, nonetheless, the very *nature* of the state's assistance which stood out. Rather than purport Rennhack's notion of German militarism, Berresheim emphasised the FRG's economic and humanitarian succour for the defence of Saigon.²¹

It was not until the collapse of the Berlin Wall that the subject attracted interest from professional historians. In his book on transatlantic relations between America, France and West Germany from 1963 until 1969, Joachim Arendt offered two substantial revisions. First, he stepped away from a faceless account of the war. Understanding historical events became equated with understanding human choices. And to understand human choices, Arendt placed more emphasis on the personal opinions of elite statesmen. Rather than contend that the Federal Republic had been unwaveringly supportive of American involvement, Arendt linked Vietnam with deeper divisions about Bonn's foreign political programme. The West German

¹⁹ M. Großheim, 'Fraternal Support: The East German 'Stasi' and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam During the Vietnam War,' *CWIHP, Working Paper #71* (September 2014), pp.1-29

²⁰ H. Rennhack, *BRD-Imperialismus: Komplize der USA-Aggressoren in Indochina* (Berlin, 1973) See also H. Rennhack, *Das barbarische Engagement* (Berlin, 1968)

²¹ V. Berresheim, *35 Jahre Indochinapolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1986), pp.11-16, pp.101-107, pp.140-141. For a more detailed examination of West German fraternal assistance, see H. Zimmermann, 'The Quiet German: The Vietnam War and the Federal Republic of Germany,' in C. Goscha and M. Vaisse (eds.), *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003), pp.49-64

government, he pointed out, had been split between “Atlanticists” and “Gaullists,” between those advocating closer ties with the United States and those wanting to move towards an independent European Bloc. Arendt’s second contribution, linked to the first, was that he placed FRG decision-making within an international context. According to the author, Bonn found itself confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, policymakers equated the defence of Saigon with the defence of Berlin and judged American involvement proof that Washington would uphold its Cold War commitments. On the other hand, the superpower’s ever deeper involvement in Vietnam caused Washington to neglect European affairs, above all, German reunification.²²

Still, the most comprehensive treatment was provided by Alexander Troche. Building on his predecessor’s work, Troche maintained that FRG decision-making had been formed out of the conflict between East and West. The principal objective had been to contain the global threat of communism. In particular, the respective mutilation of both Germany and Vietnam cemented the belief that Saigon and Berlin were fighting on the same front. But although the Erhard government willingly contrasted the fate of the two countries, Troche underlined the pessimistic mood in Bonn. Few officials were confident that the RVN would survive, or that communist subversion could be contained. West German keenness to uphold strong relations with Washington, however, as well as Erhard’s hope that public and economic assistance would, in turn, encourage U.S. sponsorship of German reunification, led Bonn to endorse American involvement.²³

²² J. Arendt, *Johnson, Vietnam und der Westen: Transatlantische Belastungen, 1963-1969* (München, 1994); J. Arendt, ‘Die Bewährungsprobe der Special Relationship: Washington und Bonn (1961-1969),’ in K. Larres und T. Oppelland (Hrsg.), *Deutschland und die USA im 20. Jahrhundert: Geschichte der politischen Beziehungen* (Darmstadt, 1997). On the impact of the Vietnam War on bilateral ties, see also A Friedrich, ‘Awakenings: The Impact of the Vietnam War on West German-American Relations in the 1960s’ (PhD Dissertation; Temple University, 2000); J. Scholtzsek, ‘Frankreich, Westdeutschland und Vietnam 1945 bis 1969,’ *Revue d’Allemagne et des Pays de langue allemande*, Teme 31, Numero 3-4, (1999), pp.423-437; T. Ruddy, ‘A Limit to Solidarity: Germany, the United States and the Vietnam War,’ in D. Junker, P. Gassert, W. Mausbach und D. Morris (eds.), *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990. A Handbook, Volume 2: 1968-1990* (Cambridge, 2004), pp.126-132. For a revisionist points of view, which refutes the impact of the Vietnam War, see T. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (London, 2003), pp.86-88, pp.234-235. On the Vietnam’s effect on the Christian Democratic Unionist Party, see K. Schüler, ‘Die Haltung der Christlich-Demokratischen Union zum Vietnam-Konflikt,’ *Historisch-Politische Mitteilungen*, Volume 21 (2014), p.159-182.

²³ A. Troche, “Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt.” *Die Ostasienpolitik der Bundesrepublik in China, Taiwan und Süd-Vietnam 1954-1966* (Düsseldorf, 2001), pp.464-468, p.471. For a similar, albeit, less thorough and unoriginal appraisal, see E. Blang, *Allies at Odds: America, Europe, and Vietnam, 1961-1968* (Plymouth, 2011). On the Berlin-Saigon analogy, see also W. Mausbach, ‘European Perspectives on the War in Vietnam,’ *German Historical Institute, Washington D.C.*, Bulletin Number 30, (Spring 2002), p.77-79; W. Mausbach, ‘Triangle of Discord: The United States, Germany, and French Peace Initiatives for Vietnam,’ in L. Gardner and T. Gittinger (eds.), *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968* (Texas, 2004), pp.172-174, pp.177-178

This exciting body of literature is invaluable to our understanding of the East- as well as West German perspective. At the same time, serious historical research remains in its infancy. There are still significant gaps in our knowledge. Much remains unknown about the opinions of high-level decision-makers, especially in the GDR. Nor do we have much insight into the two German state's relationship with either Hanoi or Saigon. Furthermore, one major shortcoming of earlier studies has been the disproportionate interest given to the FRG's relationship with Washington. When reading through previous works, it is remarkable how little attention is paid to events on the ground, notably, the Buddhist Crisis or the Diem Coup. Perhaps the most pressing demand is for a broad and more sophisticated appraisal of FRG and GDR policymaking in the run-up to military escalation.

My thesis attempts to fill this lacuna. It provides the very first analytical account of both the East- and West German perspective of the Vietnam conflict. By drawing upon a wide array of undiscovered political, diplomatic and military records, as well as memoirs, journal articles and secondary literature, it casts the widest and deepest possible net. Its prime motivation is to re-evaluate and reassess, to go beyond past assumptions and confront the conflict's origins from a new and innovative angle. Its focus is not only on the political, as well as the diplomatic dimensions in the lead up to the outbreak of war, but also on internal developments on both sides of the 17th parallel.

Three interconnected themes run through the narrative. The first theme concerns the evolving character of the geopolitical order. Initially, Bonn and East Berlin imagined the conflict in Vietnam as part of the bipolar world and related conditions and developments to the universal confrontation between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. The struggle was perceived as a Cold War battleground, with the RVN as well as the DRV participating in an existential battle. Nevertheless, the superpowers' shift towards coexistence precipitated a lessening of global tensions on either side of the Berlin Wall. Policymakers in both the FRG and GDR consequently began to think less of Vietnam as a territorial reflection of the worldwide struggle between two camps, but, rather, as a limited struggle for regional influence.

The second theme is the gradual breakdown of bloc synthesis. At the outset of the Cold War, Russia and America were economically and militarily the strongest countries in the world. For Bonn, as well as East Berlin, the two superpowers were considered the undisputed leaders of the competing ideological systems. And yet, the emergence of new power centres inside the two camps, the distinct evolvement from bipolarism to polycentrism, which found expression

in the Sino-Soviet split, the signing of the Franco-German Treaty, as well as de Gaulle's public call for the "neutralisation" of Southeast Asia, exploded the myth that the respective blocs were monolithic. In fact, what stands out most when examining the massive archival documentary is the blatant weakness of the two superpowers. East- and West German policymaking can, thus, be interpreted as responses to the two superpowers' protracted failures. Both Washington's and Moscow's inability to impose their respective will onto the Indochinese peninsula compelled GDR- as well as FRG decision-makers to focus further and further attention on Vietnam.

The third and final theme is the Vietnamese context of the war's inception. When charting the bigger picture, it is essential to examine concomitant developments on either side of the 17th parallel. East- and West German appraisals provide an excellent opportunity to explore uncharted territory and shed light on the domestic difficulties in Saigon as well as Hanoi. This thesis, therefore, devotes considerable space to the military campaign, the economic weakness of the DRV, Hanoi's shift towards Maoist radicalism and Diem's unsuccessful endeavours to both construct an effective nation-state and conquer the communist rebels in the countryside.

As should be apparent from this brief outline, readers will find little here regarding the historiographical debate about whether the Vietnam War was just or unjust, whether one side is more to blame than the other. To call the conflict a "tragedy" may well be "both true and morally satisfying. But it explains nothing."²⁴ For far too long, scholars have approached the conflict's origins from a moral standpoint. Even now, more than half a century later, there is an insistence on portraying the conflict in Vietnam as either a noble crusade, or a shameful "crime." This thesis concurs with Geir Lundestad that the question of "blame" is a "moral-political" question, rather than a "historical one."²⁵ It is neither an indictment, nor a defence. There are no "heroes" in this story.²⁶ Nor are there any "butchers."²⁷ Its concern is less with judging the ethical character of individuals, than with how the struggle on the Indochinese peninsula was understood in the FRG and the GDR. This thesis attempts to challenge the orthodox interpretation of armed conflict as a logical outcome of the Cold War struggle between East and West. It provides a new lens through which to interpret the conflict's origins

²⁴ I. Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London, 2000), p.iii

²⁵ G. Lundsted, 'How (Not) to Study the Origins of the Cold War,' in O. Westad (ed), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London, 2000), p.70

²⁶ Logevall, *Choosing War*, p.xxii

²⁷ *New Statesman*, 'How Vietnam was America's Avoidable War, 19 September 2018'

and proposes that the path to military escalation was less linear, more crooked, than has been claimed. From the East- and West German standpoint, the outbreak of war was neither preordained, nor inevitable. My aim here is to make better sense of the beliefs and opinions on either side of the Iron Curtain, to explain why particular individuals acted the way they did and how the conflict in Vietnam influenced their thinking.

Chapter 1
Setting the Stage
1960

An analysis of the East- and West German perspective on Vietnam must begin with the construction of the new international order. The unconditional surrender of the Axis powers signalled the end of one historical epoch and the beginning of another. The onset of the Cold War defined the trajectory of Bonn's as well as East Berlin's foreign political agenda. Both states were corollaries of the post-war world, born out of the struggle between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. This chapter shows how the bipolar structure shaped their respective policies towards Vietnam in 1960. It argues that, on either side of the Iron Curtain, decision-makers came to recognise the DRV and the RVN as participants of a much larger, existential contest. Just like Germany, Vietnam was judged a Cold War battleground.

There is a central reason why our story begins in the spring of 1960. It represented a key juncture. For the first time, albeit for different reasons, East- and West Germany began to take a genuine interest in Vietnam. Bonn became increasingly concerned about the RVN's internal weaknesses. At the heart of the matter was the unpopular government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. The leader's monopolism, as well as his failure to cope with the rising tide of communist subversion, caused the FRG to fret about an enemy takeover. For East Berlin, in contrast, the struggle exemplified Marxist-Leninist dialectic. The erosion of Diem's political base was linked to developments across the capitalist world. Growing unrest in South Korea, Turkey, Japan and the RVN were all cited as evidence that revolutionary forces were mobilising against "imperialist" oppression.

But the spring of 1960 was not merely a key juncture in Vietnam. It was a key juncture in the Cold War. The public outbreak of the Sino-Soviet dispute was recognised as a potential advantage in Bonn, and in East Berlin as a potential threat. Most significantly, both correlated the feud with Vietnam. The Ulbricht government feared that Hanoi would support the CCP's doctrinal challenge and precipitate an intra-bloc split. Bonn, contrariwise, judged the DRV a spatial region for which the two behemoths were competing. Already in 1960, FRG statesmen envisioned a pluralistic-, rather than a bipolar geopolitical order, in which Beijing would break with Moscow and expand its own sphere of influence. Indeed, the thought of an autonomous, belligerent China was not an unwelcome prospect. There were some, notably Konrad Adenauer, who believed that a schism offered invaluable opportunities for the western world. When Vietnam is situated in this context, it becomes clear just how crucial the bipolar structure

was. As long as the dualistic framework remained in place, the two Germanys would interconnect the struggle with their own Cold War.

Cold War Frontiers

We begin not in Saigon, nor in Hanoi, but in British-occupied Germany. On 31 October 1945, two months after the official denouement of World War II, Konrad Adenauer penned a letter entitled “My view on the international situation.” The future chancellor was a worried man. Both his hometown and his fatherland lay in ruins. The people were “spiritually,” as well as “physically,” broken. And former members of the communist party were achieving noticeable successes in urban areas. But what Adenauer feared above all else was the spectre of Russian expansionism west of the River Elbe. For him, the division of Europe was already a “fact” and there was something almost inevitable about the Cold War. Moscow, he emphasised, was defying cooperation with the Great Powers and installing its own doctrines across Eastern Europe. Adenauer did not even bother contemplating détente or negotiations. In his mind’s eye, the USSR was an existential threat. And to counteract that threat, two things needed to be done: First, Germany had to recover from its sick, war-torn self. Second, it needed to enter into an alliance with Britain and France.¹

Yet Adenauer appreciated, too, that neither German, nor European reconstruction, was feasible without U.S. assistance. Although he felt that America was conventionally apathetic towards the continent and that its interest would gradually subside, the superpower played a decisive role in Adenauer’s calculations.² It possessed something that he respected deeply, which was *power*. “Without exaggeration,” Adenauer declared, “one can say that never [...] has a nation had such power in its hands as the United States.”³ Washington’s strategy of containing the Soviet threat was moreover consistent with his own objectives. Its nuclear umbrella, coupled with the NATO alliance, provided protection from a dreaded Russian onslaught. In turn, the Marshall Plan precipitated the economic- and political revival of West Germany, whilst the supranational structure of the “Free World” gave its citizens a new and, crucially, non-national sense of identity.⁴ By 1955, Adenauer had both constructed a sovereign state and integrated the FRG into the Western Bloc under American leadership.

¹ H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe, 1945-1947* (Berlin, 1983), p.130

² *Ibid.*, p.191

³ H. Schwarz (Hrsg.), *Konrad Adenauer: Reden, 1917-1967: Eine Auswahl* (Stuttgart, 1975), p.184. On Adenauer’s fascination with American power, see also H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe, 1955-1957* (Berlin, 1983), pp.285-286

⁴ Mausbach, ‘European Perspectives on the War in Vietnam,’ p.77-79

There was a specific Cold War mind-set, then, that shaped Adenauer's thinking. He looked at the world through a bipolar, chiefly nationalistic prism. Bipolar, in the sense that centrifugal power resided with the two superpowers. And chiefly nationalistic, because Adenauer was convinced that the Soviets were Russians first and communists second. To be sure, underpinning his support for America's Cold War project was a deep-seated Russophobia. He would have agreed with the architect of the containment strategy, George Kennan, that the leitmotiv of both the Tsars and the Kremlin was territorial expansionism.⁵ Russia, Adenauer claimed, had for centuries conducted a "policy of conquest." Its totalitarian state required achievements overseas to distract the subjugated people from internal difficulties. Soviet leaders, he insisted, were no different. On the contrary, incorporation of Germany into Moscow's sphere of influence was their principal objective and the "key to world domination." Unlike Kennan, however, Adenauer did not take Marxist-Leninist scripture particularly seriously. Dogma was no more than camouflage, designed to validate "imperialist" objectives. It was *Russian* ambitions which concerned him.⁶

But although the chancellor's *Weltanschauung* was Eurocentric, and he regarded other issues, such as the conflict in Korea, of minor importance, he envisaged the Cold War as a global phenomenon.⁷ The fault line between East and West cut through other territories. One example he pointed to was Vietnam. Historically speaking, relations between the two countries were blank. The German state had never concerned itself with Indochina, having never possessed colonies in the region. Still, France's attempt to re-establish its grip over the former colonies was interpreted as a Cold War proxy, rather than a national liberation struggle. Adenauer himself told the *Bundestag* on 29 April 1954 that German soldiers enlisted in the Foreign Legion were "sacrificing their blood and lives in Indochina" not only for France, but for the "freedom of the whole world."⁸

⁵ H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe 1951-1953* (Berlin, 1983), p.68; Bundesarchiv, Koblenz (hereafter BA-Koblenz), Nachlass Heinrich Lübke, NL216, Vol.45, 'Brief von Adenauer an Präsident Kennedy, 4. Oktober 1961,' pp.60-62. See also Adenauer's comments in C. Sampson and J. Miller (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1961-1963, *Western Europe and Canada, Volume XII*, Document 97, 'Subject: Telegram from the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State, 10 April 1961' (Washington, 1994); M. Lindemann und C. Franzen (Hrsg.), *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (hereafter, *AAPD*) 1961, p.246. To compare with Kennan, see R. Churchill and W. Slany (eds.), *FRUS, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI*, Document 475, 'The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, 22 February 1946' (Washington, 1969)

⁶ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Briefe, 1951-1953*, p.135. To compare, see Kennan's essay 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), pp.1-18

⁷ H. Küsters (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1950-1954* (Berlin, 1985), p.102; H. Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Aufstieg, 1876-1952* (Stuttgart, 1986), p.580

⁸ T. Dao, 'The Federal Republic of Germany and the First Indochina War (1946-1954)' (Ph.D. Dissertation; Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, 2012), p.120

Adenauer's speech conformed to the nation's Cold War mind-set. Its bipolar framework was accepted *a priori*. True, there were voices in the media that warned about blaming the upheavals and revolts "from Burma to Indonesia, from Manchuria to Malaya" on Kremlin-based initiatives. *Die Zeit* stressed that the Cold War overlapped with decolonisation. The indigenous groups geminating in the East Asian colonies, one article noted, were extremely nationalistic and unlikely to accept Soviet directives.⁹ Ho Chi Minh, however, was a special case. Zooming in on his background, *Die Zeit*, as well as *Der Spiegel*, maintained that he was not a mere patriot championing national independence, but had received his ideological education in Moscow. The Vietminh, both newspapers agreed, was a cellular component of the international communist crusade.¹⁰

The outline of this appraisal remained in place following the end of the First Indochina War. To Adenauer's dismay, French defeat at the battle of Dien-Bien-Phu compelled Paris to sue for peace and surrender its state's jurisdiction.¹¹ In 1954, the Geneva Conference divided Vietnam provisionally along the 17th parallel, pending elections within two years to determine a national government. The elections, though, were never held. Washington refrained from signing the agreement and decided to provide all-out support for President Diem's non-communist regime.¹² FRG diplomats appreciated that the scenario was identical to Germany in reverse, insofar as it was the communists, who were demanding reunification and deriding the opposite side as illegitimate.¹³ Nonetheless, the Foreign Ministry's acceptance of the preposterous excuse that North- and South Vietnam's lopsided populaces represented an unfair predisposition revealed that the broken promises were unimportant.¹⁴ What *was* important was the Cold War. And so, Bonn endorsed America's integration of South Vietnam into the "Free World," identifying it as part of the West's containment stratagem.¹⁵ The Cold War, thus,

⁹ *Die Zeit*, Nr.49/1948, 'Zerstörte Ordnung in Asien, 2. Dezember 1948'

¹⁰ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.7/1949, 'Ostwestlicher Iwan, 16. Februar 1947,' p.9; *Der Spiegel*, Nr.32/1948, 'Rückwärtsgang nach Asien. Mit taktischer Vernebelung, 7. August 1948,' p.15; *Die Zeit*, Nr.49/1948, 'Zerstörte Ordnung in Asien, 2. Dezember 1948'; *Die Zeit*, Nr.30/1948, 'Kommunismus in Asien, 22. Juli 1948'; *Die Zeit*, Nr.18/1954, 'Dulles verlässt das sinkende Genfer Schiff. Von Teilung zu Teilung - Rückzug Amerikas auf die nächste Verteidigungslinie, 6. Mai 1954'

¹¹ Scholtyseck, 'Frankreich, Westdeutschland und Vietnam,' p.426

¹² E. Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, 2013), p.118

¹³ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts. Bestand: Bundesrepublik Deutschland (hereafter PA AA), B12, Bd.1660, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Zusammenfassende Berichterstattung über die politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Aktivität des Ostblocks, 25. August 1959'

¹⁴ PA AA, B44, Bd.50, 'Welckeck an die Gesandtschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Saigon, 31. Mai 1960,' p.36; PA AA, B44, Bd.50, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Bevölkerung von Nord- und Süd-Vietnam, 15. Juli 1960,' p.35

¹⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1653, 'Vermerk von Dr. Peckert im Referat 201. Betreff: Instruktion für Saigon und Seoul, 17. Januar 1956'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1553, 'Aufzeichnung von Welckeck im Referat 318. Betreff: Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Laos, Kambodscha, Vietnam und Südkorea, 5. Dezember 1958'

joined West Germany and South Vietnam together. Both were part of the bloc's global defence line. Both were physical manifestations of the existential dispute between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. "It is a bitter fight against the communist enemy," York von Wendland, the principal diplomat in Saigon, observed, "a fight, as you might say, on the furthestmost front."¹⁶

It was, however, not so much the fear of "losing" South Vietnam that was of central concern, but, rather, the potential repercussions on other Asian states. The defence of Saigon was considered a means rather than an end. The notorious "domino theory," associated with President Eisenhower, which posited that if one domino fell, others would follow suit, was considered a very real prospect. Having accepted Saigon as part of the bipolar struggle between East and West, the nation's fate, as well as the fate of the region, was conjoined with the fate of the entire continent. In 1958, Wendland warned that if South Vietnam were lost, then not only Southeast Asia, but "also India will, sooner or later, become communist and thereby hand the Communist Bloc an unimaginable triumphant sweep."¹⁷ The core elements of Ike's hypothesis were embedded in Wendland's mind. Abandoning South Vietnam, a small and, in itself, insignificant country, would trigger the collapse of much greater and more sizeable nation-states. America, he declared, "could not give up" Saigon, and would, if necessary, fight an international war.¹⁸

Nation-Building

So far, Washington's objective was clear to Bonn: Support President Diem and contain the communist onslaught. The problem was that, contrary to the FRG, South Vietnam did not epitomise a model of successful nation-building. Although Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano credited Diem's "energetic approach" and America's fiscal assistance for preventing the seemingly "unstoppable" Bolshevisation of all Indochina, the reality on the ground was far more ambiguous.¹⁹ From the spring of 1960, the tenor began to change. Hitherto, Wendland

¹⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, 'Wendland an das Auswärtiges Amt. Betreff: Ende der dreijährigen Legislaturperiode der Nationalversammlung, Wahlkampagne, kommunistische Störungsversuche und kommunistischer Terror, 14. August 1959'

¹⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1653, 'Wendland an das Auswärtiges Amt. Betreff: Ausblick und Vorschau der deutsch-vietnamesischen Beziehungen am Ende des Jahres 1958, 22. Dezember 1958'

¹⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Zusammenfassende Berichterstattung über die politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Aktivität des Ostblocks, 25. August 1959'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1664, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Beurteilung der Lage, 3. Dezember 1959'

¹⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1653, 'Aufzeichnung vom Außenminister Heinrich von Brentano. Betreff: Instruktion für den Gesandten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der Republik Vietnam, York Freiherrn von Wendland, 17. November 1958'

had expressed unease about communist cadres, yet he had insisted that Diem was “in control.”²⁰ Coinciding with his promotion to ambassador, however, Wendland informed his superiors that communist assaults had reached a level not seen since 1955 and that events were slipping out of the government’s grasp.²¹

Wendland highlighted two central problems. Surveying the battlefield, he argued that the methods of fighting were flawed. American advisors had trained the ARVN for conventional warfare, with an emphasis on motorised units and heavy weaponry. The nature of the struggle, though, was partisan, fought after sundown and centred on surprise, as well as speed.²² Geography added to this predicament. Communist insurgents, Wendland warned, were exploiting the porous borders to bypass the demilitarised zone. Furthermore, protective woodlands along the perimeter provided a safe-haven, as well as an invaluable platform to mount raids against adjacent targets. Wendland signposted one particularly “grotesque” incident, in which communist cadres had taken advantage of the Tet festivities to strike an ARVN barracks near Tay-Ninh. Twenty-five bodies were left behind, including women and children.²³ But although these ambushes were of concern, Wendland felt that the crux of the problem “lay deeper.”²⁴ “There is no trust,” he lamented, “between the people and government agencies.” Small landowners and rice farmers lived in perpetual fear of “oppression” and “exploitation” by state officials. ARVN soldiers, the ambassador continued, were regarded as “horrific monsters,” who abused their power to extort wealth from the rural inhabitants. Neither was discontent merely prevailing in the lower echelons. The conservative bourgeoisie, Wendland pointed out, resented its loss of power and worsened status in post-colonial Vietnam. On 26 April, eighteen distinguished personalities, most of whom had served under the Emperor

²⁰ See, for instance, PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Kommunistische Störungsmanöver in Vietnam, 20. April 1959’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Ende der dreijährigen Legislaturperiode der Nationalversammlung, Wahlkampagne, kommunistische Störungsversuche und kommunistischer Terror, 14. August 1959’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1664, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Beurteilung der Lage: 1) Gespräche mit Staatspräsident Diem. 2) Bevorstehende Regierungsumbildung, 3. Dezember 1959’

²¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Über die innenpolitische Lage, 3. März 1960.’ Bonn turned its general-consulate into an embassy in the spring of 1960. Hence, the reason for Wendland’s promotion. See PA AA, Personalakte Freiherr York von Wendland, Band 1, vom 1949 bis 1972, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Erhebung der Gesandtschaften in Bonn und Saigon zu Botschaften, 21. März 1960’

²² PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Innere Lage Süd-Vietnams, 13. April 1960’

²³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Erhöhte kommunistische Tätigkeit in Süd-Vietnam, 4. Februar 1960.’ On the Tay-Ninh raid, see also M. Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken. The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.88-89

²⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Unterredung mit dem Bruder und politischen Berater des Staatspräsidenten, Herrn Ngo Dinh Nhu, 9. März 1960’

Bao Dai, published an open letter, which criticised the despotic nature of Diem's regime and called for extensive governmental reform.²⁵

The so-called "Caravelle Manifesto" had a marked impact on Wendland, an impact that would guide his thinking throughout Diem's reign. Only the previous year, he had insisted that South Vietnam was "not ready for democracy" and that the president needed to "govern dictatorially."²⁶ With the advent of spring, he began to speak of ministerial reform, as well as limiting Diem's plenitude of power. An example of what could befall a ruling autocrat was illustrated on the Korean peninsula, where mass demonstrations forced Syngman Rhee to resign from his premiership.²⁷ Although Wendland doubted whether the political epidemic would spread to Saigon, he worried that Diem had drawn the wrong "lessons." After consulting with the president's closest advisers, Wendland reported that Diem wanted *tighter* centralisation.²⁸ The RVN leader, he wrote, would subsequently increase the number of "secret agents" to "better control" the inhabitants, as well as suppress "threatening opposition."²⁹ For Wendland, these defensive actions, together with Diem's firm resolve to "cooperate closer" with the national press, were simply part of the president's resolute campaign to expunge all domestic critique.³⁰ Diem, he complained, was unwilling to offer even "one small finger" to the opposition.³¹

Nevertheless, the most remarkable aspect of Wendland's reports was how narrowly he defined the alternatives. The sole choice, he believed, was to hope that Diem would come to his senses and thwart revolution with evolution.³² This was a rather tenuous hope, given that his own commentaries implied that Diem was advocating the exact reverse. Wendland was aware that the Americans had deliberated reshuffling the pack, of replacing Diem with another figurehead. He left his superiors in no doubt, however, about his contempt for the "fragmented"

²⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Rückwirkungen der Ereignisse in Korea auf die Lage in Vietnam, 10. Mai 1960'

²⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Ende der dreijährigen Legislaturperiode der Nationalversammlung, Wahlkampagne, kommunistische Störungsversuche und kommunistischer Terror, 14. August 1959'

²⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Rückwirkungen der Ereignisse in Korea auf die Lage in Vietnam, 10. Mai 1960'

²⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Zur innenpolitischen Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 16. Mai 1960'

²⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Rückwirkungen der Ereignisse in Korea auf die Lage in Vietnam, 10. Mai 1960'

³⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland. an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Zur innenpolitischen Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 16. Mai 1960'

³¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 1. Juli 1960'

³² PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Gegenwärtige Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 27. August 1960'

and “incompetent” opposition.³³ Regardless of his faults, regardless of the inverted pyramid structure of his decision-making, Diem was still the outstanding individual. Besides, as the son of a famous cavalry captain, Wendland attached substantial weight to the armed forces. Provided the ARVN remained loyal, state power would remain firmly in Diem’s hands.³⁴ The ambassador, therefore, deduced that it was an either/or scenario: “It looks as if the West has no other choices other than [...] Diem and the communists.”³⁵ His discernment of the Cold War as a bipolar struggle had led him to a negative dualism. The present government was bad, but no matter how nefarious it proved to be, Wendland presumed that its collapse would precipitate something much worse.

Already in 1960, then, at a time when the conflict was in its embryonic stage, Wendland was voicing apprehension. To defeat the communists, it was essential to have a popular and efficient state, along with an apposite military programme. Neither, he believed, existed. In Bonn, the East Asian expert Hilmar Bassler’s notes likewise made for grim reading. He recorded that there were four-thousand “communist bandits” below the 17th parallel and that they were often young men, with no previous affiliation to the Vietminh. Bassler was especially concerned about the rural inhabitants assisting rebels with information and food.³⁶ This illustrated the peoples’ resentment towards their government, as well as communist adeptness at attracting fresh recruits. There was, in short, a growing fear, both on the ground and inside the Foreign Ministry, that the struggle was entering a more dangerous phase.

Fighting on the Same Front

Akin to West Germany, the GDR’s initial interest in Vietnam stemmed from its own dualistic perception of the international order. Although policymakers never recognised the “Cold War” as an objective truth (the term was derided as a psychological instrument to “create an artificial threat of war”), it is beyond doubt that the Ulbricht government *did* accept its

³³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 1. Juli 1960’

³⁴ On Wendland’s family heritage, see W. Hueck, *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels, Freiherrliche Häuser B, Band VIII (Band 79 der Gesamtreihe)* (Limburg an der Lahn, 1982), pp.462-468; PA AA, B67, Bd.30, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Gegenwärtige Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 27. August 1960,’ p.329

³⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Rückwirkungen der Ereignisse in Korea auf die Lage in Vietnam, 10 Mai 1960.’ On Wendland’s belief that there was no alternative to Diem, see also PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 1. Juli 1960’

³⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Bassler an [Abteilung] D7 im Auswärtigen Amt. Betreff: Gegenwärtige Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 22. September 1960’

principal features.³⁷ At the SED's 3rd Party Conference in 1950, Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl declared that:

In the confrontation of the two worlds [...] the question is about the future and past of mankind. The capitalist countries under the leadership of the imperialist United States of America represent the past. The future is embodied in the peoples' democratic countries, spearheaded by the great populaces of the Soviet Union as the mightiest bulwark for peace. Capitalism on the one side and socialism on the other.³⁸

Grotewohl's succinct conceptual structuring of the global order was compatible with Adenauer's. He envisaged the post-war world as dualistic. He recognised Washington and Moscow as the authoritative centres of their respective "worlds." And he, too, believed that the opposite side was an existential threat. Even so, Grotewohl's assessment differed in one key aspect: He placed special emphasis on ideology. Marxist-Leninist dialectic taught that the world was divided between the oppressors and the oppressed. Nation-states were rejected as irrational, designed to obviate class warfare.³⁹ When the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917, it was presumed that subsequent revolutions would crystallise in other parts of Europe and, together, they would form a continent-wide Soviet Union.⁴⁰ But despite flashes of communist uprisings, the October Revolution remained an anomaly, causing Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, to territorialise the class struggle between the USSR and the "imperialist" powers. This territorialisation remained in place following the onset of the Cold War. The employment of Soviet-modelled systems in Eastern Europe, as well as the establishment of communist states in Mongolia, North Korea, North Vietnam and China, thus, produced an ideologically conform bloc, with the USSR at the helm.⁴¹

It cannot be overestimated just how much East Germany's own existence depended upon the preservation of Soviet power and a cohesive bloc structure. Whereas Bonn's system of government enjoyed public support, the SED was viewed with contempt by the vast majority of its people. The June 1953 uprising, in conjunction with the unremitting exodus of fleeing citizens, made it plain that the GDR could not survive outside the Cold War framework. As

³⁷ For East German disparaging of the "imperialists' Cold War," see for instance: ND-Archiv, Nr.219/1948, 'Das Prestige, 19. September 1948,' p.2; ND-Archiv, Nr.2/1949, 'Kalter Krieg gegen den Geist, 4. Januar 1949,' p.2; ND-Archiv, Nr.162/1950, 'Rolle und Richtung unseres Außenhandels, 15. Juli 1950,' p.7; ND-Archiv, Nr.305/1950, 'Von Textilsandalen und amerikanischen Militärstiefeln, 30. Dezember 1950,' p.5; ND-Archiv, Nr.13/1957, 'Kalter Krieg rettet USA-Pakte nicht, 15. Januar 1957,' p.5

³⁸ ND-Archiv, Nr.168/1950, 'Otto Grotewohl: Der Kampf um den Frieden und Nationale Front des demokratischen Deutschland, 22. Juli 1950,' p.3

³⁹ C. Arthur (ed.), *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The German Ideology, Part One* (New York, 2004), p.80

⁴⁰ O. Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York, 2017), p.33

⁴¹ A. Stephanson, 'Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War,' *H-Diplo Essay*, (May 1996), pp.13-14. The only anomaly, of course, was the Stalin-Tito split in 1948. On Tito's decision to break with the Soviet Bloc, see J. Perović, 'The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 9, Number 2 (Spring 2007), pp.32-63

Hermann Wentker points out, East Germany was an existential artefact of the post-1945 world and its foreign political agenda anchored to the decisions made in the Kremlin, as well as the Marxist-Leninist Bloc.⁴²

The GDR and the DRV were, hence, joined together through state membership of the socialist world. As early as 1950, Ulbricht received a letter from the League for the National Union of Vietnam, which declared that their homeland had “officially taken its place within the camp” and was conducting a “continuous struggle” for the “realisation of our common objectives.”⁴³ When Ho Chi Minh appealed five years later for fiscal assistance to transform the DRV into a cynosure ahead of the national elections, East Berlin imitated its European allies and, in the belief that they were “fighting on the same front against imperialism and colonialism,” contributed sixty million rouble to Hanoi’s economic programme.⁴⁴

Further evidence of East Germany incorporating Vietnam into the Cold War was revealed by its stance towards the RVN. As Gerd Horten has argued, one advantage of the struggle below the 17th parallel was that it “merged so easily” with the Ulbricht government’s “propaganda themes.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the SED’s drumfire made strenuous efforts to link the Diem regime with Konrad Adenauer. “Western observers,” *Neues Deutschland* reported, “have recently been describing Diem as the “Adenauer of South Vietnam.” And, in fact, hardly anyone personifies him as well as [he] does.”⁴⁶ The press organ highlighted the decadent and aggressive nature of the two leaders. Both, it claimed, were Cold War warriors, opposed to the reduction of geopolitical tensions and pursuing parallel policies of brute force. The bellicosity of the two statesmen was, in turn, juxtaposed with East Berlin’s own assistance for the “free” and non-enslaved Vietnam.⁴⁷ This, to use Lorenz Lüthi’s phrase, was part of the “sub-systemic Cold War” fought between the two Germanys.⁴⁸ In its pursuit to attain international

⁴² H. Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen: Die DDR im internationalen System 1949-1989* (München, 2007), p.1

⁴³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, ‘Brief von Bui Bang Duan [Doan] an die Völker Ungarns, der Tschechoslowakei, Bulgariens, Polens, Ostdeutschlands, Nordkoreas und anderer Länder der Volksdemokratie, 4. April 1950,’ p.2

⁴⁴ ND-Archiv, Nr.273/1960, ‘Festveranstaltung zum 15. Jahrestag der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam in Berlin. Wir kämpfen an der gleichen Front, 1. September 1960,’ p.1. On East German aid, see SAPMO-BArch, DC20/15569, ‘Brief von Dr. Lothar Bolz an den Außenminister Otto Grotewohl, 25. Februar 1955,’ pp.2-4; SAPMO-BArch, DC20/15569, ‘Beschluss über die Hilfe der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik beim Aufbau der Demokratischen Republik Vietnams vom 17. März 1955,’ p.23

⁴⁵ Horten, ‘Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,’ p.560

⁴⁶ ND-Archiv, Nr.313/1960, ‘Südvietnams Adenauer in Nöten, 12. November 1960,’ p.2

⁴⁷ ND-Archiv, Nr.31/1960, ‘Asien unterstützt Lösung der Westberlinfrage. “ND”-Interview mit Genossen Paul Verner, 31. Januar 1960,’ p.7; ND-Archiv, Nr.28/1960, ‘Bewegte Tage am Roten Fluss. Von unserem Sonderkorrespondenten Manfred Stuhlmann, 28. Januar 1960,’ p.7; ND-Archiv, Nr.205/1960, ‘Nach Li Syng Man, Menderes, Kishi - auch Diem?, 27. Juli 1960,’ p.7

⁴⁸ On Lüthi’s distinction between systemic and subsystemic Cold War’s, see L. Lüthi, ‘Introduction,’ *The Regional Cold Wars in Europe, East Asia and the Middle East. Crucial Periods and Turning Points* (Washington, 2015), pp.2-7. On the subsystemic Cold War between the two Germanys, see L. Lüthi, ‘The Non-

recognition, East Berlin cast itself as the morally benevolent state, fighting the revanchist objectives of the Third Reich's successor.⁴⁹ Bonn's association with Diem, in short, advanced the GDR's own Cold War narrative.

At the same time, it is crucial to appreciate that Diem was considered nothing more than a marionette of a much bigger antagonist - America. On 5 April, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MfAA) drafted a comprehensive report on South Vietnam and accused Washington of exporting the Cold War. Consistent with Leninist thought, the memorandum argued that U.S. sponsorship of Diem's "terror regime" was part of its venture to transform South Vietnam into a "new type of colony."⁵⁰ Nor did the East Germans have any doubts about their ally's righteous position. Heinz Dreßler, the chargé d'affaires in Hanoi, stressed that policymakers had made "fifty-five constructive proposals" over the past six years to normalise north-south relations and had called upon the International Control Commission to ensure the fulfilment of the Geneva Accords.⁵¹ All efforts had been in vain. As a result, the MfAA concluded that Vietnamese reunification would have to transpire through a "democratic revolution." Its "primary means" would be a "peoples' front" under the combined leadership of the working class, the peasants, layers of the intelligence and even parts of the bourgeoisie. The principal objective would be to remove the "subservient" Diem and implement democratic reform, which would, ultimately, lead to reunification.⁵²

But what is most striking about East German appraisals, especially when juxtaposed with Soviet critique of the "overly optimistic views" in Hanoi, was the strand of determinism.⁵³ GDR officials were convinced that Diem could not survive. The internal conditions for a "revolutionary struggle" appeared favourable for three reasons: First, the popular masses had a "reliable leader" in the shape of the Vietnamese Workers' Party and were awaiting its call for an uprising. Second, the present campaign was synonymous with the peoples' fight for self-autonomy during the colonial era. And third, Diem's reliance on terror meant that he was

Aligned Movement and the Cold War, 1961-1973,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 18, Number 4 (Fall 2016), p.102-118

⁴⁹ See, for instance, W. Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill, 2003), pp.81-86

⁵⁰ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bestand: Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (hereafter, PA MfAA), C600/75, 'Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam im MfAA. Betreff: Die gegenwärtige innen- und außenpolitische Situation in Südvietnam, 5. April 1960,' pp.7-14. On Lenin's appraisal of "imperialism," see R. Service, *Lenin: A Political Life, Volume 2. World in Collusion* (London, 1991), p.115

⁵¹ PA MfAA, A8689, 'Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Überblick über einige politische Schwerpunkte, 27. Juli 1960,' p.134

⁵² PA MfAA, C600/75, 'Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam im MfAA. Betreff: Die gegenwärtige innen- und außenpolitische Situation in Südvietnam, 5. April 1960,' pp.21-23

⁵³ Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p.114. On the Soviet perspective, see also Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, pp.86-87

“sitting on a volcano,” which would “sooner or later” crystallise the publics’ wrath.⁵⁴ Besides, Marxist-Leninist scripture had foretold the revolt of the masses. And the chain of events in Turkey, Japan, South Korea, all indicated that the Diem regime was living on borrowed time.⁵⁵ The MfAA consigned particular importance to the scenarios in Vietnam and Korea. Progression towards socialism above the 17th-, as well as the 38th parallel, one report maintained, was having a strong influence on citizens in the South, who were beset with “permanent and profound economic crises.”⁵⁶ For the East Germans, it was not a matter of *whether*, but *when* Diem would fall.

All the same, whilst the GDR recognised Vietnam as part of the Cold War struggle, it was not considered a priority. This came through loud and clear during a discussion between Grotewohl and Pham Van Dong, in which the prime minister requested large credits for the DRV’s Five-Year-Plan. Grotewohl refused point-blank. The bloc, he argued, could not exclusively focus on transforming North Vietnam into an “industrialised state” and, in any case, the GDR needed its reserves to surpass the West German economy.⁵⁷ When DRV executives made a further plea for fiscal succour in 1960, Ambassador Eduard Claudius gave the same response: Assistance was “not to be expected.”⁵⁸ Just like Bonn, East Berlin judged its own struggle the principal Cold War battleground. What the Ulbricht government wanted was for Hanoi to “coordinate” its propaganda campaign and help “expose” German militancy.⁵⁹ No pressing issue on either side of the 17th parallel seemed to demand East Berlin’s attention. It, therefore, took a particular historical event for policymakers to turn their gaze towards Hanoi.

⁵⁴ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Ausgearbeitet von der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Zur politischen Situation in Südvietnam, 1. Juni 1960,’ p.177, pp.180-182

⁵⁵ PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Winter an die Botschaft der DDR in der DRV. Betreff: Situation in Südvietnam, 21. Juni 1960,’ p.72; PA MfAA, A8563, ‘Vermerk Nr.167/60, ‘Gespräch zwischen Dreßler und Genosse Tadeus Findzinski, 18. Juli 1960,’ p.137

⁵⁶ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Ausgearbeitet von der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Zur politischen Situation in Südvietnam, 1. Juni 1960,’ pp.180

⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DC20/15569, ‘Besprechung mit der Delegation der Demokratischen Republik Vietnams am Freitag dem 9. Oktober 1959,’ pp.34-55

⁵⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/217, ‘Vermerk Nr.217/60 über eine Besprechung des Genossen Botschafter Claudius mit Genossen Khiem, stellv. Hauptdirektor für die grafische Industrie Vietnams am 20. September 1960,’ pp.192-194

⁵⁹ See, for instance, PA MfAA, A8563, ‘Vermerk Nr. 161/60 über eine Besprechung bei der Presseabteilung des MfAA der DRV am 24. Juni 1960, 27. Juni 1960,’ pp.129-130; PA MfAA, A8563, ‘Vermerk Nr. 174/60 über eine Besprechung mit dem stellvertretenden Leiter der Abteilung Osteuropa, Genossen Zu, am 29. Juli 1960,’ pp.144-145; PA MfAA, A8563, ‘Vermerk Nr.177/60, über eine Besprechung am 30. Juli 1960 mit dem Genossen Hoang, Mitarbeiter der Abteilung Osteuropa,’ pp.152-153; PA MfAA, A8683, ‘Ramm an das MfAA, Presse Abteilung, Sektion Auslandspublikation. Betreff: Berichterstattung der vietnamesischen Presse über die internationale Pressekonferenz des Genossen Walter Ulbricht und im Zusammenhang mit der Übergabe des Memorandums zum 15. Jahrestag der Unterzeichnung des Potsdamer Abkommens, 10. August 1960,’ pp.194-196

The Spectre of an Intra-Bloc Split

What changed East Germany's approach was the ideological dispute inside the socialist world. The genesis of the rift can be traced back to the 20th Congress of the CPSU and centred on cardinal divergences about the theoretical practices of the international communist movement.⁶⁰ These divergences developed into a fundamental disagreement on the character of the present epoch, as well as the stratagem that the movement should pursue. Nikita Khrushchev preached "peaceful coexistence," defining it as the "continuation of the struggle between the two social systems through peaceful means."⁶¹ The premier wanted to move away from Leninist dialectic that armed conflicts with "imperialism" were inevitable. In his mind, the spectre of a thermonuclear war meant that only two options existed: "Peaceful coexistence, or the most destructive conflict in history."⁶² Khrushchev, therefore, placed emphasis on a peaceful transition to communism. Mao Zedong, conversely, regarded the present period as the era of "wars, imperialism and revolution."⁶³ His programme was antipodal to Khrushchev, in the sense that he advocated a more dynamic policy, believing that the movement should not fail to utilise revolutionary conditions, or obstruct the attainment of its objectives, simply because it risked nuclear war.⁶⁴ Mao considered armed uprisings an essential tool for national liberation movements to throw off their oppressors. "Imperialism," he maintained, "fears above all the awakening of the Asian, African and Latin American people."⁶⁵ Paradoxically, then, it was the very foundation of Marxism-Leninism, the ideology that had cemented the socialist world together, which acted as the principal source of disagreement.

By April 1960, the Sino-Soviet dispute had unhinged the equilibrium of the bloc and become virtually overt. The opening salvo of the Chinese campaign was an article entitled "Long Live Leninism!" Under the guise of "modern revisionism," it disparaged peaceful

⁶⁰ This claim is, of course, contested. For the best analysis of the Sino-Soviet split, see Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*. For other excellent works, see S. Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Stanford, 2009); J. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (London, 2003); O. Westad (ed.), *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, 1998); J. Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill, 2015); D. Wang, 'The Quarrelling Brothers: New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959-1962,' *CWIHP, Working Paper #49* (July 2011), pp.1-61

⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48187, 'Brief des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas vom 5. November 1960,' p.48. For a good explanation from Khrushchev himself, see N. Khrushchev, 'On Peaceful Coexistence,' *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 38, Number 1 (October 1959), pp.1-18

⁶² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3671, 'Wanke an Ulbricht, 9. Juni 1960,' p.94

⁶³ PA MfAA, A6764, 'Sektion China im MfAA. Betreff: Information zur Haltung der Volksrepublik China zu den ideologischen Fragen, 19. Oktober, 1960,' p.319, p.375

⁶⁴ Z. Mao (ed.), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Volume IV* (Peking, 1961), p.100

⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/122, 'Liu Schau-tji am 3. Juni 1960 (Staatsbankett für [den] albanischen Präsidenten),' p.93

coexistence for hindering the development of world-revolutionary processes and echoed Leninist scripture that the existence of “imperialism” preordained the existence of wars.⁶⁶ International events seemed to vindicate the Chinese. Two weeks after the polemics were published, an American spy plane was shot down over Soviet territory on the eve of the Four Powers Summit.⁶⁷ “This,” China’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Luo Guibo, declared, “was an important lesson for those, who had any illusions about the American imperialists.”⁶⁸ With hindsight, it could be asked why this disagreement about strategy mattered so much. After all, Moscow and Beijing did not deviate on their mutual objective of attaining the communist end, but simply on how to reach that end. It is crucial to remember, though, that the ideological interpretation of Marxism-Leninism was the base on which the international communist movement had been founded. Without a coordinated line, there was a danger that the bloc could fragment, that it could split into antipathetic factions. Furthermore, a logical correlation existed between strategy and authority. Whoever determined the foreign political agenda was, in turn, master of the socialist world.

It is, thus, unsurprising that East Berlin regarded China’s gambit as an attempt to challenge the intra-bloc structure and seize control of the international communist movement.⁶⁹ Chroniclers, such as Nicole Stuber-Berries and Hope Harrison, have highlighted the GDR leader’s admiration for certain Chinese policies, along with his dexterous ability to exploit the rift during the Berlin Crisis.⁷⁰ Yet when it came to siding with either Beijing or Moscow, Ulbricht had no choice but to play the role that Khrushchev ascribed to him. The more intriguing question was which parties could, potentially, support China. East German officials were convinced that the CCP was lobbying other members to join ranks and support its ideological concept.⁷¹ The first hint that Hanoi had sympathy with its agenda was implied to Ulbricht in a report on the World Federation of Trade Unions meeting at the start of June.

⁶⁶ *Peking Review*, ‘Special Lenin Anniversary Issue. Long Live Leninism!’, 26. April 1960,’ pp.6-23; V. Zubok and C. Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, 1996), p.232

⁶⁷ J. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (Oxford, 2005), pp.195-196

⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/122, ‘Niederschrift des Studenten im 4. Studienjahr am Institut für internationale Beziehungen in Peking, Rolf Berthold, über einen Vortrag des stellvertretenden Außenminister Luo Guibo am 11. Juni 1960 im obengenannten Institut,’ p.119

⁶⁹ PA MfAA, A6764, ‘Stude an Minister Schwab zur Bestätigung. Betreff: Information zur Haltung der Volksrepublik China zu den vier ideologischen Grundfragen, 19. Oktober 1960,’ p.324, p.369

⁷⁰ Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall*; N. Stuber-Berries, ‘East German China Policy in the Face of the Sino-Soviet Conflict 1956-1966,’ (Ph.D. Dissertation; University of Geneva, 2004)

⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/122, ‘Bemerkungen zur Außenpolitik der VR China im Jahre 1960, n.d.’ p.325. In Pyongyang, the GDR ambassador, Kurt Schneidewind, similarly reported that Mao had tried “to pull the Koreans into the plot against the CPSU leadership.” See *Woodrow Wilson Centre, Digital Archive*, ‘Note about a Conversation in the Soviet Embassy with Comrade Puzanov, 30 August 1960’ <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112960.pdf?v=a73baaf6d8ddb6174849ec37f0a06b9b>

During the conference, both the head of the CCP delegation, Liu Ningy, and the general secretary, Deng Xiaoping, presented speeches unrelated to trade unions. Instead, they regurgitated, in a more detailed and coarser manner, the Leninist polemics on peaceful coexistence.⁷² Their Vietnamese counterparts, Ulbricht was told, had approved of “certain points,” most notably Liu’s contention that there could be “no illusions” about the “character of imperialism.”⁷³ All of a sudden, Hanoi acquired an importance, which it had never possessed before.

The Leninist polemics and the trade union meeting highlighted visible cracks inside the socialist world. But it was the subsequent congress of the Romanian Workers’ Party that saw the quarrel transform from a bilateral- into an intra-bloc dispute. The conference was intended as a preliminary meeting to “exchange opinions” on the international situation.⁷⁴ Khrushchev, however, decided to take the offensive and counterattack Beijing’s gambit. In Bucharest, Ulbricht and the other party delegates (aside from the CCP) were handed an 84-page memorandum, which castigated China for diverging from Marxist-Leninist guidelines.⁷⁵ Ten hours before the discussion was scheduled to begin, Khrushchev caucused with other representatives and demanded that they, “as a bloc,” unite against the Chinese.⁷⁶ East Berlin and Hanoi were, hence, sucked into the ideological maelstrom and compelled, for the first time, to take an official stance.

Interestingly, Ulbricht and the attending DRV representative, Le Duan (who ranked second in the politburo), adopted disparate tactics. The former was Khrushchev’s most vocal adherent. Ulbricht not only interrupted the Chinese delegate Peng Zhen’s speech, but attacked the CCP for being “practically opposed” to peaceful coexistence and damaging the united struggle against the capitalist foe.⁷⁷ Duan, in contrast, did not offer an opinion on the quarrel,

⁷² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3671, ‘Wanke an Ulbricht, 9. Juni 1960,’ p.15-55. On the WFTU meeting, see also H. Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei: Autobiographische Gespräche mit Harald Neubert* (Berlin, 1996), p.192

⁷³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3671, ‘Wanke an Ulbricht, 9. Juni 1960,’ p.30

⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3604, ‘Antwort des ZK der KP Chinas auf die Information des ZK der KPdSU, 10. September 1960,’ p.33; E. Hoxha, *Selected Works, Volume II* (Tirana, 1975), p.787

⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3671, ‘Mitteilung der ZK der KPdSU an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 21. Juni 1960,’ pp.64-148; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3589, ‘Brief vom Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Albanien an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion und an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas, 27. August 1960,’ p.130. According to Lorenz Lüthi, the CCP was handed the memorandum two days after the other parties. See Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.170

⁷⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3589, ‘Information an Gen. Ulbricht (Erarbeitet auf der Grundlage von Berichten unserer Botschaft in Tirana, sowie den offiziellen Stellungnahme[n] der Partei der Arbeit Albanien), 13. Oktober 1960,’ p.154; E. Hoxha, *The Khrushchevites: Memoirs. Second Edition* (Tirana, 1994), p.405, p.408

⁷⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11754, ‘Niederschrift über den Inhalt der Zusammenkünfte der Vertreter der kommunistischen und Arbeiterpartei, die anlässlich des III. Parteitages der Rumänischen Arbeiterpartei in Bukarest zu einem Meinungsaustausch zusammengekommen waren (Gedächtnisprotokoll), n.d.’ pp.115-119; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3476, ‘Intervention des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf der Sitzung vom 26. Juni 1960, während der Rede des Genossen Pin Tschen,’ p.35. The document does not state who gave the speech, but there

nor did he endorse Khrushchev. He merely stated that without peaceful coexistence, there could be no build-up of socialism in the “northern part” of Vietnam. Rather than support one side over the other, Duan proposed that the CCP and CPSU congregate to sort out their differences.⁷⁸ The initial disagreement between East Berlin and Hanoi, then, was passive. Although neither of the two states attacked each other, they had decided on different party-political positions.

Notwithstanding Ulbricht’s pro-Soviet and Duan’s ambiguous approach, Khrushchev’s attack failed to asphyxiate the Chinese challenge. True, all twelve delegates ratified a joint statement pledging bloc solidarity, but none of the underlying problems were resolved. In fact, Peng made it clear that the CCP had only signed the document to reiterate “the unity of our cause.”⁷⁹ The showdown was postponed and would (officially) resume at the Moscow meeting of the International Communist and Workers’ Parties the following November.⁸⁰ From then on, it became increasingly difficult for East Berlin to separate its political relations with Hanoi from the ideological slugfest. Vietnamese movements were, instead, analysed and contrasted with the dichotomous strategies of the CCP and CPSU.

It is essential, at this point, to outline the distinct ideological views on national liberation struggles. East Berlin did not object to overthrowing Diem, nor to the use of armaments for self-defence. Policymakers were aware that fraternal assistance was being redirected to communist cadres. As early as October 1958 - four months *before* the VWP’s 15th Plenary Session sanctioned the use of armed insurgence - East Berlin was told that the central committee had decided to “substantially increase its work” in the South and was “organising” an “underground movement.”⁸¹ But whereas GDR onlookers advocated the creation of a popular front and wanted the “main form” of the struggle to be political, Maoism considered South Vietnam an excellent model for armed violence. It was no secret that Beijing had offered

is no doubt that it was Le Duan. See PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Nhan Dan, ‘Kommunique der 18. Konferenz des Zentralkomitees der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams zur Bukarester Konferenz, 15. August 1960,’ pp.325-327

⁷⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11754, ‘Niederschrift über den Inhalt der Zusammenkünfte der Vertreter der kommunistischen und Arbeiterpartei, die anlässlich des III. Parteitages der Rumänischen Arbeiterpartei in Bukarest zu einem Meinungsaustausch zusammengekommen waren (Gedächtnisprotokoll), n.d.’ p.129

⁷⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11754, ‘Zusammenkunft der Vertreter der kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien der sozialistischen Länder am 26. Juni 1960, 11 Uhr,’ p.93

⁸⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3477, ‘Brief von der ZK der KPdSU an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 6. August 1960,’ p.1

⁸¹ Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter, BStU), MfS, AP1839/61, ‘Brief vom Handelsattache Kraemer an Genosse Wenzel, 22. Oktober, 1958,’ pp.708-711. On the VWP’s Fifteenth Plenary Session, see T. Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (Cambridge, 2017), p.142, P. Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley, 2013), p.51; H. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, 2012), p.45

strong public support for the rebels, notably coordinating mass demonstrations in the cities of Shanghai, Nanning and Kunming.⁸² Two themes were, henceforth, recurrent in the GDR's analysis: First, whether Hanoi would align itself with China and challenge the status quo within the bloc. Second, whether Hanoi would adopt a more militant programme in its endeavour to unite Vietnam.

Accordingly, East German officials tried to engage their comrades in conversation and chart the DRV's ideological standpoint. Two months before the fracas in Bucharest, Claudius had been told by Deputy Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem that his government was, at present, not advocating militarism and favoured a "political struggle." Khiem did admit that Diem's use of terror, especially in the Ben-Tre province, had compelled "former resistance fighters" to take up arms. He made it clear, however, that, because of the "global political context" (meaning the Cold War), it was "essential to maintain peace."⁸³ On 10 May, Claudius received an assurance from the central committee member, Cao Hong Lanh, that the situation remained unchanged. And yet, there was a distinct shift in emphasis. Whereas Khiem had spoken of an international "fight campaign" against both the ICC's legalisation of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) and the betrayal of the Geneva Accords, Cao pointed out that the overthrow of Syngman Rhee had given "revolutionary forces" below the 17th parallel a "strong impetus." "In accordance with the entire international situation," he declared, "the overthrow of Diem will, at the right time, transpire through revolution."⁸⁴

During the summer months, bits and pieces of information reinforced East German belief that the struggle was intensifying.⁸⁵ From private discussions, it became obvious that the Vietnamese were frustrated with the present impasse. This was hardly surprising. As Pierre Asselin notes, the policies of the past six years had "brought reunification no nearer."⁸⁶ Indeed, when Dreßler asked whether the DRV was willing to talk with Diem, or submit a new proposal,

⁸² PA MfAA, A8689, 'Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Überblick über einige politische Schwerpunkte, 27. Juli 1960,' p.137

⁸³ PA MfAA, A8570, 'Vermerk Nr.86/60. Am 15. April 1960 nahm der Unterzeichnete an einer vom stellv. Außenminister der DRV, Ung Van Khiem, einberufenen Causerie mit Botschaftern aller sozialistischen Ländern über die Verletzung der Genfer Abkommen durch die USA und die südvietnamesischen Behörden teil,' pp.7-10; PA MfAA, A8558, 'Claudius an Stude, 20. April 1960,' p.6. On Khiem's comments, see also Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p.112

⁸⁴ PA MfAA, A8563, 'Vermerk Nr.110/60. Der Unterzeichnete [Claudius] führte gemeinsam mit Gen. Kittler am 10. Mai 1960 ein ungefähr einstündiges Gespräch in französischer Sprache auf dem Flugplatz Hanoi mit dem Leiter der Abteilung Verbindung mit dem Ausland des ZK der Lao Dong Partei, Genossen Cao Hong Lanh,' pp.72-73

⁸⁵ PA MfAA, A8678, 'Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Situation in Südvietnam, 13. Juli 1960,' p.175; PA MfAA, A8563, 'Vermerk Nr.167/60. Gespräch zwischen Heinz Dreßler und Tadeus Findzinski, 18. Juli 1960,' p.137; PA MfAA, A8690, 'Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Überblick über einige politische Schwerpunkte, 27. Juli 1960,' p.134

⁸⁶ Asselin, *Hanoi Road to the Vietnam War*, p.78

foreign ministerial executives stated that their government “no longer had any hope of negotiating.”⁸⁷ On 14 July, the Head of the Non-European Department, Ilse Engelhardt, likewise recorded that the “mantra” of the reunification struggle had changed from “negotiations” to “overthrow the Diem-clique!” Only after the regime had been removed and MAAG ejected from the South, embassy officials told her, could a dialogue begin.⁸⁸

Although the Vietnamese shared their resolve to topple Diem, there was a distinct fuzziness about methods. At the VWP’s 3rd Party Congress, held between 5 and 10 September, Le Duan reaffirmed the need to “overthrow” the “tyrannical and dictatorial” Diem regime, as well as “build a national democratic coalition government.”⁸⁹ The Vietnamese revolution, Dreßler emphasised, had two tasks: First, to complete the build-up of socialism in the North. And second, to “liberate the South” from the political rule of “American imperialism and their henchmen.”⁹⁰ But as the attending politburo member, Kurt Hager, pointed out, Duan did not expatiate on how the anti-Diem forces should be organised, nor in what way the president would be removed. “The reunification question,” he relayed to Ulbricht, “is plainly missing a clear concept.”⁹¹ Still, the East Germans saw no evidence of a shift towards Maoist radicalism. On the contrary, they were left in no doubt that Hanoi feared the spectre of an expanded conflict. “A U.S.-invasion,” the ambassador to the GDR, Pham Ngoc Thuan, explicitly told Deputy Foreign Minister Peter Florin, “needs to be prevented at all costs.”⁹² In any case, the Diem government was so weak that there did not appear a need for radical measures. When Claudius asked the French delegate-general for his appraisal of the political situation, it was estimated that Diem would last no longer than “six to eight weeks.”⁹³

⁸⁷ PA MfAA, A8563, ‘Vermerk Nr.174/60 über eine Besprechung mit dem stellvertretenden Leiter der Abteilung Osteuropa, Genossen Zu, am 29. Juli 1960,’ p.145; PA MfAA, A8563, ‘Vermerk Nr.176/60 über ein Gespräch mit dem stellvertretenden Leiter der Abteilung Osteuropa, Genossen Zu, am 4. August 1960,’ p.150

⁸⁸ PA MfAA, A8590, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.8/60 über eine Unterredung zwischen Herrn Cuong, Mitarbeiter der Botschaft der DRV in der DDR und der Kollegin Engelhardt vom MfAA am 12. Juli 1960,’ p.28

⁸⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/24521, ‘Le Duan, Politischer Bericht des Zentralkomitees der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 5. September 1960,’ p.43

⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/216, ‘Aufzeichnung von Dreßler. Betreff: Beschluss des 3. Parteitages der Vertreter des ganzen Landes der Werktätigen Vietnams über die Aufgabe und Politik in der neuen Etappe, 19. September, 1960,’ p.5

⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48178, ‘Bericht über den III. Parteitag der Werktätigen Vietnams, 31. Oktober 1960’

⁹² PA MfAA, A17255, ‘Aktenvermerk über Gespräche in Verbindung mit einem Abendessen in der Botschaft der DRV Berlin am 28. August 1960,’ pp.47-50. For further examples, see PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk Nr.189/60 über die Situation in Laos, 27. Juli 1960. Der stellvertretende Außenminister Genosse Nguyen Co Thanh setzte am 15. August 1960 die vertrauliche Information über die Situation in Laos fort,’ p.61; PA MfAA, A8590, ‘Vermerk 21 über eine Unterredung der Kollegin Engelhardt von der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung des MfAA mit Herrn Phan Van Kim am 13. Oktober 1960,’ p.83

⁹³ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.223/60 über ein Gespräch zwischen Genosse Claudius und dem Generaldelegierten Frankreichs Chambon, am 1. Oktober 1960,’ p.17. See also Dreßler’s subsequent memorandum on Diem’s “weakening” position in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/217, ‘Aufzeichnung von Dreßler. Betreff: Situation in Südvietnam, 17. Oktober 1960,’ pp.208-209, p.218

Notwithstanding Hanoi's expressed reluctance to adopt a Maoist strategy, East Berlin noticed that it was refusing point-blank to take an official stance on the ideological dispute. Although the two countries were advocating the same objective - preservation of a monolithic bloc structure - the different manner in which they attempted to resolve the issue was remarkable. From East Berlin's perspective, it was clear that Hanoi wanted to mediate. On 26 August, Ulbricht received a letter from Ho Chi Minh, which warned that the enemy was endeavouring to exploit the ideological dispute. "It is essential," the letter read, "that there exists, without any reservation, a unanimous opinion on the fundamental questions."⁹⁴ East Berlin, however, paid no notice. In fact, it not only ignored the appeal, but disregarded his proposal to "avoid all measures" that could produce "hostile relations."⁹⁵ Barely two weeks later, Ulbricht dispatched a long harangue to the CCP, chastising its espousal of "erroneous, un-Marxist-Leninist conceptions on the question of strategy and tactics." Yet what stood out most in Ulbricht's diatribe was that he portrayed the ideological dispute as a disagreement between China and all other communist states.⁹⁶ He evidently realised that if Beijing failed to obtain international support for its militant doctrines, it would be isolated and unable to challenge the present bloc structure.

As a result, the East Germans monitored Hanoi's preparations at the 3rd Party Congress and searched for signs of pro-Chinese activism. According to Ilya Gaiduk, GDR representatives were tipped off that Beijing would exploit the festivities to rekindle its ideological spat and secretly prepared counter-speeches.⁹⁷ There is no evidence, though, that the feud spilled over. DRV decision-makers, Dreßler reported, were rather attempting desperately to appease the two behemoths and circumvent any possible embarrassment. Examples included inviting three CCP and CPSU delegates (the other parties only received two invitations), as well as offering both Li Fuchun and Nuritdin Mukhitdinov an unlimited amount of time for their welcome addresses (the other delegation leaders were given no more than ten minutes).⁹⁸ North Vietnamese diplomats even disclosed to the GDR's general-counsellor in Beijing, Werner Wenning, that their country had gone so far as to discourage President Liu Shaoqi from attending the celebrations.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Bericht von Botschafter Claudius an Genossen Ulbricht und Schwab, 25 August 1960,' pp.13-17

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.17

⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3605, 'Ulbricht an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas, 6. September 1960,' p.90, pp.91-93, p.99, pp.101-103

⁹⁷ Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p.119

⁹⁸ PA MfAA, A8558, 'Dreßler an Stude, 12. August 1960,' p.30

⁹⁹ PA MfAA, A8558, 'Wenning an Stude, 22. August 1960,' p.40

Interestingly, the East Germans explained this nonalignment in economic terms. Hanoi, Claudius argued, depended upon foreign credits for its Five-Year-Plan. Beijing's aid agreement, above all, its decision to provide a number of coffee- and sugar plantations, meant that the DRV could not afford to impair bilateral ties.¹⁰⁰ Claudius pointed out that Moscow had likewise exported large amounts of heavy industry and built a thermal power station in Lao-Cai.¹⁰¹ The East Germans were cognisant, too, of the "tense" atmosphere above the 17th parallel. In private, DRV comrades referred to the "very bad" harvest and admitted that the monthly amount of rice per head had dropped from 18 to 13.2 kilogrammes. Beijing's challenge to Soviet authority, Claudius deduced, put North Vietnam in a "perilous" position: Whichever way decision-makers turned, they would anger one of the two sides.¹⁰²

But it was precisely because of the DRV's nonalignment stance that uncertainty filtered into the reports. In his review of the 3rd Party Congress, Hager complained that the Vietnamese had "offered no open commitment to the policies of the CPSU" and had failed to mention either Chinese "sectarianism" or "dogmatism." "Evidently," he reflected, "there are still fluctuations," and the VWP "did not want to commit itself."¹⁰³ Echoing his superior, Claudius stressed that it was "very difficult" to get an "exact appraisal" of the leaders' personal opinions.¹⁰⁴ The central committee had congregated three times to discuss the schism. Yet, in every public statement, neither China, nor the USSR, was mentioned without referencing the other.¹⁰⁵ It was, thus, unclear to East Berlin what position Hanoi would take at the upcoming Moscow Conference.

The issue was acquiring evermore urgency. Although Lorenz Lüthi has claimed that the CCP and CPSU "came to realise that they had to pull back from confrontation," East German policymakers remained anxious that the intra-bloc structure could fragment.¹⁰⁶ Prior to the

¹⁰⁰ PA MfAA, A8715, 'Bericht von Claudius über Dien-Bien-Phu, 25. Juni 1960,' p.18

¹⁰¹ PA MfAA, C1064/73, 'Jahresbericht der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 5. Januar 1961,' p.125

¹⁰² PA MfAA, A17255, 'Claudius an Minister Schwab/Gen. Fischer. Betreff: November-Konferenz, 15. Oktober 1960,' p.52; PA MfAA, C1064/73, 'Jahresbericht der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 5. Januar 1961,' p.137. For North Vietnamese concern about the bad harvest, see PA MfAA, A8590, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.15/60 über eine Unterredung des Koll. Stude mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der DRV, Phan Van Kim, am 24. August 1960,' p.62; PA MfAA, A6671, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem vietnamesischen Botschaftsrat, Genossen Tran-trong-Quat, 17. Dezember 1960,' p.42

¹⁰³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48178, 'Information an das Politbüro des ZK der SED. Bericht über den III. Parteitag der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 30. Oktober 1960,' pp.5-6

¹⁰⁴ PA MfAA, C1084/77, 'Jahresbericht der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 5. Januar 1961,' p.146

¹⁰⁵ PA MfAA, A17255, 'Claudius an Minister Schwab/Gen. Fischer. Betreff: November-Konferenz, 15. Oktober 1960,' p.52; PA MfAA, A8705, 'Claudius an das MfAA, Betreff: 11. Jahrestag der Gründung der VR China, 18. Oktober 1960,' p.390

¹⁰⁶ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.183

conference, an editorial board committee, comprised of twenty-six parties, congregated in order to discuss the CPSU's first draft of a joint declaration.¹⁰⁷ On 5 October, Le Duan tried to counteract another rumpus. "The main thing," he declared, "is the unity [...] of our parties," and insisted that everyone should help in overcoming the dispute.¹⁰⁸ Akin to Ho's mediation letter, Duan was unsuccessful. Immediately after his speech, Deng Xiaoping took the floor and accused the CPSU of imposing its programme on a "minority," as well as ignoring the distinctive contributions of other countries, such as North Vietnam and Albania to Marxist-Leninist scripture.¹⁰⁹ Deng's speech was an unmistakable attempt to categorise particular states as victims of the Kremlin's "great power chauvinism," implying, in turn, that Beijing was the guardian of their interests. "[The CCP's] talk of minority and majority," Hermann Matern, the East German representative, complained to Ulbricht, "really does pose the danger of a fractional conflict."¹¹⁰

It was an ominous prelude. For three consecutive weeks, the committee quarrelled and rowed, drafting an astonishing 175-pages worth of notes and suggestions.¹¹¹ "The very length of the meeting," Donald Zagoria writes, "was [...] testimony to the gulf within the bloc."¹¹² East Berlin's fear, however, that North Vietnam might endorse the CCP proved unfounded. Le Duan backed Deng on certain points, most notably requesting an addendum on the "prevention of wars" chapter, yet there was no visible shift in Hanoi's, now familiar, nonalignment stance.¹¹³ Nor did there appear any likelihood of a shift. Prior to his departure for the official conference, Ulbricht received a telegram from Ambassador Paul Wandel, informing him that Ho Chi Minh had been witness to a three-hour spat between Deng and the Soviet ambassador

¹⁰⁷ Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, p.195

¹⁰⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11756, 'Dritte Plenarsitzung, Mittwoch, 5. Oktober 1960, 14.00 Uhr. Es sprachen: Le Guan [Duan], Partei der Arbeit Vietnam; Deng Hsiao-ping, Kommunistische Partei Chinas; Koucky, KP der CSSR; Kliszko, PVAP,' pp.35-37. On North Vietnamese stress for unity, see also the delegation's comments on the Soviet draft of the Moscow Declaration in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11760, 'Einige Erwägungen der Delegation der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams zum Entwurf einer neuen Erklärung der Kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien (Mitgeteilt in der Nachmittagssitzung der Redaktionskommission am 5. Oktober 1960),' pp.162-167

¹⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11757, 'Diskussionsbeitrag des Genossen Deng Hsiao-Ping in der Redaktionskommission (5. Oktober 1960),' p.22. It was also striking that Deng did not mention any of the Eastern European countries (sans Albania) in his speech and focused on communist parties outside the Soviet orbit.

¹¹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3477, 'Hermann Matern an Walter Ulbricht, 5. Oktober 1960,' p.29

¹¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11757, 'Bericht des Vorsitzenden des Sekretariats der Redaktionskommission, n.d.' p.90

¹¹² D. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton, 2015), p.345

¹¹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11757, 'Bericht des Vorsitzenden des Sekretariats der Redaktionskommission, n.d.' p.95. For the North Vietnamese opinion on the draft, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11760, 'Einige Erwägungen der Delegation der Partei der Werktätigen zum Entwurf einer neuen Erklärung der Kommunistischen- und Arbeiterparteien (Mitgeteilt in der Nachmittagssitzung der Redaktionskommission am 5. Oktober 1960)' pp.144-167

in China, Stepan Chervonenko. Throughout the discussion, both sides had used abrasive language to attack each other's ideological theories and woo the president to their side. According to Wandel, Deng complained that the Kremlin had, for "over a year, conducted a campaign" against Beijing and insisted that the CCP would not accept a critique of Chinese factionalism. "There are some parties," he argued, "that do not agree, amongst others, the Vietnamese," pointing to Ho Chi Minh. Chervonenko, in contrast, hinted that the Great Leap Forward experiment had failed and that Beijing would be forced to alter its economic policies "in less than five years." Ho, however, refrained from sharing his own thoughts and simply continued to listen.¹¹⁴

At the Moscow Conference, which began on 10 November, East Germany and North Vietnam resumed their particular policies. Akin to the discussions in Bucharest, the summit was framed from the outset, with Khrushchev circulating a 98-page indictment of the CCP to all attending parties.¹¹⁵ Ulbricht, accordingly, joined the pro-Soviet choir's rebuff of the "Chinisation" of Marxism-Leninism, endeavouring to preserve monolithism through isolation.¹¹⁶ Ho, in contrast, reiterated support for both parties and even organised a "petition group" to promote compromise.¹¹⁷ For a brief period, it seemed as if the conference might precipitate an even bigger crisis, with either side refusing to budge. Nonetheless, despite perilous setbacks, a compromise began to, eventually, take shape. It was clear that China had failed to persuade the attendants (aside from the Albanian Workers' Party) from openly endorsing its militant programme. As a result, Mao decided on a tactical retreat.¹¹⁸ On 1 December, the final draft of the Moscow Declaration was agreed upon.¹¹⁹ Heralded as the

¹¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/122, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung, Botschafter Wandels mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR am Montag, dem 7. November 1960,' pp.216-218

¹¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48187, 'Brief des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas vom 5. November 1960,' pp.1-98; Hoxha, *The Khrushchevites*, p.444

¹¹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11762, 'Rede von Gen. W. Ulbricht, 15. November,' pp.206-223. For evidence that the Soviets and their satellites were trying to isolate the Chinese, see also the declaration and speeches given by the Bulgarian and Hungarian leaders in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11767, 'Erklärung der Delegation der Bulgarischen Kommunistischen Partei zu den Reden des Vertreters der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas Genossen Deng Hsiao-Ping und des Vertreters der Albanischen Partei der Arbeit Genossen Enver Hodscha auf der Beratung von Vertretern der kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien in Moskau (November 1960), 18. November 1960,' pp.160-183; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11767, 'Neuerliche Stellungnahme der Delegation der Ungarischen Sozialistischen Arbeiterpartei zu Fragen, die sich auf der Beratung ergeben haben, 19. November,' pp.185-198

¹¹⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11763, '7. Plenarsitzung am Donnerstag, dem 17. November 1960. Es sprach Genosse Ho Chi Minh,' pp.24-25; National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter, NARA), TS No.104558/61, Copy No.22, 'The Moscow Conference of the Communist Parties (November 1960),' p.viii. On Ho's attempt to mediate, see also D. Wang, 'The Quarrelling Brothers: New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959-1962,' *CWIHP, Working Paper #49* (July 2011), p.50

¹¹⁸ On China's tactical retreat, see Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, p.57; Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, pp.189-191

¹¹⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11763, '14. Plenarsitzung am 1. Dezember 1960, pp.214-215'

bloc's definition of the present world situation, it was to act as an ideological compass for the international communist movement.¹²⁰

Even so, the historical episode had revealed both the prospect of a split, as well as the brittle nature of monolithism. In fact, Enver Hoxha left the conference before the declaration was even signed.¹²¹ The concentration of power, which was based on a single locus of leadership, was becoming increasingly incompatible with the existing bloc structure. Most importantly, the East Germans had realised, for the first time, that North Vietnam harboured “dogmatic conceptions” identical to Beijing. There was no hint of approval for Ho's brokering. It was, instead, dismissed as part of Hanoi's “wait-and-see” approach and cited as evidence that the DRV could not be relied upon. “It will be the embassy's task,” Claudius projected, “to analyse very carefully the opinions [of the Vietnamese], in addition to the practical effects of the 1960 Moscow Declaration.”¹²²

Still, the conference was, overall, judged a “major success.” The chief editor of *Neues Deutschland*, Hermann Axen, would later point out that it was measured by its historical significance. The convocation of eighty-one communist parties was unprecedented and the unanimous signing of the Moscow Declaration had, in the eyes of East German policymakers, “consolidated the movement.”¹²³ Even the Chinese expressed their delight that an agreement had been reached. On the final day of the plenary session, the attending Liu Shaoqi declared that: “In our socialist community, from the GDR to [...] the Vietnamese Republic, all twelve of our socialist states are brothers” and, in a symbolic gesture, invited Khrushchev to sign the declaration first.¹²⁴ Despite the intra-bloc disagreements, then, a schism had been averted. East Berlin continued to regard itself and Hanoi as members of a monolithic bloc, united in their Cold War crusade against a common adversary.

Interpreting North Vietnam

The consequences of a potential Marxist-Leninist split were not merely a leitmotiv in East Berlin. Bonn, too, considered the subject of fundamental importance. Curiously, though, this remains a major lacuna in the historiography. Scholars have first and foremost concentrated

¹²⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11762, ‘Rede von Gen. W. Ulbricht, Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 15. November 1960,’ pp.206-207; PA MfAA, A8669, ‘Schwerpunktarbeitsplan der Botschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam für das Jahre 1961, 24. Januar 1961,’ p.33

¹²¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3589, ‘Information von der Botschaft der DDR [in] Budapest an Walter Ulbricht, 30. November 1960,’ pp.156-158

¹²² PA MfAA, C1064/73, ‘Jahresbericht der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 5. Januar 1961,’ pp.146-147

¹²³ Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, p.208

¹²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11763, ‘14. Plenarsitzung am 1. Dezember, 1960,’ p.215, p.220

on whether Bonn supported American involvement. No doubt this aspect is essential to our understanding of the FRG perspective. Yet it is only one part of the story. It is also crucial to examine Bonn's assessment of the "other side."¹²⁵ Interestingly, Hanoi's policies were correlated again and again with Sino-Soviet relations. Although Wendland did concede that the regime was, to some extent, pursuing "national objectives," neither he, nor his foreign ministerial colleagues, took Vietnamese patriotism particularly seriously. The DRV was, instead, pronounced a client state, a spatial region under the tutelage of one of the two communist giants. It was initially presumed that Hanoi belonged to the Chinese "sphere of influence" and that the Kremlin had not just rescinded its authority, but was refusing to interfere in domestic affairs.¹²⁶ Bonn's cognisance of the Sino-Soviet quarrel, however, precipitated a more comprehensive investigation.

There is no doubt that the spectre of a doctrinal split was a prospect which the FRG relished. Russia, China, as well as their "European and Asian satellites," possessed "over one billion people," not to mention "thirty-five million square kilometres" of land. These were frightening statistics, statistics which implied that the Cold War pendulum was oscillating eastwards. Inside the Foreign Ministry, Mao's triumph over the Kuomintang was considered the "most significant event" of the post-war era, for it had allowed the USSR to break free from its global isolation. In contrast to the European satellites, Beijing was not beholden to Moscow.¹²⁷ The Sino-Soviet coalition was a strategic alliance, rather than an asymmetrical partnership between master and marionette. But precisely because of China's independence, there was a chance of the alliance collapsing, of the relationship transforming into heresy, or even apostasy. A split between Moscow and Beijing, the West Germans reasoned, would equipoise the socialist world's strength and provide an opportunity to play-off one side against the other.¹²⁸

Sure enough, in the spring of 1960, FRG onlookers began to notice signs of discord. Given that Bonn did not have an embassy on the Chinese mainland, its general-consulate in Hong Kong was responsible for chronicling the CCP's domestic- and foreign political agenda. The "Long Live Leninism!" article implied to the Sino experts that Beijing disagreed with

¹²⁵ F. Logevall, 'Bringing in the "Other Side": New Scholarship on the Vietnam War,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 3, Number 3 (Fall 2001), pp.77-93

¹²⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Bericht von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Zusammenfassende Berichterstattung über die politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Aktivität des Ostblocks, 25. August 1959'

¹²⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, 'Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die chinesisch-sowjetische Beziehungen, 1. September 1960.' On Chinese independence from the USSR, see A. Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History* (Chapel Hill, 2013), p.2

¹²⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, 'Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die chinesisch-sowjetische Beziehungen, 1. September 1960'

Moscow about the question of war and peace, that it equated “imperialism” with “conflict,” and considered the road to “*real peace*” only possible through “armed struggle.”¹²⁹ Subsequent measures seemed to underwrite these judgements. On 17 August, the vice-consul in Hong Kong, Horst Pommerening, reported that, over the past weeks, an unusual number of Soviet specialists had left China. He called into question the “official reason” (that the contracts had expired) by pointing out that the Yugoslav media was making comparisons with the Kremlin’s decision to withdraw engineers from Belgrade in 1948. Whilst Pommerening was uncertain about the actual meaning of these developments, he inferred from the return of great numbers of Chinese students, as well as the cessation of the jointly edited magazine, *Druzhiba*, that the rivalry was growing fiercer, above all, in the “peripheral areas of the Asian region.”¹³⁰

Enter North Vietnam. When juxtaposing East- and West German analysis, it is striking that the latter separated policymakers much earlier into distinctive factions. As early as 1959, Wendland argued that there were “two fiercely combative groups” inside the VWP - one “pro-Chinese,” the other “pro-Soviet.”¹³¹ The following spring, Bonn received a thorough report on the subject from one of Germany’s most renowned Kremlinologists, Klaus Mehnert. Born in Tsarist Russia a year after the 1905 Revolution, Mehnert dedicated his life to studying the Marxist-Leninist world. He was the author of six bestsellers and taught both history and politics at Berkeley.¹³² In a memorandum entitled “Hanoi between Moscow and Beijing,” Mehnert, just like Wendland, split the party into separate factions. The “old guard,” clustered around Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong, he claimed, enjoyed personal ties with the USSR and were not just Marxist-Leninists, but Vietnamese nationalists, who harboured “traditionally-ingrained” fears of China. The competing group, under the leadership of the party’s theoretician, Truong Chinh, was formed mostly out of younger members and regarded the Chinese model more analogous to Vietnam. It was Mehnert’s subsequent prediction, however, which stood out:

In the long run, as Red-China gains in strength, the gravitational pull of the great neighbour will prove itself to be ever stronger. [...] It cannot be expected that Moscow will defend its position energetically in this [...] so

¹²⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, ‘Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Krieg und Frieden in chinesischer Sicht, 14. Oktober, 1960.’ My italics.

¹³⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, ‘Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt, Betreff: China und Sowjetrußland. Rückkehr von Fachleuten in die Sowjetunion, 17. August 1960’; PA AA, B12, Bd.672, ‘Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die chinesisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen, 1. September 1960’

¹³¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, ‘Bericht von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Zusammenfassende Berichterstattung über die politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Aktivität des Ostblocks, 25. August 1959’

¹³² *New York Times*, ‘Klaus Mehnert Dead: A Specialist on Russia, 3 January, 1984’; *Der Spiegel*, Nr.41/1981, ‘Rainer Traub über Klau Mehnert: “Ein Deutscher in der Welt.” Spätzle in Shanghai, 5. Oktober 1981,’ p.255-257

evidently Chinese domain. It can be deduced that North Vietnam will become more and more of a Beijing-satellite, even if, today, it is not.¹³³

It was an extraordinary appraisal. Despite Mehnert's contentions that Hanoi was leaning towards Moscow and that Ho sought to counteract Chinese influence, he was convinced that North Vietnam would, inevitably, get sucked into the PRC's orbit. The future of the region, Mehnert attested, belonged to China.

Mehnert's perception of North Vietnam as a battleground for Sino-Soviet influence was embraced by FRG officials. Reports from Saigon, Hong Kong and Singapore all asserted that Beijing was slowly but surely expanding its role across Southeast Asia.¹³⁴ Pommerening, for instance, signposted the "unmistakable" launch of a propaganda campaign. "Especially the situation in South Vietnam," he intoned, "is the subject of numerous statements and press releases." Under the pretext of U.S. violation of the Geneva Accords, Beijing was accusing America of interference in Indochinese affairs and readying itself for armed conflict. Pommerening cited one article, which proclaimed: "True to the traditional friendship between the Vietnamese and Chinese populaces, the 650 million Chinese are ready to actively support the [...] peoples' fight for freedom against its oppressors."¹³⁵ Both Hanoi and Beijing were, thus, portrayed as united in their struggle against U.S. tyranny. And yet, in a subsequent report, Pommerening estimated that the bilateral relationship was not as strong as Beijing wanted it to be. Reading through the published speeches of the 3rd Party Congress, he saw no sign that Hanoi was surrendering its independence, or that its position had changed in light of the Sino-Soviet quarrel. Contrary to the Chinese representative, Pommerening noted, Pham Van Dong's address had hardly mentioned the PRC, whereas Ho Chi Minh had refrained from commenting on Beijing altogether. "So far, the People's Republic of China has evidently failed to obtain North Vietnam's unquestionable support for its foreign political ideas," Pommerening concluded.¹³⁶

¹³³ PA AA, B44, Bd.13, 'Klaus Mehnert an die Abteilung 7 im Auswärtigen Amt. Betreff: Klaus Mehnert über Nord-Vietnam, 7. Mai 1960,' pp.76-80

¹³⁴ PA AA, B44, Bd.13, 'Röhreke in Singapur an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Sowjetzonal Tätigkeit in Nordvietnam, 25. Mai 1960,' pp.197-198; PA AA, B44, Bd.13, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: a) Sowjetzonenbotschafter in Nord-Vietnam, b) Nordvietnamesische Propaganda gegen die Vereinigten Staaten und veränderte Haltung des indischen Vertreters in der Kontrollkommission, c) Äußerungen nordvietnamesischer Regierungsstellen zu einem Umsturz in Süd-Vietnam, d) Chinas Absichten in diesem Raum, 13. Juli 1960,' pp.200-201; PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die Volksrepublik China und Süd-Vietnam, 18. August 1960'

¹³⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Bericht von Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die Volksrepublik China und Süd-Vietnam, 18. August 1960'

¹³⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, 'Bericht von Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: China und Nord-Vietnam, 14. September 1960.' On this point, see also PA AA, B44, Bd.53, 'Bericht von Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Fünfjahresplan der Demokratischen Republik Vietnams (Nord-Vietnam), 28. September 1960,' p.50

These deliberations about the DRV oscillating towards Beijing, not to mention the prospect of an ideological split, revealed just how much Bonn's support for South Vietnam and the strategy of containment depended upon the bipolar Cold War. Both, as Wendland argued, were fighting a common enemy. Both were part of an existential struggle between East and West. If, however, the schism widened, if the socialist world fragmented and the Sino-Soviet alliance transformed into a belligerent rivalry, then the FRG would be more inclined to seek national rewards, rather than counteract Chinese aggression. And nobody relished the prospect more than Konrad Adenauer.

The Chancellor's Prediction

To understand Adenauer's interest in the Sino-Soviet relationship, it is necessary to return full-circle to his own Cold War mindset. Adenauer supported America's containment programme. As a devout Christian, he equated the Eastern danger with an antediluvian "flood," which needed to be curbed through the building of "dams" and "protective walls."¹³⁷ It was essential, he believed, that the West remained united. When Charles de Gaulle pitched to him his "future thinking" of an autonomous Europe, which would devise its own political policies, Adenauer voiced genuine sympathy.¹³⁸ He liked the idea of Western Europe "walking on its own two feet," and had, for some time, worried about U.S. troop withdrawals.¹³⁹ "I, too," he assured the French leader, "do not want to be an instrument of the Americans."¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Adenauer rejected de Gaulle's proposal of a joint defence system.¹⁴¹ Anything which might encourage Khrushchev, or cause a rift inside the Western Bloc, was out of the question.¹⁴² Adenauer feared that the world was "in the middle of an intensified Cold War" and that the Atlantic alliance needed to stand shoulder-to-shoulder.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe, 1947-1949*, p.458; Mensing, (Hrsg.) *Adenauer: Briefe 1951-1953*, p.69; Küsters (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche 1950-1954*, p.136

¹³⁸ BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, 'Unterredung zwischen General de Gaulle und Bundeskanzler Adenauer in Colombey-les-Deux Eglises, am 14. September 1958,' p.38

¹³⁹ BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 29. Juli 1960 ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten de Gaulle,' p.135. On Adenauer's fear that the United States would forsake Germany, see also H. Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Staatsmann, 1952-1967* (Stuttgart, 1991), pp.205-206

¹⁴⁰ BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, 'Unterredung zwischen General de Gaulle und Bundeskanzler Adenauer in Colombey-les-Deux Eglises, am 14. September 1958,' p.46

¹⁴¹ H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe, 1959-1961* (Berlin, 1983), p.190

¹⁴² H. Küsters (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1959-1961* (Berlin 1988), p.220; BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 7. Oktober 1960 um 12.00 Uhr ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Premierminister Michel Debre,' p.187

¹⁴³ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe, 1959-1961*, p.190. It is worth mentioning Adenauer's concern about his country's confidence in the Western Bloc. On 15 March, he disclosed to the American ambassador that whereas in 1952, 66% of the population had believed that the West would win the Cold War, only 36% "still believed this." See D. Baehler and C. Sampson (eds.), *FRUS, 1958-1960, Berlin Crisis, 1959-1960, Germany; Austria*,

But as Marc Trachtenberg has argued, in one specific manner, the chancellor's stratagem was not defensive at all, but purposely *offensive*.¹⁴⁴ What Adenauer desired more than anything else was German reunification. He was unsure, though, how to achieve his objective. A military conquest of the GDR was both impossible and suicidal. Nor did he trust the concept of *détente*, equating it with an acceptance of the status quo.¹⁴⁵ Adenauer, therefore, seized upon the hope that the Communist Bloc would fragment, that Moscow and Beijing would turn against each other. The chancellor's thinking was influenced by Wilhelm Starlinger's *Grenzen der Sowjetmacht*, published in 1955. The book was primarily a report on Starlinger's experiences as a trained physician, along with his imprisonment in a Siberian Gulag. It was, however, the author's conclusion that impressed Adenauer. Reflecting on his past, Starlinger attempted to prophesise future developments, the most extraordinary of which was his claim that the Sino-Soviet partnership bore within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Starlinger explained the reasons for an eventual split through territorial necessity. China's incessant population increase would compel the CCP to overlook ideological parallels, renege on the alliance and turn towards Siberia for *lebensraum*. The Kremlin would be forced to safeguard its European flank and concentrate on the more dangerous, Chinese opponent. This, Starlinger contended, would "completely transform" the geopolitical landscape. America would have to "neutralise" Indochina and, "sooner or later, surrender it to Chinese absorption." Rather than deter Beijing, which he regarded as inevitably futile, the West should seek *détente* and use it as a bargaining chip to push Soviet Russia on German reunification.¹⁴⁶

The chancellor's visit to Moscow in September 1955 seemed to confirm Starlinger's hypothesis. During his negotiations with Khrushchev on the release of POWs, the premier took Adenauer aside and told him in strict confidence that the Soviets were deeply troubled about the Chinese, whose population was "increasing by twelve million each year and living off a handful of rice [...] They are sucking us dry, like leeches. You Germans [must] help us overcome this problem."¹⁴⁷ Three years later, Adenauer raised the subject with the Soviet

Volume IX, Document 256 'Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Dwindling Confidence in the US and General Ability of the West to Compete with the Soviet Union 15 March, 1960' (Washington, 1993)

¹⁴⁴ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, p.274

¹⁴⁵ BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, 'Unterredung zwischen General de Gaulle und Bundeskanzler Adenauer in Colombey les Deux Eglises, am 14. September 1958,' p.46; H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe 1955-1957* (Berlin, 1983), p.61

¹⁴⁶ W. Starlinger, *Grenzen der Sowjetmacht im Spiegel einer West-Ostbegegnung hinter Palisaden von 1945-1954* (Würzburg, 1955) p.116, pp.120-121, p.125, p.127

¹⁴⁷ BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, 'Unterredung zwischen General de Gaulle und Bundeskanzler Adenauer in Colombey les Deux Eglises, am 14. September 1958,' p.39. To compare, see also Khrushchev's comments on his visit to China in 1954, S. Khrushchev (ed.), *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 3. Statesman, [1953-1964]* (Pennsylvania, 2007), p.399

statesman, Anastas Mikoyan, who described the Sino-Soviet relationship as “excellent.” But when the chancellor pressed him on what it would look like in the distant future, Mikoyan balked.¹⁴⁸

Both biographers and former officials have mentioned Adenauer’s “fascination” with the prospect of a Sino-Soviet split.¹⁴⁹ But it was not merely a fascination. It was an *obsession*, an obsession which became hardwired into his mind. The chancellor was convinced that an unfettered, militant China was just what Bonn needed. “It is not pleasant,” he pointed out, “to have a neighbour whose population comprises over 600 million, whereas your own is 200 million.”¹⁵⁰ He, like Starlinger, predicted that Beijing would inevitably transform into the USSR’s main opponent, thus, offering the West a glorious chance to turn the screws on Berlin. As the third great power, Washington would have to opt for one of the two. “America,” Adenauer explicitly told the West Berlin mayor, Willy Brandt, in December 1960, “must decide whether it wants to go with China or the Soviet Union.”¹⁵¹ His own task, Adenauer believed, was to ensure that Washington considered Europe, not Asia, the nucleus of the Cold War.¹⁵²

It is crucial to bear in mind, however, that hardly anyone shared this conviction. The hypothesis, Pommerening admitted, was appealing, given that it would be the “panacea” for most of the West’s current problems. But he dismissed both the forecast of a schism and the prospect of playing the two sides off each other as “wishful thinking.” “To this day,” he contended, there was “no evidence” that an “open split” would transpire.¹⁵³ In their report on the Moscow Conference, Foreign Ministry officials compared the relationship to “Siamese twins, whose heads quarrel, but whose bodies cannot be separated.” At least for the foreseeable future, they informed Adenauer, Beijing was “materially” and “militarily” dependent on the

¹⁴⁸ K. Adenauer, *Erinnerungen, 1959-1963* (Stuttgart, 1968), p.183

¹⁴⁹ W. Grewe, *Rückblenden, 1976-1951* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), pp.634-635; P. Koch, *Konrad Adenauer. Eine politische Biographie* (Hamburg, 1985), p.356; H. Koehler, *Adenauer. Eine politische Biographie* (Berlin, 1994), p.856, p.970, p.998, Schwarz, *Adenauer*, pp.221-222

¹⁵⁰ Küsters (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1959-1961*, p.324

¹⁵¹ Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Willy-Brandt-Archive (hereafter cited as AdsD, WBA), A6, Mappe, 70, ‘Vermerk über die Besprechung zwischen dem Bundeskanzler und dem Bürgermeister von Berlin am 22. Dezember 1960 von 12.00-13.15 Uhr im Palais Schaumburg,’ p.6; W. Brandt, *Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), p.422

¹⁵² A. Poppinga (Hrsg.), *Konrad Adenauer: “Seid wach für die kommenden Jahre”* (Bergisch Gladbach, 1997) p.423; Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe 1955-1957*, p.269

¹⁵³ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, ‘Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die chinesisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen, 1. September 1960’

USSR. Chinese policymakers needed all the help they could get to industrialise the economy, develop the armed forces and further their hegemonic aspirations in the Pacific.¹⁵⁴

It is safe to say, then, that the Cold War framework was still considered bipolar. Bonn and Saigon were on the same side, united in the face of a belligerent Marxist-Leninist foe. A diary entry made by the FRG's ambassador to France, Herbert Blankenhorn, underlines this point:

Guy Mollet brought up [...] the international situation. He said that Khrushchev's increasingly caustic language was disturbing him greatly. He reckoned that the Communist Bloc would become active in East Asia first, namely against South Vietnam [...] and he believes that one also has to already prepare for a further threat against Berlin in autumn.¹⁵⁵

The Cold War was, hence, still imagined as an interconnected, zero-sum game, where victory for one side meant defeat for the other. Both Germany and Vietnam were neuralgic points in a global, existential struggle. And it seemed that defeat below the 17th parallel was becoming evermore likely.

The Failed Coup

On 11 November, at 3:30 a.m., Wendland awoke to the sound of machine-gun fire. Cause of the noise were two mutinying parachute brigades under the command of Colonel Vuong Van Dong and Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi. The insurgents captured key strategic buildings, including the General Staff Headquarters, the Ministry of Defence and Tan-Son-Nhat Airport. Initial news reports suggested that Diem had been usurped, that the armed forces had decided on "immediate action" to save Saigon from the "impending communist danger." At 11:30 a.m., *Radio Vietnam* announced that the revolution had triumphed and a preliminary government would shortly be formed.¹⁵⁶

The announcement, though, came too soon. Despite capturing most of their objectives, the insurgents failed to conquer Independent Palace. Diem's presidential guards managed to repulse the assault and, in turn, arrest the revolt's momentum. A curious interregnum followed,

¹⁵⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.672, 'Aufzeichnung von Dr. Graf Welzeck, dem Herrn Bundeskanzler vorzulegen. Betreff: Verhältnis Peking-Moskau, 6. Dezember 1960'

¹⁵⁵ H. Blankenhorn, *Verständnis und Verständigung. Blätter eines politischen Tagebuchs, 1949 bis 1979* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), p.377. See also the FRG's Defence Minister Franz Josef Strauss' comments to the American secretary of state about the USSR "probably" shifting the crisis from Berlin to the "Far East" in Baehler and Sampson (eds.), *FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume IX*, Document 259, 'Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: German Defence Situation and the Aftermath of the Summit Breakdown, 20 June 1960'

¹⁵⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 15. November 1960.'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Aufzeichnung von Duckwitz für den Herrn Bundesminister. Betreff: Staatsstreich in Süd-Vietnam (Stand: 11. November, mittags), 11. November 1960'

during which the rebels' demanded that Diem resign from his post.¹⁵⁷ The president prevaricated, paying lip-service to governmental reform but, simultaneously, dispatching envoys to loyalist troops outside Saigon. The following day, at first light, fighting recommenced.¹⁵⁸ Both the ARVN's 7th Division in Bien-Hoa and 21st Division in My-Tho encircled the capital, thereby tipping the balance of power back in Diem's favour. By mid-afternoon, the putsch had failed and forced the two rebel-chiefs to flee South Vietnam.¹⁵⁹ Diem had survived. But only just.

West German reaction to the incident was twofold. On the one hand, there was respect, admiration even, for Diem's handling of the crisis. Wendland and Blankenhorn applauded both the president's courage, as well as his resolute decision-making. Wendland went so far as to juxtapose his actions with the supine collapse of the Kaiserreich: "If exactly forty-two years ago," he claimed, "one single ruling German prince had acted the same way, then the course of German history might have turned out different."¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, there was a shared conviction that Diem's triumph was no more than a fleeting victory. For the West Germans, the revolt confirmed what they had been saying all along: Diem's autocratic system was unpopular and needed to be reformed.¹⁶¹ At the same time, the botched coup reinforced Wendland's belief that Diem had no intention of reversing his stance. In fact, it provided him with a convenient excuse to clamp down on the oppositional factions, notably a number of "Caravellists," who had supported the uprising.¹⁶² Furthermore, three independent newspapers, which had published the rebels' appeal, were placed under the direct command of high-ranking executives.¹⁶³ Diem's actions were, in short, diametrically opposed to FRG reading of the situation. Both in Bonn and in its foreign missions, there was an insistence that liberalism,

¹⁵⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 15. November 1960'; The National Archives (hereafter, TNA), FO371/152744, 'From Mr. Hohler in Saigon. Subject: Report on the attempted coup d'état mounted by parachute brigade in Saigon against President Diem, 19 November 1960,' p.11

¹⁵⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 15. November 1960'

¹⁵⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Vietnam Press Feature Service, No.24. Content: Documents on the recent abortive coup d'état for the benefit of our esteemed readers, n.d.'

¹⁶⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Blankenhorn an das Auswärtige Amt. Bezug: Drahterlass 594 vom 25. Oktober [1960], 15. November 1960'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Bericht von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 15. November 1960'

¹⁶¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Bericht von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 15. November 1960'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 21. November 1960'

¹⁶² PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Bericht von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Missglückter Militärputsch in Saigon, 15. November 1960'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Fernschreiben von Blankenhorn in Paris an das Auswärtige Amt, 15. November 1960'

¹⁶³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, 'Erfahrungsbericht von Dr. Anna-Christie Cronholm für den Zeitraum vom 1. November bis 31. Dezember 1960, 31. Dezember 1960'

rather than repression, was the answer to popular discontent. If Diem did not act soon, Wendland warned, then either another, more serious revolt would occur, or the communists would, ultimately, annex the South.¹⁶⁴

At the end of a turbulent year, FRG reports from Saigon recorded that the “powder keg” was close to igniting. The speed with which mild concern had transformed into downright panic was remarkable. Communist cadres were expanding their control over the lowlands and, often without resistance, occupying villages barely two miles outside the capital.¹⁶⁵ Events in neighbouring Laos added to this concern. The downfall of Souvanna Phouma’s government, as well as Moscow’s decision to organise an airlift for the Pathet Lao-Kong Le coalition, were ominous forewarnings that the Cold War struggle was intensifying. Comparisons with the conflict in Korea began to filter through the narrative, as diplomats’ envisaged both Beijing and Hanoi dispatching “volunteers,” thereby turning the parallel struggle into a bigger, more dangerous conflagration.¹⁶⁶ “One cannot escape the feeling,” Wendland noted gloomily, “that the clock is ticking and the hour of reckoning is drawing nearer.” It seemed doubtful to him that the “Free West” would be able to contain the communists for much longer.¹⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, this bleak atmosphere was in sharp contrast to the buoyant mood above the 17th parallel. A day after the furore, Claudius was invited to an information meeting, chaired by the prime minister. After explaining what had happened, Pham Van Dong declared that the coup was a defeat for the other side. It was irrelevant, he said, who the rebels were, or that they had failed. What mattered was that the putsch “mirrored the peoples’ struggle against Diem” and its abhorrence of “American intrusion.” The setting for a “revolutionary struggle,” he emphasised, had become more favourable. Despite clinging onto power, Diem had suffered a “serious blow” against his authority and the masses now understood that “he can be toppled.” “Our compatriots,” Claudius was assured, “will unremittingly continue the struggle to overthrow the Diem regime.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon Nr. 6 vom 15. November 1960’

¹⁶⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1656, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Vietnam nach dem missglückten Putsch, 29. November 1960’

¹⁶⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1602, ‘Bidder in Thailand an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Laos in Laos, 20 Dezember, 1960.’ On West German concern that the conflict would spill over into a wider conflict, see also, PA AA, B12, Bd.1602, ‘Bidder an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die äußeren Einwirkungen auf die Ereignisse in Laos, 7. Dezember 1960’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1602, ‘Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die Volksrepublik und Laos, 15. Dezember 1960’; PA AA, B12, Bd.678A, ‘Pommerening an das Auswärtige Amt: Betreff: Volksrepublik China und Laos, 5. Januar 1961’

¹⁶⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1602, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Laos-Krise aus hiesiger Sicht, 20. Dezember 1960’

¹⁶⁸ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.254/60 über eine Botschaftsinformation zur Lage in Südvietnam am 12. November 1960,’ p.27; PA MfAA, A8558, ‘Claudius an Stude, 14. November 1960,’ p.62

GDR officials were equally inclined to focus on the “rottenness” of Diem’s dictatorship, rather than his political survival.¹⁶⁹ At the heart of the RVN, Dreßler asserted, there was an “unresolvable contradiction” between the U.S.-backed Ngo family and the “patriotic” inhabitants. The more Diem relied on terror, the more he would intensify the peoples’ resistance.¹⁷⁰ In their annual report, Claudius and Dreßler linked developments below the 17th parallel with Leninist dialectic. Ulyanov taught that for a “revolutionary situation” to exist, the ruling class “should be unable to live in the old way” and the lower classes “not want to live in the old way.”¹⁷¹ According to the two men, this was precisely the scenario in South Vietnam. Diem’s political base was shrinking and citizens of all strata were no longer prepared to accept his tyrannical rule. The president, they predicted, would relinquish his power and precipitate the creation of a national-coalition government.¹⁷² Nobody was in any doubt that Diem’s reign was drawing to a close.

¹⁶⁹ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Kurze Übersicht über die Militärrevolte in Südvietnam, 28. November 1960,’ p.169

¹⁷⁰ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Situation in Südvietnam nach dem Staatsstreich vom 11. November 1960,’ p.150

¹⁷¹ N. Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought: Theory and Practice in the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions* (Chicago, 1983), p.37

¹⁷² PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Kurze Übersicht über die Militärrevolte in Südvietnam, 28. November 1960,’ p.169

Chapter 2

Towards Open Warfare

1961

Future historians will describe our time as the time of great changes. [...] Simultaneous with these tremendous technical transformations, the peoples of Asia and Africa, which have, hitherto, dawned in the semi-darkness of history are rapidly awakening to political sovereignty.¹

So wrote Herbert Blankenhorn, as 1960 became 1961. This diary entry draws our attention to one of the most pivotal developments of that year: The ever-increasing status of former colonies on the international stage. There was an appreciation, in both German capitals, that the “Third World” was transforming into a Cold War battleground. Khrushchev’s famous speech in January pledged total support for “wars of national liberation” and identified Vietnam as an exemplar. It was the premier’s first public address following the Moscow Conference and West German onlookers considered it to have a “programmatic character,” to be a “clear concession to radical currents within the international communist movement.” In Moscow, the FRG ambassador inferred from Khrushchev’s emphasis on the “need” for liberation struggles that “stronger action in trouble spots,” notably “Southeast Asia,” was to be expected.²

On 10 January, Walter Ulbricht received a similar report from the MfAA. But rather than predict Khrushchev’s stratagem, it contemplated the future policies of the newly-elected president. JFK, Ulbricht was told, would not limit his programme to existing Cold War frontiers. He would expand the economic and scientific contest, as well as “strengthen” American influence in the “Afro-Asian states.” The MfAA, however, predicted that Kennedy’s “pivotal offensive” would transpire in the “underdeveloped countries,” for he considered these areas to offer “*the* decisive opportunity” to “contain the influence of the socialist world system.”³

Alongside this heightened interest in the Third World, there was a realisation that the post-war epoch was “coming to an end.” At the annual German-American conference, government officials estimated that “new power centres,” such as China and a European superstate, were geminating. “Although these centres of power,” the communiqué read, “do not yet have the importance of the [...] global powers, their development has, nevertheless,

¹ Blankenhorn, *Verständnis und Verständigung*, p.386

² PA AA, B41, Bd.32, ‘Aufzeichnung der Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands in Moskau. Betreff: Chruschtschow-Rede vom 6. Januar 1961 über die Moskauer Konferenz der kommunistischen Parteien vom November 1960, 20. Januar 1961,’ p.228, p.232

³ SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1323, ‘Winzer an Ulbricht. Betreff: Einschätzung der künftigen Politik der Regierung Kennedys, 10. Januar 1961,’ p.88, p.94. My italics.

prepared for the dissolution of this unnatural order.”⁴ The grammatical tense was crucial. Policymakers were convinced that the world remained split in half, that the Cold War represented a struggle between diametrically opposed belief systems. And yet, there was a sense that the global order was changing, that other countries were gathering strength and would subsequently challenge the bipolar structure, which the two superpowers had created.

Whilst the West Germans were theorising about the end of the post-war world, their eastern counterparts were witnessing it. The Ulbricht government’s hope that the unanimous Moscow Declaration had resolved the intra-bloc strife proved false. At the 4th Congress of the Albanian Labour Party, Peter Florin and Hermann Axen condemned the festivities as a “left-sectarian, nationalistic divergence.” Rather than highlight the triumphs of peaceful coexistence, the speeches echoed Beijing’s “Long Live Leninism!” polemic. Every reference to Hoxha, Mao or Ho Chi Minh was greeted with raucous standing ovations, whereas Khrushchev’s name induced demonstrative silence. Axen and Florin divided the delegations into two groups. Most of the representatives had “stuck resolutely to the line of the Moscow Declaration.” Yet, a cluster of Asian countries, such as North Vietnam, had accentuated the threat of “modern revisionism,” and offered exuberant praise for Albania’s endeavour to maintain the “purity of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism.” There was a palpable sense of foreboding. Both men warned that the situation inside the socialist world had become “complicated.” “It is obvious,” they stressed, “that now the struggle for the correct [...] implementation of the Moscow Conference must be carried out.”⁵

Two themes were, hence, recurrent in the FRG’s and GDR’s appraisal of Vietnam in 1961. First, just like Berlin, policymakers related conditions and developments to the global Cold War. The conflict on the Indochinese peninsula was still very much part of the existential struggle between two opposing blocs. Second, both countries focused evermore attention on the Sino-Soviet dispute. Decision-makers in Bonn and East Berlin were convinced that the ideological schism was growing wider.

⁴ Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, St. Augustin Archiv (hereafter, ACDP), Nachlass Birrenbach, I-433-159/1, ‘Atlantik Brücke e.V. Deutsch-Amerikanische Konferenz vom 16.-19. Februar, 1961 in Washington D.C. Betreff: Die Außenpolitik der Regierung Kennedy’

⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2/752, ‘Anlage Nr. 9 zum Protokoll Nr. 10 vom 28. Februar 1961. Betreff: Bericht der Delegation des ZK der SED über den IV. Parteitag der Partei der Arbeit Albaniens,’ pp.62-72. For the North Vietnamese address in Tirana, see PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Zëri i Popullit, Begrüßungsansprache des Leiters der Delegation der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, Gen. Nguyen Sui Zin, 18. Februar, 1961,’ pp.353-358

The Significance of Laos

At the start of 1961, it was not Vietnam which gripped East- and West German attention, but, rather, the Kingdom of Laos. Akin to its neighbour, Laos had been part of the French Empire and officially gained independence at the Geneva Conference.⁶ Both German states had a somewhat disdainful attitude towards the kingdom. On his visit to Vientiane in late January, the special correspondent for the *German News Service* (ADN), Artur Mannbar, informed Ulbricht that the Pathet Lao's "ideological standard" was "very low" and party members had "no Marxist education." As a former resistance fighter, Mannbar was moreover appalled by the "eccentric views" of the Pathet Lao's coalition partner, Kong Le. "In his eyes," Mannbar reported, "Rommel was the most brilliant general of the Second World War and Hitler had been a great statesman." "During one of our talks," he assured the politburo, "which lasted deep into the night, I tried to correct his worldview, but it will certainly take more time."⁷ The West Germans, in contrast, despaired over the Royal Lao Armed Forces. Despite superiority in numbers, as well as technical equipment, the anti-communist militias of Boun Oum and General Phoumi Nosavan were dismissed as both weak and incompetent.⁸

Laos, nevertheless, became an integral part of the Cold War, an invaluable pawn in a much larger chess game. For FRG onlookers, it was the kingdom's geographical location that mattered. A communist takeover, Hilmar Bassler warned, would provide a strategic springboard to launch raids against South Vietnam and Thailand.⁹ The absorption of Laos, he contended further, would undermine the peoples' trust in Western-, above all, American promises.¹⁰ Yet the scenario on the ground was, if anything, even more abject than below the 17th parallel. Although Phoumi's soldiers drove Kong Le out of Vientiane in December 1960, there were no West German celebrations. Quite the opposite. Rumours of DRV troops crossing the Laotian border fuelled unease that the concurrent struggles were spiralling out of control.¹¹ On 6 March, Kong Le and the Pathet Lao counter-attacked, tearing Phoumi's armies in half

⁶ For an overview of the history of Laos, see S. Jacobs, *The Universe Unravelling. American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, 2012), pp.25-36

⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48204, 'Politbüro: Bericht des Genossen Artur Mannbar, Sonderkorrespondent des ADN, über seinen Aufenthalt vom 30. Januar - 9. Februar 1961 in Laos, 5. Februar 1961'

⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bidder. Bezug: Über meine Informationsreise nach Vientiane und über die Lage und Ziele der Regierung Boun Oum, 21. Januar, 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.2/61. Lage in Laos, 24. Januar 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Berendonck, Betreff: Die Lage in Laos vor der SEATO-Konferenz, 23. März 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1608, 'Bassler an das Referat 704, 23. Juni 1961'

⁹ BA-Koblenz, B122/5467, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Die Lage in Vietnam, 15. November 1961,' p.196

¹⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Lage in Laos, 17. Januar 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler für Dr. Berthold Martin, Betreff: Lage in Laos, 24. April 1961'

¹¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Karl Carstens. Betreff: Die Entwicklung in Laos, 4. Januar 1961'

and blunting the general's attempt to seize the Plain of Jars.¹² Explicit exclamations, such as "hopeless" and "catastrophic," spelt out just how anxious the West Germans were about the frontline disintegrating.¹³ Barely seven weeks later, communist partisans captured Vang Vieng, the last stronghold north of the capital. In the words of the FRG's military attaché, Klaus Herrmann, the defeat was comparable to a "Laotian Dien-Bien-Phu."¹⁴

But irrespective of Phoumi's demands for external intervention, not one bureaucrat in either the Foreign Ministry or its overseas embassies advocated fighting violence with violence.¹⁵ Direct U.S. involvement, even with allied support, was rejected. "Events," Herrmann pointed out, "are proceeding under their own laws." Conventional methods of warfare were unsuitable.¹⁶ The inaccessible mountain and jungle areas simply made it impossible to "liquidate" all partisans. Direct involvement would, instead, alarm world opinion, as well as threaten both regional and global peace.¹⁷ With armed warfare crossed out, the sole alternative was to seek a political compromise. The Pathet Lao-Kong Le coalition, Herrmann noted, had conveyed its readiness to cooperate with the non-aligned, "legitimate" government of Souvanna Phouma.¹⁸ Neither did Beijing or Moscow seem keen for the conflict to escalate. Indeed, the influx of letters reaching Hong Kong from the mainland, which openly begged for scraps of food, suggested to Bassler that the PRC had more pressing problems.¹⁹ Two days after the fall of Vang Vien, the Kremlin signalled its own preference for a ceasefire and suggested reconvening the Geneva Conference.²⁰

¹² PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Nr.10/61. Lage in Laos, 10. März 1961'

¹³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bidder. Bezug: Über meine Informationsreise nach Vientiane und über die Lage und Ziele der Regierung Boun Oum, 21. Januar 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.8/61, Lage in Laos, 1. März 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1595, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung, Nr.13/61. Betreff: Lage in Laos, 17. März 1961'

¹⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1595, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung, 28. April 1961'

¹⁵ See, for instance, PA AA, B12, Bd.1663, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Konsultationen der Aussenminister der Sechs am 31. Januar 1961 in Brüssel, Situation in Südost-Asien, insbesondere in Laos, 19. Januar 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bidder. Bezug: Über meine Informationsreise nach Vientiane und über die Lage und Ziele der Regierung Boun Oum, 21. Januar 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.8/61, Lage in Laos, 1. März 1961'

¹⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Nr.8/61. Lage in Laos, 1. März 1961'

¹⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Bericht von Bidder. Bezug: Über meine Informationsreise nach Vientiane und über die Lage und Ziele der Regierung Boun Oum, 21. Januar 1961'

¹⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Bericht von Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.2/61. Lage in Laos, 24. Januar 1961'

¹⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: 17. Januar 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.662a, 'Auszugsweise Abschrift aus Schreiben von Alfred Joachim Fischer vom 23. Januar 1961 an Ministerialdirektor Duckwitz'

²⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler für Dr. Berthold Martin, Betreff: Lage in Laos, 24. April 1961'

Washington's decision to attend the political summit in mid-May, rather than initiate armed conflict, was endorsed by the West Germans.²¹ At the same time, an explicit distinction was made between talks on Laos and continual struggle in Vietnam. After all, officials could have suggested to their American counterparts that the strategy of containing communism with unpopular despots was futile and that the conference offered an auspicious opportunity to neutralise, or disengage, from the region. No such suggestion was proposed. Regardless of how the Laos Crisis ended, Ambassador Wendland maintained, Saigon was the "focal point of the Free World" and Washington "could not let Vietnam fall."²² But there was more. Wendland felt that the FRG needed to share the burden and provide its own fraternal assistance. As a result, both in the first half of 1961 and during his six-month home leave, the ambassador worked tirelessly on convincing his superiors that the RVN was entitled to fraternal aid.

When making his case, Wendland spoke of a "moral obligation."²³ Bonn could not focus exclusively on its own survival and needed to sponsor other bloc countries. If it did not, he warned, then the FRG would expose itself to the charge that it "treats friends worse than insecure cantonists."²⁴ Wendland reminded his colleagues that the Cold War was interrelated. By defending Saigon, he argued, they were not merely containing communism on the Indochinese peninsula, but "defending our position in Europe."²⁵ It was noticeable, too, that Wendland had backtracked from his vein of fatalism the previous year, insisting that he was "cautiously optimistic."²⁶ On 17 April, he recorded an "unmistakable decline" in communist terror and expressed satisfaction that rebel forces had failed to sabotage the rigged presidential vote, which saw Diem re-elected with 88%.²⁷ It seemed that the enemy had overestimated its

²¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1603, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Nr.8/61. Lage in Laos, 1. März 1961'

²² PA AA, B12, Bd.1663, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Deutsche Kredithilfe bei Industrialisierung Vietnams, 30. Januar 1961'

²³ Ibid.; PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die deutsch-vietnamesische Beziehungen, ihr heutiger Stand und ihre weitere Entwicklung im Hinblick auf die angekündigten Regierungsreformen, die bevorstehende Präsidentenwahl und die Lage in südostasiatischen Raum, 10. Februar 1961'; PA AA, B67, Bd.32, 'Aufzeichnung von Dr. Lang. Betreff: Besprechung mit einer vietnamesischen Delegation im BMW am 15. Mai 1961,' p.393

²⁴ PA AA, B67, Bd.32, 'Aufzeichnung von Dr. Lang. Betreff: Besprechung mit einer vietnamesischen Delegation im BMW am 15. Mai 1961,' p.394

²⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die deutsch-vietnamesische Beziehungen, ihr heutiger Stand und ihre weitere Entwicklung im Hinblick auf die angekündigten Regierungsreformen, die bevorstehende Präsidentenwahl und die Lage in südostasiatischen Raum, 10. Februar 1961'

²⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Kommunistische Untergrundbewegung, Sicherheitslage, wirtschaftliche Erschließung des Landes durch neue Flugplätze, vorsichtiger Optimismus bezüglich der Gesamtlage, 27. Februar 1961'

²⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Die Ziele des Kommunismus in Südvietnam, 17. April 1961'; PA AA, B12, Bd.1652, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Wiederwahl des Präsidenten der Republik Vietnam, Herrn Ngo Dinh Diem, 10. April 1961'

influence, that its hope of transforming the event into a cohesive uprising had failed. Given his previous criticisms of Diem's style of leadership, it was pertinent that Wendland singled him out as a "glimmer of hope." The president's defence measures had withstood this particular "trial of strength" and he even claimed that "as long as Diem is at the helm, the communists do not stand a chance."²⁸

Wendland was not the only advocate of a hands-on approach. Both Washington and Saigon were pushing the FRG to make sacrifices. Barely three weeks after his inaugural address, Kennedy demanded "more information" on Bonn's foreign aid programme. There was a firm resolve in the White House to "get the Germans up on a mountain" and obligate them to subsidise the "underdeveloped nations."²⁹ During a private talk with Wendland, Diem correspondingly referred to the sizeable assistance that Bonn was bequeathing other Asian countries (Pakistan, for example) and stressed that he desired financial help with the construction of a medical department at Hue University.³⁰ Two months later, the RVN government requested a 150 million D-Mark credit to build both a urea plant, as well as other installations connected with the Nong-Son industrial complex.³¹

The response was hesitant. In contrast to his ambassadorial colleague, Hilmar Bassler approached the problem from a different angle. As Alexander Troche emphasises, the East Asian expert preached "*safety before assistance*." It was all very well providing fraternal support, yet Bassler voiced scepticism about large-scale projects in "unstable areas."³² This unease is not difficult to understand, especially given the reports of communist advances on the adjacent frontline. Subversive infiltration, Bassler argued, had reached new heights and would, in turn, have a detrimental impact below the 17th parallel.³³ Nor is there any doubt that he had little respect for the RVN regime. Prior to Hans-Joachim von Merkatz's tour of Southeast Asia, Bassler's department advised the federal minister not to visit Saigon, on

²⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Die Ziele des Kommunismus in Südvietsnam, 17. April 1961'

²⁹ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (hereafter, JFKL), The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Meetings & Memoranda, Box 317, 'Memorandum for the File, Subject: Discussion with the President, 10 February 1961'

³⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1663, 'Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.6 vom 11. März 1961'

³¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1663, 'Entwurf einer Aufzeichnung von D7 an D4. Betreff: Kapitalkredit für die Rep[ublik] Vietnam, 18. Mai 1961'

³² Troche, "*Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt*," p.255. My italics. See also PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Bassler an das Referat 120, 15. April 1961'

³³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Bassler an das Referat 120. Betreff: Schaffung eines abhörsicheren Besprechungsraums anlässlich Neubau des Kanzleigebäudes der Botschaft in Saigon, 15. April 1961'

account of Diem's persistent refusal to reform.³⁴ And yet, the loss of American prestige troubled Bassler. He pointed out that despite the collective defence treaty (SEATO), as well as Secretary of State Dean Rusk's assurances that Washington would not accept further communist expansion, the U.S. had failed to react. This refusal, Bassler warned, had triggered a "serious crisis of confidence." For the Thais, in particular, Laos embodied the "badly lead" and "weak defences" of the Western World.³⁵ Bassler, therefore, suggested a compromise. Bonn would offer a credit worth 50 million D-Mark on the condition that the Nong-Son project's feasibility was guaranteed. Meanwhile, he recommended an increase in technical support, such as dispatching doctors to Hue University.³⁶

The erosion of the bloc's defence line, then, coupled with demands for more economic assistance, made the FRG adopt a more proactive stance. For the first time, there was a genuine *willingness* to contribute. State Department bureaucrats remarked upon the "frank and friendly" bilateral talks, noting that it was the West Germans, who were taking the initiative and "currently pressing *us*" on "what they might do."³⁷ When juxtaposed with Bonn's dogged evasion of U.S. demands for fraternal aid in 1964 and 1965, this was a remarkable statement. The West German government clearly felt an obligation to respond to American-Vietnamese calls for allied support and assist in the nation-building project.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the FRG's counterparts used the Moscow Declaration as an ideological guideline to understand the relationship between Laos and Vietnam. The ukase proclaimed that in both countries a "national-democratic movement" was developing against the "American imperialists and their flunkies." Hand-in-hand with all Asian, African and Latin American people, the popular masses were determined to demolish the "system of colonial slavery." For MfAA officials, events in Laos confirmed the declaration's claim that Washington was the "central bulwark of modern colonialism." Its

³⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die deutsch-vietnamesische Beziehungen, ihr heutiger Stand und ihre weitere Entwicklung im Hinblick auf die angekündigten Regierungsreformen, die bevorstehende Präsidentenwahl und die Lage in südostasiatischen Raum, 10. Februar 1961'

³⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1608, 'Bassler an das Referat 704. Betreff: Beitrag zur Laos-Frage und der Genfer Laos-Konferenz, 23. Juni 1961'

³⁶ PA AA, B67, Bd.34, 'Vermerk über die Besprechung im BWM, betreffend Kreditwünsche der Republik Vietnams, insbesondere das Hongson Projekt, 19. September,' pp.128-129. See also JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 194, Vietnam General 8/61, 'Ambassador Nolting to Secretary of State. Subject: Status Report on Political Items as of 17 August, 1961'

³⁷ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 194, Vietnam, General 8/61, 'Memorandum from Robert H. Johnson for Mr. Rostow. Subject: The current status of work on the Staley Report, 1 August 1961'; The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum (hereafter, LBJL), The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Vice Presidential Security File, Box 11, Folder 3, Nations and Regions, Status Report Presidential Task Force Viet-Nam, 'Status Report on the Presidential Programme for Viet-Nam, as of 1 September 1961.' My italics.

willingness to sponsor despotic tyrants made it the “main culprit” of the war.³⁸ Just like the battle below the 17th parallel, East Berlin filtered the conflict through an ideological prism. And it seemed, yet again, that the practical confirmed the theoretical. In a private conversation with the leader of the Pathet Lao, Prince Souphanouvong, Ambassador Claudius was told that partisan units were being placed under a uniform command and, thanks to the bloc’s shipment of weapons, fully operational.³⁹ Sure enough, on 8 March, Claudius reported that between eighty to one-hundred of Phoumi’s troops had fallen in one single skirmish.⁴⁰

But despite the stream of positive news from the front, it is remarkable that the East Germans did not deliberate total annexation. Emphasis was placed on curtailing, rather than destroying the enemy. In Beijing, Ambassador Josef Hegen emphasised to a CCP politburo member that the bloc’s relative strength made it possible to “tame” imperialism in Laos.⁴¹ At the heart of this evaluation was the hope that a political summit would restore Phouma to power and dissuade Washington from engaging in a local war.⁴² Already on 9 January, the GDR ambassador in Moscow reported that both Phouma and Norodom Sihanouk had called upon Khrushchev to offset another “Korea.”⁴³ East Berlin positioned itself firmly behind the Kremlin. On 21 January, the Cambodian representative to China was handed an official statement, which endorsed Sihanouk’s proposal of a conference and underlined the GDR’s support for a “peaceful,” “independent,” and “neutral” Laos.⁴⁴

A sceptic reader might counter that this was no more than smoke and mirrors, that Phouma was simply an invaluable tool to be pushed aside at the right moment. Archival evidence, though, suggests that GDR endorsement was genuine. Reading between the lines, whilst policymakers were prepared to offer propaganda and material assistance, there remained

³⁸ PA MfAA, C658/75, ‘Aufzeichnung, der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam, 27. Februar 1961 Zur Entwicklung der Situation in Laos nach dem 9. August 1960, 27. Februar 1961,’ p.40; *New York Times*, ‘Text of Statement by Leaders of 81 Communist Parties After Meeting in Moscow, 7 December 1961,’ p.14

³⁹ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk Nr.10/61. ‘Am 20. Januar 1961 wurde Kollege Claudius vom Führer der Pathet Lao, Souphannavong, der sich im Augenblick in Hanoi befindet, auf Wunsch des hiesigen Außenministeriums empfangen,’ p.128

⁴⁰ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk Nr.48/61. Am 8 März [1961] bat der Außenminister der laotischen Regierung, Pholsena durch die Laos-Abteilung des hiesigen Außenministeriums den Kollegen Claudius um einen Besuch,’ p.143

⁴¹ PA MfAA, A6744, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen Hegen und den Stellv. Vorsitzenden der Volksrepublik China, Genosse Bi-wu anlässlich der Akkreditierung am 30. April 1961,’ p.440

⁴² PA MfAA, C658/75, ‘Aufzeichnung von Winter in der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Zur Entwicklung der Situation in Laos nach dem 9. August 1960, 27. Februar 1961,’ p.52

⁴³ PA MfAA, A770, ‘Vermerk: Am 9. Januar bat der stellvertretende Minister für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Genosse Firjubin die sozialistischen Botschafter zu sich, um sie über einige Fragen der Lage in Laos zu informieren,’ pp.3-4

⁴⁴ PA MfAA, A8569, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Kurzinformation über die wichtigsten Maßnahmen der DDR zur Unterstützung des Kampfes des laotischen Volkes um Frieden, Neutralität und nationale Unabhängigkeit, 21. März 1961,’ p.131

an undercurrent fear that the civil war could ignite. Concern was raised about ARVN troop movements, as well as provocations along the Cambodian perimeter.⁴⁵ It was pertinent that the MfAA expressed alarm about Vietnamese candidness and instructed Claudius to treat the subject of fraternal aid “very discretely.”⁴⁶ The East Germans, in sum, did not want to offer Washington a pretext for war. No doubt the GDR’s own internal problems were at the back of its policymakers’ minds. In the spring of 1961, attention remained fixed on the unresolved Berlin Crisis, especially the mass exodus of fleeing refugees.⁴⁷ The spectre of a hot war on the Indochinese peninsula, right at the point when East Berlin was fighting for state survival, would not only divert Soviet attention, but might postpone the signing of a German peace treaty.

The Ulbricht government, therefore, welcomed the reconvening of the Geneva Conference. It was heralded as a triumph for the Laotian people and the bloc’s “consistent peace policy.” It offered the prospect of resolving international issues in the “spirit of peaceful coexistence,” as well as extricating Laos from “foreign” (that is to say, American) involvement.⁴⁸ GDR executives had every right to be optimistic. The editor of the Pathet Lao newspaper, Sisana Sisane, disclosed to Claudius that “more than two-thirds” of territory was under the coalition’s control.⁴⁹ Given this preponderance of strength, there was a certitude that the western countries, above all, America, would have to make concessions.⁵⁰ Then again, it was precisely because of this “liquidated position” that the East Germans feared an expanded presence below the 17th parallel. Placing Vietnam within a global context, Dreßler warned that Kennedy would increase economic and military assistance to divert from his previous failures.⁵¹ “We are aware,” Deputy Foreign Minister Sepp Schwab assured Ambassador Thuan, “that a very dangerous situation is developing.” Diem, he claimed, could “not last much longer” and projected that Washington would dispose of its marinet in the hope of establishing a

⁴⁵ PA MfAA, A8569, ‘Maßnahmeplan zur Unterstützung des Kampfes des laotischen Volkes für Frieden, Neutralität und Unabhängigkeit, 18. Januar 1961,’ p.123; PA MfAA, A8699, ‘Bericht über die Delegationsreise zum II. Gewerkschaftskongress der vietnamesischen Gewerkschaften vom 23. Februar bis 27. Februar 1961,’ p.174; PA MfAA, A11592, ‘Engelhardt an Dreßler, 28. Februar 1961,’ p.164

⁴⁶ PA MfAA, A8648, ‘Stude an Claudius, Betreff: Erweiterte USA-Invasion in Südvietnam, 10. Mai 1961,’ pp.12-15

⁴⁷ Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall*, pp.169-170

⁴⁸ PA MfAA, A8606, ‘Erklärung des Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zur Eröffnung der Internationalen Konferenz zur Regelung des Laos-Problems in Genf, 10. Mai 1961,’ p.92

⁴⁹ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk Nr. 120/61 über ein Gespräch mit dem Chefredakteur der Zeitung “Lao Hakant,” Direktor des Radios “Freie Stimme der Pathet Lao” und Leiter der Erziehungs- und Propaganda-Kommission des ZK der Neo Lao Haksat, Genossen Sisane Sisana am 18. Mai 1961,’ p.197

⁵⁰ PA MfAA, A8606, ‘Vermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem Genossen V.I. Erofeyev, Sekretär der sowjetischen Delegation zur Laoskonferenz, und I. Zemskov, Berater der sowjetischen Delegation, am 15. Mai 1961’ p.98

⁵¹ PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Erweiterte USA-Invasion in Südvietnam, 27. Mai 1961,’ p.176

“stable” foundation. The United States, Schwab warned, was determined to defend Saigon “at all cost.”⁵²

But although Mark Moyar has contended that Hanoi was not entirely satisfied with developments in the South, private exchanges suggest the opposite.⁵³ During Ung Van Khiem’s Africa tour, the GDR representative in Conakry was informed that the scenario had “never been better,” even when compared with the struggle before 1954.⁵⁴ The revolution could not be asphyxiated. No force could prevent it. It was an “objective law.”⁵⁵ The East Germans shared this confidence. For Dreßler, Washington’s “invasion” was a clear sign of weakness, a sign that its puppet’s regime could not survive independently.⁵⁶ This is not to argue that East Berlin was ignorant of the other side’s strengths. MfAA officials acknowledged that Diem boasted a repressive state system, which remained highly effective in urban areas.⁵⁷ Still, the “multi-layered revolutionary upswing” convinced GDR onlookers that America’s position would “be lost in the foreseeable future.”⁵⁸ To be sure, the most important projection of final conquest was presented to the MfAA in mid-February. It was officially informed that a new organisation had been founded, an organisation that aimed to topple Diem and form a coalition government. The organisation’s title was the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

The Birth of the Vietcong

Although East German diplomats learnt of the NLF’s existence barely a week after its formation, it was not until two months later that the subject was officially broached.⁵⁹ According to Margaret Gnoinska, North Vietnam did not reveal to the Poles that the NLF was “actually Hanoi’s creation.”⁶⁰ East Berlin, however, was under no illusions. In fact, when juxtaposed with Gnoinska’s work, it is remarkable how much information the Vietnamese were

⁵² PA MfAA, A17255, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.4/61 über eine Unterredung des Botschafters der DRV in der DDR, Pham Ngoc Thuan, mit Minister Schwab, am 26. Mai 1961,’ pp.79-84

⁵³ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, p.124; PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Erweiterte USA-Invasion in Südvietnam, 27. Mai 1961,’ p.176

⁵⁴ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk von Kittler in Conakry über Gespräche am Abend des 14. März 1961,’ pp.57-58

⁵⁵ PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Vermerk Nr.49/61 über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abteilung Osteuropa am 25. Februar und 8. März über die Situation in Südvietnam,’ pp.116-127. See also, PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.80/61 über eine Botschafterinformation am 4. April 1961 gegeben vom stellv. Hoang Van Tien im Außenministerium,’ pp.70-73

⁵⁶ PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Erweiterte USA-Invasion in Südvietnam, 27. Mai 1961,’ p.176; PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Situation in Südvietnam, 23. Juni 1961,’ p.124

⁵⁷ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Aufzeichnung von I. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnams. Betreff: Information über die Lage in Südvietnam, 20. April 1961,’ p.138

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.140

⁵⁹ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.295/60 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Chien Sy am 31. Dezember 1960,’ pp.38-39

⁶⁰ M. Gnoinska, ‘Poland and the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia,’ pp.491-492

prepared to divulge. On 11 February, the first secretary, Phan Van Kim, requested a meeting with Fritz Stude and Ilse Engelhardt. The exchange was marked “strictly confidential.” Its purpose was to provide an overview of the reunification struggle. Stude and Engelhardt were told that the 15th Plenary Session had set down the theoretical blueprint. It had been decided that military combat should only be used to complement the political fight. But “now,” Kim declared, “the situation has changed so much that the armed partisan struggle is given priority in certain areas.” The failed November putsch had led policymakers to conclude that the “crisis” of the RVN regime “has begun.” Consistent with the 15th Plenary Session’s resolution, Kim revealed that the Vietcong had been formed on 20 December 1960 to collect and unite all forces which opposed Diem. He admitted that it had been “established by the Workers’ Party of Vietnam,” but that this should, “of course,” be kept secret. “The time has come to set up this front with the aim of overthrowing the [...] Diem regime,” he declared. In response to Stude’s question whether the slogan “overthrow Diem” was new, Kim explained that “previously, we have said that we are fighting against the Americans and [...] Diem, now, we are just saying ‘fight against Diem.’”⁶¹

GDR policymakers appreciated that the genesis of the Vietcong marked a “new stage.” This was illustrated, above all, by their inquisitive probing. Both in East Berlin and Hanoi question sheets were handed over with requests for further material.⁶² One specific issue that intrigued the MfAA was the interregnum period from the downfall of Diem until final reunification. The Vietcong’s ten-point-programme did not explain how the two territories would merge.⁶³ This was significant to East Berlin, for it highlighted a crucial difference between Germany and Vietnam. Whereas the Ulbricht government identified the existence of two German states, Hanoi did not recognise the RVN, either *de facto* or *de jure*. There was,

⁶¹ PA MfAA, A17255, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.1/61 über eine Unterredung des Koll. Stude mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der DRV, Phan Van Kim, am 11. Februar 1961,’ pp.67-76. Two days later, the North Vietnamese confirmed, once more, that the VWP had founded the National Liberation Front. See PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.2/61 über eine Unterredung der Kollegin Engelhardt mit dem Presseattaché der Botschaft der DRV, Gen Truong Quang Ngo am 13. Februar,’ p.111

⁶² PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.2/61 über eine Unterredung der Kollegin Engelhardt mit dem Presseattaché der Botschaft der DRV, Gen Truong Quang Ngo am 13. Februar,’ pp.112-114; PA MfAA, A11592, ‘Engelhardt an Dreßler. Betreff: Manifest der Befreiungsfront Südvietnams, 28. Februar 1961,’ p.164; PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Vermerk Nr.49/61 über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abt. Osteuropa am 25. Februar und 8. März über die Situation in Südvietnam,’ pp.116-127

PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.56/61 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abteilung Osteuropa am 18. März 1961 über die Situation in Südvietnam,’ pp.59-66

⁶³ PA MfAA, A11592, ‘Engelhardt an Dreßler. Betreff: Manifest der Befreiungsfront Südvietnam, 28. Februar 1961’ p.165

hence, a concern that East Berlin's propaganda support could clash with the German question.⁶⁴ Vietnamese responses were consistent. Not only Kim, but also the deputy head of the East European department, emphasised that they would never accept two Vietnamese states. Both, however, claimed that reunification would be a step-by-step process. Diem needed to be eliminated swiftly in order to counteract an American response. Once the president had fallen, Hanoi would "begin talks on reunification with a new South Vietnamese government."⁶⁵ In theory, therefore, the plan was simple: Unite all patriotic forces to topple Diem through a combined political and military struggle, which would, eventually, lead to a national-democratic coalition and precipitate final reunification.

There is little evidence to suggest that the East Germans objected to this programme. Stude assured Kim that his government was "very happy" about the formation of the NLF, that it represented a "very important" step towards liberating South Vietnam.⁶⁶ In the eyes of East Berlin, Washington and Saigon remained the culprits. The Vietcong was no more than a response to their oppressive practices, especially the violation of the Geneva Accords.⁶⁷ Approval was also voiced for the NLF's endeavour to expand its popular base. In the countryside, the statistics were impressive. During a meeting with a Vietcong affiliate, Dreßler was told that in the Mekong-Delta 470 of 493 communities were under rebel control. Not even the vicinity around Saigon was safe, with skirmishes transpiring barely six kilometres from the capital.⁶⁸ Influence in urban areas, though, remained comparatively weak. The NLF, Dreßler reported, was, therefore, trying to interconnect the two struggles and mobilise support inside the metropolises. To overcome Diem's ban on free movement, partisans were visiting cities under the pretext of filing reports, but, instead, encouraging others to familiarise themselves with the revolutionary struggle. Claudius even contended that the programme did not go far

⁶⁴ PA MfAA, A8687, 'Sektion Vietnam an die Botschaft in der DRV, 12. April 1961, Betreff: Einschätzung der Kräfteverhältnisse in Südvietnam,' p.116. On the GDR's adoption of the "two-state" theory, see Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, p.170

⁶⁵ PA MfAA, A17255, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.1/61 über eine Unterredung des Koll. Stude mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der DRV, Phan Van Kim, am 11. Februar 1961,' p.71; PA MfAA, A11591, 'Vermerk Nr.49/61 über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abteilung Osteuropa am 25. Februar und 8. März 1961 über die Situation in Südvietnam,' pp.118-119; PA MfAA, A11591, 'Vermerk Nr.56/61 über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abteilung Osteuropa am 18. März 1961,' p.129

⁶⁶ PA MfAA, A8590, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.1/61 über eine Unterredung des Koll. Stude mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der DRV, Phan Van Kim, am 11. Februar 1961,' p.105

⁶⁷ PA MfAA, A8687, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Information über die Lage in Südvietnam, 20. April 1961,' pp.131-140; PA MfAA, A8648, 'Stude an Claudius. Betreff: Erweiterte USA-Invasion in Südvietnam 10. Mai 1961,' p.14; PA MfAA, A11591, 'Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Erweiterte USA-Invasion in Südvietnam, 27. Mai 1961,' pp.170-177

⁶⁸ PA MfAA, A8572, 'Vermerk Nr.150/61 über ein Gespräch am 5. Juli 1961, Abteilung Südvietnam,' pp.207-217; On the NLF's interest in separating the Diem regime from its urban support, see R. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (London, 1998), pp.11-12

enough. The role of the national bourgeoisie, he complained to Florin, was undervalued and the NLF needed to incorporate those “pro-American” elements, which had tried to usurp Diem in November.⁶⁹ Still, the principal strategy was not contested. Nor did Dreßler express doubt, when DRV officials claimed that it was only a question of “when and how” Diem would fall.⁷⁰

Interestingly, these assurances of inevitable triumph below the 17th parallel coincided with an increased awareness of domestic problems. When comparing the two issues, it was ominous how the tone switched from confidence to concern. Whilst attending the Vietnamese Congress of Trade Unions in late February, the visiting GDR delegation reported on the difficulties of agricultural development. The lack of mechanised equipment and transport facilities meant that farmers had to push their ploughs by hand, whereas women had to carry finished produces (approximately fifty kilogrammes) on their own shoulders. At a special reception in the presidential palace, Ho Chi Minh himself made a personal plea for fraternal assistance.⁷¹

But it was only after the Second National Congress, where the harvest failure of 1960 took centre stage, that the East Germans began to realise just how serious the situation had become. Out of the projected 5.6 million tonnes of unpeeled rice, the annual economic plan had merely generated 4.4 million, resulting in a shortfall of 1.2 million. Furthermore, the population density was growing at an alarming rate. “New Hanoi,” it was confirmed, would triple in size and the inhabitants would grow by about 38%.⁷² There was clearly a widening gap between the amount of food available and the number of mouths to feed. In fact, the Secretary of the Assembly, Tran Dinh Tri, disclosed to Dreßler that the shortages were so severe that famine had broken out in several provinces.⁷³ Because of this domestic crisis, DRV leaders were forced to introduce a new price policy and inhibit peasants from selling their meagre produces on the black market.⁷⁴ It was striking just how open the East Germans were in their criticism. Prior to his recall, Claudius complained to his French colleague that the target

⁶⁹ PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Claudius an Florin, Betreff: Übernahme chinesischer Erfahrungen in der DRV, 21. März 1961,’ pp.335-336

⁷⁰ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.49/61 über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abteilung Osteuropa am 25. Februar und 8. März [1961] über die Situation in Südvietnam,’ p.126

⁷¹ PA MfAA, A8699, ‘Bericht über die Delegationsreise zum II. Gewerkschaftskongress der vietnamesischen Gewerkschaften vom 23. Februar bis 27. Februar 1961,’ pp.168-175

⁷² PA MfAA, A8690, ‘Vermerk Nr.101/61 über ein Gespräch mit dem Sekretär des Ständigen Ausschusses der Nationalversammlung, Kollegen Tri, am 28. April, 1961,’ p.108, p.110

⁷³ Ibid., p.108

⁷⁴ PA MfAA, A8650, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem vietnamesischen Geschäftsträger, Botschaftsrat Tran-trong Quat am 11. April 1961,’ p.31; PA MfAA, A8690, ‘Vermerk Nr.101/61 über ein Gespräch mit dem Sekretär des Ständigen Ausschusses der Nationalversammlung, Kollegen Tri, am 28. April, 1961,’ p.111

data had been “much too ambitious.”⁷⁵ No doubt he felt a certain amount of vindication. The ambassador was aware of Hanoi’s strong economic ties with Beijing, as well as its decision to divert from the Soviet model. Chinese representatives, he pointed out, frequently visited the neighbouring province of Lao-Cai to advertise the advantages of people’s communes.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, even though the abandonment of Maoist economic principles was watched with quiet satisfaction, it simultaneously reminded the East Germans that North Vietnam remained a backward state, that its domestic position was fragile and unprepared for a fully-fledged war.

Dwindling Optimism

FRG diplomats in Saigon were oblivious to Hanoi’s internal quandaries. Their attention revolved, instead, around the Vietcong. With Wendland on home leave, Erich Jakob took charge of the ambassadorial duties and offered an entirely different appraisal. The former, as chronicled above, had highlighted “bright spots,” hoping to convince his superiors that Saigon deserved fraternal assistance.⁷⁷ In his first memorandum, Jakob refused to mince words. The “flash visits” of renowned U.S. statesmen, such as General Lemnitzer and Averell Harriman, he warned, laid bare the “extremely critical” situation. Compared with the 4.000 insurgents operating in 1960, Jakob estimated that the number had tripled, whereas the ARVN’s defence tactic remained both uncoordinated and unsuited for guerrilla warfare.⁷⁸

An example of Jakob’s criticism was provided the following month. On 20 June, the high command launched Operation Dong-Da. Its objective had been to re-establish government authority in the Vinh-Binh province, where partisans owned small workshops and had even built recruitment centres. Marine commandos were tasked with blockading the coast from the sea. Infantrymen would, in turn, move through the rice paddies and encircle NLF insurgents. Theoretically, Jakob saw little chance of escape. Practically, cooperation proved fallible. The

⁷⁵ TNA, FO371/160147, ‘From Her Majesty’s Consul General, Hanoi to SEAD. Subject: North Vietnamese target figures for 1965: Encloses a list of figures given by the Minister of Heavy Industry in a Press Article, 29 July 1961’

⁷⁶ PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Claudius an Florin, Betreff: Übernahme chinesischer Erfahrungen in der DRV, 21. März 1961,’ pp.333-334, p.337; On the connection between the North Vietnamese and Chinese economy, see, for instance, PA MfAA, A8650, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem vietnamesischen Geschäftsträger, Botschaftsrat Tran-trong Quat am 11. April 1961,’ p.31; PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.272/61 über ein Gespräch des Botschafters Genosse Nohr mit dem stellv. Präsident der Allgemeinen Gewerkschaftsbundes Vietnams, Genossen Nguyen Cong Hoa, 23. November 1961,’ pp.4-5

⁷⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1660, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die Ziele des Kommunismus in Südvietsnam, 17. April 1961’

⁷⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, ‘Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuchswelle amerikanischer Politiker und Militäre in Vietnam, 8. Mai 1961.’ A similar estimate was reported by the West German representative at NATO headquarters, who claimed that the rebel numbers had increased from 3.000 in May 1959 to 12.000 in June 1961. See PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, ‘Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bei der Nordatlantikpakt-Organisation an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 28. Juni 1961’

Marines, he complained, had been far too slow in carrying out the blockade, thereby, allowing cadres to either abscond, or resume their daily work.⁷⁹ The botched operation was testament to the difficult, almost impossible, venture of separating the Vietcong from local villagers. Government forces were chasing shadows and Jakob spoke of a “permanent insecurity.”⁸⁰

Alternatives, however, remained scant. There was no talk of either negotiations or withdrawal. Jakob, just like Wendland, envisaged the Eastern Bloc as one cohesive unit. If the communists captured Saigon, then the entire hemisphere would fall “like a ripe fruit.” The RVN, he insisted, had become a “test-case” of Western “strength.”⁸¹ At the same time, Jakob understood that Diem was wary of U.S. intervention, for it would substantiate the Vietcong’s claim that he was an “imperialist lackey.”⁸² Rather than direct involvement, Jakob stressed that Diem wanted additional advisers, as well as American credits to recruit 50.000 more soldiers.⁸³ Interestingly, the counsellor claimed that Diem was confident about his bargaining position: “One hears in the highest government circles that if Vietnam needs the assistance of the United States, then the Americans [...] need Vietnamese cooperation much more.” The RVN leadership, Jakob pointed out, was certain that even a small change in the superpower’s policy would crystallise a loss in prestige.⁸⁴ After Cuba and Laos, JFK could not afford another Cold War setback. His government had no other choice. It was compelled to sponsor Diem.

Sure enough, Lyndon Johnson’s subsequent tour of Southeast Asia, which coincided with the opening of the Geneva Conference, conveyed Washington’s resolve to counter the “confidence crisis.”⁸⁵ LBJ’s relentless lionising of Diem left Jakob in no doubt that the U.S. was determined to persist with their man “come what may.” Yet it was not the vice-president’s assurances that struck Jakob. It was, rather, his complete disregard for cultural norms.

⁷⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, ‘Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Die Sicherheitslage in den Provinzen südwestlich von Saigon, 12. Juli 1961’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, ‘Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Entwicklung der Sicherheitslage in Südvietsnam innerhabl des letzen Monats, 7. August 1961’

⁸⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, ‘Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Sicherheitslage in den Zentralprovinzen Südvietsnams, 15. Juli 1961’

⁸¹ PA AA, B67, Bd.32, ‘Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Deutsche Wirtschaftshilfe für Südvietsnam, 20. Juni 1961,’ pp.508-509

⁸² PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, ‘Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuchswelle amerikanischer Politiker und Militäre in Vietnam, 8. Mai 1961,’; Library of Congress (hereafter, LOC), The Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 527, Folder 4, Special Files, Public Service, JFK-LBJ, SEA, 29 April-5 May 1961, ‘From Saigon to Sec of State, 3 May 1961’

⁸³ LOC, The Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 527, Folder 4, Special Files, Public Service, JFK-LBJ, SEA, 29 April-5 May 1961, ‘From Mendenhall to Secretary of State, 3 May 1961’; PA AA, B67, Bd.31, ‘Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuch des Vizepräsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten Lyndon B. Johnson in Saigon, 18. Mai 1961,’ p.502

⁸⁴ PA AA, B67, Bd.31, ‘Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuch des Vizepräsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten Lyndon B. Johnson in Saigon, 18. Mai 1961,’ p.503

⁸⁵ PA AA, B32, Bd.145, ‘Grewe an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Reise Vizepräsident Johnsons durch Südostasien, 9. Juni 1961’

Johnson's vigorous persona, he reported, had clashed with the "observant and contemplative" Asian psychology.⁸⁶ Time after time, the vice-president had ordered the convoy to stop, so that he could mingle with the crowd and identify himself as a "baby kisser." LBJ's mannerisms, the counsellor observed, had bemused foreign onlookers and brought to mind an American election campaign.⁸⁷ It certainly entrenched Jakob's own belief that U.S. policymakers knew little, if anything, about their partner's customs and traditions.

Besides, notwithstanding LBJ's verbal and contractual pledges, Jakob remained dispirited about the future. Not only did he speak of a permanent insecurity, he also highlighted the problem of "defeatism." It was "a fact" that citizens were losing interest in the RVN and had begun to focus on their personal welfare. "The overwhelming majority no longer believes in victory [...]," Jakob claimed. "They are just wondering: How much longer will it take?"⁸⁸ Even at the highest level, confidence was dwindling. Jakob reported that the Director for Foreign Aid, Vu Van Thai, along with a number of other state officials, had tendered his resignation and that relatives were being sent to France for "health reasons."⁸⁹ Jakob blamed the lack of will on the Diem government. It had failed to fashion a national identity. Although he himself estimated the chances of defeating the Vietcong at about 50%, RVN citizens seemed to think that it was between 25- to 10%. The Vietnamese, Jakob maintained, were generally anti-communist. But if the options were either an unpopular dictatorship or Bolshevisation, then there did not seem to be much difference.⁹⁰ The problem was, hence, psychological. The people needed something or someone to believe in. They needed a motivation to fight.

Jakob was not alone in his pessimism. On 13 October, Herrmann informed his superiors that the conflict had transformed into a "regular, albeit undeclared war." The ferocity of the fighting troubled him. In one single month, 1.500 civilians had lost their lives.⁹¹ The two men disagreed, however, on the central problem. Whereas Jakob pointed to the loss of morale,

⁸⁶ PA AA, B67, Bd.31, 'Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuch des Vizepräsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten Lyndon B. Johnson in Saigon, 18. Mai 1961,' pp.499-500. Interestingly, Ambassador Bidder in Thailand offered a similar appraisal of LBJ's visit to Bangkok. See PA AA, B32, Bd.145, 'Bidder an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuch des amerikanischen Vizepräsidenten Lyndon B. Johnson und die thailändisch-amerikanischen Beziehungen, 21. Juni 1961,' pp.289-293

⁸⁷ PA AA, B67, Bd.31, 'Jakob an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuch des Vizepräsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten Lyndon B. Johnson in Saigon, 18. Mai 1961'

⁸⁸ PA AA, B67, Bd.34, 'Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Defaitismus im vietnamesischen Bürgertum, 5. Oktober 1961,' p.240, p.243

⁸⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, 'Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Innenpolitische Lage in Südvietsnam, 11. Juli 1961'; PA AA, B67, Bd.34, 'Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Defaitismus im vietnamesischen Bürgertum, 5. Oktober 1961,' p.243

⁹⁰ PA AA, B67, Bd.34, 'Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Defaitismus im vietnamesischen Bürgertum, 5. Oktober 1961,' p.240, p.244

⁹¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.35/61, Sicherheitslage in Südvietsnam, 13. Oktober 1961'

Herrmann emphasised external threats. The RVN's political survival, he argued, was interlocked with Laos. If Phouma succeeded in forming a neutralist government that controlled the entire country, then the Vietcong's resources through the "Laotian corridor" would be inhibited. But if the Pathet Lao remained in control of the bordering regions, then the supply lines would be secured and initiate further subversion.⁹²

Whether Herrmann believed that a neutral Laos was realistic seems unlikely. On his subsequent visit to Vientiane, he reported that government troops were violating the ceasefire and had launched coordinated (albeit, calamitous) assaults.⁹³ Cables from Geneva echoed these evaluations. "We doubt," the U.S. deputy negotiator told the FRG's representative, Erich Boltze, "whether we have been wise to come at all and whether we have not gone too far already."⁹⁴ The opposite side did not appear enthusiastic about neutralisation either. During a private conversation with the RVN's chargé d'affaires, Bassler was told that "one cannot help get the feeling that between the Soviet delegation, on the one hand, and the other two [the Chinese and North Vietnamese] on the other, there are tactical differences." To be more precise, the former wanted a prompt solution, whereas the latter wanted to slow down discussions.⁹⁵ The South Vietnamese were not the only ones who had noticed this discrepancy. Josef Hegen had noticed too.

Tactical Disagreements

Josef Hegen was a dyed-in-the-wool Marxist. Born in Hunschgrün, Böhmen to a working-class family, he was no older than fourteen when he joined the Young Communist League. In 1933, he became a politburo member of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party and completed his political education at the Lenin-school in Moscow.⁹⁶ During the penultimate year of World War II, Hegen was parachuted into Nazi-occupied Slovakia, with orders to facilitate the Red Army's advance towards Prague. Barely one-hundred kilometres behind enemy lines, he fell into the hands of the Gestapo. His point of contact had been betrayed and Hegen was carted off to Mauthausen concentration camp, where he was selected for

⁹² Ibid.; PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, 'Aufzeichnung von Jakob. Betreff: Sicherheitslage im Raum Saigon, 28. Juli 1961'

⁹³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1595, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr. 40/61. Derzeitige Entwicklung in Laos, 9. November 1961'

⁹⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1609, 'Boltze an das Auswärtige Amt, Fernschreiben Nr.91, 26. Mai 1961'

⁹⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1608, 'Bassler an die Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Moskau, Hongkong, Saigon, London, Washington, Genf. Betreff: Laos-Konferenz, 2. August 1961'

⁹⁶ H. Müller-Enbergs, J. Wielgoths, D. Hoffmann (Hrsg.), *Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein biographisches Lexikon* (Berlin, 2000), pp.321-322

particularly cruel methods of torture.⁹⁷ But despite Heinrich Himmler's instructions to massacre prison inmates, the order was, for some unexplained reason, never carried out.⁹⁸ Hegen survived. And, following his return to Czechoslovakia, he oversaw the expulsion of German Bohemians, before relocating to the GDR himself.⁹⁹

Everything about Hegen screamed ideology. Here was a man, who had dedicated his life to the Marxist-Leninist cause. It was the reason why Ulbricht handpicked him for the role of ambassador to Poland in 1957 and it was undoubtedly the reason why he sent Hegen to Beijing four years later. The intra-bloc dispute was a delicate subject and Hegen was considered a "hardliner," someone who would follow party protocol.¹⁰⁰ A month after his arrival, Hegen dispatched a handwritten message to Ulbricht. "There are signs," it read, "that [...] differences in the conduct of the PRC on international issues are resurfacing." Laos was a prime example. Beijing, Hegen noted, was "evidently in disagreement" with the Kremlin's plan of action. Its standpoint, endorsed to a great extent by Hanoi, was "what has not been attained through weapons, cannot be attained through negotiations." Neutralism was "not a solution." Instead, the circumstances were favourable for the Pathet Lao, which needed to take advantage of the forthcoming monsoon season. "This view," Hegen warned, "was expressed by representatives of the Chinese Foreign Office, as well as the Vietnamese embassy."¹⁰¹

Hegen's letter revealed that, underneath the surface, intra-bloc friction was still discernible. To highlight this friction further, it is worth examining Hegen's discussion with his DRV counterpart. On 12 May, Tran Tu Binh told Hegen that, from a political standpoint, the main task was to form a government under Souvanna Phouma. "The leadership of this government, though," Binh insisted, "must lie in the hands of the Pathet Lao, only then will a genuine peace be assured." He dismissed the so-called "Austrian example" and seemed completely unperturbed about the prospect of discussions breaking down. "One has to be willing to fight again," he remarked, "and then to negotiate again and then fight again." This

⁹⁷ H. Brie, *Erinnerungen eines linken Weltbürgers* (Berlin, 2006), p.112. Brie's account differs sharply from the biographical lexicon of the GDR. I have chosen to rely on Brie, since he was an embassy official in Beijing and knew Hegen personally.

⁹⁸ R. Haunschmied, J. Mills, S. Witzany-Durda, *St. Georgen-Gusen-Mauthausen - Concentration Camp Mauthausen Reconsidered* (Norderstedt, 2007), p. 289

⁹⁹ Müller-Enbergs, Wielgoß, Hoffmann (Hrsg.), *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, p.322

¹⁰⁰ H. Wentker, 'Bedroht von Ost und West. Die Entstalinisierung von 1956 als Herausforderung für die DDR,' in R. Engelmann, T. Großbölting und H. Wentker (Hrsg.), *Kommunismus in der Krise. Die Entstalinisierung 1956 und die Folgen* (Göttingen, 2008), p.162. On Hegen's adherence to the party line during the Polish crisis in the 1950's, see B. Ihme-Tuchel, "'Manche haben vom Polyzentrismus geträumt.'" Die Reaktion der SED auf die polnische Krise von 1956,' in H. Timmermann (Hrsg.), *Die DDR - Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates* (Berlin, 2001), p.575

¹⁰¹ SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1222, 'Hegen an Ulbricht, 31. Mai, 1961,' pp.9-11

was an endorsement of Mao's "fight fight, talk talk" strategy, which aimed at keeping the dialogue open, whilst using the interval to remobilise and resume the offensive.¹⁰² Binh also placed the conflict in an international milieu. The struggle, he declared, would not merely precipitate victory in Laos, but would have a "great influence" on the revolutionary movements throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. It would prove that the U.S. was incapable of coping with a small country and, thus, be a "huge contribution" to the triumph of socialism. The exchange ended with a coda on South Vietnam. Just like Laos, Binh estimated that developments below the 17th parallel were "favourable." 50% of the villages in the central areas had been "liberated," whereas in the southern part, the figures were even more impressive, with 800 out of 1.100 under NLF control.¹⁰³

Hegen did not challenge these comments, but he left the meeting visibly nonplussed. The ambassador noticed Binh's continual use of "we" when referring to guerrilla forces in Laos and he must have realised that this appraisal deviated from Khrushchev's public insistences that the Kremlin wanted a "neutral Laos after the model of Austria."¹⁰⁴ Privately, Hegen felt that Binh had "more or less" told him that the time for "active action" had arrived. Although Hegen offered no further reflections, it was telling that he relayed to Ulbricht the Soviet ambassador's "great concern." According to Stepan Chervonenko, the Vietnamese wanted to implement policies without consulting the bloc. "This could produce a situation," he warned, "in which [...] the socialist countries will be sucked into a confrontation at a time not of our choosing, with all its consequences."¹⁰⁵

In the historiography, it is often argued that from 1961 the Soviets began to "disengage" from Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁶ The GDR perspective, however, challenges this assertion. It reveals that the Kremlin was, instead, competing with Beijing for Vietnamese patronage. On 2 August, the embassy in Moscow reported that their Soviet counterparts were pursuing an "extremely

¹⁰² Interestingly, the Chinese made the exact same argument to Hegen and compared the situation with the Korean War. On the Chinese contention that it would be better for the Pathet Lao to continue the military conflict, whilst negotiating at the same time, see Hegen's discussion with the Vice-President of China, Dong Biwu in PA MfAA, A6744, 'Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen Hegen und den stellv. Vorsitzenden der Volksrepublik China, Genosse Bi-wu anlässlich der Akkreditierung am 30. April 1961,' pp.438a-440. For an example of Mao's "fight fight, talk talk" strategy, see S. Jager, *Brothers at War. The Unending Conflict in Korea* (London, 2013), p.194

¹⁰³ PA MfAA, A6744, 'Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem vietnamesischen Botschafter über die Laos-Frage während der Exkursion des Diplomatischen Korps am 12. Mai 1961,' pp.456-457

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.457; JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 79, Germany, Adenauer Visit, 4/61, 'Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Meeting between the Secretary and the German Chancellor and Foreign Minister, 12 April 1961'; Gaiduk, *USSR and Vietnam*, p.149, p.160

¹⁰⁵ SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1222, 'Brief von Hegen an Ulbricht, 31. Mai.1961,' pp.9-11

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance, Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p.58, Gaiduk, *USSR and Vietnam*, p.177, p.209

active” economic plan.¹⁰⁷ In 1961, Hanoi was presented with both a 460 million rouble aid package and a 510 million rouble credit.¹⁰⁸ The objective, GDR officials emphasised, was to ensure “unanimous opinion” on “all ideological and practical questions”¹⁰⁹ Simply put, the Kremlin was employing its financial might to attain Hanoi’s support for the bloc’s (or rather, its own) political programme. Hegen, in turn, emphasised that Beijing was endeavouring to broaden its influence. Irrespective of the Great Leap Forward fiasco, Hanoi had received a grant of approximately 900 million- and a loan of 300 million rouble.¹¹⁰ Liu Shaoqi justified this succour by pointing out that North Vietnam was on the “frontline of the socialist camp.” Its geographical location required the maintenance of large armies and the PRC was, therefore, offering “uncompensated military assistance.” “In fact,” Liu reflected, “it is like having our own units there.”¹¹¹

The president’s remark was telling. It implied that he considered Vietnam to be in Beijing’s sphere of influence, to be Beijing’s responsibility. In contrast, when the East Germans requested fraternal assistance to overcome the FRG’s economic blockade, Chinese policymakers demurred. The People’s Republic, they noted, was only providing support for “certain countries” and advised East Berlin to seek help from Moscow.¹¹² Nor was it simply on a fiscal level that Beijing was tightening its grip. Claudius’ replacement, Karl Nohr, noticed a sharp rise in Chinese teachers at both the party’s school and Hanoi University. “It follows,” he warned, “that, on an ideological and scientific field, PRC influence is growing.”¹¹³ The East Germans feared that these developments would allow China to exercise pressure on Hanoi and

¹⁰⁷ PA MfAA, A266, ‘Bericht von Nestler über die Besuche der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der KVDR und der Regierungsdelegation der DRV in der Sowjetunion, 2. August, 1961,’ p.59. On Soviet continued interest in Indochina, see the head of the Southeast Asian department’s comments to Heinz Abraham, in PA MfAA, A770, ‘Auszug aus dem Aktenvermerk des Genossen Prof. Abraham über ein Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Südostasien-Abteilung im MID, Genossen Moljakow, 28. November 1961,’ p.17

¹⁰⁸ PA MfAA, C1064/73, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kittler in der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Kurzfassung des Jahresberichtes der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnams für 1961 vom 6. Dezember 1961,’ p.29. See also, PA MfAA, A266, ‘Anhang zum Bericht über den Besuch der Regierungsdelegationen Koreas und Vietnams in der UdSSR, 1. August 1961,’ pp.54-55

¹⁰⁹ PA MfAA, A266, ‘Bericht von Nestler über die Besuche der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der KVDR und der Regierungsdelegation der DRV in der Sowjetunion, 2. August, 1961,’ p.59. On Soviet fiscal aid, see also, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg (hereafter, BArch-MA), DVW1/6426, Bd.1, ‘Aufzeichnung von Erwin Witt. Betreff: Bericht über die Einschätzung der militärisch-politische Lage der DRV, 12. Dezember 1961’

¹¹⁰ PA MfAA, C1064/73, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kittler in der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Kurzfassung des Jahresberichtes der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnams für 1961 vom 6. Dezember 1961,’ p.64

¹¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1222, ‘Aktenvermerk über den Abschiedsbesuch beim Vorsitzenden der Volksrepublik China, Genossen Liu Schau-tji am 8. Februar 1961,’ p.8

¹¹² SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1221, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung in der Abteilung internationale Verbindungen des ZK der KP China am 3. Februar 1961,’ p.68

¹¹³ PA MfAA, C1064/73, ‘Jahresbericht der Botschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der DRV, 6. Dezember 1961,’ p.65

dictate its foreign policies. Indeed, this was seemingly confirmed, when Hanoi refused to accept the de-facto expulsion of Albania from the Communist Bloc.

Vietnamese Disobedience

Ulbricht had been aware, for some time, that Soviet-Albanian relations were sour. At the Moscow Conference, he received a transcript of a conversation, in which Hoxha had yelled and gesticulated at the premier, before storming out of the room.¹¹⁴ The Albanians had never accepted Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation programme and were alarmed by Soviet rapprochement with their Yugoslav nemesis.¹¹⁵ In the aftermath of the conference, Ulbricht, undoubtedly on orders from above, published his report, which accused the Albanian delegates of an "especially dogmatic" attitude. It was the first time, since the Stalin-Tito split, that one communist state had publicly disparaged another.¹¹⁶ In August, at the height of the Berlin Crisis, Hoxha refused to attend the Warsaw Pact summit, which had been convened to finalise the construction of the wall. Ulbricht took offense and demanded the exclusion of the Albanian representative, dismissing him as "not competent" enough to participate.¹¹⁷ On 18 December, East Berlin imitated the Kremlin's decision to withdraw its envoy from Tirana.¹¹⁸ By the end of 1961, the East German government no longer recognised the PLA as a Marxist-Leninist party.

At first glance, the expulsion of Albania appears rather trivial. After all, it was the smallest member of the bloc. The state was poor, isolated and weak. Albanian defiance of the Kremlin's authority was far more significant than its size, however. For the East Germans, it represented a new phase in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Beijing had turned Tirana into its political mouthpiece and created an axis inside the socialist camp.¹¹⁹ At the CPSU's 22nd Congress in

¹¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11769, 'Niederschrift einer Unterredung zwischen Delegationen des ZK der KPdSU und des ZK der APdA, am 12. November 1960,' pp.131-155.

¹¹⁵ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.201; Hoxha, *The Khrushchevites*, pp.353, pp.362-365

¹¹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3590, 'Brief des ZK der Albanischen Partei der Arbeit an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 14. Januar 1961,' p.1; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Records of the Ambassador at Large, Llewellyn E. Thompson, 1961-1970, Box 4, Lot 67D2, Albania. 'Draft from B. Zook. Subject: Tirana's Defiance of Moscow Underscored by Albanian party congress, 1 March 1961'

¹¹⁷ B. Bonwetsch, A. Filitow, 'Chruschtschow und der Mauerbau. Die Gipfelkonferenz der Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten vom 3.-5. August 1961,' *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Jahrgang 48, Heft 1, (2000), p.164; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3478, 'Standpunkt Albaniens auf der Beratung zum Abschluss eines Friedensvertrages mit Deutschland, 3. August 1961,' pp.11-14

¹¹⁸ ND-Archiv, Nr.348/1961, 'Beziehungen DDR-Albanien, 19. Dezember 1961' p.1; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3592, 'Ministerium für Auswärtiges Amt in Tirana an die Botschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 26. Dezember 1961,' p.150

¹¹⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/2373, 'Auswertung der Beschlüsse des 22. Parteitages der KPdSU, n.d.' pp.19-20; PA MfAA, A6744, 'Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Sziget, Botschaftsrat der ungarischen Botschaft am 8. November 1961, p.93'

October, Zhou Enlai's publicly condemned Khrushchev's treatment of Albania as "un-Marxist" and symbolically placed a wreath on Stalin's tomb.¹²⁰ The subsequent welcome reception for the prime minister in Beijing, which encompassed an "extraordinarily large number of leading functionaries," including Mao himself, made it clear to the East Germans that Zhou's "open partisanship for Albania" had been consistent with the party hierarchy.¹²¹ China's deviant attitude, Hegen cautioned, was "weakening the entire socialist camp" and would make it more difficult for both the USSR and the other states to "pursue their peace policy."¹²²

Just like the previous year, the unspoken question was which countries would align with China. Interestingly, GDR executives took a particular interest in Hanoi. On 18 November, the Counsellor of the Embassy in Moscow, Heinz Abraham, raised North Vietnam's position with a central committee member.¹²³ Chinese influence, it seemed, was growing throughout the Southeast Asian region and Soviet critique of Beijing wanting to solve every question with "one or two battalions" was taken seriously.¹²⁴ Perhaps a further explanation for East German interest was that bilateral ties were the strongest they had ever been in the autumn of 1961. The MfAA had been delighted with Vietnamese propaganda support, above all, Ho Chi Minh's repeated public demands for the signing of a peace agreement.¹²⁵ In contrast to his Chinese and Korean counterparts, Ho also responded to Ulbricht's letter, notifying him of the August summit, by sending a strong delegation in the shape of the celebrated General Giap.¹²⁶ "It is clear [...]," Phan Van Kim assured Stude, "that

¹²⁰ PA MfAA, M1635, 'Aufzeichnung von Hegen. Betreff: Vorläufige Einschätzung der Haltung der Kommunistische Partei Chinas zum XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, 2. November 1961,' pp.52-53

¹²¹ PA MfAA, A6764, 'Aufzeichnung von Stude. Betreff: Einige Bemerkungen zur Rede Tschou En-lais auf dem XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU,' p.184; PA MfAA, M1635, 'Aufzeichnung von Hegen. Betreff: Vorläufige Einschätzung der Haltung der Kommunistische Partei Chinas zum XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, 2. November 1961,' p.54

¹²² PA MfAA, M1635, 'Aufzeichnung von Hegen. Betreff: Vorläufige Einschätzung der Haltung der Kommunistische Partei Chinas zum XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, 2. November 1961,' p.58

¹²³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3497, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung mit dem stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter im ZK der KPdSU, Genossen Medwedjew, am 18. November 1961,' p.210

¹²⁴ PA MfAA, A8733, 'Kittler an Genosse Wenning in China, 14. Dezember 1961,' p.2

¹²⁵ PA MfAA, A8683, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Einschätzung der Stellungnahmen der Demokratischen Republik Vietnams zum Abschluss eines Friedensvertrages mit beiden deutschen Staaten und zur Regelung der Westberlinfrage, 26. Juli 1961,' p.108. See also, PA MfAA, A8681, 'Aufzeichnung von Winzer. Vorlage für das Sekretariat des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 28. November 1961,' p.114

¹²⁶ Bonwetsch und Filitow, 'Chruschtschow und der Mauerbau,' p.155-198. For Ulbricht's letter to Ho Chi Minh, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Письмо Вальтера Ульбрихта Хо Ши Мину, июль 1961,' pp.19-20. For Ho Chi Minh's response, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3386. 'Ho Chi Minh an Ulbricht, 15. Juli 1961,' p.219

the German question is the most important in the world. That is why cooperation between the DRV and GDR is essential.”¹²⁷

At the 22nd Party Congress, however, Ho Chi Minh resumed his non-alignment tactic, neither repeating the criticisms of Stalin or Albania.¹²⁸ The ADN-correspondent, Klaus Pommerening, reported that Hanoi had cancelled the Vietnamese-language broadcasts from both *Radio Moscow* and *Radio Beijing*. The explanation given was that they included “unpublished extracts” of party congress material. Indeed, when *Radio Hanoi* shared twelve lines of Khrushchev’s speech, those responsible were chastised for not conferring with the central committee beforehand.¹²⁹ DRV authorities, Pierre Asselin points out, were acting as if “the Sino-Soviet dispute hardly existed.”¹³⁰ The East Germans offered three explanations. It was no surprise that economic factors were highlighted. Despite Pham Van Dong’s insistence to Ambassador Nohr that the food crisis had been solved, Pommerening pointed out that citizens in the metropolises were receiving barely five grams of meat per day, whilst living costs, such as the prices of gas and electricity, continued to rise.¹³¹ As a result, the DRV remained dependent on fraternal succour. The second reason was Beijing’s “strong” influence. It was striking that the East Germans began to speak of two opposing factions within the VWP: One “pro-Chinese,” the other “pro-Soviet.”¹³² North Vietnam’s unwillingness to criticise Tirana, coupled with its strong emphasis on Albanian memorial days, hinted that Chinese investment was proving fruitful and that its standpoint was “prevailing.”¹³³ Pommerening was

¹²⁷ PA MfAA, A8681, ‘Vermerk Nr.8/61 über eine Unterredung des Kollegen Stude mit dem Geschäftsträger a.i. der DRV in der DDR, Herrn Phan van Kim, am 12. Juli 1961,’ p.229. The same argument was made by the Deputy Defence Secretary, Hoang Van Thai, to Ambassador Nohr. See PA MfAA, A8572, ‘Vermerk Nr.203/61 über den Besuch beim stellvertretenden Verteidigungsminister der DRV, Genossen Hoang Van Thai, am 11. September 1961,’ p.342

¹²⁸ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Betreff: Ho Chi Minh Wortlaut. Anhang 9, 22. Oktober 1961, n.d.’ pp.182-185

¹²⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Klaus Pommerening. Betrifft: Berichterstattung über XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, 26. Oktober 1961’

¹³⁰ Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to War*, p.106. On Vietnamese silence, see also PA MfAA, A6744, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem Genossen Szigeti, Botschaftsrat der ungarischen Botschaft am 23. November 1961,’ p.40

¹³¹ PA MfAA, A8572, ‘Vermerk Nr.202 über einen Besuch des Botschafters, Genossen Nohr, beim Ministerpräsidenten Genossen Pham Van Dong, 31. August 1961,’ p.338; PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.295/61 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Lapin, Protokollchef der Botschaft der Sowjetunion, 28. November 1961,’ p.11; PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.272/61 über ein Gespräch des Botschafters Genosse Nohr mit dem stellvertretenden Präsidenten der Allgemeinen Gewerkschaftsbundes Vietnams, Genossen Nguyen Cong Hoa am 23. November 1961,’ p.4; SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Tätigkeitsbericht von Pommerening, 9. Dezember 1961’

¹³² SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung Pommerening, Betrifft: Information über die vietnamesische Haltung zu Albanien, 11. Dezember 1961’; PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam im MfAA. Betreff: Ergänzung zum Bericht über die Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnam zum XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, 16. November 1961,’ p.110; PA MfAA, A6744, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem Genossen Szigeti, Botschaftsrat der ungarischen Botschaft am 23. November 1961,’ p.40

¹³³ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Sektion Vietnam im MfAA, Ergänzung zum Bericht über die Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnam zum XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, 16. November 1961,’ p.110

struck by the fact that portraits of Stalin and Mao could be seen “everywhere,” whereas there were “hardly any” pictures of Lenin and “very rarely” of Khrushchev. The third and most fascinating argument, though, was that the congress “held a mirror in front of [the leaderships] face.” In a private discussion with Duong Bach Mai, member of the Vietnamese Fatherland Front and the GDR’s most useful informant, Pommerening was told that the VWP was not democratic. Its leaders did not tolerate criticism and those who dared raise their voice were simply given no more work. “We do not have the same methods as in Albania,” Bach Mai reflected, “but, in a certain way, it is just as bad.” A clear stance on all of the 22nd Congress’ resolutions, he claimed, would “precipitate a split.”¹³⁴

At the same time, it is important to understand that the East Germans did not believe Hanoi was siding with Beijing *against* the pro-Soviet states. The USSR, Dreßler noted, was still considered the centre of the bloc. Strong feelings of “genuine gratitude for the great and comprehensive assistance” were palpable.¹³⁵ North Vietnam was, instead, continuing to walk a political tightrope. Even so, both Nohr and Dreßler judged this position “untenable” in the long run. Policymakers could not equivocate forever. They would have to, eventually, take an official stance.¹³⁶ Indeed, Le Duan’s report at the 6th Central Committee Plenum, held between late November and early December, illustrated just how difficult non-alignment was. As Tuong Vu has argued, the report offered “pages and pages” of praise for the USSR, as well as highlighting the significance of the 22nd Congress for both mankind and Vietnam.¹³⁷ Embassy officials, however, focused on the final part of Duan’s statement, which examined Stalin and Albania.

The first secretary justified Ho’s silence at the congress on the grounds that North Vietnam had been unaware that these issues would be discussed. He openly voiced support for the removal of Stalin’s coffin from the mausoleum, but did not condemn the Soviet leader’s mistakes or his personality cult. Quite the reverse. Duan offered personal praise. During Stalin’s tenure, he noted, the CPSU had, “for the first time in the world,” successfully built up socialism, beaten the “fascist armies,” as well as established the preconditions for both the development of socialism and the rise of national liberation movements. “Like all

¹³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening, Betrifft: Information über die vietnamesische Haltung zu Albanien, 11. Dezember 1961’

¹³⁵ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Dressler an das MfAA. Betreff: Bericht von Genossen Le Duan, 1. Sekretär der ZK der PWV, auf der 6. Tagung des ZK, am 30. November bis 2. Dezember 1961, 19. März 1962,’ p.247; PA MfAA, C1064/73, ‘Jahresbericht der Botschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der DRV, 6. Dezember 1961,’ p.91

¹³⁶ PA MfAA, C1064/73, ‘Jahresbericht der Botschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der DRV, 6. Dezember 1961,’ p.68

¹³⁷ Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution*, p.164

revolutionaries throughout the world,” he declared, “our party respects the CPSU and the Soviet people, whilst, simultaneously, respecting Stalin.” On the second point, Duan voiced his regret about the quarrel and proposed that the central committee mediate between Moscow and Tirana. Yet he made it clear that, in the eyes of the DRV leadership, Albania “remains a socialist country” and that bilateral relations would resume.¹³⁸

Duan’s report is one of the most illuminating documents available to historians, for it offers a unique insight into the leadership’s discernment of the Sino-Soviet dispute. East German onlookers appreciated its value. Behind closed doors, the VWP had defied the 22nd Party Congress. Le Duan had neither offered a “clear position” on Stalin, nor had he “recognised” the criticisms of Albania. But what stood out most in Dreßler’s own appraisal was his reference to Beijing. Duan, the chargé contended, had “strongly emphasised” China’s position, as well as the importance of strengthening bilateral ties.¹³⁹ Dreßler’s remark revealed not only that the East Germans were instinctively connecting Hanoi’s movements with the Sino-Soviet quarrel, but that they remained worried about the prospect of North Vietnam openly siding with the PRC. Furthermore, Le Duan’s statement implied to the East Germans something about Duan himself, namely that he was a “fervent supporter” of the Chinese line.¹⁴⁰ From then on, his actions and statements received particular significance. Duan came to personify the faction inside the VWP, which advocated both stronger cooperation with China and a more radical political agenda.

Signs of Discontent

It is doubtful whether Konrad Adenauer had ever heard the name Le Duan. It is even more doubtful that he would have cared about him. The chancellor’s global map was based on 19th-century Europe. The geopolitical landscape was carved into spheres of influences, into great and small powers.¹⁴¹ To be sure, there was something distinctly Wilhelmine about Adenauer. In 1895, the Kaiser told Tsar Nicholas II that Russia’s “great task” was to “defend

¹³⁸ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Bericht von Genossen Le Duan, 1. Sekretär der ZK der PWV, auf der 6. Tagung des ZK, am 30. November bis 2. Dezember 1961, 19. März 1962,’ p.245; PA MfAA A8693, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kittler, 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Einschätzung der Auswertung des XXII. Parteitages der KPdSU in der DRV, 23. Januar 1962,’ p.281

¹³⁹ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Bericht von Genossen Le Duan, 1. Sekretär der ZK der PWV, auf der 6. Tagung des ZK, am 30. November bis 2. Dezember 1961, 19. März 1962,’ p.246

¹⁴⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Klaus Pommerening. Betreff: Zur sowjetischen Parteidelegation in der DRV, 31. März 1962’

¹⁴¹ Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus (hereafter StBKAH), III/59 (VI) 1961, ‘Unterredung zwischen dem Herrn Bundeskanzler und dem Botschafter der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik, Herrn Sabri, 24. August 1961,’ p.13

Europe from the inroads of the Great Yellow Peril Race.”¹⁴² In 1961, the chancellor insisted to a scoop of journalists that “Red-China is the prospective opponent of all whites.” And that Russia needed to “act as a guard for the whites against the Far East.”¹⁴³

The term “Far East” was pertinent. For Adenauer, the “Far East,” the “yellow folk” represented China.¹⁴⁴ It was the centre of gravity in the hemisphere. It was the nucleus of the Asian race. Nor had his obsession with a prospective Sino-Soviet split abated. On the contrary, it remained embedded in Adenauer’s mind, even when discussing the subject with men far more knowledgeable than himself. On 14 July, he asked the Japanese foreign minister for an appraisal of Chinese power. Zentaro Kosaka replied that the PRC was, “potentially,” “very powerful,” but, in practice, beseeched by internal shortcomings. To distract the peoples’ attention, Adenauer was told, Beijing was inclined to “expand externally.” Kosaka highlighted its “interference and advances” in Laos and Vietnam as specific examples. But when Adenauer asserted that Moscow was “not unhappy” about its neighbour’s domestic crisis, Kosaka demurred. Whilst it was true, that an “anti-Russian atmosphere” existed in China, he, like the FRG’s Foreign Ministry beforehand, dismissed the spectre of a serious rift as “wishful thinking.”¹⁴⁵

This episode revealed a lot about Adenauer. It revealed that he was merely concerned about Southeast Asia when discussing a prospective Sino-Soviet split. It was, in his eyes, little more than a territorial domain. He offered no indication that the beliefs and objectives of the smaller states mattered. At the back of his mind was always the question of how his country could exploit Soviet fear of China. He remained adamant that a strong PRC would compel the Kremlin to divert resources and present an opportunity for the Western Bloc to demand concessions on Berlin. But most important of all, it illustrated that, despite all evidence to the contrary, Adenauer remained convinced that his vatic postulation was correct. Experts were telling him that he was wrong, that it was a figment of his imagination. It did not matter. Barely a month later, he was assuring a foreign diplomat that there would be a “global struggle”

¹⁴² E. Dugdale (ed.), *German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914. Volume III: The Growing Antagonism* (London, 1930), p.1

¹⁴³ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1961-1963*, p.18. See also Adenauer remarks to General de Gaulle in BA-Koblenz, B136/51018, Band 1, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 9. Dezember 1961 um 11 Uhr in Paris ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsident de Gaulle unter vier Augen,’ p.250

¹⁴⁴ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1961-1963*, p.18, Küsters, (Hrsg.) *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1959-1961*, p.451

¹⁴⁵ StBKAH, III/59 (VI) 1961, ‘Aufzeichnung: Unterredung zwischen dem Herrn Bundeskanzler und dem japanischen Außenminister Herrn Zentaro Kosaka, an der auch der Bundesminister des Auswärtigen und der japanische Botschafter teilnahmen, 14. Juli 1961,’ pp.74-76

between Moscow and Beijing.¹⁴⁶ The future had already been written. It was going to happen. He was sure of it.

Obstinacy is a characteristic seldom praised. In fact, Andrew Preston has blamed American entrance into the Vietnam War first and foremost on the Johnson administration's narrowing down of available alternatives.¹⁴⁷ When charting Adenauer's intransigence, however, it is difficult not to be impressed. He was on his own in 1961, hardly anyone believed him.¹⁴⁸ It is not difficult to understand why. The truth was that his argument was vacuous. He was basing his projection of future events largely on a private exchange, which had transpired half a decade ago. He never considered the idea that Khrushchev's remark had been a trick, or that the premier was judging his character. Henry Kissinger's description of Adenauer is crucial here. His devoutly religious upbringing, Kissinger told JFK, had caused him to believe in absolute values. There were certain maxims that Adenauer held rigidly.¹⁴⁹ So it was with the prospective Sino-Soviet split. It seemed to offer Adenauer hope. The spectre of the two behemoths turning against one another, he attested to the American journalist, James Reston, was Europe's sole "salvation."¹⁵⁰ Not only, then, did the chancellor believe it would happen, it simply *needed* to happen.

Ironically, it was at the exact moment when the FRG faced its darkest hour that Adenauer could point to some factual evidence. 13 August 1961 is a fateful day in German history. It was the day that the border between the East- and West Berlin was sealed shut. For the Ulbricht government, the wall solved the problem of its state bleeding dry and guaranteed the GDR's political existence. For Bonn, it was a reminder that reunification was unforeseeable in the near future and precipitated a loss of confidence in the United States.¹⁵¹ Adenauer himself, though, was not particularly upset with the lack of response. Behind closed doors, he

¹⁴⁶ StBKAH, III/59 (VI) 1961, 'Aufzeichnung eines Gesprächs zwischen dem Herrn Bundeskanzler und dem Botschafter der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik, Herrn Sabri, 24. August 1961,' p.13

¹⁴⁷ A. Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam* (Cambridge, 2006)

¹⁴⁸ One FRG official that did echo Adenauer's determinism was President Heinrich Lübke. Yet, as a close friend of Adenauer's, it is unclear whether Lübke was merely regurgitating the chancellor's position. See BA-Koblenz, B122/5434, 'Aufzeichnung eines Gesprächs zwischen dem Bundespräsidenten und Herrn Harriman, 6. März 1961,' p.30

¹⁴⁹ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 79, Germany, Adenauer Visit, 4/61, 'Memorandum from Henry Kissinger for the President. Subject: Visit of Chancellor Adenauer - Some Psychological Factors, 6 April, 1961.' On Adenauer's religious upbringing, see C. Williams, *Adenauer. The Father of the New Germany* (London, 2000), pp.10-11

¹⁵⁰ G. Buchstab (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: "Stetigkeit in der Politik." Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1961-1965* (Düsseldorf, 1998) p.111. James Reston visited the chancellor at the end of 1961. See Mensing, (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche 1961-1963*, p.60-69

¹⁵¹ H. Kleinmann (Hrsg.), *Heinrich Krone, Tagebücher. Zweiter Band: 1961-1966* (Düsseldorf, 1995), p.15; BA-Koblenz, NL178/10c, Nachlass Hans-Christoph Seeböhm, 'Vermerk über die 156. Kabinettsitzung am 18. August 1961,' p.17

appreciated the dilemma. Firm countermeasures, as demanded by a large segment of the population, could have (and probably would have) led to an unpredictable escalation.¹⁵²

It was, nonetheless, remarkable that Adenauer instinctively correlated developments in Berlin with the Sino-Soviet dispute. The episode was a curious one. On 9 November, Hans Kroll, the FRG's ambassador, was summoned to a discussion with Khrushchev. The two men's relationship was surprisingly close. The premier had taken a personal liking to Kroll, who spoke fluent Russian and, in the words of one of his superior's, had "great spiritual talents."¹⁵³ Kroll was, moreover, strikingly self-confident and, without his government permission, proposed a plan to resolve the crisis. "The main issue," he emphasised, "was to remove the wall in Berlin." Khrushchev countered that if relations were "normalised" with East Germany, the wall could "disappear."¹⁵⁴ Then, almost poetically, he reflected that reconciliation between the two people would be the "coronation of my life's work in foreign political matters."¹⁵⁵

The "Kroll Affair" became a scandal in the Western press, for it insinuated that Bonn was negotiating with the Kremlin behind their allies back, fuelling suspicions of another "Rapallo." But despite strong pressure, the chancellor refused to sack Kroll, believing that direct personal contact with Khrushchev offered the best chance of thwarting his worst nightmare: That the two superpowers would solve the Berlin question over his head.¹⁵⁶ More importantly, Adenauer inferred from the premier's remarks that he was turning eastwards. In his subsequent discussion with Kroll, he disclosed that Khrushchev had told the Italian leader, Amintore Fanfani, that the Soviets wanted an agreement, so that he could "face China." Furthermore, the chancellor cited a series of articles published in *Le Figaro*, which reported that huge military buildings had been constructed on the Sino-Soviet border. Kroll seemed to confirm Adenauer's belief that bilateral relations were collapsing. At the 22nd Congress, the ambassador pointed out, there had been a "clear dispute" between Zhou Enlai and Khrushchev, outwardly on ideological matters, practically on the problem of Albania.

And why? Adenauer asked rhetorically. Because Zhou Enlai stood up to him in front of the entire communist elite. He told him, Mr Khrushchev you are not treating Albania as a real Marxist-Leninist should. This is a sign that [Khrushchev] is afraid of Red-China [...] He does not dare touch Albania.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² ACDP Archiv, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-025/4, 'Aufzeichnung von Globke. Betreff: Mauerbau, n.d.'

¹⁵³ K. Carstens, *Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen* (Oldenburg, 1993), p.238. See also H. Osterheld, "Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens..." *Adenauers letzte Kanzlerjahre- ein dokumentarischer Bericht* (Mainz, 1986), pp.57-58

¹⁵⁴ A truncated copy of the Khrushchev-Kroll discussion can be found in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3509, 'Auszüge aus der Unterredung des westdeutschen Botschafters in Moskau, H. Kroll, mit dem Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates der UdSSR, N.S. Chruschtschow, 9. November 1961,' pp.220-230

¹⁵⁵ H. Kroll, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Botschafters* (Köln, 1967), p.525

¹⁵⁶ Carstens, *Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen*, p.239; Kleinmann (Hrsg.), *Krone, Tagebücher, Zeiter Band*, p.16

¹⁵⁷ StBKAH, III/60 (VII), 'Stenographische Niederschrift über das Gespräch zwischen dem Herrn Bundeskanzler, Carstens, Dr. Globke, Dr. Kroll am 14. November 1961,' pp.246-269

As a result, the chancellor was convinced that his prophesy was not only coming true, but that it was transpiring faster than he had ever dared imagine.¹⁵⁸ In his eyes, the Communist Bloc was breaking up and the two behemoths were turning against one another.

How Open was the Future?

In the historiography, there is an ongoing debate about whether the conflict in Indochina was preordained, whether the structure of the international system had planted the seeds of war.¹⁵⁹ A close examination of the East- and West German archives in 1961 certainly reveals an undercurrent of determinism on either side. After all, GDR officials had been told by the Vietnamese that a neutral Laos was unacceptable. On 2 November, Bach Mai even insisted to Pommerening that a peaceful solution below the 17th parallel was “no longer *possible*.” The only alternative, he claimed, was to “eliminate the USA-Diem regime through military means.”¹⁶⁰ It seems ominous that FRG diplomats likewise recorded a propensity among State Department officials to regard a “direct confrontation” between America and the Vietcong as “probably unavoidable.”¹⁶¹ Back in Bonn, Bassler came to the same conclusion: Armed intervention offered the only chance of thwarting a communist triumph.¹⁶² Everything, it seemed, depended on the coming weeks. Those would be “crucial for the fate of the country,” that was when the “dice would fall.”¹⁶³ Both sides were on the brink of armed conflict.

If history had been slightly different, if war had broken out in 1961, instead of 1965, then the inevitable hypothesis would be difficult to refute. On either side of the 17th parallel, statesmen were asserting that they needed to fight violence with violence, that they needed to conquer their opponent by force. And yet, there was a palpable *fear* of armed conflict. In his seminal work on the origins of World War I, Christopher Clark has questioned whether

¹⁵⁸ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche*, 1961-1963, p.67

¹⁵⁹ See, for instance, Herring, *America's Longest War*, p.xii; F. Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York, 2012), p.704

¹⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Information über ein Gespräch am 2. November 1961 mit Duong Bach Mai, Mitglied des Sekretariats der Vaterländischen Front und Direktor der Wochenzeitung “Thong Nhat.”’ My italics. Interestingly, Klaus Herrmann echoed these comments, informing the Defence Secretary that the North Vietnamese were “barely concealing” that they “no longer desired” a neutralist solution. See PA AA, B12, Bd.1595, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Nr.40/61, Derzeitige Entwicklung in Laos, 9. November 1961’

¹⁶¹ ACDP Archiv, Nachlass Kurt Birrenbach, I-433, 041/1 ‘Aufzeichnung von Swidbert Schnippenkötter. Betreff: Amerikanische Fernostpolitik in den ersten sechs Monaten der Kennedy-Regierung - Bericht der Botschaft in Washington vom 15. August 1961’

¹⁶² BA-Koblenz, B122/5467, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Die Lage in Vietnam, 15. November 1961,’ pp.199-200

¹⁶³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1657, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.39/61. Dienstreise nach Saigon vom 25.-31. Oktober 1961, 2. November 1961’; PA AA, B67, Bd.34, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 4. Dezember 1961,’ p.211

decision-makers understood how high the stakes were, whether they grasped the reality of it all.¹⁶⁴ The Vietnam War was different. Nobody was under any illusion in 1961 what pulling the trigger would mean. The Soviets, in particular, fretted about the prospective dangers. True, GDR diplomats occasionally heard the phrase “paper tiger” being uttered, but those were anomalies.¹⁶⁵ “We fear that Laos might develop into a second Korea,” Liu Shaoqi admitted to Hegen. He insisted, however, that the U.S. feared it “even more.”¹⁶⁶ It was not difficult for the ambassador to understand Liu’s angst. Horrific rumours of two-and-a-half million citizens dying of famine in Zhejiang alluded to the fact that the state’s economy had broken down.¹⁶⁷ In North Vietnam, the same dilemma was apparent, albeit on a smaller scale. Despite the annual rice harvest being “one of the largest in the country’s history,” Pommerening warned that it was still not enough to feed the inhabitants.¹⁶⁸ The communist states seemed neither willing, nor capable of fighting an international war.

Cause for concern above the 17th parallel was also the expansion of U.S. military- and economic assistance. At the 3rd Meeting of the Second National Assembly, Ung Van Khiem declared that Washington was attempting to “artificially inflate” South Vietnam and “put it on the same footing as West Berlin.”¹⁶⁹ The evidence was plentiful. Diem’s decision to declare a state of emergency, the dispatching of U.S. helicopters, as well as the Staley Plan’s intention to smother the national liberation movement in eighteen months, were all highlighted as preparations for war.¹⁷⁰ In turn, there were signs that the Vietcong’s successes were slowing down. “Here and there,” Pommerening reported, “one currently hears criticisms of the South Vietnamese patriots” for adopting armed measures “at a time when its base of military groupings had still been too small.”¹⁷¹ Vietnamese reunification did not seem as certain as it once was. The fatalistic confidence, so palpable at the start of the year, was ebbing away.

¹⁶⁴ C. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London, 2012), pp.561-562

¹⁶⁵ PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.300/61 über ein Abendessen mit dem Leiter der Abteilung Osteuropa und SU, Genosse Hien und den Leiter der Sektion Deutschland, Genossen Viet Dzan, 12. Dezember,’ p.16

¹⁶⁶ PA MfAA, A6744, ‘Aktenvermerk über den Antrittsbesuch des Genossen Botschafter Hegen beim Vorsitzenden der Volksrepublik China, Liu Schau-tji am 9. Juni 1961,’ p.412

¹⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/123, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterhaltung mit Genossen Tschekunow, 2. Sekretär der sowjetischen Botschaft, 13. Dezember 1961,’ p.555

¹⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Tätigkeitsbericht von Pommerening, 9. Dezember 1961’

¹⁶⁹ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Nohr an das MfAA. Betreff: III Sitzung der Nationalversammlung – Lage in Südvietnam,’ 13. November,’ p.104; PA MfAA, A8572, ‘Vermerk Nr.261/61 über eine Unterredung mit dem Sekretär des Ständischen Ausschusses der Nationalversammlung der DRV, Genossen Tran Dinh Tri, am 8. November 1961,’ p.448

¹⁷⁰ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.248/61 über eine Information des stellv. Vorsitzenden der Verbindungsmission der vietnamesischen Volksarmee, dem Oberstleutnant Mai Lam, zur Lage in Südvietnam, 20. Oktober 1961,’ pp.102-103; PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Nohr an das MfAA. Betreff: III Sitzung der Nationalversammlung - Lage in Südvietnam, 13. November 1961,’ p.102a

¹⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Tätigkeitsbericht von Pommerening, 9 Dezember 1961’

Then again, it was unclear just how far the Kennedy government would go to save its ally. Diem's brother, Archbishop Thuc, complained to President Heinrich Lübke that, irrespective of their constant promises, the Americans had "attempted to appease with words." "At any Soviet pressure," he lamented, "they have given in by taking small steps backwards."¹⁷² On his return to South Vietnam, Wendland recorded an atmosphere of "disapproval towards America." Saigon had not received a formal guarantee that the superpower would use "all its means" to "prevent the Bolshevisation" of the RVN. General Maxwell Taylor's statement that he had "great confidence" in the South Vietnamese army to "cope with anything within its borders" suggested to the West Germans that, at least for the time being, Washington had set limits on its assistance. Wendland was unsure whether JFK could even "plausibly justify" armed involvement to the American people, "when there was a harbouring suspicion that they would have to fight for an authoritarian, nepotistic regime."¹⁷³

From the East- and West German standpoint, then, the future remained unwritten. There were still too many uncertainties, too many what-ifs. There were question marks over the effectiveness, decisiveness and willingness of the participants involved. Several paths remained open and there was still a possibility that, when it came to the decision for or against open warfare, either one side, or both, would blink. After all, the two superpowers had decided to defuse the crisis in Laos. There was no reason why it could not happen again. The final and strongest refutation that the structure of the international system made war inevitable is that the global order subsequently transformed. In fact, 1962 would be the year when the bipolar structure of the Cold War disintegrated.

¹⁷² BA-Koblenz, B122/5467, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundespräsident empfing am 23. November 1961 den Bruder des vietnamesischen Staatspräsidenten Ngo Dinh Diem, Erzbischof Dinh Diem, zu einer Unterredung,' p.191

¹⁷³ PA AA, B67, Bd.34, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Besuch Ministerpräsident von Malaya und Ergebnis der Taylor-Mission, 30. Oktober 1961,' p.144; PA AA, B67, Bd.34, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 4. Dezember 1961,' p.211

Chapter 3

The Break-up of the Post-War Order

1962

On 19 December 1962, *Der Spiegel* published an article entitled “Eastern Bloc Split. In Deep Mourning.” At several party congresses, it reported, the Chinese had attacked Soviet leaders in a tone not witnessed since the murderous faction struggles of the 1920s. The CCP’s objective had been to capitalise on Khrushchev’s “débâcle” during the Cuban Crisis. Beijing, the article relayed, was attempting to gather followers for its interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. It wanted to unfetter itself from the socialist camp. It wanted to build its very own bloc. Included in the article was a cartoon, which depicted a forlorn Khrushchev angrily surveying a horde of Maos, who held up a sign that read “600 million Albanians cannot be mistaken.” The sign insinuated that, irrespective of Soviet discontent for Tirana (and, in turn, Beijing), Chinese endorsement meant that they were right and Khrushchev was wrong. Yet the most ominous feature of the cartoon was that some of the Maos were pointing at the diminutive premier. There was something both menacing and accusatory about the pointing. It implied that Khrushchev was powerless to stop the Chinese, that he was incapable of coercing them to follow his leadership. The barren land on which the two sides stared at each other, along with the dark and gloomy background, exposed the irredeemable nature of the broken alliance. “In front of the entire world,” *Der Spiegel* declared, the split “has become visible.”¹

It would be difficult to overstate the effect of the split on East- and West German analysis of Vietnam. Hitherto, their respective foreign political programmes had been first and foremost dictated by the exigencies of the bipolar world. The conflict below the 17th parallel had been perceived as a Cold War battleground, as an existential struggle between two opposing belief systems. For Bonn, South Vietnam was part of the “Free World’s” defence line. For East Berlin, Vietcong rebels exemplified the national liberation movement. Yet Beijing’s challenge to Moscow’s hegemony exposed the shifting and transforming nature of the global alliance structures. The interpretation of the Cold War as a contest between two ideologies - Marxism-Leninism on the one hand, capitalism on the other - did not fit the facts. The international order was no longer dualistic. This chapter illustrates how new power centres began to openly challenge the authority of the two superpowers and in what way it changed both Bonn’s and East Berlin’s perception of the struggle in Vietnam.

¹ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.51/1962, ‘Ostblock, Spaltung. In tiefer Trauer, 19. Dezember 1962,’ pp.67-68. For the cartoon, see <http://magazin.spiegel.de/EpubDelivery/spiegel/pdf/45125301>

Political and Military Setbacks

Until the final months of 1961, the East Germans had received repeated assurances that victory was guaranteed, that it was only a matter of time until the Diem regime fell apart. At the turn of the year, however, GDR onlookers detected signs that not everything was going according to plan. After a private chat with a member of the committee for reunification, Heinz Dreßler expressed surprise by his admission that American involvement was “undoubtedly causing difficulties” and that the NLF had failed to unite the people under its control.² These comments challenged the cheerful assurances, which Josef Hegen was receiving, that nine of the thirteen million citizens were living in “liberated areas.”³ It seemed to the East Germans that their comrades had not been entirely truthful about developments below the 17th parallel, that achievements had been augmented and problems minimised.

Top-secret information from the Hungarian ambassador in Beijing reinforced these suspicions. It was customary for socialist states to circulate records with the purpose of coordinating the bloc’s agenda. Thus, when Ferenc Martin met leading DRV decision-makers on his farewell visit, Hegen received a copy of the transcripts. The content must have come as a shock to the ambassador, for there was no trace of confidence, no hint that the other side was on the brink of defeat. Instead, Ung Van Khiem expressed concern about the “very serious” situation. “Thousands of the best cadres,” he complained, had perished and were dropping “like flies in autumn.” A political solution did not appear within reach. Although the foreign minister insisted that the struggle would, “in any case,” continue, he conceded that it “cannot continue in its present form.” To “prevent the further bleeding out of progressive forces,” he said, it would be “best to impose a solution in a more decisive manner.”⁴ Khiem could scarcely have been more forthright. He had made it clear that any hope of reunifying Vietnam in the short-term had extinguished. The enemy was fighting back.

East Berlin’s appraisal of the conversation was twofold. The MfAA estimated that the Vietcong had suffered “huge human losses,” especially in the last couple of months. And that these losses made it essential to re-evaluate tactics.⁵ Hanoi had reached a crossroad. The sharp increase in U.S. assistance necessitated a response. The question was what to do next. After

² PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.39/62 über Gespräche mit dem Genossen Phan Duc, Mitglied des Komitees für Wiedervereinigung, am 23. und 26. Januar 1962,’ p.133, p.137

³ PA MfAA, A17347, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Information des vietnamesischen Botschafters, Genossen Tran Tu Binh, über die Entwicklung in Südvietnam und Laos am 5. Januar 1962,’ p.163

⁴ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit dem ungarischen Botschafter, Genossen Martin, am 31. Januar 1962,’ p.68; PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem ungarischen Botschaftsrat, Genossen Szigeti am 26. Januar 1962,’ p.3

⁵ PA MfAA, A8693, ‘Stude an Nohr, 13. Februar 1962,’ p.49

probing Colonel Luu Van Loi (“General Giap’s right-hand man”), Pommerening revealed that there was a split inside the party. One group felt that American involvement did not pose a serious threat and saw no need for intervention. A second group, encouraged by the denouement of Portuguese rule in India and confident of Chinese patronage, was advocating “military operations.” On 6 January, *Nhan Dan* announced that male citizens between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five were required to sign up for armed service. All soldiers released in 1954, Pommerening noted, were re-registering and adolescents were being enlisted for “immediate deployment” to the South. “In this context,” he warned, “it is often spitefully claimed that only the USSR is opposed to a [military] solution.”⁶

Despite these ominous remarks, there was a sense that Hanoi was placing more emphasis on the political struggle. This sense was not groundless. The previous autumn, it had circulated an official letter to 103 nations, condemning U.S. interference in Vietnamese affairs and demanding the fulfilment of the Geneva Accords.⁷ Motivation stemmed from a desire to galvanise world support, above all, to secure the peoples’ patronage for “peaceful reunification.”⁸ On 19 February, Karl Nohr received a special request from Khiem to employ “all available means” and help secure peace on the Indochinese peninsula. In the past seven years, he reflected, the number of people murdered, wounded and abducted had been greater than the fatalities of the entire resistance struggle. Khiem expressed concern about the establishment of a new American headquarter, which was “practically the South Vietnamese forces high command.” The DRV, he reminded both Nohr and his ambassadorial colleagues, represented the “outpost of the socialist camp in Southeast Asia.” Fraternal countries could, thus, “not remain indifferent” to its plight.⁹

⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Tätigkeitsbericht, 20. Januar 1962.’ See also BArch-MA, DVW1/6426a, ‘Militärattaché in Hanoi, Erwin Witt, an den Leiter der Auslandsabteilung im Ministerium für Nationale Verteidigung Genossen Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Verordnung der Registrierung, Statistik, und Verwaltungsarbeit der Reservisten und Gesetz über die militärische Ausbildung der Reservisten, Partisanen und Selbstverteidigungskräfte, 9. Januar 1962.’ Robert Brigham’s work similarly argues that, at the turn of 1962, Vietcong decision-makers felt that the war had entered a “new phase” and that its strategy and tactics needed to be reevaluated. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, p.15

⁷ PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Nohr und Dressler an die Abteilung Information des MfAA und Abteilung Außenpolitik im ZK, 27. November 1961,’ p.267; PA MfAA, A11591, ‘Brief von Ung Van Khiem an Dr. Lothar Bolz,’ pp.268-271. Interestingly, Hanoi’s went so far as to dispatch an appeal to the Federal Republic of Germany.

⁸ PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.43/62 über eine Information des stellvertretenden Leiters der Presseabteilung des MfAA der DRV, Genossen Le Trang, vor Vertretern der Botschaften und Presseagenturen der sozialistischen Länder, 30. Januar 1962,’ p.78; SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Information über eine interne Zusammenkunft der Presseabteilung des Außenministeriums der DRV mit den in Hanoi akkreditierten Journalisten, sowie Attachés aus sozialistischen Ländern, 12. Februar 1962’

⁹ PA MfAA, A8681, ‘Nohr an Stude, 20. Februar 1962,’ p.8; PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Bericht über die Information des Außenministers, Genossen Ung van Khiem, vor den Botschaftern der sozialistischen Länder über die Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 19. Februar 1962,’ pp.97-98

Nohr immediately pledged support.¹⁰ He agreed that U.S. actions were transforming South Vietnam into a Cold War hotspot, not only for Southeast Asia, but for the “entire world.” These were not hollow phrases. In their joint memorandum, Nohr and Dreßler warned that names associated with Korea, such as Paul Harkins’ appointment as chief of staff, embodied American resolve to construct a “military apparatus, akin to the one it had during the Korean War.” Western press reports, they pointed out, estimated U.S. personnel at approximately 4.000 men, with a further 7.000 in the pipeline. Nor were the Americans just giving advice, but, rather, flying military helicopters, as well as initiating herbicidal warfare. Both officials were worried, too, about the internationalisation of the conflict. Saigon had received armed assistance from Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand. In a characteristic manner, Nohr and Dreßler drew special attention to the FRG - “America’s closest ally” - where former Wehrmacht soldiers were offering their services. The Vietnam Crisis, they warned, had become “very serious.”¹¹

More interesting than GDR condemnations, however, was the acknowledgment that Washington *and* Hanoi were violating the Geneva Accords. “I must say,” Pommerening remarked, “it is very difficult to find arguments against the claim that North Vietnam is sending troops. [...] It is an open secret here that cadres are leaving for the South, that military equipment is reaching South Vietnam through Laos.”¹² Voices close to the action echoed this appraisal. The head of the Polish sub-committee of the ICC conveyed to Erwin Witt his own task of ensuring that Hanoi’s infringements did not become public and that DRV officials had even advised him to avoid certain streets and areas.¹³

In light of the DRV’s actions, one nation that was repeatedly alluded to was India. India enjoyed a special role. It was not only a member of the non-aligned movement, but also the disinterested bystander in the ICC (alongside Canada and Poland).¹⁴ Pommerening, though, warned that the Indian delegation had begun to investigate Hanoi’s “subversive activities.” He, therefore, feared that the government’s “barely undisclosed assistance” would make it easy to

¹⁰ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Bericht über die Information des Außenministers, Genossen Ung van Khiem, vor den Botschaftern der sozialistischen Länder über die Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 19. Februar 1962,’ p.99

¹¹ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Nohr und Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Situation in Südvietsnam, 1. März 1962,’ pp.77-96; PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Bericht über die Information des Außenministers, Genossen Ung Van Khiem, vor den Botschaftern der sozialistischen Länder über die Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 19. Februar 1962,’ p.99

¹² SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Tätigkeitsbericht, 20. Januar 1962’

¹³ BArch-MA, DVW1/6426, Bd.1, ‘Witt an Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Analyse über die Militärpolitik der Partei in Bezug auf die Vereinigung Vietnams und die Lage in Südvietsnam, 30. April 1962’

¹⁴ On India and the Vietnam War, see M. Lawrence, ‘The Limits of Peacemaking: India and the Vietnam War, 1962-1967,’ *India Review*, Volume 1, Number 1 (January 2002), pp.39-72

“gather evidence.”¹⁵ DRV bureaucrats shared these concerns and it was not unusual for them to criticise India’s “impartial role.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, they agreed that Indian support was essential. On 30 March, the Deputy Head of the South Vietnam department, Thuan Anh, informed Dreßler that his government had sent special envoys to New Delhi (as well as Burma, Cambodia and Indonesia). The purpose, he explained, was to condemn both the deployment of U.S. military units and the sending of armed personnel by allied nations. It was hoped that the four states would be encouraged to assist in counteracting the “serious danger” in South Vietnam. But although Anh insisted that the visits had been “satisfactory,” he acknowledged that there was a palpable distrust of Hanoi. Discussions with India had been “the most difficult,” for it “feared a reunified Vietnam under a communist regime.” Privately, Dreßler questioned whether there was any realistic prospect of India changing its stance. The Nehru government had not responded to Hanoi’s circulated letter and, in Dreßler’s own exchanges with Indian delegates, they had “made explicit” their belief that North Vietnam’s transfer of men and material was the *cause* of U.S. aggression.¹⁷

The full extent of Hanoi’s failed initiative became apparent to East Berlin following the ICC’s special report. On 2 June, the Canadian and Indian legislatures forwarded a joint appraisal to the Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference, which accused the DRV of dispatching armed personnel and seeking the “overthrow of the [Diem] administration.” Whilst the report did not draw a cause-and-effect relationship, the dates implied that Hanoi’s interference had started first.¹⁸ The East Germans were left in no doubt that it was a key document “in the hands of the U.S.-Diemists.” It had legitimised the other side’s belligerent activities and provided an opportunity for Washington to enlarge its presence below the 17th parallel.¹⁹ Hanoi’s reunification campaign had suffered a resounding political setback.

¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Tätigkeitsbericht, 20. Januar 1962’

¹⁶ On North Vietnamese concern about Indian bias, see for instance, PA MfAA, A17347, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Dr. Lothar Bolz mit dem Botschafter der DRV, Tham Ngoc Thuan, am 22. Januar 1962,’ p.165; PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.43/62 über eine Information des stellvertretenden Leitern der Presseabteilung des MfAA der DRV, Genossen Le Trang, vor Vertretern der Botschaften und Presseagenturen der sozialistischen Länder am 30. Januar 1962,’ p.76; SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Information über eine interne Zusammenkunft der Presseabteilung des Außenministeriums der DRV mit den in Hanoi akkreditierten Journalisten sowie Attachés aus sozialistischen Ländern, 12. Februar 1962’

¹⁷ PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.128/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Tuan Anh, stellvertretender Leiter der Sektion Südvietnam im MfAA der DRV, 30. März 1962,’ pp.171-181

¹⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Vietnam No.1 (1962). International Control Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam. Special Report to the Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference on Indo-China, Saigon 2 June, 1962’

¹⁹ PA MfAA, A8713, ‘Bericht über eine vertrauliche Pressekonferenz im MfAA der DRV am 5. Juni 1962 zum Bericht der indischen und kanadischen Delegation der CIC zur sogenannten subversiven Tätigkeit der DRV,’ p.105

Even so, Ambassador Thuan insisted to the Deputy Foreign Minister, Georg Stibi, that it would, ultimately, make no difference. On the battlefield, he maintained, the balance of power lay with the NLF.²⁰ This was a sweeping assertion. And a difficult one to corroborate. David Kaiser reminds us that “armies throughout history have customarily exaggerated the casualties they inflict.”²¹ The Vietcong was no exception. In contrast with American statistics, which estimated ARVN losses in 1961 at 4.004, the figures quoted by the DRV’s Ministry of Defence to Witt were almost three times as high.²² Witt was, hence, right to warn about exaggerating rebel achievements. Although the Vietnamese insisted that two-thirds of RVN terrain was under rebel control, he pointed out that this “control” was not “continuous” and “often no more than intrusion.” The truth was that Diem’s soldiers principally governed in the day-time, whereas the NLF ruled after nightfall.²³

East German diplomats also noticed a distinct shift in emphasis. Whereas the previous year, DRV officials had projected that Diem could, conceivably, fall in less than twelve months, the underlying theme in 1962 implied that reunification was a protracted struggle.²⁴ Indeed, the East Germans were told that it was advantageous to *preserve* the regime. State terror offered a convenient way of uniting broad sections of the population and, as the departmental head of the committee for reunification reasoned to Dreßler, Diem’s removal could encourage the splintered “anti-communist” groups to amalgamate. “The tactical maxim,” Truong Van Chan explained, “is [...] to attract the anti-Diem forces in Diem’s ranks and direct

²⁰ Ibid., pp.129-130

²¹ D. Kaiser, *American Tragedy, Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, 2000), p.158

²² BArch-MA, DVW1/6426 Bd.1, ‘Witt an Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Analyse über die Militärpolitik der Partei in Bezug auf die Vereinigung Vietnams und die Lage in Südvietnam, 30. April, 1962’; PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.109/62. Dreßler an das MfAA, 17. März 1962,’ p.145. To compare, see NARA, RG200, National Archives Gift Collection. Records of Robert S. McNamara, Defence Programmes and Operations, Box 76. Relations Committee, March 1966, ‘Statistics on Viet-Nam, Table I, n.d.’ It is worth noting that, according to historian Tuong Vu, Le Duan exaggerated enemy casualties on the eve of the Tet Offensive in 1968. It is more than likely that this was a recurrent theme. See, Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution*, p.193

²³ BArch-MA, DVW1/6426 Bd.1, ‘Witt an Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Analyse über die Militärpolitik der Partei in Bezug auf die Vereinigung Vietnams und die Lage in Südvietnam, 30. April, 1962’

²⁴ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.49/61 über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Su, stellvertretender Abteilungsleiter der Abteilung Osteuropa am 25. Februar und 8. März [1961] über die Situation in Südvietnam,’ p.55. It is remarkable how often the North Vietnamese insisted in the first half of 1962 that the war would last for a long time. For examples, see PA MfAA, A8603, ‘Vermerk Nr.43/62 über eine Information des stellvertretenden Leitern der Presseabteilung des MfAA der DRV, Genossen Le Trang, vor Vertretern der Botschaften und Presseagenturen der sozialistischen Länder am 30. Januar 1962,’ p.79; SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Information über eine interne Zusammenkunft der Presseabteilung des Außenministeriums der DRV mit den in Hanoi akkreditierten Journalisten sowie Attachés aus sozialistischen Ländern, 12. Februar 1962’; PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.166/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen, Abteilungsleiter im Komitee für Wiedervereinigung am 10. Mai 1962,’ p.165, p.170; PA MfAA, C1065/73, ‘Vermerk Nr.13/62 über eine Unterredung des Kollegen Stude mit dem Botschafter der DRV, Herrn Pham Ngoc Thuan, am 1. Juni 1962,’ p.135; PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.208/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Thuan Anh, Leiter der Abteilung Südvietnam im MfAA der DRV am 21. Juli 1962,’ pp.203-204

them against the main opponent,” meaning the president himself. Nohr and Dreßler deduced that the NLF lacked the necessary strength to conquer the South. Communist partisans were still gathering followers and endeavouring to exploit Diem’s unpopularity.²⁵ In Bonn, it was precisely this unpopularity that remained the central concern.

Shades of Optimism

Hilmar Bassler was perhaps the most fascinating individual on the FRG side. Born in Danzig, he studied Law and Political Science, before completing his doctorate at the University of Göttingen. A highly intelligent man, Bassler’s education included studying Russian, Turkish and Japanese, not to mention being fluent in English, French and Swedish. He became a member of the NSDAP two months after the reoccupation of the Rhineland and entered the Foreign Ministry in 1939. Following the collapse of the Third Reich, Bassler was relieved of his duties and spent several years working for private enterprises, before re-joining the East Asian department in 1952.²⁶

The archival record reveals that Bassler was not a pleasant character. His relationship with Wendland was particularly fractious. A couple of years after Americanisation, Wendland wrote a letter from his new ambassadorial post, asking the recipient to express his warm wishes to everyone, “apart from the horrible Bassler.”²⁷ Confident in his own expertise, Bassler had no shame in disparaging Wendland’s analysis as poor and inadequate to American colleagues.²⁸ Indeed, Bassler’s name was familiar amongst foreign officials. Given his shared birthplace with Arthur Schopenhauer, it was rather fitting that he earned a reputation for being unreservedly pessimistic. According to the Americans, Bassler lived under a perpetual raincloud.²⁹ Already the previous November, he had concluded that South Vietnam would turn communist, unless Washington decided to live up to its SEATO obligations and escalate the war.

²⁵ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.166/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Truong Van Chan, Abteilungsleiter im Komitee für Wiedervereinigung am 10. Mai 1962,’ pp.166-171

²⁶ PA AA, Personalakte, Hilmar Bassler von 1950 bis 1972, ‘Personalbogen von Hilmar Bassler, i.d.’

²⁷ PA AA, NL Wendland, Karton 985, ‘Wendland an Frau Dr. Gisela, 24. März 1969’

²⁸ For evidence of Bassler’s criticism of Wendland, see, for instance, NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Box 2942, POL-27 Military Operations, VIET-S, 4/1/1964, ‘Embassy in Bonn to Rusk, 4 March, 1964’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Box 1898, POL1, Gen. Policy. Background, ASIA SE, 1/1/1964, ‘Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Southeast Asia, 26 February 1964’

²⁹ NARA, RG0084, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry# UD 3340-E, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon. Classified General Records, 1956-1963, Container #71, 350 Internal Political Relations, GVN, ‘Ambassador Dowling to Secretary of State, 2 March 1962’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic Aid, Box 508, AID (GER W) VIET S, 64-65, ‘Coburn Kidd to Department of State. Subject: German Views on Viet Nam, 19 May 1964’

Bassler's visit to the Asian hemisphere in the spring entrenched this pessimism. True, on his tour of the countryside with President Diem, he remarked that America was "on [the] right track."³⁰ But it was little more than a brief interlude. Following his return, Bassler argued emphatically that, under the present programme, Indochina was being lost.³¹ The RVN capital, he warned, was "an enclosed city." Its land connection to the north, as well as the Cambodian border, had been cut. Bassler moreover worried about the state's porous borders. Even with American assistance, the ARVN had been unable to obstruct the flow of supplies from the Vietcong's external bases in Sepon and Attapeu. The prospects of defending the RVN, Bassler claimed, had worsened, rather than improved.³² And yet, despite this dire assessment, Bassler insisted that South Vietnam was worth fighting for, that it was "almost as important" as Berlin.³³ He considered it nothing less than a "political concern of the first order," both for the U.S. and the "entire Free World."³⁴

But when it came to outlining a constructive plan, Bassler adopted a paradoxical standpoint. Although he argued that the Americans were wrong to analyse Vietnam "primarily as a field of military operations," he insisted that the only way of counteracting the downward spiral was through "massive intervention."³⁵ This was a bold statement. Bassler was convinced that if the West did not want the entire hemisphere to collapse, then it needed to escalate. He placed particular importance on the psychological impact. South Vietnam and its adjacent neighbours either did not have a reason to fight, or were losing faith in American promises. Kennedy's actions, such as the deployment of the 7th Fleet to the Indochinese peninsula, were

³⁰ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 196, Vietnam, General 4/17/62-4/30/62, 'From Trueheart to Secretary of State, 17 April 1962'

³¹ NARA, RG0084, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry #UD 3340-E: Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1956-1963, 320 International Political Relations, Germany, 'From Dowling to Secretary of State. Subject: Statements by Foreign Office Official Bassler Following Return Trip to Southeast Asia, 3 May 1962'

³² PA AA, B12, Bd.1659, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Besuch von Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, 10. Mai 1962'

³³ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 196, Vietnam, General 4/17/62-4/30/62, 'From Trueheart in Bonn to the Department of State, 17 April 1962'

³⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1659, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Besuch von Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, 10. Mai 1962.' For Bassler's personal assessment, see also his report to Konrad Adenauer, in PA AA, B12, Bd.1673, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler, dem Herrn Bundeskanzler vorzulegen, 22. Mai 1962'

³⁵ NARA, RG0084, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry# UD 3340-E, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon. Classified General Records, 1956-1963, Container #71, 350 Internal Political Relations, GVN, 'Ambassador Dowling to Secretary of State, 2 March 1962'; NARA, RG0084, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry# UD3340-E: Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon. Classified General Records, 1956-1963, Container #66, 320 International Political Relations, Germany, 'Statements by Foreign Office Official Bassler Following Return from Trip to Southeast Asia, 3 May 1962'

being dismissed as “inadequate” and “ridiculous.”³⁶ Escalation, he contended further, would act as a useful tool to press the Diem regime for reform. As long as the president was insulated against social and political liberalisation, its people would have no conception for what they were fighting for.³⁷ Military force, then, was a means, rather than an end. Its purpose was to bolster morale, to offer hope. Bassler’s formula would remain unchanged right up until Americanisation.

This trust in military strength also explains Bassler’s scepticism about financial assistance. He was astonished that the U.S. placed so much weight on its foreign aid programme.³⁸ Though he drafted a statement in full support of fraternal succour, he remained adamant that Washington was putting the cart before the horse. National security needed to be guaranteed, before the West could finance larger economic projects. Even if the construction of these industrial enterprises could be safeguarded, Bassler claimed that they would be unprofitable, owing to the high costs of armed protection.³⁹ Nevertheless, American calls for additional support were intensifying. Policymakers and bureaucrats alike were being subjected to increasing demands. Again and again, U.S. officials inquired about the fifty million D-Mark capital injection for the Nong-Son project.⁴⁰ At the start of the year, the State Department decided to dispatch the former Director of the Bureau for German Affairs, James Riddleberger, in the hope of persuading the Adenauer government to “take early action.”⁴¹ Nor was it only the Americans, who were intensifying the pressure. In March, the chancellor received a personal invoice from Diem. The RVN leader drew Adenauer’s attention to a radio broadcast

³⁶ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/6266, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Lage in Laos, 16. Mai May 1962.’ On Thai loss of confidence in the United States, see also PA AA, B12, Bd.1607, ‘Fernschreiben von Berger in Kopenhagen, Nr. 51 vom 15. Mai 1962’

³⁷ NARA, RG0084, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry# UD 3340-E, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon. Classified General Records, 1956-1963, Container #71, 350 Internal Political Relations, GVN, ‘Ambassador Dowling to Secretary of State, 2 March 1962’

³⁸ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 196, Vietnam, General 4/17/62-4/30/62, ‘Trueheart to State Department, 17 April 1962’

³⁹ PA AA, B67, Bd.32, ‘Bassler an Hess, 19. April 1962,’ pp.66-67; PA AA, B12, Bd.1659, ‘Bassler an das Referat 803. Betreff: Wirtschaftshilfe an Vietnam, 19. Juni 1962’

⁴⁰ For evidence of U.S. pressurising both the chancellor and the Minister for Economic Affairs, Ludwig Erhard, see NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Subject, Personal Name and Country Files – 1960-1963. 1962 Subject Files, Memorandum of Conversation - Australia to PM Macmillan’s visit, 27-29 April, Box 16, ‘Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Forthcoming Visit of Erhard and GER Development Aid to Southeast Asia, 3 January 1962’; PA AA, B67, Bd.34, ‘Nachrichtenspiegel, vom 10. Januar 1962,’ p.205; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 2564, 85/K.00 Second Fine/7-562, ‘Telegram from Paris to Secretary of State, 7 March 1962’

⁴¹ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 2564, 85/K.00 Second Fine/7-562, ‘Telegram from Rusk to Paris, Saigon, Bonn, London, Rome, Ottawa, Tokyo, 9 January 1962’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1659, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kaiser. Betreff: Wirtschaftshilfe an Vietnam, 15. Juni 1962’

on 18 January, which he denounced as a “public admission” that the Vietcong’s campaign was directed and controlled from Hanoi. Enemy assaults, he continued, were part of the socialist world’s effort to “achieve world domination.” Saigon needed help from being “overwhelmed by the massive subversion” from North Vietnam, “backed by heavily increased support from the Communist Bloc.” Diem asked Adenauer to raise his voice “in defence of freedom,” and to condemn armed aggression against the “duly constituted government of the Republic of Vietnam.”⁴²

In the corridors of power, however, there remained a sense of unease. Was the U.S. committed to defending South Vietnam? Did it fully endorse the Diem government? These were the questions to which Bonn wanted answers.⁴³ There was a whiff of fatalism about the project, which Bassler was, at least in-part, responsible for. After reading one of Bassler’s sombre reports, the cabinet member, Hans-Christoph Seebohm, told the Foreign Minister that he expected Saigon to meet the same fate as Laos, and trigger the collapse of the entire region. “Whether such a collapse can be prevented by external forces, as America is demanding,” he mused, “seems very doubtful.” After all, the French had attempted to preserve its empire through violence. Seebohm did not see how the Americans could fare any better.⁴⁴

Wendland was cognisant of this trepidation. In his continued attempt to push Bonn towards a more active approach, he often cited statistical evidence of U.S. aid, as well as assurances from American officials that this was a struggle the West could not “afford to lose.”⁴⁵ Wendland remained adamant that the FRG had an “obligation” to assist. His warnings about what would happen if Saigon fell acquired an evermore apocalyptic tone: Not only the entire region - “from the Philippines to India” - would turn communist, but it would have a detrimental impact on the African continent. Contrary to Seebohm, however, Wendland insisted that the tide could still be “stemmed.” He was vocal in his praise. At long last, a more “systematic plan” had been formulated. The ARVN had been enlarged from 150.000 to 200.000 men and was fighting in smaller units, thus, gaining greater mobility. Furthermore,

⁴² BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3656, ‘Ngo Dinh Diem to Konrad Adenauer, 31 March 1962’

⁴³ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Subject, Personal Name and Country Files, 1960-1963. 1962 Subject Files, Box 16, ‘Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Forthcoming Visit of Erhard and GER Development Aid to Southeast Asia, 3 January 1962’

⁴⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1597, ‘Hans-Christoph Seebohm an Schröder, 8. Juni 1962.’ For a further example of West German fatalism, see ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-120/2, ‘Bach an Globke, 22. März 1962’

⁴⁵ See, for instance, PA AA, B12, Bd.1659, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Voraussetzung für die Verwendung des deutschen 50-Mio DM Kredites im Raum Tourane/Nong Song, 29. Januar 1962’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Neues amerikanisches Militärkommando in Südvietsnam, 13. Februar 1962’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.2, 5. Januar 1961’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Militärische Lage, 24. März 1962’

government troops had been equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and boasted much-improved lines of communication.⁴⁶

In turn, the story of Olaf Müller, a German citizen, who was captured on his way to a Buddhist shrine, exposed the Vietcong's own difficulties. Accused of being an American spy, Müller marched alongside communist partisans for sixty-eight consecutive days. On the whole, the NLF's treatment was surprisingly cordial. Despite being subjected to a stream of propaganda, Müller was not forced to perform hard labour, nor did he suffer physical abuse. What intrigued Wendland, though, was Müller's claim that his meals had become "worse and worse." Vietcong cadres had told him that the "white zones" along the border were making the transference of war materials increasingly difficult. Drawing on this evidence, Wendland argued that the strategic hamlet programme, launched at the start of the year with the purpose of separating the NLF from the peasants, was depriving rebels of food bases. This, Wendland reasoned, explained why partisans had switched tactics and were raiding hospitals and leproseries for medical supplies.⁴⁷

It would be wrong to push this optimism too far. Although Wendland was pleased that U.S. assistance had introduced some stability, he objected to the "very optimistic remarks" of the visiting Robert McNamara.⁴⁸ Vietcong cadres, he argued, had been "hit, but were by no means destroyed."⁴⁹ Besides, just like Bassler, Wendland remained worried about the "shocking unpopularity" of the Diem regime.⁵⁰ Its political isolation, coupled with the president's propensity to lecture rather than listen, accentuated the state's weaknesses. Diem, the ambassador warned, believed that God had chosen him to be Vietnam's saviour and the only people he trusted were his relatives. In fact, the bombing of the presidential palace by two mutinous ARVN pilots at the end of February made Diem's cloistered decision-making even more pronounced. Wendland doubted whether the president could ever be persuaded to disassociate himself from his siblings, or that an orderly system was possible under his reign.⁵¹

⁴⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1659, 'Wendland an das Auswärtiges Amt. Betreff: Voraussetzung für die Verwendung des deutschen 50 Mio-DM Kredites im Raum Tourane/Nong Son, 29. Januar 1962'

⁴⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Verschwinden des deutschen Staatsangehörigen Olaf Müller, 20. Juni 1962.' On Müller's adventure, see also *Times Herald*, 'German Visitor Gets a 'Guided' Tour with Viet Cong, 10 June 1962,' p.24; *New York Times*, 'Vietnam Reds See German Sightseer, 10 June, 1962,' p.11

⁴⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Rückwirkungen der Ereignisse in Laos auf die Lage in Vietnam, 14. Mai 1962'

⁴⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Verschwinden des deutschen Staatsangehörigen Olaf Müller, 20. Juni 1962'

⁵⁰ PA, AA, B12, Bd.1665, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Sicherheitslage in Süd-Vietnam, 8. August 1962'

⁵¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Bombenschlag meuternder Flieger, 5. März 1962.' During a conversation with his Australian counterpart, Wendland was told that Garfield Barwick, the

Herrmann, likewise, warned of overconfidence. In successive reports, the military attaché offered an even-handed assessment between American triumphalism and Bassler's pessimism. The arrival of more than 6.000 U.S. advisers, he said, along with the effective use of material assistance, had halted the Vietcong's advances. Despondency within the armed forces was declining and in the first half of April, 50% more rebel defectors had been recorded than in the entire month of March.⁵² Nevertheless, Herrmann remained adamant that the future of South Vietnam depended on the future of Laos. "Hardly anyone seriously believes," he wrote, "that a neutral Laotian government [...] will be able to completely prevent infiltration into South Vietnam." If there was a prospect, however, of limiting enemy subversion, or of inhibiting it for a longer period, then the Vietcong would be cut-off from its supply bases and provide the ARVN with some respite.⁵³ Meanwhile, there was another, nationalistic reason why West Germany refocused its attention on Vientiane. Rumours were circulating that Souvanna Phouma was about to recognise the GDR.

Fighting for Laos and the Limits of Peacekeeping

The prospect of Vientiane establishing state relations with East Germany had been a growing concern since the turn of the year. On 16 December, Phouma had stressed in an ADN interview that "Laos must have friendly relations with all countries. Given that there is already a diplomatic mission of the Federal Republic accredited in Laos, it must also have diplomatic relations with East Germany."⁵⁴ The statement made perfect sense. It fitted into the prince's plan of building a non-aligned government, extricating Laos from the Cold War and steering a middle-course between the two opposing blocs.⁵⁵ Yet neither the FRG, nor the GDR analysed

Australian Foreign Minister, had been subjected to a three-hour presidential monologue, without being able to get a word in edge way. See PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, 'Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Besuch des australischen Außenministers in Südvietnam 6. Juni 1962'

⁵² PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.13/62 Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 17. April 1962'

⁵³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1648, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Nr.24/62. Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 7. Juli 1962.' On Herrmann's belief that the military situation in Southeast Asia depended primarily on events in Laos, see also PA AA, B12, Bd.1658, 'Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.20/62. Die ausländischen Truppen in Thailand und die mögliche Weiterentwicklung der Lage in Südostasien, 26. Juni 1962'

⁵⁴ AAPD 1962, p.1439, Fußnote 2

⁵⁵ PA MFAA, A8564, 'Vermerk Nr.42/62 über ein Gespräch zwischen dem Botschafter Genossen Nohr und dem Leiter der laotischen Vertretung, Herrn Thao Pheng, 29. Januar 1962,' p.260. The historiography remains rather hazy on Phouma, who is oftentimes simply labelled a neutralist without any further reflections on his personal character or his past history. For some background and his foreign political agenda, see E. Wehrle, "'A Good, Bad Deal': John F. Kennedy, W. Averell Harriman and the Neutralisation of Laos, 1961-1962,' *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 67, Number 3 (August 1998), p.361; J. Rust, *So Much to Lose: John F. Kennedy and American Policy in Laos* (Lexington, 2014), pp.37-38; Jacobs, *The Universe Unravelling*, p.31

Phouma's comments from the Laotian perspective. Instead, they examined them from a nationalist standpoint, at the centre of which was the Hallstein Doctrine.

Adopted in 1955, the doctrine's objective was to ensure that East Germany did not achieve diplomatic recognition, that it remained illegitimate on the international stage. The establishment of bilateral ties by a third party was deemed an infringement on the FRG's mandate to represent all German nationals.⁵⁶ The struggle for Laos erupted at a critical moment. As William Gray points out, in mid-1962, Bonn failed to stop the GDR from building a general-consulate in Iraq, whereas political relations with Ceylon had, likewise, deteriorated.⁵⁷ Privately, Adenauer warned that there was a danger of the doctrine "drying out" and suggested that the FRG exchange it for something "valuable," such as better living conditions for the East Germans.⁵⁸ Yet Bonn's and East Berlin's endeavours in Laos illustrated that the doctrine was still very much alive. The former feared that its nemesis was taking advantage of the unstable situation to grab a foothold on the global stage.⁵⁹ It would be the first time that a country outside the bloc had established state relations.⁶⁰ Sure enough, above the 17th parallel, Dreßler emphasised that it would be a "decisive blow" against both "the Hallstein Doctrine" and "West German militarism."⁶¹ Klaus Pommerening went further. Vientiane, the ADN-correspondent argued, was a political hub, an intersection between many national- and international interests. Not only did it have strong links with the ring of nations around it, but the Western Powers - America, France and Britain - all had their very own information centres. The establishment of an embassy in such a maelstrom of political currents, Pommerening concluded, would bolster the GDR's international prestige.⁶²

Phouma's remarks, therefore, initiated a flurry of movement. On 9 January, the MfAA informed Nohr that a resolution had been drafted, which welcomed the impending formation of a coalition government. Nohr was appointed chief negotiator and ordered to make contact

⁵⁶ On the Hallstein Doctrine, see Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, pp.81-86

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.136

⁵⁸ AdsD, A6, 1/WBA-BER-0072, 'Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Regierenden Bürgermeisters, Willy Brandt, mit dem Bundeskanzler, 19 Juni 1962,' p.2

⁵⁹ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1348, 65/J.00/6-2260, 'From Morris to Secretary of State, 5 July 1962'

⁶⁰ PA MfAA, A8564, 'König an Dölling in Moskau, 12. September 1962,' p.363; JFKL, The Papers of McGeorge Bundy, 9/52/A/5/1, Series 4. White House Subject Files. Accounting Sheets and Appraisal Lists, Re: Securities, 1962-1940 (1 of 2), Box 33, European Trip, September 1962, 'For Eyes Only Delivery to Bundy, 2 October 1962'

⁶¹ PA MfAA, A8564, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.211/62 über eine Unterredung des Charge d'Affaires, Genossen Dreßler mit dem Rat der Wirtschafts- und Kulturvertretung des Königreiches Laos, Kamphay Boupou am 29. Juni 1962,' p.335

⁶² PA MfAA, A8564, 'Vermerk Nr.198/62 über eine Unterredung der Genossen Dressler und Winter mit dem ADN-Korrespondenten, Genossen Pommerening am 26. Juni 1962,' p.333. On the significance of Laotian recognition for the GDR, see also S. Bock, I. Muth, H. Schwiesau (Hrsg.), *DDR-Außenpolitik im Rückspiegel: Diplomaten im Gespräch* (Münster, 2004), p.305

with the Laotian representative. What the Ulbricht government wanted was an official assurance that Vientiane would recognise East Berlin.⁶³ Simultaneously, their western counterparts confronted the prince head on. A week after Nohr received his instructions, Erich Boltze cornered Phouma in Paris and warned that state relations would be “seriously jeopardised” if he were to act upon his statement. The FRG was aware that it held several advantages. For one thing, it was far wealthier and could, accordingly, bend others to its will. Phouma’s response was telling. He emphasised that the maintenance of close contacts in the “economic sector” was a top priority and expressed his wish to avoid a split “at all costs.” Phouma proposed that neither German state would be recognised and that Laos would, instead, handle bilateral affairs with the FRG through its embassy in France.⁶⁴

The first round had gone to Bonn. Unlike East Berlin, it had been given Phouma’s word that he would not extend diplomatic relations. Even so, the Ulbricht government was not about to give up. Rather shrewdly, it turned its attention to other high-ranking policymakers. In the spring of 1962, Foreign Minister, Quinim Pholsena, was offered an official state visit and treated to a “heart-warming” reception, with which he was “extremely pleased.”⁶⁵ The wooing seemed to bear fruit. Two weeks later, during his stopover in Hanoi, Pholsena informed Nohr that economic and cultural representatives should initially be exchanged, before moving towards state recognition. When the ambassador pointed out that Phouma was currently absent, Pholsena replied that it was the Council of Ministers, not the prince, which held the decisive vote. As a result, he intended to present Phouma with a *fait accompli*.⁶⁶

These were incredible words. Quite apart from Pholsena plotting behind his superior’s back, it exposed the kingdom’s fractious and brittle nature. It was moreover curious that despite East- and West German wrangling, neither of them had any confidence in the coalition’s prospects. Phouma’s nonalignment, Bassler contended, was “unenforceable.” It was based on an equipoise between communist and capitalist power. Yet the enemy’s control over nine-tenth of Laotian terrain, when compared with the strip of land held by Boun Oum and Phoumi, exposed the asymmetrical nature of the two sides.⁶⁷ FRG officials were worried, too, about the

⁶³ PA MfAA, A8605, ‘Stude an Nohr, 3. Januar, 1962,’ p.26; PA MfAA, A8605, ‘Stude an Nohr, 14. Februar 1962,’ p.38

⁶⁴ PA AA, B38-IIA1, Bd.114 ‘Gesandter a.D. Boltze in Paris, 10. Januar 1962,’ pp.379-380. On FRG use of its economic muscle, see Gray, *Germany’s Cold War*, p.135

⁶⁵ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk 165/63 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Quang, Mitarbeiter der Protokollabteilung des MfAA der DRV, am 7. Mai 1962,’ pp.291-292

⁶⁶ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk 167/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Botschafter Nohr mit dem Informationsminister des Königreiches Laos, Quinim Pholsena, 7. Mai 1962,’ pp.295-296

⁶⁷ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/6266, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler für Adenauer. Betreff: Lage in Laos, 16. Mai 1962’

communists' unconcealed confidence, both in deeds and in words. Beijing was so sure of conquest, the consulate in Hong Kong reported, that it had begun to build a highway from Yunnan to Northern Laos, with the hope of connecting it to the Southeast Asian road network.⁶⁸ Khrushchev, Hans Kroll similarly pointed out, had acknowledged that the Americans would "perhaps, fight a long war," but that they would "definitely be chased from foreign soil." Although the communists preferred a deal on Laos, Kroll estimated that they were unafraid of fighting a jungle war.⁶⁹ Whatever happened, the communists were convinced that victory was theirs.

What Kroll did not realise, however, was that it was precisely this divergence on tactics which worried the East Germans. Dreßler complained that the CCP, VWP and Pathet Lao were all showing "dogmatic tendencies," as well as disregarding the bloc's peaceful coexistence programme.⁷⁰ The source of friction revolved, above all, around Phouma. The prince was not only tilting towards Bonn on the German question, but relying increasingly on U.S. assistance and advice. Explanations for his divergence were plentiful, yet vague. Prominent amongst them were family ties, Phouma's personal friendship with Averell Harriman, as well as insidious U.S. manoeuvring.⁷¹ What interested the East Germans, though, was not the reason, but the solution. In his seminal work on the Soviet perspective of the Vietnam War, Ilya Gaiduk notes that in early March, the communists held a secret conference with the sole purpose of deliberating tactics.⁷² GDR archival records not only confirm this, but disclose that there were, in fact, two such meetings. Although East German officials did not attend the first conference, the Soviet Ambassador, Suren Tovmassian, provided Dreßler with a comprehensive report. Whereas the Soviets had taken the view that anything which might alienate Phouma should be avoided, the other three representatives had advocated militarism. Tovmassian compared the attitude of the Laotian, Vietnamese and Chinese "to a man, who wants to grapple with his opponent [...] without evaluating either his own, or his opponent's strength first." This is not to argue that the Soviets were completely averse to force. Tovmassian even acknowledged that

⁶⁸ ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-120/2, 'Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Politische Lage in Südostasien, 22. März 1962'

⁶⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1607, 'Aufzeichnung von Kroll an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Sowjetunion und Laos, 25. Mai 1962'

⁷⁰ PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d'Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, 13. März 1962,' p.23

⁷¹ PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr. 94/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Winter mit dem Rat der laotischen Wirtschafts- und Kultur-Vertretung, Kamphang Boupha, am 12. März 1962,' p.4; SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, 'Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur Situation in Laos, 27. April 1962'; PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d'Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, 13. März 1962,' p.11

⁷² Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p.177

the Pathet Lao needed to be furnished with more armaments. Still, both he and Dreßler expressed doubt whether violence alone would solve the crisis. They agreed that the Asian parties were overestimating the use of militancy and underestimating the political struggle. What concerned them, above all else, was that further skirmishes could lead to the abandonment of the Geneva Conference and reignite civil war.⁷³

Two months later, at a second and enlarged meeting, Nohr witnessed the disagreements first-hand. Under strict orders to remain silent, he watched the discussions from the side-lines, as Chinese, Soviet, Vietnamese, Laotian and, interestingly, Korean representatives contributed to the debate. Akin to the first meeting, a contrast was discernible between one faction, which advocated peaceful means, and a second that emphasised militarism. The leader of the Lao Peoples' Revolutionary Party, Kaysone Phomvihane, argued that U.S. violation of the ceasefire made the construction of a coalition government (let alone its preservation) unlikely and that talks needed to be supplemented by armed struggle. His proposal received both Chinese and Korean endorsement. Tovmassian, in contrast, repeated what he had told Dreßler: The Geneva Conference provided a platform to solve the problem peacefully. Although Tovmassian admitted that he was "under no illusions" about the government's prospects, he stressed that it would liquidate Washington's involvement and allow communist forces to strengthen their own influence over the inhabitants.⁷⁴ And yet, it was Khiem's statement which stood out. Already after the first summit, he had shared his belief that the Pathet Lao's attitude towards Phouma was wrong.⁷⁵ At the second conference, Khiem officially broke with the Asian parties and insisted that it was precisely because relations had become more difficult that the bloc needed to show a "high degree of elasticity" towards the prince. At no point did Khiem advocate militarism. He, instead, endorsed Tovmassian's proposal of seeking a peaceful solution.⁷⁶

⁷³ PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d'Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, 13. März 1962,' pp.9-16, pp.24-26

⁷⁴ PA MfAA, G-A314, 'Information über die Konferenz der Vertreter der Bruderparteien der Länder des sozialistischen Lagers (außer Albanien) in Anwesenheit des Generalsekretärs des ZK der Laotischen Volkspartei, Genossen Kay Son, zur Situation in Laos und über die Hilfe für Laos am 13./14. April in Hanoi,' pp.1-6; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/329, 'Von Aussenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen an Genosse Honecker. Betreff: Konferenz der 12 Bruderparteien zur Laos-Frage in Hanoi, 26. April 1962,' pp.111-112

⁷⁵ PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d'Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, am 13. März 1962,' p.13

⁷⁶ PA MfAA, G-A314, 'Information über die Konferenz der Vertreter der Bruderparteien der Länder des sozialistischen Lagers (außer Albanien) in Anwesenheit des Generalsekretärs des ZK der Laotischen Volkspartei, Genossen Kay Son, zur Situation in Laos und über die Hilfe für Laos am 13./14. April in Hanoi,' p.4

This disagreement on strategy meant that the establishment of state relations with Laos acquired further significance for East Berlin. There was a danger of both the civil war rekindling as well as Soviet authority diminishing. It was evident that the Kremlin's advice was not being heeded, that it could not control the Pathet Lao. Ten days after the inconclusive summit, rebel forces counterattacked, seizing the enemy's military base southeast from Nam-Tha. On 24 April, the defence positions east- and north-east of the city surrendered. By 6 May, Nam-Tha itself had fallen.⁷⁷ The euphoria in Hanoi, following the "complete destruction" of Phoumi's armies, was not entirely shared in East Berlin.⁷⁸ For one thing, they had not been consulted. Pommerening had been aware that Pathet Lao units were "encircling" Nam-Tha, yet he had insisted that, "at present," its troops were "not thinking about occupying this area."⁷⁹ Although he subsequently argued that it had been a "legitimate" attack, which had thwarted Phoumi's own plans for a large-scale offensive against the Chinese-Laotian border, he seemed more concerned that the assault could crystallise a split between Phouma and the Pathet Lao.⁸⁰ Sure enough, when Nohr broached the question with Tovmassian on 8 May, he was told that the prince was showing signs of wanting to restrict "democratic forces." "The establishment of relations with further socialist states," Tovmassian maintained, "would strengthen the position of these democratic forces."⁸¹ In other words, the presence of a GDR ambassador would place the bloc (meaning the Kremlin) in a more favourable position to influence the decision-making process.⁸²

But despite East German fear that the Pathet Lao's belligerency would trigger the resumption of armed conflict, it had quite the opposite effect. Rather than rush to Phoumi's assistance, William Rust points out that JFK rejected the proposed contingency plans and voiced his desire for a "prompt political agreement."⁸³ At the subsequent Geneva conference in June, it was announced that a compromise had, at long last, been reached. Phouma would

⁷⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1648, 'Aufzeichnung von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.16/62. Lage in Laos, 15. Mai 1962'; *New York Times*, 'Reds Take Key Ridge in Laos, 25 April 1962' p.6

⁷⁸ PA MfAA, A8564, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.172/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Winter mit dem Laos-Bearbeiter des MfAA, Genossen Tham, 10. Mai 1962,' p.303. Mari Olsen's work, likewise, argues that the Soviets had tried to stop the Pathet Lao from launching their assault. See Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, p.108

⁷⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, 'Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur Situation in Laos, 27. April 1962'

⁸⁰ PA MfAA, A8607, 'Bericht des ADN-Korrespondenten Genossen Pommerening über seine Reise nach Laos vom 15. bis 17. Mai 1962,' p.9

⁸¹ PA MfAA, A8564, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.168/62 über ein Gespräch des Genossen Botschafter Nohr mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Genossen Tovmassian am 8 Mai 1962,' pp.298-299

⁸² Ibid. pp.298-299; PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d'Affaires, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, am 13. März 1962,' p.14

⁸³ Rust, *So Much to Lose*, pp.115-129. See also Jones, *The Universe Unraveling*, pp.260-261

head the troika government, whilst the two deputy premiers, Souphanouvong and Phoumi, were appointed minister of planning and minister of finance, respectively.⁸⁴ More significant for East Berlin, though, was the cabinet meeting's announcement on 24 June that Laos would establish diplomatic relations with "any country which so requested."⁸⁵ Three days later, with Phouma attending his daughter's wedding in Paris, the cabinet decreed that Vientiane would offer "full diplomatic representation" to the GDR.⁸⁶ Incredibly, it had taken less than seventy-two hours for Laotian legislators to contravene Phouma's leadership - a damning indictment of just how fragile the administrative apparatus was. All three "directions," Herrmann complained, were anxious to maintain their respective power, rather than govern effectively.⁸⁷ They were, hence, not sharing political authority, but vying for it.

Again, Bonn was forced to respond. And again, it went to the very top. On 23 July, Foreign Minister, Gerhard Schröder, met Phouma in Switzerland and reiterated the familiar line that the FRG was the only "legitimate" German state. To emphasise the point, Schröder noted that every single nation outside the socialist world, including the neutralist countries, recognised its legitimacy. But whereas Boltze had used veiled threats to counsel the prince, Schröder switched tactics and expressed sympathy for Phouma's plight, as well as hinting that Bonn would provide financial succour if Laos refused to recognise the GDR.⁸⁸ The carrot had replaced the stick. A month later, Adenauer's cabinet approved a 20 million D-Mark credit.⁸⁹

Bonn's decision to provide fiscal aid left East Berlin with little room to manoeuvre. Although the newly-arrived chargé d'affaires in Vientiane, Joachim Naumann, hinted that his government would willingly dispatch an economic mission and that the GDR's industrial strength was "roughly equivalent to Japan," these were hollow words.⁹⁰ It could not compete with the FRG on an economic level. Besides, Bonn's allies were favourably placed. British, American and, above all, French bureaucrats used their private connections with Laotian

⁸⁴ Rust, *So Much to Lose*, p.133-134

⁸⁵ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1348, 65/J.00/6-2260, 'From Creel in Vientiane to Secretary of State, 30 June 1962'

⁸⁶ *Times Herald*, 'Laos Coalition Takes Control, Pledges Peace, 24 June 1962,' p.25; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Box 1348, 65/J.51K/9-662, 'Unger in Vientiane to Secretary of State, 29 September 1962.' Souvanna admitted to the American ambassador in Laos that he had not been consulted.

⁸⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1648, 'Aufzeichnung von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.20/62. Die ausländischen Truppen in Thailand und die mögliche Weiterentwicklung der Lage in Südostasien, 26. Juni 1962'

⁸⁸ ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder, 01-483, 281/1, 'Aufzeichnung: Gespräch zwischen dem Herrn Bundesminister des Auswärtigen und dem laotischen Ministerpräsidenten, Souvanna Phouma, 23. Juli 1962'

⁸⁹ U. Roessel und C. Seemann (Hrsg.), *Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, Band 15, 1962* (München, 2005), p.383

⁹⁰ PA MfAA, G-A337, 'V. Bericht von Naumann in Vientiane, 15. August, 1962,' p.78

policymakers to make the case against state recognition.⁹¹ East German attempts to counter these actions and mobilise both Soviet and Polish patronage had little effect.⁹² On 1 September, Souphanouvong informed Naumann that the cabinet had approved the establishment of ambassadorial relations with seven socialist countries. The GDR was not one of them. “It follows,” Fritz Stude complained bitterly, “that Phouma [...] wants to postpone official recognition.”⁹³ Bonn had, in short, thwarted its nemesis’ ploy.

But whilst the East- and West German political struggle for Laos had concluded in the latter’s favour, the bigger issue of neutralisation remained unresolved. Despite the head of the Soviet delegation Georgi Pushkin’s insistence to Ambassador Dölling that the negotiations had been a “success” and that this was “immediately apparent” when comparing the initial Western proposals to the final draft, the truth was that the accords were never implemented.⁹⁴ There was no trust within the troika government, nor, for that matter, between the foreign countries. On 8 October, Khiem informed Nohr that there were still approximately 7.000 American- and allied forces on Laotian terrain. In turn, the FRG ambassador to Thailand, Hans Bidder, quoted Phouma complaining that North Vietnamese “volunteers” had remained in the kingdom.⁹⁵ These accusations are not meant to blame either side for violating the agreement, but to illustrate the lack of goodwill. There was never any intention of adhering to neutralism.

The failure of the Geneva conference marked a turning point. The lesson drawn in Bonn was that neutralisation was not a practical alternative. Whenever the subject was broached, officials automatically pointed to the ineffectual summit on Laos. Furthermore, after probing his American colleagues, Wendland reported that a neutral South Vietnam was “out of the question.” It could only be considered, he stressed, if the DRV was neutralised as well, which

⁹¹ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1348, 65/J.51K/1-1360, ‘From London to Secretary of State, 5 July 1962’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1553, ‘Welczeck an das Referat 710 für den Merkzettel des Herrn Bundeskanzlers. Betreff: “Gute Dienste” der Franzosen in der Deutschlandfrage, 29. August 1962’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1348, 65/J.55/9-2062, ‘From Unger to Secretary of State, 10 November 1962’

⁹² PA MfAA, G-A337, ‘IV. Bericht von Naumann in Vientiane, 12. August, 1962,’ p.71; ⁹² PA MfAA, G-A337, ‘V. Bericht von Naumann in Vientiane, 15. August, 1962,’ p.77

⁹³ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Aufzeichnung von Stude. Betreff: Information über die Herstellung diplomatischer Beziehungen zwischen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und dem Königreich Laos, 12. September 1962,’ pp.363-364. Likewise, the U.S. Ambassador Unger reported on 16 September that East German ambassadorial representation had “been shelved.” See NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Box 1348, 65/J.00/6-2260, ‘Unger to Secretary of State, 16 September 1962’

⁹⁴ PA MfAA, A1142, ‘Dölling an Winzer, 1. August 1962,’ p.219; M. Thee, *Notes of a Witness, Laos and the Second Indochina War* (New York, 1973), p.291

⁹⁵ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.249/62 über eine Information des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Genossen Ung Van Khiem, vor den Botschaftern der sozialistischen Länder am 8. Oktober 1962,’ p.373

was “impossible,” given that it belonged to the “communist satellite belt.”⁹⁶ The East Germans, in contrast, had several reasons to endorse a political settlement. Principally, it wanted American interference below the 17th parallel to end and for Washington to withdraw its units.⁹⁷ An international conference was equally compatible with peaceful coexistence and would counteract the ominous prospect of a larger war. In the summer of 1962, Dreßler estimated that the “revolutionary situation” was “very favourable.” Comparing the struggle for Vietnamese reunification with the GDR’s demands for a German peace treaty, he argued that both states needed to mobilise fraternal support from all socialist countries. Only then would the “imperialist” powers submit to negotiations. What Dreßler did not mention was that the bloc had been calling for a German peace treaty since 1958 and that Khrushchev’s continual ultimatums had been ignored. It seems rather fanciful that international pressure would induce Washington to abandon its nation-building project. Still, the chargé d'affaires remained adamant that the marshalling of global support would leave the U.S. with no choice, but to negotiate.⁹⁸

The historiography on whether Hanoi advocated neutralisation is punctuated with inconsistencies and guesswork. Archival records, which could shed light on the matter, remain inaccessible.⁹⁹ The East German account does offer some illuminating insight into Vietnamese thinking. Prior to the ratification of the Geneva Accords, the Head of the DRV’s Propaganda Department, Luu Quy Ky, informed the GDR’s press attaché in “strict confidence” that his country was preparing a “strong delegation” with the aim of “transforming” the summit into an international conference on South Vietnam. Luu admitted that the decision had not yet been finalised, but, echoing Dreßler, he insisted that the timing was “opportune.” A summit condemning American belligerence, Luu continued, presented the “most effective means” of counteracting the “harmful” ICC report. When asked whether Beijing approved, he replied that the Chinese were equally in favour of “clarifying” the South Vietnam problem.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ PA AA, B12, Bd.1607, ‘Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Laotischer Goodwill-Mission in Saigon, 8. Mai 1962’

⁹⁷ PA MfAA, C288/75, ‘Aufzeichnung von Stude. Betreff: Kontaktaufnahme mit der südvietnamesischen Delegation auf der Moskauer Konferenz, 30 June 1962,’ p.160

⁹⁸ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Vermerk Nr.207/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Thuan Anh, Leiter der Abteilung SV im MfAA der DRV am 17. Juli 1962,’ p.198

⁹⁹ For some thought-provoking analysis, see Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War*, pp.125-144; W. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam, Second Edition* (Oxford, 1999), pp.222-224; A. Guan, ‘The Vietnam War, 1962-64: The Vietnamese Communist Perspective,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 35, Number 4 (October 2000), pp.603-606. For the NLF’s view on neutralisation, see Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, pp.19-26

¹⁰⁰ PA MfAA, A8564, ‘Vermerk Nr.197/62 über eine Unterredung zwischen dem Genossen Luu Quy Ky, Leiter der Presseabteilung des ZK der PWV und dem Genossen Ramm, 12. Juni 1962,’ p.323

There is no doubt, then, that policymakers were deliberating the idea. In light of the DRV's domestic problems, the move towards an international conference must have made sense to East Berlin. Ambassador Thuan admitted that his country was trapped in a "vicious circle." The amount of food available was simply not enough to feed its inhabitants.¹⁰¹ Despite the government's "greatest hope," rice harvests for May and June had been worse than the previous year. North Vietnam's food reserves were nominal and only the importation of rice and corn were safeguarding its provisions.¹⁰² In the eyes of GDR officials, the situation was "more than serious."¹⁰³ Any respite would surely be welcomed.

Nevertheless, if the East Germans had hoped that their comrades would push for an international conference, then they were disappointed. On 17 July, Dreßler raised the subject of negotiations with Thuan Anh, asking him what specific measures Hanoi intended to take in working towards a conference. "This question," he explained to the MfAA, "was asked to finally learn from the Vietnamese side what they wanted to do, apart from their usual protests, to ensure the fulfilment of the [1954] Geneva Accords."¹⁰⁴ The fact that Dreßler labelled it an "unofficial, personal inquiry" suggests that he was hoping to learn more information off-the-record. Four days later, he received a one-and-a-half-hour response. The newly-appointed head of the South Vietnam department informed Dreßler that the DRV was not pressing for a summit, because, in its opinion, the present "conditions" were "not yet ripe." America was stepping up its military actions and neither Washington, nor the Diem regime, intended to solve the Vietnam problem peacefully. "If the DRV, however, does express a willingness to participate in such an international conference," Thuan Anh contended, "then only because it is convinced that the USA-government and Diem *would reject participation*."¹⁰⁵ The resistance movement, he emphasised, needed to inflict heavy blows - "of a military nature" - against the "imperialists," until they had no alternative, but to enter into negotiations. Drawing upon the Laotian example, he concluded that only the military defeat at Nam-Tha had made the "reactionary forces" agree to talks.¹⁰⁶ The same would hold true for Vietnam.

¹⁰¹ PA MfAA, A8688, 'Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Botschafters der DRV in der DDR, Pham Ngoc Thuan, in der LPG "Max Reimann" in Gusow Kr. Seelow am 4. August 1962,' p.205

¹⁰² PA MfAA, A8603, 'Vermerk über die am 27. Juli 1962 im Ministerium für Aussenhandel stattgefundene Aussprache mit dem Minister für Aussenhandel der DRV, Genossen Phan Anh,' p.293

¹⁰³ PA MfAA, A8598, 'Informationen über einige ernste Schwierigkeiten auf dem Gebiet der Versorgung in der DRV, bedingt durch erhebliche Rückstände in der Planerfüllung der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion, sowie über neue Massnahmen der Regierung zur Steigerung der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion. 15. August 1962,' p.246

¹⁰⁴ PA MfAA, A8570, 'Vermerk Nr.207/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Thuan Anh, Leiter der Abteilung Südvietnam im MfAA der DRV am 17. Juli 1962,' p.198

¹⁰⁵ PA MfAA, A8570, 'Vermerk Nr.208/62 über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Thuan Anh, Leiter der Abteilung Südvietnam im MfAA der DRV am 21. Juli 1962,' p.198, pp.201-204. My italics.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.204

In his subsequent report to the MfAA, Dressler reflected that this was a “clear answer.” Thuan Anh had stated that armed struggle was the “main form” of Hanoi’s reunification strategy and that the time for discussions had not yet arrived. “That is why,” Dreßler wrote, “[the DRV] is not demanding international negotiations with greater emphasis, or in concrete forms.”¹⁰⁷ To be sure, when he asked Anh’s deputy a couple of weeks later about press reports of a “great campaign” to convene a conference, Dreßler was told, once again, that North Vietnam opposed negotiations and that these reports were “exaggerated.”¹⁰⁸ East German evidence, therefore, echoes Margaret Gnoinska’s claim that the DRV “may not have been so serious about the idea of neutralising South Vietnam after all.”¹⁰⁹ Hanoi, Dreßler complained, did “not fully recognise” the strategy of peaceful coexistence and “gravely underestimated” the ability of the socialist camp to resolve the Vietnam problem through political means. The lesson taken from the Laos Crisis was that only armed struggle could create favourable conditions for reunification. Worryingly for the East Germans, Hanoi’s rhetoric was becoming increasingly consistent with that of Beijing.¹¹⁰

Hanoi’s Ambiguity

On 10 January 1962, Ulbricht received an official letter from the central committee of the VWP. The central theme corresponded with its previous dispatch in August 1960, for it highlighted, once again, Vietnamese consternation about the state of affairs inside the Marxist-Leninist world:

Until now, the communist [...] parties, as well as the countries of the socialist camp, whose greatest centre is the Soviet Union, have always stood together like one single bloc [...] It is regrettable that today we face such a difference of opinion. We are convinced that the fraternal parties, just like our party, are worried about this situation.

The letter made two proposals. First, a conference should be convoked to discuss and settle the Albanian-Soviet dispute. Second, in anticipation of the proposed conference, bloc members should cease the polemics and create a favourable environment for a successful meeting.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Situation in Südvietsnam, 23. Juli 1962,’ pp.51-52

¹⁰⁸ PA MfAA, C228/75, ‘Vermerk Nr.227/62 über ein Gespräch mit Gen. Hoan, Mitarbeiter der Abteilung Südvietsnam im MfAA der DRV, am 16. August 1962,’ p.150

¹⁰⁹ Gnoinska, ‘Poland and the Cold War,’ p.550. Ilya Gaiduk similarly suggests that Hanoi was merely using the idea as a “propaganda tool.” See Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, pp.196-197

¹¹⁰ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Dreßler an das MfAA. Betreff: Situation in Südvietsnam, 23. Juli 1962,’ pp.51-53. For the Chinese interpretation of the Laos conflict, see PA MfAA, G-A338, ‘Vermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem ungarischen Botschaftsrat, Genosse Szigeti, 9. Mai, p.8; PA MfAA, A6760, ‘Aufzeichnung der DDR Botschaft in Peking. Betreff: Entwicklung der aussenpolitischen Konzeption der VR China in den Monaten Januar bis Juli 1962,’ p.40

¹¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, ‘Brief vom Zentralkomitee der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland, den 10. Januar 1962,’ pp.21-22

Nothing in the voluminous archival evidence suggests that East Berlin gave much thought to its ally's brokering. It was not discussed in the politburo and Ulbricht's response was no more than an addendum to the CPSU's long-winded rant about the "anti-Marxist splitting activities" of Enver Hoxha.¹¹² The proposals were rejected. A conference, Ulbricht explained, would provide the Albanians with a platform to resume their calumnies. The SED's own polemics, in contrast, were part of its "duty" to safeguard the "solidarity of the international workers' movement," as well as "the purity of Marxism-Leninism."¹¹³ Most telling about the German and Soviet retorts, however, was their joint emphasis on China. Hanoi had not mentioned Beijing in its appeal, yet both insisted that the PRC had the ability to "normalise" the fractured alliance and that it should "correct" the Albanian leadership. The shrouded accusation was plain: It was all Beijing's fault.¹¹⁴

At first glance, Ulbricht's response was baffling. As he himself admitted, the unity of the socialist camp was an "existential question" for the GDR. In his eyes, it resembled the defensive shield against Bonn's "imperialism and militarism."¹¹⁵ He, even more than Ho Chi Minh, had an incentive to resolve the dispute. No doubt the reason for his dismissive attitude were instructions from above. Unlike Ho, Ulbricht had little room to manoeuvre. The Kremlin had rejected the proposal and, therefore, the SED rejected it. But it would be erroneous to argue that East Berlin was blindly following Moscow's orders. There was an undercurrent suspicion in the MfAA that Beijing had "inspired" the Vietnamese to circulate the appeal, a suspicion reinforced following the CCP's unequivocal endorsement.¹¹⁶ To understand Ulbricht's response, it is essential to correlate Hanoi's letter with developments inside the bloc.

It was at this juncture, as winter moved towards spring, that talk of a split resurfaced. A report from Josef Hegen to the politburo in March is apposite. The ambassador estimated that CCP policymakers had utilised China's national uniqueness and its association with national liberation struggles to digress from Marxist-Leninist truths. Beijing, he claimed, was

¹¹² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Brief von Ulbricht an das Zentralkomitee der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 15. März 1962,' pp.104-108. For the Soviet letter, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Brief vom Zentralkomitee der KPdSU an das Zentralkomitee der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 24. Februar 1962,' pp.28-68

¹¹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Brief von Ulbricht an das Zentralkomitee der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 15. März 1962,' pp.104-108

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.106; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Brief vom ZK der KPdSU an das Zentralkomitee der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 24. Februar 1962,' p.65; This was also the CCP's inference from the statements. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3606, 'Brief vom Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Vietnams,' p.101

¹¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY30/3667, 'Brief von Ulbricht an das Zentralkomitee der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 15. März 1962,' p.105

¹¹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, 'Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Außenpolitik und International Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,' p.175

using its exceptionalism as an ideological platform to popularise Maoist theories and, thus, “create its own centre inside the international workers’ movement.” It was the conclusion, though, that must have struck Ulbricht. Beijing’s next move, Hegen projected, would be to openly fight for bloc leadership, even at the expense of a split. Confident of stronger support for its policies, the CCP wanted to convene an international conference with the sole purpose of advancing its ambitions. If it failed (at the very least) to attain parity with the USSR, Hegen asserted, then it was conceivable that Beijing would secede and form its own ideological bloc.¹¹⁷

This was the scenario in which East Berlin found itself. The break-up of the socialist world was a genuine prospect. To hold a conference, like the Vietnamese were proposing, could precipitate the collapse of the international communist movement. The irony of Hegen’s report, however, was the timing. Despite being at odds over Laos, the advent of spring offered signs of reconciliation. Ambassador Dölling was assured by a central committee member of the CPSU that there had been a “turn of 180 degrees.” The two parties, he was told, were taking steps to improve bilateral ties.¹¹⁸ In a private exchange, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chen Yi, echoed this point, remarking that the quarrels were “problems between brothers, problems of a socialist family.” For Mao Zedong, he insisted, communist concord was the very “foundation” of China’s foreign political programme.¹¹⁹

And yet, East German anxiety over the CCP’s intentions did not abate. Rather, it interweaved into the fabric of its reporting on North Vietnam. A blatant dualism became evermore discernible: Either Hanoi’s policies corresponded with Moscow or Beijing. Any supposed departure from Marxist-Leninist guidelines was judged to have “Chinese roots.”¹²⁰ Fritz Stude, for example, insisted that regardless of its self-styled objectivity, Hanoi was

¹¹⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/808, ‘Bestand: Politbüro, Information über das Verhalten der KP Chinas zu den Fragen des Marxismus-Leninismus nach dem XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, März 1962,’ pp.1-13

¹¹⁸ PA MfAA, A1142, ‘Dölling an Genosse Winzer, 28. Februar 1962,’ p.185. On the improvement of GDR-PRC relations, as well as in the bloc as a whole, see also PA MfAA, A1144, ‘Krolkowski an Dölling, 9. Mai 1962,’ p.383 and Stubber-Berries, ‘East German China Policy,’ p.188, p.259

¹¹⁹ PA MfAA, A6760, ‘Hegen an Schwab, 3. Mai 1962,’ pp.48-49. It is, of course, difficult to know whether Chinese overtures and remarks were genuine. Extracts from Enver Hoxha’s personal diary, however, do suggest that the Chinese (at least for the time being) were advocating rapprochement. See E. Hoxha, *Reflections on China. Volume I: 1962-1972. Extracts from the Political Diary* (Tirana, 1975), p.7, p.9, p.18, p.23 p.29

¹²⁰ Examples include, SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Tätigkeitsbericht, 20. Januar 1962’; PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Nohr und Dreßler an das MfAA, 1. AEA - Sektion Vietnam. Betreff: Situation in Südvietnam, 1. März 1962,’ p.94; PA MfAA, A8683, ‘Aufzeichnung von Nohr und Dressler, Vermerk Nr.79/62, 3. März 1962,’ p.38; BArch-MA, DVW1/6426 Bd.1, ‘Militärattaché Witt an Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Analyse über die Militärpolitik der Partei in Bezug auf die Vereinigung Vietnams und die Lage in Südvietnam, 30. April 1962.’ The only reference to certain DRV party leaders advocating a “third way” was during a conversation with Tovmassian. See PA MfAA, G-A337, ‘Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d’Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, am 13. März 1962,’ p.25

providing diplomatic support for Albania and tilting towards the PRC. Both Pham Van Dong's and Ung Van Khiem's admittance that they "still did not really understand the actual causes of the dispute" entrenched GDR belief that this "objectivity" was down to Hanoi's own ambivalence on a number of key ideological issues.¹²¹

It was this ambivalence which also precipitated a more in-depth evaluation of Sino-Vietnamese ties. Dreßler informed Tovmassian that the embassy was giving "much thought to this important question." The East Germans agreed with their Soviet counterparts that traditional and geographical ties were crucial. According to Tovmassian, Ho Chi Minh acknowledged his peoples' need to "create their own culture; now, there is either French or Chinese."¹²² The DRV, in short, needed to break free from past influences and form its own national character. Nonetheless, what stood out in the embassy's appraisals was its emphasis on short-term developments, above all, the pervasion of Maoist dogma. The central press organ for Chinese immigrants was the third biggest Vietnamese newspaper. It included *Renmin Ribao* commissioners, received instructions from Beijing and had offered far more coverage on the Albanian question than *Nhan Dan*. The upsurge in delegation exchanges and visits of party leaders to Beijing (which often included meetings with Mao himself) had underpinned the CCP's influence.¹²³ Technical-scientific cooperation, Erwin Witt contended further, as well as the training of Vietnamese cadres at Chinese universities, held great importance for Hanoi's Five-Year-Plan. "Against this backdrop," he reflected, "it follows that Chinese ideologies are [...] being adopted."¹²⁴

Besides, there were indications that some DRV policymakers were unsatisfied with the Kremlin's lack of fraternal support. On 22 February, *Nhan Dan* published an editorial, declaring that Britain as well as the USSR had a "great responsibility" for South Vietnam and expressed disappointment that they had "not yet taken positive and effective measures" to prohibit the violation of the Geneva Accords. This implicit public attack against the Co-Chairmen clearly shook Ambassador Nohr. He judged it "completely inadmissible" and to

¹²¹ PA MfAA, A8693, 'Stude an den Außerordentlichen und Bevollmächtigten Botschafter der DDR in der DRV, Genossen Nohr, 13. Februar 1962,' p.49; PA MfAA, A8693, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit dem ungarischen Botschafter, Genossen Martin, am 31. Januar 1962,' p.67; PA MfAA, A8693, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem ungarischen Botschaftsrat, Genossen Szigeti am 26. Januar 1962,' p.6

¹²² PA MfAA, G-A337, 'Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d'Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, am 13. März 1962,' p.20

¹²³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/808, 'Bestand: Politbüro. Information über das Verhalten der KP Chinas zu den Fragen des Marxismus-Leninismus nach dem XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, März 1962,' p.7

¹²⁴ BArch-MA, DVW1/6427, 'Aufzeichnung von Erwin Witt. Betreff: Abschlussbericht über die Auswertung des XXII. Parteitages in der DRV, 20. März 1962.' On this point, see also the report to the SED politburo in SAPMO-BArch DY30/J IV 2/2J/808, 'Bestand: Politbüro. Information über das Verhalten der KP Chinas zu den Fragen des Marxismus-Leninismus nach dem XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU, März 1962,' p.7

expose a “remarkable discrepancy” between Hanoi and Moscow.¹²⁵ In turn, commenting on a CPSU delegation visit a couple of weeks later, Pommerening drew attention to the fact that no communiqué was signed. Instead, the Soviet representative had tellingly stated upon departure that “one day, all communist parties will understand the correct words of the 22nd Party Congress.” It seemed ominous to Pommerening that Le Duan had been mysteriously absent throughout the private discussions and had not even bothered to attend the festivities.¹²⁶

Still, notwithstanding this concern about Vietnamese ambiguity, East German attention remained focused on China. China was at the fulcrum of the intra-bloc dispute and loomed large over the Asian continent. On 2 June, the Head of the Far East Department, Horst Brie, contended that the “course of events in Southeast Asia depend to a decisive extent on the joint actions of the Soviet Union and the PRC.” Consistent with Hegen’s analysis, he argued that Beijing was pursuing an autonomous strategy. It was endeavouring to strengthen its own influence, as well as advertise the national liberation struggles in Indochina as examples of armed struggle. Not once did Brie mention Hanoi’s or the Pathet Lao’s objectives. The principal protagonists were America, the USSR and China. North Vietnam was primarily referenced when discussing Chinese “influence,” or deliberating whether it endorsed Maoist radicalism. This came through loud and clear during what Niu Jun has described as the PRC’s “turn to the left.”¹²⁷

Beijing’s Gambit

It did not take long for Hegen’s prediction of a split to come true. As Jeremy Friedman points out, events unfolding in China were “setting the stage for what would be an explosion of Sino-Soviet confrontation.”¹²⁸ The first sign of change recorded by the GDR embassy was a rise in food goods, above all, a much richer supply of fruit and vegetables in the metropolises. Favourable weather conditions had ensured a bumper summer harvest and the crop yields for autumn were projected to be a vast improvement. These developments were met with warm approval amongst the inhabitants, who remarked upon the plentiful amount of food available

¹²⁵ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Nohr und Dreßler an das MfAA, Betreff: Situation in Südvietsnam, 1. März 1962,’ p.93

¹²⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur sowjetischen Parteidelegation in der DRV, 31. März 1962.’ See also PA MfAA, G-A337, ‘Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d’Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, am 13. März 1962,’ p.19

¹²⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/124, ‘Aufzeichnung von Horst Brie. Betreff: Einige Bemerkungen über die gegenwärtige Haltung der VR-China zur Entwicklung in Südvietsnam und Laos, 2. Juni 1962,’ pp.222-226; J. Niu, ‘1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy,’ *CWIHP, Working Paper #48* (October 2005), pp.1-36

¹²⁸ Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, p.92

to them.¹²⁹ The downward economic trend had stopped. After five consecutive years of famine, it seemed that China was, at long last, on the road to recovery.

The subsequent months of September and October witnessed a revival of Chinese polemics. Tracing the evolution of thought is not easy, but the prime instigator, in the eyes of East Berlin, was the CCP's objection to nuclear disarmament.¹³⁰ One of the cardinal thesis of the Moscow ukase had been to prohibit the manufacture, testing and use of atomic devices.¹³¹ The Kremlin's refusal to hand over the bomb, Hermann Axen reflected years later, was both "an expression of hegemony" and "mistrust" towards Beijing.¹³² Responding to the news that Moscow and Washington intended to negotiate on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, the CCP sent the CPSU a strong letter, insisting that any settlement would "jeopardise the sovereign rights of the People's Republic."¹³³ Beijing, instead, expressed support *for* nuclear proliferation. Its own possession of the bomb, policymakers contended, would underpin the bloc's military prevalence.¹³⁴ To reinforce its point, the CCP published several editorials, which portrayed disarmament as an American conspiracy to "bind Chinese hands."¹³⁵ East Berlin was most displeased, for this rebuttal counteracted its attempts to prevent the FRG from acquiring a nuclear arsenal. China's reaction was lambasted as a classic case of "nationalist trends." Beijing, one senior official in the MfAA complained, opposed the cooling of Cold War tensions, because it would obstruct its ambitions on the Asian continent.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ PA MfAA, A8607, 'Information zur Lage in der Versorgung der Bevölkerung auf Grund der Einschätzung der Monate Juli/August 1962, 6. September 1962,' pp.267-268. On Chinese economic resurgence and its effect on foreign policy, see R. MacFarquar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Volume 3: The Coming of the Cataclysm* (Oxford, 1997), pp.281-282; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p.115; Chen, *Mao's China*, p.83, p.210

¹³⁰ PA MfAA, A6760, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung, Sektion China. Betreff: Einige Hauptfragen der Politik der Volksrepublik China in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahres 1962, 13. November 1962,' p.16; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, 'Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Außenpolitik und International Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,' pp.149-150

¹³¹ *New York Times*, 'Text of Statement by Leaders of 81 Communist Parties After Meeting in Moscow, 7. December, 1960,' p.14. See also SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3606, 'Brief von Walter Ulbricht an das ZK der KP China, 29. Oktober 1962,' pp.224-225

¹³² Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, p.215

¹³³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3606, 'Antwort der Sowjetregierung auf die Erklärung der Regierung der Volksrepublik China vom 3. September 1962,' p.209. On Chinese opposition to U.S.-Soviet negotiations on nuclear disarmament, see also Wang, 'The Quarrelling Brothers,' pp.64-65

¹³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3606, 'Antwort der Sowjetregierung auf die Erklärung der Regierung der Volksrepublik China vom 3. September 1962,' p.201, p.203

¹³⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, 'Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Außenpolitik und International Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,' p.175. See also PA MfAA, A6760, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion China. Betreff: Einige Hauptfragen der Politik der Volksrepublik China in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahres 1962, 13. November 1962,' p.16

¹³⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/115, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung im MfAA der DDR am 5. August 1962,' p.312

In this context, the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee was labelled a “further expression of the PRC’s intensified offensive.”¹³⁷ Hegen was struck by its “programmatic character.”¹³⁸ The published communiqué declared, categorically, that international developments had proven the Chinese ideological line to be “entirely correct.” There was no mention of the other socialist countries’ foreign political achievements. Nor was there an endorsement of the economic contest between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. Instead, the communiqué contained a general appeal to fight three enemies: “U.S. imperialists,” “reactionaries” and “modern revisionists.” The bloc was relegated to a secondary position, its task presented from the standpoint of supporting national liberation struggles. It had already been established, Hegen noted, that the CCP’s programme deviated from the Moscow Declaration. It was the first time, however, that the central committee had endorsed this deviation in a party document.¹³⁹

To be sure, the dual October crisis made GDR policymakers realise just how far China had diverged from the bloc’s agenda. First, Beijing’s assault along the Sino-Indian border was condemned as a blatant violation of peaceful coexistence and proof that the CCP was taking “practical steps” to implement its militant theories.¹⁴⁰ Second, Beijing’s public portrayal of the Cuban Crisis as a “humiliation” for Khrushchev meant that the CCP was not only pursuing its own objectives, but following an agenda that was “openly contradicting” the communist movement.¹⁴¹ “The PRC,” Hegen declared, “has ideologically and theoretically prepared this act for a long time and is now trying to prove that the split is historically necessary and justifiable.”¹⁴² At the subsequent four party congresses, the schism widened. Chinese diplomats’ hurled abuse against the “modern revisionists,” whilst the Burmese, Malayan, North Korean representatives all refused to stand up and applaud the CPSU’s “smart and prudent

¹³⁷ PA MfAA, A6760, ‘Aufzeichnung von Brie. Betreff: Einschätzung der wichtigsten Probleme des 10. Plenums des ZK der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas, den 5. Oktober 1962,’ p.4

¹³⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV2/2J/899, ‘Bestand: Politbüro. Einschätzung des 10. Plenums des VIII. ZK der KP Chinas (Ausarbeitung der Botschaft Peking vom 10. Oktober 1962), 9. November 1962,’ p.1

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.11; PA MfAA, G-A317, ‘Jahresbericht der Botschaft der DDR in der Volksrepublik China, 29. Dezember 1962,’ p.24

¹⁴⁰ PA MfAA, A6760, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäische Abteilung, Sektion China. Betreff: Einige Hauptfragen der Politik der Volksrepublik China in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahres 1962, 13. November 1962,’ p.28

¹⁴¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, ‘Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Außenpolitik und International Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,’ p.148

¹⁴² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48410, ‘Bestand: Politbüro. Einschätzung unserer Botschaft in der Volksrepublik China über Leitartikel der “Volkszeitung” vom 15. Dezember 1962,’ p.3

peace policy.”¹⁴³ For the Chinese, Ulbricht emphasised to Khrushchev, the dispute was no longer about “existing disagreements,” but represented an “ideological-political split.”¹⁴⁴

It is worth pausing to consider the decisive impact of the Chinese challenge on both East Berlin’s analysis of the Vietnam conflict and the international order at large. On “every fundamental foreign policy issue” the CCP was adopting a “divergent position.”¹⁴⁵ True, for the past two years, concern had been raised about Chinese movements. But a discrepancy between the practical and the theoretical had been highlighted. After all, despite incessant calls for “revolutionary struggle,” the CCP had shown “particularly great” readiness to solve problems at the negotiation table and had offered no more than verbal support for Vietnamese reunification.¹⁴⁶ In practice, the Chinese “were doing nothing.”¹⁴⁷ On the basis of the economic upswing and the Plenum’s ideological blueprint, however, the MfAA feared that China was becoming more active on the global stage and endowing its foreign policy with an aggressive component.¹⁴⁸ Ulbricht himself offered several descriptions for Chinese ideology - “nationalism,” “great-power chauvinism,” “left-sectarian dogmatism.”¹⁴⁹ Whatever it was, it was judged “anti-Marxist.”¹⁵⁰ The simplistic conception of the Cold War as a struggle between communism and capitalism was, thus, untenable. The myth of a cohesive, ideological bloc had been debunked. The dualistic international framework had collapsed.

China’s decision to break with the socialist camp, its abandonment of what fundamental Marxist-Leninist guidelines, caused East Berlin to return to the question it had posed since the summer of 1960: What stance would Hanoi adopt? There were two correlating strands to this question: Would the VWP publicly support Beijing’s splitting activities? And would it embrace Maoist dogma to reunify Vietnam? As a result, Peng Zhen’s visit in autumn was deemed part of a Chinese effort to push the DRV towards escalation and expose the bankruptcy of peaceful

¹⁴³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48395, ‘Bestand: Politbüro. Bericht über die Teilnahme der Delegation des ZK der SED am VIII. Parteitag der Bulgarischen Kommunistischen Partei, 27. November 1962,’ p.15

¹⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3291, ‘Ulbricht an Chruschtschow, 27. Dezember 1962,’ p.212

¹⁴⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, ‘Abteilung Außenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,’ p.47

¹⁴⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/115, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung im MfAA der DDR am 5. August 1962,’ p.312

¹⁴⁷ PA MfAA, G-A337, ‘Vermerk Nr.98/62 über eine Unterredung des Genossen Dreßler als Charge d’Affairs, und dem Genossen Winter mit dem Botschafter der UdSSR, Genossen Tovmassian, 13. März 1962,’ p.23. On Chinese weakness, see also Wenning’s discussion with the Polish Ambassador, Stanislaw Flato in PA MfAA, G-A338, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem Ministerrat der polnischen Botschaft, Genossen Flato, am 19. Februar 1962,’ p.5

¹⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/899, ‘Bestand: Politbüro, Einschätzung des 10. Plenums des ZK der KP Chinas, 9. November 1962,’ p.2

¹⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3291, ‘Ulbricht an Khrushchev, 27. Dezember 1962,’ p.213, p.215

¹⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/48410, ‘Bestand: Politbüro. Einschätzung unserer Botschaft in der Volksrepublik China über [den] Leitartikel der „Volkszeitung“ vom 15. Dezember 1962,’ p.4

coexistence.¹⁵¹ Tovmassian complained to Nohr that Beijing wanted to entangle Hanoi and Moscow in a “military adventure.” Nevertheless, the East Germans saw little evidence that North Vietnam was enthusiastic about expanding the war. At the same time as the CCP delegates were declaring support for an intensified struggle, the Head of the Central Commission for Reunification, Nguyen Van Vinh, hinted to Nohr that his country did not share these views.¹⁵² The NLF’s objective, Vinh revealed, was to inflict decisive losses and build a coalition government, founded on neutrality and peace. Drawing upon the Laotian example, he explained that it was not a matter of achieving a complete military victory, but of forcing the other side to accede to negotiations. The conflict would retain its “local character.” “This policy,” Vinh declared, “is consistent with the opinions of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the CCP.”¹⁵³

Vinh’s remarks comforted East German officials. In a collective report, Nohr, Pommerening, Witt and the newly-arrived chargé d’affaires, Eckhart Bibow, expressed satisfaction that the DRV wanted to, ultimately, unite Vietnam through negotiations. Vinh’s admittance that “neither side can achieve a military victory” was considered “very important.” But it was not the report’s contention that Hanoi had rebuffed Maoism, which caught the eye. It was East German scepticism about the NLF’s successes on the battlefield. Although Vinh cited myriad statistics to prove that progress was being made (at one point claiming that the ratio of enemy deaths was 10:1), GDR diplomats dismissed these figures as “doctored.”¹⁵⁴ Other sources were depicting a gloomier and more complicated state of affairs. The Polish liaison officer, for example, warned that revolutionary élan was “diminishing” and rebel forces

¹⁵¹ BArch-MA, DVW1/6426 Bd.1, ‘Witt an Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Bericht über die militär-politische Einschätzung der DRV, 22. Dezember 1962.’ See also PA MfAA, G-A317, ‘Jahresbericht der Botschaft der DDR in der Volksrepublik China, 29. Dezember 1962,’ p.26

¹⁵² PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Botschafter Nohr mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Genossen Tovmassian, am 17. Oktober 1962,’ p.20

¹⁵³ PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Information vom Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Kommission für die Wiedervereinigung, Gen. Nguyen Van Vinh über die Lage in Südvietnam, 27. September 1962,’ pp.9-10

¹⁵⁴ PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Kommission für die Wiedervereinigung, Genossen Vinh, über die Lage in Südvietnam und der Wiedervereinigungspolitik der Regierung der DRV, 5. Oktober 1962,’ p.13. Interestingly, during a private conversation with the Soviet ambassador, Nohr asked Tovmassian whether the central committee of the CPSU had, in fact, endorsed North Vietnam’s reunification strategy. Tovmassian responded that he was unaware of any official endorsement. He claimed that during Ho Chi Minh’s visit to Moscow in August 1961, the DRV president had merely asked Khrushchev for his opinion. The Soviet Premier had pointed out that the North Vietnamese were closer to the problem and, therefore, better suited to evaluate the situation. He had also assured Ho that the Soviet Union would “not oppose any measures adopted” by the Vietnamese Workers’ Party. See PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Botschafter Nohr mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Genossen Tovmassian, 17. Oktober 1962,’ p.20

were showing signs of “fatigue.”¹⁵⁵ Witt argued further that the working-class was “fragmented and disorganised,” with trade union’s appealing for the NLF to “end the acts of terrorism.”¹⁵⁶ He appreciated that the conflict was not simply a struggle between the government and the NLF. Despite the existence of several anti-Diem organisations, Witt pointed out that only a few were willing to work with communist partisans. The intellectual class’ abhorrence for Diem had not translated into active support and the Vietcong was still trying to amass followers.¹⁵⁷ Most importantly, though, as Tovmassian explicitly relayed to Nohr, the DRV’s reunification programme “complied with Soviet views” and was a “clear departure from the Chinese line.”¹⁵⁸

Developments above the 17th parallel fuelled East German confidence that its ally would refrain from aligning with Beijing. Discord inside the VWP had been apparent for some time, yet GDR officials not only separated the party into two “directions,” but began to label them “Marxist-Leninist” and “in line with CCP policy”¹⁵⁹ It cannot be overstated just how incredible this categorising was. Le Duan and his followers were no longer considered communists, but renegades, who, like Beijing, had digressed from Marxist-Leninist guidelines. And, consistent with Mari Olsen’s work, the MfAA was convinced that the Sinophiles were “losing influence.”¹⁶⁰ True, both during the Cuban Crisis and the four party congresses, Hanoi had returned to its ambivalent stance - neither offering complete support for the USSR, nor openly attacking Khrushchev.¹⁶¹ According to Nohr, however, Vietnamese policymakers chaired a meeting on 15 November, where, for the first time, open criticism was voiced of the CCP. Rather surprisingly, given his renowned affiliation with China, Truong Chinh was cited

¹⁵⁵ PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Kommission für die Wiedervereinigung, Genossen Vinh, über die Lage in Südvietnam und der Wiedervereinigungspolitik der Regierung der DRV,’ p.12

¹⁵⁶ BArch-MA, DVW1/6427, ‘Aufzeichnung von Witt. Betreff: System der Parteien, Klassenkräfteverhältnisse und Religionen in Südvietnam, 13. November 1962’; PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Vorsitzenden der Zentralen Kommission für die Wiedervereinigung, Genossen Vinh, über die Lage in Südvietnam und der Wiedervereinigungspolitik der Regierung der DRV,’ p.12

¹⁵⁷ BArch-MA, DVW1/6427, ‘Aufzeichnung von Witt. Betreff: System der Parteien, Klassenkräfteverhältnisse und Religionen in Südvietnam, 13. November 1962’

¹⁵⁸ PA MfAA, G-A336, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Genossen Botschafter Nohr mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Genossen Tovmassian, am 17. Oktober 1962,’ pp.20-21

¹⁵⁹ BArch-MA, DVW1/6426, Bd.1, ‘Witt an Schütz. Betreff: Bericht über die militär-politische Einschätzung der DRV, 22. Dezember 1962’

¹⁶⁰ Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, pp.122-123; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, ‘Abteilung Außenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,’ p.181

¹⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur vietnamesischen Haltung gegenüber der sowjetischen Kubapolitik, 8. November 1962’; The only indication that North Vietnam had sympathy for the Chinese was that *Radio Hanoi* broadcasted the CCP delegation’s speech at the Czechoslovakian party congress. See PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Aufzeichnung von Dreßler. Betreff: Auftreten der Delegation der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV) auf den Parteitag der Bruderparteien in Bulgarien, CSSR, Ungarn und Italien, 14. Dezember 1962,’ p.247

as the leading critic. The president of the National Assembly complained that Beijing was following its “own rational” interests, rather than the “overall” interests of the socialist world.¹⁶² Ho Chi Minh himself subsequently demanded that the politburo draft a strong statement of support for Khrushchev’s peaceful resolution of the Cuban Crisis. “The discussion at the party conference,” the MfAA reasoned, “suggests that in leading circles of the Vietnamese party, the opinion is prevailing, that, on the basis of the Soviet Union’s proposals, the outbreak of war should be avoided by all available means.”¹⁶³

At the turn of the year, then, the East Germans were hopeful that Hanoi would not bend to Beijing’s will, that it would not unfetter itself from the Soviet Bloc. Mixed in with this hope, however, was an appreciation that Hanoi had not “unambiguously fixed” its ideological standpoint and that a large part of the middle cadres disapproved of Khrushchev’s decision to withdraw the missiles from Cuba. A leading professor at Hanoi University told Pommerening that Soviet measures were “morally and politically disarming the working-classes of the world.” The politburo member, Hoang Quoc Viet, moreover, complained that there was “too much fear of war.”¹⁶⁴ GDR diplomats were, thus, not oblivious to rumblings of discontent. In his annual review, Nohr went so far as to assert that the “Chinese oriented forces are, at present, still in the majority.” Nevertheless, he predicted that Hanoi would not “oppose” the USSR. Its leading policymakers still recognised Moscow as the “centre of the international communist movement” and placed great importance on its “active help and support in building socialism in the DRV.”¹⁶⁵ Everything, though, depended on which of the two party factions - the pro-Soviet or pro-Chinese - would triumph over the other. Everything revolved around the Sino-Soviet split. The same held true, in a very different way, for Adenauer.

¹⁶² PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Bericht der Botschaft der DDR in der DRV über die ökonomische, politische und kulturelle Entwicklung der DRV und die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der DRV im Jahre 1962, 10. Dezember 1962,’ p.19; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, ‘Abteilung Außenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,’ p.181. The Romanian ambassador in Hanoi confirmed that Truong Chinh had openly criticised the PRC at the central committee meeting. See PA MfAA, A8716, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.8/63 über ein Gespräch des Genossen Mothes mit dem Botschafter der rumänischen Volksrepublik, Vasile Pogaceanu, am 14. Januar 1963 in der Botschaft der RVR,’ p.254

¹⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, ‘Abteilung Außenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,’ p.181. Tuong Vu’s work complements East German reports on Ho, for he notes that *Nhan Dan* did, in fact, publish an article, which defended Khrushchev’s decision to withdraw the missiles. See Tuong, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution*, p.165, Footnote 54

¹⁶⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur vietnamesischen Haltung gegenüber der sowjetischen Kubapolitik, 8. November 1962’

¹⁶⁵ PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Bericht der Botschaft der DDR in der DRV über die ökonomische, politische und kulturelle Entwicklung der DRV und die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der DRV im Jahre 1962, 10. Dezember 1962,’ p.18

The Spectre of Chinese Militarism

Franz-Josef Bach prided himself on his knowledge of the chancellor's "inner circle." Between 1957 and 1961, he was Adenauer's personal assistant and Head of the Chancellery's Foreign Political Office. Bach was invited to all of Adenauer's official meetings, both in his role as chancellor, as well as leader of the CDU. Accordingly, Bach had a shrewd insight into the mind of the man. Reading his recollections, one is struck by his attention to detail, by his knowledge of not only Adenauer's character, but also the character of his closest associates, Hans Globke and Heinrich Krone.¹⁶⁶ Bach was clearly at the heart of government. But as 1961 moved towards 1962, his career took an odd turn. After supervising the CDU/CSU Party's general election campaign, Bach found himself on a passenger ship, heading for the Far East: Destination, Hong Kong.¹⁶⁷

Even with hindsight, Bach's appointment as consul-general seems bizarre. Though he had joined the Foreign Ministry in 1951, and had worked both in Sydney, as well as in Washington, Bach's résumé offers no hint of interest in Far Eastern affairs.¹⁶⁸ On 22 March, he wrote an illuminating letter to Globke, which noted that "for a European, it is frightening to see how much Southeast Asia and East Asia are already beginning to come to terms with communism." Bach, in short, viewed developments through European eyes. The only barriers to Marxist-Leninist expansion he could list were U.S. military power and the spectre of nuclear war.¹⁶⁹ Archival records do not provide conclusive evidence that the chancellor had suggested Bach for the job. But it seems more than likely. In 1962, several of Bach's dispatches ended up on Adenauer's or Globke's desk, and it is safe to assume that the chancellery wanted a reliable man on the spot.¹⁷⁰ Hong Kong, as Bach noted, was "an excellent observation post for China, an invaluable assembly point for all kinds of news."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ H. Schwarz (Hrsg.), *Konrad Adenauers Regierungsstil* (Bonn, 1991), pp.81-88; F. Bach, 'Konrad Adenauer und Hans Globke,' in D. Blumenwitz, K. Gotto, H. Maier, K. Repgen, H. Schwarz (Hrsg.), *Konrad Adenauer und seine Zeit. Politik und Persönlichkeit des ersten Bundeskanzlers. Beiträge von Weg- und Zeitgenossen* (Stuttgart, 1976), pp.177-185

¹⁶⁷ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.49/1961, 'Franz Josef Bach, 29. November 1961,' p.97

¹⁶⁸ R. Vierhaus (Hrsg.), *Biographisches Handbuch der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages, 1949-2002* (München, 2002), p.28

¹⁶⁹ ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-120/2, 'Bach an Globke, 22. März 1962'

¹⁷⁰ See, for instance, BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, 'Bericht von Bach. Betreff: Verhältnis Sowjetunion-Rotchina, 23. Januar 1962'; PA AA, B12, Bd.678, 'Krapf an den Herrn Staatssekretär, 24. Januar 1962' (Krapf specifically requested that Bach's report be sent to the chancellor.); BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, 'Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Außenpolitische Ziele der Volksrepublik China'; ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-120/2, 'Bach an Globke, 22. März 1962'; ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-120/2, 'Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Politische Lage in Südostasien, 22. März 1962'

¹⁷¹ ACDP Archiv, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-120/2, 'Bach an Globke, 22. März 1962'

Just like Adenauer, Bach evaluated foreign affairs through the lens of national- and power-political interests. “Everything that happens here,” he wrote, “takes place inside the state of tensions between Beijing and Moscow and Beijing and Washington.”¹⁷² This triangular relationship intrigued him. He ascribed little significance to smaller and, frankly, more active participants. When Bach did mention Hanoi, it was in conjunction with Chinese objectives, and judged no more than a “good partisan,” whose “communist units” were being “thrown into the fight.”¹⁷³ Bach, instead, drew a straight line between the CCP’s “great power” aspirations and the conflict below the 17th parallel. In a report to the Foreign Ministry, which was forwarded to Adenauer, Bach emphasised that Chinese culture was one of the oldest on the planet and that its citizens had always been respected as one of the most educated peoples’. The Chinese, he contended, harboured an “intellectual arrogance” towards those, whose history and culture were not as ancient as their own. For centuries, China had lived under foreign rule and had understood the need to divide and conquer its adversaries. The result of this past history, Bach claimed, was “an overwhelming sense of nationalism, which even today [...] gives the Chinese an inner conviction that their country will - regardless under which flag - play a dominant role in world affairs.” In the eyes of the PRC, Bach continued, “the Russians, as well as the Americans, lack any cultural or historical authority to make a claim for world leadership.”¹⁷⁴ China’s long and proud past, along with its own self-entitlement, he believed, were driving its global ambitions.

The key element of Bach’s argument, however, was that he made a distinction between status quo- and revisionist powers. For the Chinese, “similar to the Federal Republic’s problem of Central Germany,” Taiwan was their “most burning national problem.”¹⁷⁵ It is useful to magnify this point. Whereas the two superpowers were content with the existing international order, West Germany, China, North Vietnam and France were not. If there was one feature the four countries had in common, it was a yearning to revise the map of the world. They all had national ambitions, ambitions which could not be resolved by reducing the Cold War

¹⁷² BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Außenpolitische Ziele der Volksrepublik China’; ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder, 01-070-120/2, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach, 10. Mai 1962’

¹⁷³ PA AA, B12, Bd.678, ‘Bach an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Das Verhältnis der VR China zu Nordvietnam. Warnung an die Vereinigten Staaten, 28. Februar 1962’; PA AA, B12, Bd.678, ‘Bach an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Volksrepublik China und Nordvietnam, 14. März 1962’; ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder, 01-070-120/2, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach in Hongkong, 10. Mai 1962’

¹⁷⁴ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Außenpolitische Ziele der Volksrepublik China, 20. März 1962’

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. On the comparison between Chinese and German aspirations, see also PA AA, B12, Bd.678, ‘Bach an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Die Außenpolitik der VR China nach dem XXII. Parteitag der KPdSU (Oktober 1961), 16. Januar 1962’

atmosphere. Bach set out the national differences between Moscow and Beijing. The two countries, he stressed, were at different stages of their development. The USSR had reached the apogee of its economic and military might: It was one of the greatest industrial countries on the planet. Soviet policymakers had no outstanding irredentist claims and needed to evaluate their choices carefully, for fear of jeopardising the peoples' living standards. China, in contrast, was at the "lowest level" of industrialisation. Its botched economic plans and lack of food had "almost automatically" induced decision-makers to turn their gaze towards Southeast Asia. They were endeavouring to suck all of Indochina into the PRC's "sphere of influence." Beijing was, hence, pursuing policies contrary to both Washington and Moscow. Whereas the former had vital defence interests in the region, the latter needed to preserve its superpower status and feared that Chinese domination would diminish its own influence in the Pacific. "Nothing," Bach declared, "is, therefore, more suitable to raise alarm in Beijing than reports of a settlement between the Soviet Union and the United States. Nothing would be more inconvenient for the Red-Chinese than Moscow and Washington agreeing on a *modus vivendi* in Central Europe."¹⁷⁶

The spectre of Soviet-American rapprochement was exactly what haunted Adenauer as well. It would entrench the status quo. It would extinguish any hope of reunifying his fatherland. In February 1962, he expressed "despair" about Dean Rusk public statement that "America has nothing against the Soviet Union: The German's do because of Berlin [...] but we have nothing against Russia!"¹⁷⁷ The chancellor was disturbed further by JFK speaking of "West Germans," as well as "West Germany," during a subsequent press conference. He did not consider these remarks accidental and inferred that Berlin was becoming a "bargaining chip" in U.S. deliberations.¹⁷⁸ As a result, Adenauer proposed an alternative to rapprochement with the Kremlin: Rapprochement with China. On 22 May, he asked both Ambassador Dowling and the Undersecretary of State, George Ball, why Washington was "not sending the Red-Chinese food?" What Adenauer wanted was for the Kennedy administration to make contact with the CCP through charitable organisations and improve its bargaining position vis-à-vis Khrushchev. For him, it was not a "humanitarian" issue, but a "political one."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, 'Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Außenpolitische Ziele der Volksrepublik China, 20 März 1962'

¹⁷⁷ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1961-1963*, p.114

¹⁷⁸ *AAPD, 1962*, p.830

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.974-975. Adenauer similarly asked Rusk whether the United States was considering changing its stance towards China. See JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, President's Office Files, Countries 8/37/E/2/2, Reference Box 117, German Security, 1/62-9/62, 'From Secretary of State to President and Acting Secretary, 23. June 1962'

This is not to argue that Adenauer was oblivious to Western concerns about China. During his farewell visit, the Australian ambassador made it clear that Sydney dreaded the spectre of Chinese “infiltration” across Southeast Asia.¹⁸⁰ In fact, Kennedy’s National Service Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, explicitly told Adenauer that the PRC, not the Soviet Union, was the “most aggressive communist state.”¹⁸¹ The chancellor appreciated these views and even went so far as to claim that China would, one day, become the “biggest problem for mankind.”¹⁸² In the short-term, however, Adenauer’s evaluation was predicated on the belief that Moscow judged Beijing its “presumptive adversary,” and whatever aggravated the Soviets was in his interest.¹⁸³ This became obvious during a conversation between Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle on 6 September. The French president has received much acclaim in the historiography for his “neutralisation” proposal, yet what was most striking in the autumn of 1962 was his ambivalence.¹⁸⁴ De Gaulle shared with the chancellor his inner thoughts, remarking that he often asked himself whether Europe had an interest in “ignoring such an enormous entity, such as China,” or “locking it in a cage” with the USSR. He asked whether there was any advantage of establishing ties with Beijing. Adenauer responded that he had “tried in vain to convince influential Americans of the need to make the Chinese threat clearer to the Soviets.” He was visibly unimpressed with their retorts that public opinion would not accept Sino-American rapprochement, or that Washington could not abandon Taiwan.¹⁸⁵ Still, the chancellor must have been encouraged by de Gaulle’s report on the Laos conference, for he revealed that the PRC’s delegation had been “very polite and courteous” towards the French, whereas there had “been almost no relationship” between the Chinese and the Soviets. Adenauer, in his characteristic manner, bluntly declared that he “only had an interest in the fact

¹⁸⁰ StBKAH, Abt III, 61, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler empfing am 2. März 1962 um 10.00 Uhr in Anwesenheit von VLR I Dr. Osterheld den australischen Botschafter, Sir Alan Stewart Watt, zu dessen Abschiedsbesuch,’ p.437

¹⁸¹ Osterheld, “*Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens...*”, p.147

¹⁸² BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 6. September 1962 ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten de Gaulle, 6. September 1962,’ p.75

¹⁸³ AAPD, 1962, p.974

¹⁸⁴ On de Gaulle’s neutralisation proposal, see F. Logevall, ‘De Gaulle, Neutralization and American Involvement in Vietnam, pp.69-102,’; Torikata, ‘Reexamining de Gaulle’s Peace Initiative,’ pp.909-938

¹⁸⁵ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 6. September 1962 ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten de Gaulle, 6. September 1962,’ p.73, p.76. Interestingly, when Adenauer asked McGeorge Bundy about Sino-American rapprochement, Bundy argued that public opposition was not a prime motivation in the administration’s China policy. Instead, he stressed that rapprochement with China would encourage the most aggressive voices in the Communist Bloc. See AAPD, 1962, p.1596

that the Russians and the China are preoccupied with each other and that the Soviets are afraid of the Chinese.”¹⁸⁶

It was an illuminating response, both for what Adenauer said and what he omitted. There was no mention of Diem’s letter to him the previous spring. No hint of concern about communist annexation. And no trace of sympathy for the local inhabitants. In his eyes, the conflict below the 17th parallel was simple. If it deepened Sino-Soviet discord, then it benefitted Europe and, above all, Germany. Everything else was irrelevant.

Still, Adenauer himself remained a lone voice. As late as 20 August, the Foreign Ministry’s China expert, Johannes Welczeck, complained that the Sino-Soviet disagreements were being “grossly overestimated.”¹⁸⁷ The very idea of a “complete break, let alone a military conflict,” he argued, was “unrealistic.”¹⁸⁸ This is not to suggest that the West Germans were oblivious to visible cracks. The rift was considered serious. There was an appreciation that the two behemoths were jostling for political influence. Welczeck acknowledged that smaller countries, notably North Vietnam, were playing China and Russia off each other to “make economic profit,” as well as remain “relatively independent.”¹⁸⁹ And yet, the Eastern Bloc was still considered an interconnected alliance. The first secretary of the embassy in Washington, for example, surmised that the stalemate in Europe would encourage the communists to turn their attention towards Southeast Asia.¹⁹⁰ Even Bach viewed the overriding motifs as too strong for a “real dispute” to crystallise. The fear of “external influences,” he argued, was holding the “system” together. It was a “rivalry.”¹⁹¹ Nothing more, nothing less.

¹⁸⁶ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 6. September 1962 ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten de Gaulle, 6. September 1962,’ p.76

¹⁸⁷ PA AA, B42, Bd.2, ‘Aufzeichnung von Welczeck, Betreff: Das Verhältnis der Vereinigten Staaten zur Volksrepublik China und der Republik China (Taiwan), 20. August 1962’

¹⁸⁸ AAPD, 1962, p.922. It is remarkable just how consistent and adamant Welczeck was in his conviction that the possibility of a split was “unrealistic.” See BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, ‘Aufzeichnung von Welczeck, Betreff: Die Volksrepublik China und der Ostblock, 30. Mai 1962’; ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-050/5, ‘Frankreichreise (Besuch des Herrn Bundeskanzlers in Frankreich vom 2. bis 8. Juni 1962) Betreff: Die innere Lage des Ostblocks, n.d.’; PA AA, B42, Bd.2, ‘Aufzeichnung von Welczeck. Betreff: Das Verhältnis der Vereinigten Staaten zur Volksrepublik China und der Republik China (Taiwan), 20. August 1962,’ p.117

¹⁸⁹ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, ‘Aufzeichnung von Welczeck. Betreff: Die Volksrepublik China und der Ostblock, 30. Mai 1962.’ On West German analysis of the Sino-Soviet rivalry vis-à-vis North Vietnam, see also, PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Fernschreiben von Kroll aus Moskau, Nr.189 vom 2. März 1962’; PA AA, B44, Bd.50, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kroll. Betreff: Wissenschaftlich-technische Zusammenarbeit zwischen der UdSSR und Nordvietnam,’ pp.289-290; PA AA, B44, Bd.50, ‘Aufzeichnung von Scholl. Betreff: Wirtschaftlich-technische Zusammenarbeit zwischen der UdSSR und Nord-Vietnam, 21. September 1962,’ pp.292-293

¹⁹⁰ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 1783, 751K.00/2-1962--/3-262, ‘Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: United States Evaluation of Chinese Communist Activities and Intentions in Vietnam and Laos, 7 March 1962’

¹⁹¹ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Außenpolitische Ziele der Volksrepublik China, 20. März 1962.’ Interestingly, on 17 October, Bach drafted a memorandum, which continually placed the “socialist camp” in quotation marks. Yet he did not contend that the bloc had split. On the

China's assault against India, then, in conjunction with its ferocious anti-Soviet polemics following the Cuban Crisis, came as a huge shock. At the same time, the rationality of Beijing's calculations, as well as Moscow's awkward dilemma, were quickly understood. A report from the Press- and Information Office to the chancellor, barely three weeks after the twin crises, pointed out that the CCP was trying to capitalise by "all available means." Khrushchev's withdrawal of the missiles had allowed Beijing to embellish its own "unshakable steadfastness" with the Cuban people. There was no mention of U.S.-Soviet discussions in the CCP press organs. No portrayal of Khrushchev as the "great peacemaker." Rather, America was accused of "nuclear blackmail" and of duping Russia with "flowery words." "Here," the report noted, "is a clear indication of Beijing's dissatisfaction with Moscow's peaceful coexistence." It was telling, too, that the memorandum placed North Vietnam in the same bracket as Albania. Hanoi was judged no more than a Chinese satellite, which was regurgitating the CCP's lavish praise for Castro.¹⁹² Most significant, however, was that West German decision-makers were beginning to realise that the bloc was imploding. As Horst Osterheld, one of the chancellor's closest advisers, reflected years later, "the schism between Moscow and Beijing, which Adenauer had prophesised for seven years, had become evident."¹⁹³

But it was Adenauer's own fatalistic discernment of Chinese expansionism, which stood out in those historic weeks. Any assistance provided to the Nehru government, he told Senator William Fulbright on 19 November, would make little difference. If the PRC was serious about annexing Indian terrain, then "nobody could stop the Chinese."¹⁹⁴ Besides, this was not the central issue. The central issue was what effect the attack was having in Moscow. And here, Adenauer was unequivocal: It was completely at odds with the Kremlin's wishes. It was unnerving for Khrushchev and, therefore, advantageous for the West. As Adenauer himself put it, "However sad it might be that so many people have lost their lives in India, [...] *from our point of view*, we can say that Red-China's advances will most probably bring with it a lessening of pressure on Europe and America."¹⁹⁵ This was cut-throat Realpolitik. Chinese antagonism was compelling the USSR to divert its attention from one border to another. That men were dying on the battlefield was unfortunate, but unimportant. "We are glad," the

contrary, he still spoke of "bloc discipline." See, PA AA, B12, Bd.678, 'Bach an das Auswärtiges Amt. Betreff: Der chinesisch-sowjetische Gegensatz in "internationalen Fragen," 17. Oktober 1962'

¹⁹² BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3623, 'Aufzeichnung von Dr. Sch., Presse und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. Betreff: Rotchina und Kuba, 13. November 1962'

¹⁹³ Osterheld, *"Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens..."*, p.171

¹⁹⁴ StBKAH, III/61, 'Aufzeichnung eines Gespräches zwischen dem Herrn Bundeskanzler und dem Vorsitzenden des Außenpolitischen Ausschusses des amerikanischen Senats, Mr. Fulbright, 19. November 1962,' pp.18-19

¹⁹⁵ G. Buchstab (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: "Stetigkeit in der Politik."* *Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands, 1961-1965* (Düsseldorf, 1998), pp.319-320. My italics.

chancellor declared, “that Red-China has arrived on the scene and is, thus, influencing Soviet Russia.”¹⁹⁶ He was convinced that East Asia would be the PRC’s next target.¹⁹⁷ And yet, Adenauer was filled with an ominous sense of foreboding. Whatever happened, he told his cabinet, Chinese aggression should, under no circumstances, precipitate a settlement between the Western Powers and the USSR. Deep down, he remained worried that the two superpowers would strike a deal on Berlin and turn their joint attention towards Beijing. Adenauer feared, above all else, that Germany would pay the price for American-Soviet rapprochement.¹⁹⁸

Angst about Chinese aggression was certainly palpable on the ground. In his annual report, Wendland warned that there was a “growing fear” of the PRC’s “power-political closeness.”¹⁹⁹ The collapse of the Indian front had boosted Beijing’s prestige and humiliated New Delhi. The RVN’s foreign minister emphasised to Wendland that it had been a Chinese “masterstroke” to order the cessation of fire and partially withdraw its army in the midst of a sweeping advance.²⁰⁰ Curiously, this pervasive fear crystallised right at a time when the cables reaching Bonn were becoming more sanguine. At the end of August, the head of the presidential task force had assured the FRG embassy in Washington that the chances of another Dien-Bien-Phu were “practically no longer possible.”²⁰¹ Although the West Germans were not as buoyant as their American counterparts, there was a glimmer of cautious optimism. They agreed that the battlefield was improving. Material and tactical superiority, Wendland reflected, had allowed the ARVN to seize the initiative.²⁰² Its advantages were formidable. For one thing, it controlled the sky. Between October 1961 and September 1962, its pilots had flown 2.825 missions with 11.986 flight hours. Both Vietcong testimony and captured documents revealed that the use of napalm was having a detrimental effect on morale. In tandem with these bombing assaults, the high command had launched a series of large-scale operations, thereby inflicting heavy casualties. On 19 September, for instance, ARVN troops

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-07-003/3, ‘Vermerk: Verhandlungen zwischen der Verhandlungskommission der CDU/CSU und der FDP unter dem Vorsitz des Herrn Bundeskanzlers, 29. November 1962.’ It is clear that Adenauer was thinking of Indochina. In a conversation with Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda on 5 November, he specifically mentioned Laos as an example. See *AAPD, 1962*, p.1831

¹⁹⁸ StBKAH, III/28 Koalitionskrise II (Heft 1), ‘Vermerk: Verhandlungen zwischen der CDU/CSU und der FDP unter dem Vorsitz des Bundeskanzlers, 7. Dezember 1962,’ p.50

¹⁹⁹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.85, 14. Dezember 1962’

²⁰⁰ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: 1) Erneute Verschlechterung der kambodschanischen-vietnamesischen Beziehungen (eventuell bevorstehender Abbruch) 2) Prestige-Verlust Indiens, wachsende Furcht vor Rot-China, 5. Dezember 1962’

²⁰¹ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Lillienfeld an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Washington und die Lage in Vietnam, 30. August 1962’

²⁰² PA AA, B12, Bd.789, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Tagung der Ostexperten der NATO in Paris, 4. September 1962’

killed 154 and captured 28 Vietcong forces in the Plaines des Joncs. American intelligence staff, Herrmann informed his superiors, had intercepted enemy transmissions, instructing their units to avoid combat whenever possible and prepare for the resumption of “simple partisan missions.”²⁰³

Of paramount importance for Herrmann was that segments of the inhabitants were cooperating with ARVN forces. In the southern provinces, citizens had shared the Vietcong’s strength and location.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, the enemy had made one of its “gravest errors”: It had lost the support of the mountain tribes in central Vietnam. According to Herrmann, well over 100.000 tribesmen had resettled in strategic hamlets as a result of the oppression and bad treatment of the Vietcong. Communist partisans had, hence, not only lost reconnaissance and supply carriers, they had spawned a further antagonist, which “often defended its new villages with considerable success.”²⁰⁵ In the historiography, these victories have frequently been dismissed as insignificant.²⁰⁶ The West Germans, though, were impressed. It was not so much the loss of manpower that pleased them, but the destruction of numerous supply bases and training facilities. The hard-pressed rebels, Herrmann pointed out, were having to retreat into the forests and mountains, which made the distribution of everyday goods a “very serious and, oftentimes, unsolvable problem.”²⁰⁷ Little by little, the tide seemed to be turning.

And yet, despite declaring that “for the first time, the people are fighting with a weapon in their hand against the communists,” Wendland cautioned that the political situation remained precarious. There was no getting away from it. The regime was deeply unpopular. Its use of governmental decrees and imprisonment of numerous officials had alienated the upper-classes. In turn, the Ngos “pronounced Mandarinism” made them incapable of connecting with ordinary Vietnamese. Although the inhabitants had resigned themselves to the present government, they were still prepared to refuse orders and undermine their superiors. Further coup attempts, the

²⁰³ PA AA, B12, Bd.1648, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.33/62. Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 19. September 1962’; PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung, Betreff: Bericht Nr.44/62. Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 14. November 1962’

²⁰⁴ PA AA, B12, Bd.1648, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.34/62. Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 25. September 1962.’ Interestingly, Herrmann’s claim that the mountain dwellers had fled Vietcong rule is repeated in a NATO report. See NATO Archive, C-M(62)107, ‘Report Prepared by the National Experts on the Far East. Subject: The Situation in the Far East, 27 November 1962,’ p.6

²⁰⁵ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung, Betreff: Bericht Nr.44/62 Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 14 November 1962’

²⁰⁶ For historians, who have argued that the optimism was unfounded, see, for instance, Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp.33-34; Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, pp.83-84; Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War*, p. 62; P. Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Kansas, 2002), p.131, pp.133-134

²⁰⁷ PA AA, B12, Bd.1665, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung, Betreff: Bericht Nr.44/62, Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam, 14. November 1962’

ambassador felt, were to be expected.²⁰⁸ It was an ominous forecast. Unbeknownst to Wendland, 1963 would expose the peoples' ferocious hatred for the Ngo-clan and shake the regime to its foundations. It would be the final year of Diem's difficult and controversial presidency.

²⁰⁸ PA AA, B12, Bd.789, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland, Betreff: Tagung der Ostexperten der NATO in Paris, 4. September 1962'

Chapter 4

The New Global Order

1963

In August 1963, a Stasi agent, codenamed “E.J.,” filed a report on the peoples’ reaction to the ideological dispute. “The discussions, which are being conducted in all strata of the GDR’s population,” E.J. assured his/her superiors, “reveal that the overwhelming majority is evaluating the dispute [...] from the standpoint of the CPSU- and SED leadership.” There was, however, a palpable angst that the “yellow peril,” the “people without space,” was placing emphasis on national liberation struggles and that Beijing’s “imprudent, world-peace threatening acts” could crystallise a global war. Simultaneously, citizens were speaking of a “crumbling” socialist camp. They believed that there were now “three currents” in the form of “left radicals” (Albania and China), a “middle-line” (Khrushchev and Ulbricht), as well as the “revisionist line” of Josip Tito.¹

E.J.’s report provides an invaluable insight into the mind-set of the inhabitants. It revealed, above all, that Bloc cohesion was considered dead, buried and unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. There was a palpable angst that China had awoken, that China had unfettered itself from Soviet authority and was pursuing a militant strategy. The East Germans were not alone in this regard. An opinion poll conducted on the other side of the Berlin Wall showed that 35% of their western counterparts believed that Beijing wanted to “plunge the world into war.” Indeed, asked which state was the bigger threat - China or Russia - 47% named the former and merely 23% the latter.² When examining the East- and West German perspective of the Vietnam War, it is useful to keep these statistics in mind, for they confirm that, irrespective of the two nations disparate ideological systems, there was a consensus that China was a (if not *the*) threat to world peace. Just like East Berlin, FRG policymakers estimated that the socialist

¹ BStU, Archiv der Zentralstelle, MfS, SED-KL, 1179. Der Bundesbeauftragte Zentralarchiv, Z788, ‘E.J. über die Reaktion der Bevölkerung der DDR auf die ideologische Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen den sozialistischen und kommunistischen Parteien und der Führung der KP Chinas, 7. August, 1963,’ pp.1-6

² StBKAH, Abtlg 2, Bestand 100, ‘Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach am Bodensee. Frage: Was glauben Sie von welchem Land droht dem Westen mehr Gefahr - von China oder Russland? 20. Oktober 1963,’ p.283. Interestingly, East- and West German perception of China mirrored that of the United States. A national survey conducted in the autumn of 1963 found that more than 6 out of 10 American citizens perceived the PRC as the “bigger threat” to the U.S. than Soviet Russia. To compare, in 1961 only 40% of Americans named China as the bigger threat, whereas 45% chose the USSR. The report also stated that “our interviews show that from a fourth to a third of the electorate is moving mentally towards a possible eventual alliance of the U.S. with Russia against Red China.” See LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Asia and the Pacific, Cambodia, China, Box 237, China Cables, Vol. I, 12/63-9/64 [1 of 2], ‘Report on Changes in Public Attitudes toward Communist China by Samuel Lubell Associates. Subject: Summary of Findings, n.d.’

camp was no longer monolithic, that cohesion had broken down.³ The way they tried to understand the split was to contrast it with religion. During a radio show, Hans Kroll spoke of “two communist popes” in the shape of Khrushchev and Mao.⁴ *Der Spiegel* pointed to Martin Luther nailing his theses to the Church of Wittenberg.⁵ Whereas foreign ministerial officials labelled the smaller communist states “proselytes.”⁶

But it was not merely the Marxist-Leninist world, which was experiencing epoch-changing transformations. In the West, too, the collapse of centrifugal power was patent. Fearful of both American-Soviet détente and the solidification of the status quo, Adenauer challenged U.S. authority by signing the Franco-German agreement. Furthermore, President de Gaulle’s public appeal for the “neutralisation” of Southeast Asia ran counter to American endeavours to win the armed struggle against the NLF. It was in this atmosphere, then, that Bonn and East Berlin confronted Vietnam. The perception of the Cold War, as well as the structure of world power, had shifted. In 1963, a polycentric order came into being.

The Question of Victory

At the start of the year, an air of confidence was discernible below the 17th parallel, a feeling that South Vietnam was “over the worst.” During his brief return to Bonn, Wendland’s assistant, Dedo von Krosigk, assured Hilmar Bassler and the chancellor’s office that the security situation was improving.⁷ Krosigk could point to American data, which claimed that no more than 8% of the rural inhabitants was under rebel control. Local villagers were actively depriving partisans of food goods and Vietcong morale was flagging. There had been setbacks on the frontline it was true, but those did not change the fact that substantial progress was being made, exemplified by the construction of 4.000 strategic hamlets. The counterinsurgency effort had, in short, been blunted.⁸

³ ACDP, Nachlass Heinrich Krone, I-028-008/4, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Die Haltung der VR China nach dem ideologischen Streitgespräch in Moskau, 2. September 1963’

⁴ PA AA, B2, Bd.145, ‘BPA Abteilung Nachrichten Rundfunkausnahme, Deutsche Gruppe West, WDR, 25. Juli 1963, 20.15 Uhr’

⁵ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.26/1963, ‘Ostblock. Moskau-Peking. Geld und Bonbons, 26. Juni 1963,’ p.57

⁶ PA AA, B40, Bd.7, ‘Aufzeichnung von Dr. Wickert, über den Herrn Staatssekretär dem Herrn Minister vorgelegt. Betreff: Der Konflikt zwischen der Sowjetunion und der Volksrepublik China, 22. November 1963,’ p.237

⁷ H. Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard, 1963-1966. Ein dokumentarischer Bericht aus dem Kanzleramt* (Düsseldorf, 1992), p.37; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Fischer-Lossainen. Betreff: Vietnam, 17. Januar 1963’

⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.66, ‘Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bei der Nordatlantikpakt-Organisation. Betreff: Lage in Südvietnam, 18. Januar 1963’

This striking optimism raised several eyebrows. Hilmar Bassler told Krosigk that he did not share his confidence. Press reports, he pointed out, were portraying a far more dismal scenario. One particularly scathing piece in the *FAZ* warned that the conflict had “entered a state of crisis.” Reason for the crisis was the Vietcong’s ever-growing success in shooting down American helicopters. The article was published at a pivotal moment. Foreign ministerial officials were finalising the details for the long-awaited fiscal aid of fifty million D-Mark, together with a further credit of fifteen million. Dissatisfied with Krosigk’s analysis, Bassler requested that the Defence Ministry dispatch Herrmann to find out what had happened.⁹

The Battle of Ap Bac is one of the most fascinating skirmishes of the Vietnam conflict. Orthodox historians consider it evidence that Washington’s and Saigon’s optimism was illusory. Revisionists, in contrast, have accused the media of exaggerating its significance.¹⁰ East- and West German documentation offers a two-sided account. Herrmann highlighted a series of unfortunate events. The plan of action, he relayed, had been to shell the rebels’ position at dawn. Under the cover of the bombing, American helicopters would transport two infantry companies behind the NLF and, together with other conventional forces, attack in unison. However, Herrmann continued, nobody had noticed two further Vietcong bases, which outflanked the main assault. Worse still, the commandant had selected a landing area next to a forest, concealing entrenched, well-armed guerrillas. When the first helicopter descended, it was taken out immediately. The responsible officer, though, insisted that his subordinates land at the designated spot. Within a matter of minutes, the Vietcong had hit fourteen of the fifteen helicopters. Four plummeted, with a fifth reaching the landing site, before being taken out. The skirmish only ended after the ARVN’s air force had napalmed and bombed Vietcong defences.¹¹

Reported casualty figures varied spectacularly. Herrmann claimed that government forces had suffered sixty-eight deaths and two-hundred wounded, compared to the Vietcong’s hundred dead and “numerous wounded.”¹² In Hanoi, Nguyen Van Vinh told Ambassador Nohr

⁹ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In Vietnam, 11. Januar 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Fischer-Lossainen. Betreff: Vietnam, 17. Januar 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Vietnam, 19. Januar 1963’

¹⁰ For some interesting analysis of the Battle of Ap Bac, see Schulzinger, *Vietnam War*, pp.117-118; Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, pp.140-141; Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to War*, pp.151-153; Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, pp.186-205

¹¹ PA AA, B37, Bd.66, ‘Aufzeichnung von Herrmann. Betreff: Militärische Entwicklung in Südvietsnam; hier: der Kampf bei My-Tho am 2. Januar 1963, 16. Januar 1963’

¹² *Ibid.* Herrmann’s figures correspond with U.S. data. See NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Subject, Personal Name and Country Files, 1960-1963, Subject Files, CSM-Communism to POL-2, General Records & Statistics, Box 21, DEF - Defence Affairs, January - February - March, ‘From Chalmers B. Wood to Governor Harriman. Subject: Your Conversation with Ken Crawford, 10 January 1963’

that five-hundred ARVN soldiers had been killed, whereas the rebels had lost barely ten combatants. Nohr was right to question these figures, for in the same report, Vinh stated that 50.100 ARVN units had been either wounded or killed in the past year.¹³ A frankly bizarre claim, when juxtaposed with the U.S. record of 4.457 fatalities.¹⁴ What intrigued the West Germans, however, was that communist guerrillas had employed a “new tactic.” The Vietcong had dug fortified positions and resisted for as long as possible, before absconding at a “suitable moment.” And yet, Herrmann judged the stratagem only a partial success. The losses suffered in men and material were too high. In the long run, they were unsustainable. Besides, one setback did not portend the loss of an entire war. The month of January, Herrmann pointed out, had witnessed considerable triumphs, above all, the capture of a secret Vietcong HQ on the Cambodian border. Irrespective of Ap Bac, he maintained, rebel forces were being hurt.¹⁵

Herrmann’s estimations, then, tilted towards the revisionist argument. There is no doubt that Ap Bac was celebrated above the 17th parallel. Psychologically, it offered hope. The dreaded “iron birds” had caused confusion and panic amongst the partisans.¹⁶ But through careful planning, Vinh emphasised, they had, for the first time, been able to take the offensive and crush a superior opponent.¹⁷ Notwithstanding this jubilation, it would be wrong to take this argument too far. Vinh himself admitted that the rebels were both “relatively weak” and “inferior to the enemy.”¹⁸ The head of the Polish ICC commission was even more explicit. Hanoi, he revealed to Nohr, was “bleeding” and suffering “very high losses.”¹⁹ Herrman was,

¹³ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Bericht über die militärische Lage in Südvietnam, 2. März 1963,’ pp.23-24, p.31. The following June, Vinh restated his claim that 50.000 ARVN soldiers had been “knocked out” in 1962. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Informationen für die Botschafter der sozialistischen Länder in Hanoi. Betreff: Die Lage in Südvietnam während der ersten 6 Monate 1963, 7. Juni 1963,’ p.60. Interestingly, at the NLF’s central committee meeting on 6 March 1963, President Nguyen Huu Tho augmented the figures even further, asserting that “80.000 enemies had been incapacitated” in 1962. See PA MfAA, C737/77, ‘Bericht über die ordentliche Tagung des ständigen Ausschusses des ZK der Nationalen Befreiungsfront Südvietnam, 14. März 1963,’ p.61

¹⁴ NARA, RG200, Records of Robert S. McNamara, Defense Programs and Operations, Box 76, ‘Foreign Relations Committee, March 1966, Statistics on Vietnam, Table I, n.d.’

¹⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.66, ‘Aufzeichnung von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.3/63. Sicherheitslage in Südvietnam zu Beginn des Jahres 1963, 17. Januar 1963’

¹⁶ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Aufzeichnung von Mehlig und Bibow. Betreff: Kampfhandlungen in Südvietnam, 14. Januar 1963,’ p.43; PA MfAA, A8688, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung zwischen Genossen Minister Schwab und dem Leiter der Regierungsdelegation der DR Vietnam, Genossen Hoang van Diem, zur Leipziger Frühjahrsmesse 1963, sowie dem Botschafter der DR Vietnam in der DDR, Genossen Thuan, 4. März 1963,’ p.128

¹⁷ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Bericht über die militärische Lage in Südvietnam, 2. März 1963,’ pp.21-23

¹⁸ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Komitees für Wiedervereinigung der DRV vom 6. Juli 1963 über die Situation in Südvietnam im 1. Halbjahr 1963 sowie der Haltung der DRV zu einigen wichtigen Fragen des Südvietnam-Problems,’ p.3

¹⁹ PA MfAA, A8670, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.27/63 über ein Abendessen für den Leiter der polnischen Delegation der Internationalen Kontroll- und Überwachungskommission für Laos, Genossen Thee, gegeben von Genossen Botschafter Nohr am 2. März 1963 in der Botschaft der DDR,’ p.12. It is perhaps worthy to note that in the spring of 1963, the Indian ICC Delegation took it as a “sure thing” that the NLF would “not achieve further military or political victories.” See Woodrow Wilson Center, Digital Archive. ‘Secret Telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to

therefore, both right and wrong. Ap Bac had been significant, in the sense of offering the Vietcong a morale boost, as well as “confirming” its theory that decisive victories on the battlefield would precipitate talks and reunification.²⁰ But, overall, the ARVN had regained the initiative.

There was, of course, a difference between winning and bringing the war to a successful conclusion. Wendland was aware of that. Despite the government’s progress, he saw no evidence that Vietcong rebels intended to give up. He recognised the danger of the conflict grinding into a protracted stalemate. Wendland worried, too, about whether the U.S. had the patience for a long, drawn-out struggle.²¹ It was no secret that American-Vietnamese ties were cooling. The publication of Senator Mike Mansfield’s report, which contended that the RVN was “less, not more stable than it was at the outset” and even advised reducing U.S. involvement, had triggered “outrage” in Saigon.²² During a private chat with the president’s brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, Wendland learnt that the regime was aware of American irritation, especially towards him and his wife. Although the ambassador did not consider the Nhus “anti-American,” he appreciated that they were proud, anti-colonial and sensitive about national sovereignty. This, the ambassador explained, was the reason for the joint pledge to phase out U.S. advisors.²³ All in all, Wendland did conclude that victory was realistic. But “then what?” Then, it could become even more critical. The war could be won, he reflected, though not the peace. The Diem government was incapable of ruling under normal conditions and would most likely be “swept away” in a general election.²⁴

It was, however, not the situation on the ground that primarily troubled the West Germans. It was, rather, the lengthening Chinese shadow. On his tour of Southeast Asia, Franz-Josef Bach was struck by the atmospheric angst. “The feeling of having to come to terms with the great power of the East,” he informed Heinrich Krone, “is unmistakable.” Bach

Spasowski (Warsaw) [Ciphergram No. 5295], 24 April 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AMSZ, Warsaw, 6/77, w-102, t-625, obtained and translated by Margaret Gnoinska. Published in *CWIHP Working Paper No. 45*. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118948>

²⁰ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Aufzeichnung von Mehlig und Bibow. Betreff: Kampfhandlungen in Südvietsnam, 14. Januar 1963,’ p.45

²¹ PA AA, B.37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 13. Februar 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Josef Jansen. Betreff: Lage in Südvietsnam, 12. März 1963’

²² PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Bericht des Senators Mike Mansfield “Vietnam and Southeast-Asia,” 30. April 1963’; LOC, The Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 519, Special Files, Public Service, JFK-LBJ, Vietnam, General, January-August 1963, ‘Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Report of Senator Mike Mansfield, Senator J. Caleb Boggs, Senator Claiborne Pell, Senator Benjamin A. Smith to the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 1963’

²³ PA AA, B37, Bd.59, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Die “Graue Eminenz” Ngo Dinh-Nhu und deren neue Politik, 7. Mai 1963’

²⁴ PA AA, B.37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Lage in Süd-Vietnam, 13. Februar 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Josef Jansen. Betreff: Lage in Südvietsnam, 12. März 1963’

acknowledged that the loss of Saigon would be a “tremendous, if not final, blow to the Free World’s position in Asia.” Yet he doubted whether the containment of China was feasible.²⁵ Bach was not alone in this regard. Klaus Herrmann echoed his colleague’s warning that the PRC had established a “useful base” in Indochina, from where it could operate at will.²⁶ At the beginning of the turmoil, Herrmann noted, Beijing had kept a low profile. But from the autumn of 1961, and especially since the summer of 1962, there had been “clear evidence” that China was monitoring the proceedings in its “historic sphere of influence.” Beijing’s “immediate objective,” he emphasised, was to tighten its grip on Laos and North Vietnam, as well as “stem” Russian influence. “Western observers in Hanoi,” Herrmann reported, “believe that Ho Chi Minh and his peers are almost fearfully trying to maintain relations with Moscow without alienating Beijing.”²⁷

Hanoi Leans Towards the PRC

How much influence did China have above the 17th parallel? Would Hanoi abandon its middle-of-the-road policy and align with Beijing? These were the interlocked questions which weighed heavily on the minds of East German officials. Any hope that China might desist from breaking with the bloc flickered and died in the aftermath of the SED’s 6th Party Congress. Prior to the festivities in mid-January, Ulbricht was forewarned that the CCP delegation would impose a debate to “strengthen its faction” and “announce its claim to leadership.”²⁸ The magnitude of the congress was personified in Khrushchev’s decision to attend personally, something which he had not done since the fracas in Bucharest three years before.²⁹

On the opening day, Ulbricht and Khrushchev adopted disparate roles. The former not only launched assaults against the uninvited Albanians, but condemned the CCP for violating

²⁵ ACDP, Nachlass Heinrich Krone, 01-228, 008/4, ‘Franz-Josef Bach an Heinrich Krone, 5. Februar 1963’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1963, Box 3820, POL-Asia, ‘John Lacey to Department of State. Subject: German Consul General Bach’s Comments on Asia, 23 April 1963’

²⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.49, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: VR China und Laos, 20. März 1963’

²⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.50, ‘Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht: Nr.17/63. Die Lage in den südlichen Grenzgebieten Rotchinas und ihre mögliche Auswirkung auf die künftige Entwicklung in Südostasien, 10. Juni 1963’

²⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/115, ‘Florin an Ulbricht. Betreff: Vorbereitung der Delegierten unseres Parteitages auf das Auftreten der Delegation der KP Chinas und anderer Bruderparteien, 6. Dezember 1962,’ p.254

²⁹ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.233. On the congress in Bucharest in June 1960, see Chapter 1. On the SED’s 6th Party Congress, see also Stubber-Berries, ‘East German China Policy,’ pp.269-270, pp.341-345; C Gardet, *Les relations de la République populaire de Chine et de la République démocratique allemande (1949-1989)* (Oxford, 2000), pp.154-160

peaceful coexistence in its border dispute with India.³⁰ Khrushchev, though, held out an olive branch, proposing a verbal ceasefire. Ideological disagreements, he stated, did not warrant “excommunication.” The premier assured his audience that Soviet Russia would “use all our energy” to consolidate the international communist movement.³¹ But despite Khrushchev’s offer, as well as private appeals from the East Germans, Wu Xiuquan refused to respond in kind.³² Barely three minutes into his own speech, he accused the “modern revisionists” of undermining socialist cohesion. The effect was immediate. Throughout the Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Wu was treated to a cacophony of boos, catcalls and jeering. The chairman of the session - much to the crowds’ delight - demanded that Wu refrain from his “unqualified and provoking attacks”³³ One American onlooker described it as the “most humiliating treatment ever publicly accorded” to a communist representative.³⁴

In the following weeks, Beijing’s press organs blasted the “barbarism” witnessed at the congress. One particularly vicious polemic juxtaposed the rude treatment of Wu with the “wild ovations” for the attending Yugoslavs. “Those who have brought this about,” it declared, were attempting to replace Marxism-Leninism and install a “modern revisionist programme.” They had betrayed the revolution. There could be no reconciliation:

Don’t some people frequently say that we ought to “synchronise our watches?” Now, there are two watches. One is Marxism-Leninism [...] and the other is modern revisionism. [...] Which is to be the master watch?³⁵

For Josef Hegen, the image of “two watches” signified final proof of the CCP leadership’s “actual intentions.” He no doubt realised that it was a reference to Khrushchev’s appeal in 1959 for the bloc to “synchronise watches.” Beijing, Hegen contended, did not want to overcome the ideological disagreements. It had no interest in maintaining a united front. Policymakers were, instead, actively pursuing the break-up of the international communist movement.³⁶

³⁰ W. Meißner (Hrsg.), *Die DDR und China 1949 bis 1990: Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur. Eine Quellensammlung* (Berlin, 1995), pp.130-131

³¹ ND-Archiv, Nr.17/1963, ‘Rede des Genossen N.S. Chruschtschow, 17. Januar, 1963,’ pp.5-6

³² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3607, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Delegation der KP Chinas zum VI. Parteitag der SED am 16. Januar 1963,’ pp.1-2

³³ Meißner (Hrsg.), *Die DDR und China*, pp.132-134

³⁴ *Times Herald*, ‘Chinese [Delegate] Jeered in E[ast] Berlin as He rejects K[h]rushchev’s] Appeal: Wu Treatment one of [the] Worst in Red History, 19 January 1963,’ p.1

³⁵ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, National Security Files, Countries, Box 24, China General, 1/63-3/63, ‘Memorandum from William H. Brubeck for Mr. McGeorge Bundy, the White House. Subject: Red Flag Article, 8 March 1963.’ The appeal for the socialist camp to “synchronise watches” had initially been made by Khrushchev at the Hungarian party congress in December 1959. See D. Tompkins, ‘The East is Red? Images of China in East Germany and Poland through the Sino-Soviet Split,’ *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* Nummer 62 Heft.3 (2013), p.413

³⁶ SAPMO-BArch, NY182/1221, ‘An Genosse Ulbricht, von Abteilung Aussenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Grobeinschätzung des Artikels aus der “Roten Fahne” Nr.3/4-63 “Nochmals zu den Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen Genossen Togliatti und uns,” 18. März 1963,’ p.180, p.183

It was against this backdrop that East Berlin turned its attention to Hanoi. “Having drawn the battle-lines,” Lorenz Lüthi observes, “both sides tried to recruit supporters.”³⁷ Chinese defection was bad enough, but if Hanoi and Pyongyang abandoned the Soviet camp, then the communist structure would be split on territorial lines. It would, in essence, signify the de-facto erection of a rival Asian Bloc. At the congress, though, SED policymakers had made an exceptional blunder. They had not permitted the other Asian participants to give a welcome speech, thus, inadvertently fortifying the invisible line in racial terms.³⁸ With hindsight, this decision is difficult to understand. The MfAA had even advised its superiors to seize the opportunity and assist North Vietnam in “breaking away” from Chinese influence.³⁹ Whatever the motive was, it did not go down well in Hanoi. Unlike its reporting on the Czechoslovakian- and Bulgarian party congresses, North Vietnam provided extensive coverage of the SED’s festivities. After the publication of Wu’s speech, however, *Nhan Dan*, demonstrably ceased its editorials. When GDR diplomats enquired as to why, they were told that North Vietnam was displeased about its delegation’s inability to give a speech, as well as the outspoken criticism of China.⁴⁰

All the same, East German optimism continued into the new year. From a domestic standpoint, Hanoi simply could not afford to choose sides. The Foreign Trade Minister, Phan Anh, disclosed to Nohr that North Vietnam was facing “colossal difficulties.”⁴¹ It was no wonder. On his visit to Hong-Quang in February, Nohr recorded that a severe draught (the worst since 1954) was prohibiting the irrigation of agricultural land.⁴² Food produce was, in turn, failing to keep pace with a rapidly increasing population, which had reached 743.000 newborns per annum.⁴³ Fraternal assistance remained the DRV’s principal lifeline. Besides,

³⁷ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.233

³⁸ Mao Zedong gleefully picked up on this point in his letter to Walter Ulbricht. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3607, ‘Brief vom Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland, 27. März 1963,’ p.37

³⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/31, ‘Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Aussenpolitik und Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Die Politik der Bruderparteien der sozialistischen Länder, 21. Dezember 1962,’ p.182

⁴⁰ PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Aufzeichnung von Schneidewind. Betreff: Information über die Auswertung des VI. Parteitages der SED in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 3. Mai 1963,’ p.69; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi, 24. April 1963,’ p.39

⁴¹ PA MfAA, A8716, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.24/63 über ein Abendessen des Genossen Botschafter Nohr für den Aussenhandelsminister der DRV, Phan Anh, 26. Februar 1963,’ p.241

⁴² PA MfAA, A8704, ‘Bericht über eine Informationsreise in das Gebiet Hong-Quang vom 14.-16. Februar 1963,’ p.111

⁴³ PA MfAA, A8716, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.146/63 über den Besuch einer der gegenwärtig in den Vororten von Hanoi gezeigten Ausstellungen über “eine vernünftige Schwangerschaftsregelung” in Hanoier Stadtbezirk Dong Da, 22. November 1963,’ p.1. Interestingly, after visiting the DRV, President Antonyn Novotny reported that the present “major issue” for North Vietnam was the increasing birth-rate and quoted Prime Minister, Pham Dong, admitting that he “did not know what will happen in 5-10 years,” if nothing changed. According to Novotny, all politburo members had no fewer than 7 children. See Státní Archiv Ústřední, ÚV KSČ, Fond 07/16, Antonín

choosing one particular side would be inconsistent with Hanoi's foreign political agenda. Past evidence revealed that although the Vietnamese had tilted towards Beijing, they had refrained from regurgitating anti-Soviet rhetoric. In fact, Ung Van Khiem had emphasised that the nation's basic principle was to maintain strong relations with *both* countries.⁴⁴ There was a predisposition, then, to contain the dispute, rather than widen it.

East German confidence appeared vindicated in mid-January. Concurrent with the SED's festivities, President Novotny of Czechoslovakia and Soviet politburo member, Yuri Andropov, visited Hanoi. The embassy monitored the visit with rapt attention, searching for clues that would reveal their comrades' stance. Upon arrival, the two guests were asked to refrain from mentioning the dispute. But behind closed doors, tempers were rising. Le Duan insisted that they discuss Soviet relations with both Tirana and Beijing. "Is it bad if we criticise the imperialists," he asked? "That is what we and the Chinese comrades did at the party congresses." Duan also voiced irritation about Khrushchev's letter to JFK, which had expressed confidence in the U.S. government's desire to "maintain peace." No doubt he was thinking of the skirmishes below the 17th parallel. Nevertheless, after listening patiently to Andropov, Duan thanked him for his detailed presentation and claimed that they now had a "better understanding" of the CPSU's policies. Ho Chi Minh admitted that North Vietnam had been "displeased" with the decision-making in Cuba, but that it now recognised the Kremlin's "clear and correct" position. "The Vietnamese people," Ho stressed, "stand loyally on the side of the Soviet populace and Lenin's party."⁴⁵

In the joint communiqué, Novotny and Ho declared that the only correct strategy was "peaceful coexistence." They lauded the USSR as the "centre of the socialist camp" and endorsed Khrushchev's proposal to cease the polemics. China, in contrast, was barely mentioned. It was the first time, as Horst Brie pointed out, that the highest echelons of the DRV had taken such an "explicit" and "positive" position on fundamental issues.⁴⁶ East German optimism was, therefore, reasonable. At a time when Beijing was polemicizing against

Novotný - Zahraničí, Karton 227, Návštěva 1. tajemníka ÚV KSČ a prezidenta ČSSR A. Novotného ve VDR (1963), výbor Komunistická strana Československa, 'Zpráva s. A. Novotného o cestě do jihovýchodní Asie a o některých dalších otázkách dne 15. února 1963,' Sv. 25, Ar.j. 333, 1., pp.1-46

⁴⁴ PA MfAA, A8693, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit dem ungarischen Botschaftsrat, Genossen Szigeti am 26. Januar 1962 in der ungarischen Botschaft,' p.5

⁴⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, 'Informationen über die Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV) anlässlich der Besuche einer Delegation des Obersten Sowjets der UdSSR und des Präsidenten der CSSR Genossen Novotny in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 23. Februar 1963,' pp.8-10

⁴⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, 'Information über das gemeinsame Kommuniqué des Präsidenten Ho Chi Minh und Präsident Antonin Novotny, 1. Februar 1962,' pp.13-16. It is striking just how angry Mao Zedong was with the Novotny-Ho Chi Minh communique. He subsequently told Kim Il-Sung that it was "directed against China." See Yang, 'Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude,' p.24

Khrushchev and dismissing peaceful coexistence as treason, the DRV president had contradicted Maoist dogma in public.

On 10 February, Hanoi, once again, pressed for socialist concord. Referencing the proposals made by a “number of fraternal parties,” the politburo published a statement, which underlined the need to focus on what united-, rather than divided the movement:

We have a common enemy: Imperialism. We have a common ideology: Marxism-Leninism. We have common goals: Socialism and communism. We have a joint programme: The two Moscow Declarations of 1957 and 1960.

Similar to its appeal the previous year, three concrete proposals were made. First, the polemics should stop. Second, an international conference should be convened with the purpose of settling the ideological dispute. Third, the CPSU and CCP should create “necessary conditions” to ensure a fruitful discussion.⁴⁷

And yet, reading between the lines, there were subtle clues that policymakers were backtracking from the Novotny-Ho declaration. Moscow, for instance, was not described as the “centre of the socialist camp.” Instead, the accord of the communist parties was hailed as the “core” of the peoples’ revolutionary movement.⁴⁸ According to Pommerening, both the head of the party committee for propaganda, To Huu, and politburo member, Le Duc Tho, had reproached Ho Chi Minh for naively accepting the visitors’ “wrong” appraisal of China.⁴⁹ Interestingly, on the same day that East Berlin received the VWP’s appeal, Xuan Thuy, the president of the society for Sino-Vietnamese friendship, paid tribute to the two peoples’ “revolutionary cause.” What was most remarkable about Xuan Thuy’s editorial was that he compared DRV-PRC relations to “lips and teeth,” a simile used to describe the Sino-Korean alliance during the Korean War.⁵⁰ Even so, Pommerening remained optimistic. Despite

⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/437, ‘Eckhart Bibow an Peter Florin. Betreff: Erklärung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams zur Einheit der kommunistischen Weltbewegung, 12. Februar 1963,’ p.22-27. Interestingly, the CCP refused to publish the politburo’s declaration. According to Tovmassian, it stopped reporting on North Vietnam and focused, instead, on the national liberation struggle in the South. See PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen dem sowjetischen Botschafter, Gen. Tovmassian und dem Gen. Bibow am 7. August 1963,’ p.22

⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/437, ‘Eckhart Bibow an Peter Florin. Betreff: Erklärung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams zur Einheit der kommunistischen Weltbewegung, 12. Februar 1963,’ p.22-27. See also SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/437, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.18/63 über eine Information des Politbüros der PWV, Genossen Hoan Van Hoang und Genossen Ung Van Khiem, bezüglich einer Erklärung des ZK der PWV zu Fragen der Einheit der kommunistischen und Arbeiterbewegung am 11. Februar 1963,’ pp.28-29

⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi. Betreff: Situation nach Politbüro-Erklärung, n.d.’ pp.31-32

⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Möge die vietnamesische-chinesische Freundschaft ewig grünen wie die Bäume im Frühjahr, von Xuan-Thuy, Präsident der Gesellschaft für vietnamesische-chinesische Freundschaft (Übersetzung aus “Nhan Dan” vom 12. Februar 1963),’ p.1; Z. Shen, ‘Alliance of “Teeth and Lips” or Marriage of Convenience? The Origins and Development of the Sino-North Korean Alliance, 1946-1958,’ *U.S.-Korean Institute Working Papers Series*, (December 2008), pp.3-4, p.24, Footnote 2

acknowledging that the “majority” of party members approved the Chinese line, he stressed that they had been unable to obviate the published Ho-Novotny communiqué. *Radio Hanoi*’s subsequent suspension of programmes from Russia *and* China suggested to him that a balance of power existed.⁵¹

With the advent of spring, however, East German optimism drastically diminished. Both on a theoretical and practical level, the DRV began oscillating towards China. As Mari Olsen notes, the change did not occur overnight, but in stages.⁵² The initial step was Le Duan’s speech on Karl Marx’s death-day. The first secretary defined the VWP’s position on a number of fundamental Marxist-Leninist issues. It was, in short, a doctrine.⁵³ Furthermore, Duan’s address represented the “ideological basis” for closer Sino-Vietnamese collaboration. Whilst acknowledging that peaceful coexistence was an “objective necessity,” Duan declared that the state’s guiding principle was the revolutionary struggle to overthrow “imperialism.” But he went further. Quoting Lenin, Duan estimated that the prospect of a peaceful rise to power was merely 1%. The October Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Vietnamese Revolution and the Cuban Revolution were all cited as examples. Nor did he voice any criticism of Albania. Instead, Duan rejected rapprochement with Belgrade and condemned Yugoslav revisionism as a “harmful threat.”⁵⁴

The seriousness with which Eckhart Bibow examined the speech was testament to just how much weight the GDR placed on Duan’s remarks. For the East Germans, he remained the embodiment of the “left-sectarian” faction. Bibow’s blank refusal to consider his address from a Vietnamese, rather than a Khrushchevist or Maoist perspective, revealed that the ideological split had rendered all else secondary. Although Duan had, “for the most part,” properly explained the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, Bibow contended that he had come to the “wrong practical applications.” The VWP had adopted Beijing’s perspective on key issues in world politics. Duan’s depreciation of peaceful coexistence, his emphasis on revolutionary struggle, as well as his public criticism of Yugoslavia, Bibow warned, all strengthened China’s position. “Contrary to its stated intentions,” he concluded, “[the VWP] is counteracting the unity and cohesion of the international communist movement.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi. Betreff: Situation nach Politbüro-Erklärung, n.d.’ pp.31-32

⁵² Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, pp.126-129

⁵³ This was certainly what Duong Bach Mai told Pommerening. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten, 28. Mai 1963,’ p.50

⁵⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/437, ‘Einschätzung der Rede des 1. Sekretärs des ZK der PWV Le Duan anlässlich des 80. Todestages von Karl Marx auf der Parteihochschule der PWV, 29 Mai 1963,’ pp.74-79

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Liu Shaoqi's subsequent visit to Hanoi between 10 and 16 May fuelled East German concern that the Sinophiles were in the ascendancy. Prior to the president's arrival, the aforementioned Xuan Thuy usurped Khiem as foreign minister.⁵⁶ In turn, middle-ranking functionaries, who had failed to consistently support Maoist theories were ousted from their posts. This organisational reshuffle was a masterstroke. It meant that To Huu, a renowned Sinophile, was in complete control of the printing press. The public would read what the pro-Chinese wanted them to. It was no coincidence that the tone began to sharpen. The party's press organs, Bibow reported, had launched a broad political campaign to highlight the revolutionary bonds between Vietnam and China.⁵⁷ Indeed, Liu's trip received widespread public attention. The president was welcomed by 200.000 citizens, who carried giant pictures of himself and Mao Zedong (yet none of either Marx or Lenin).⁵⁸ Pommerening was particularly shocked that Liu was invited to share his ideological theories and polemicize against "modern revisionism." It also seemed ominous that Ho Chi Minh, the man most identified with Moscow, condemned revisionism in the signed communiqué as the "central danger" for the international communist movement.⁵⁹

Most striking about East German appraisals, though, was that they blamed Chinese intrusion for Hanoi's change of heart. Vietnam, the MfAA contended, had been judged the best chance of expanding Beijing's authority within the communist world. Decision-makers had, thus, employed pressure and blackmail to push the VWP onto their side. Both in Beijing and Hanoi, diplomats reported that Liu's visit had been conditioned on Vietnamese approval of Maoist ideology.⁶⁰ "The behaviour of the CCP delegation in the DRV and the political-moral pressure exerted," one senior official observed, [...] "represents an open interference in the inner-party political dispute."⁶¹ Liu's insistence that there could be "no middle-way" between

⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, 'Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi, 24. April 1963,' p.39

⁵⁷ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Einschätzung des Besuches der chinesischen Partei- und Regierungsdelegation unter Leitung des Präsidenten der VR China Liu Schao Tschü und des stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten Tschên Yi vom 10. bis 15. Mai 1963 in der DRV, 28. Mai 1963,' pp.1-2

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.7

⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, 'Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi vom 28. Mai 1963, p.50. For the entire statement, see SAPMO-BArch, NY182/1221, 'Tiedke an Ulbricht. Betreff: Gemeinsame Erklärung des Vorsitzenden Liu Schao-tschü und des Präsidenten Ho Chi Minh, 12. Juni 1963,' p.201

⁶⁰ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: Einschätzung der derzeitigen Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams in den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten, 19. August 1963,' pp.38-39; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/224, 'Aufzeichnung von Brie. Betreff: Bemerkungen zum Besuch des Vorsitzenden der Volksrepublik China, Liu Schau-tji in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam (vom 10. bis zum 16 Mai 1963), 31. Mai 1963,' p.19

⁶¹ PA MfAA, A8749, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Einflussnahme der KP Chinas auf die Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV), 4. Juni 1963,' p.9

communism and modern revisionism was the most blatant example cited, whilst his venerations of Duan's "high Marxist-Leninist spirit" were judged a public endorsement.⁶² Nor was it only at the top-level that the Chinese were attempting to influence Hanoi. The PRC's embassy, Pommerening warned, was exploiting its underground network to "poison the atmosphere."⁶³ Through words of mouth, as well as the circulation of CCP brochures, Chinese specialists and the Hoa minority were infiltrating the inhabitants to propagate harmful anti-Soviet rhetoric.⁶⁴

Then again, despite strong Chinese pressure, as well as Liu's bombastic language (most notably that the struggle between Marxism-Leninism and modern revisionism would decide "victory or defeat" for the proletariat), GDR officials were unconvinced that Beijing had achieved all its objectives. The formulation of the Ho-Liu statement suggested compromise. On Hanoi's initiative, both states affirmed support for the signing of a German peace treaty, something which the Sino-Korean equivalent glaringly omitted. China's theories on the national liberation struggle were not fully endorsed either. Instead of declaring the Third World to be the "focal point" of the present epoch, it was set alongside the socialist camp.⁶⁵ Judging from the public speeches, Bibow noticed that the Vietnamese leadership had refrained from attacking Khrushchev, or the USSR. The option of mediating between the two sides had evidently been left open.⁶⁶

Still, it was undeniable that the VWP's stance had shifted. At a private gathering between East German and Soviet Bloc representatives in mid-June, it was agreed that the Chinese-wing was directing the state's political programme. On that very day, the press organs distributed 70.000 copies of the CCP's open letter, whereas the Soviet equivalent was only accessible with special permission. None of the diplomats offered much hope that the situation could be rectified. Although the politburo was not unanimous in its support for closer bilateral

⁶² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, 'Rede des Präsidenten Liu-Schao-Tschi auf der Grosskundgebung auf dem Ba-dinh-Platz in Hanoi, n.d.' pp.16-17; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/224, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Einschätzung des Besuches des Vorsitzenden der VR China Liu Tschau-Tji in der DRV vom 10. bis 16. Mai 1963, 28. Mai 1963,' p.10

⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, 'Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur politischen Situation in der DRV, 31. August 1963'

⁶⁴ PA MfAA, A8749, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Einflussnahme der KP Chinas auf die Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV), 4. Juni 1963,' p.11

⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/224, 'Aufzeichnung von Brie. Betreff: Bemerkungen zum Besuch des Vorsitzenden der Volksrepublik China, Liu Schau-tji in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam (vom 10. bis zum 16. Mai 1963), 31. Mai 1963,' p.20; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/221, 'Aufzeichnung von Mahlow. Betreff: Übersicht über die Beziehungen der DDR und der VR China im 1. Halbjahr 1963, 16. August 1963,' p.41; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/224, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Einschätzung des Besuches des Vorsitzenden der VR China, Liu Tschau-Tji, in der DRV vom 10 bis 16. Mai, 1963, 28. Mai 1963,' p.14

⁶⁶ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: Einschätzung des Besuches der chinesischen Partei- und Regierungsdelegation unter Leitung des Präsidenten der VR China, Liu Schao Tschi, und dem stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten Tschen Yi vom 10. bis 15. Mai 1963 in der DRV, 28. Mai 1963,' p.9

relations, the Sino-Vietnamese statement had bound the two countries together.⁶⁷ Most importantly, Hanoi's shift made it plain to the East Germans that Soviet Bloc influence was diminishing. The last GDR technicians were set to leave in July and the number of Russian specialists had shrunk from 3.000 to 300.⁶⁸ Unable to influence events and fearful of Maoist radicalism, officials shuddered to think of the consequences. In Vientiane, Joachim Naumann was already warning that the Chinese, the DRV and the Pathet Lao had constructed a "united front," with the purpose of solving the conflict through armed struggle.⁶⁹ Tovmassian captured the mood when he exclaimed: "God save us from our friends - we can deal with our enemies."⁷⁰

Witness to Murder

It was a strange coincidence that while the East Germans fretted about the decline of Soviet Bloc authority above the 17th parallel, their western counterparts witnessed a simultaneous shakedown in the South. But whereas the former was orchestrated from the top-down, in the latter it was vice-versa. The "Buddhist Crisis" was an internal revolt that precipitated the beginning of the end for Diem. It was the first time that FRG citizens intervened in domestic affairs, albeit without their government's consent. The historiography has placed great significance on the crisis, yet chroniclers have tended to regurgitate familiar facts, rather than provide a first-hand account of those fateful days in Hue.⁷¹ Fortunately, a German doctor by the name of Erich Wulff witnessed the incident and offers a comprehensive narrative of the killings. *Der Spiegel* went so far as to describe him and his colleague, Hans Hölterscheidt, as the men who had "crystallised the greatest religious crisis" in RVN history.⁷² Let us listen to their voices.

⁶⁷ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit den Botschaftern der Sowjetunion, der CSSR und der VR Ungarn anlässlich eines Filmabends der Botschaft, 14. Juni 1963,' p.19; PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: Einschätzung der derzeitigen Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams in den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten, 19. August 1963,' p.30

⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, 'Aufzeichnung von Pommerening über seine redaktionelle Tätigkeit, 24. Juni 1963'

⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/682, 'Abschlussbericht des Genossen Bambor über die Situation in Laos, 4 Mai 1963,' p.10

⁷⁰ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit den Botschaftern der Sowjetunion, der CSSR und der VR Ungarn anlässlich eines Filmabends der Botschaft, 14. Juni 1963,' p.20

⁷¹ The best and most thorough account of the Buddhist Crisis is E. Miller, 'Religious Revival and the Politics of Nation Building: Reinterpreting the 1963 'Buddhist Crisis' in South Vietnam,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 49, Issue 6, (August 2014), pp.1-60. On the Hue incident, see also E. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (Oxford, 1987), pp.103-119

⁷² *Der Spiegel*, Nr.37/1963, 'Südvietnam. Madame Nhu. Gefährlicher Frühling, 11 September 1963,' p.75. The famous American journalist, David Halberstam credited the German doctors with breaking the story. See D. Halberstam, *The Making of Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era. Revised Edition* (Plymouth, 2008), p.118. After interviewing Erich Wulff, U.S. State Department officials asserted that his description of the 8 May disturbances was "probably accurate." See NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State,

On the eve of Buddha's 2507th birthday, Wulff decided to join his friends for a walk. The 36-year old neurologist had been living in Hue for the past two years. Born in Estonia, he and his family were Baltic Germans, who had returned to the fatherland during World War II. Wulff himself had found it difficult to integrate. He was unable to shake off a feeling of "incomprehension" towards Germany and, after completing his medical exams, tried to "escape to France." Unsuccessful in finding a job, he grudgingly accepted his fate and made an effort to adjust to German life. He took up a position at the University of Freiburg and was soon managing his own department. But despite his academic rise, Wulff complained of a "growing spiritual impoverishment." Long-standing projects were left unfinished, nor was he able to build a sensual relationship in his private life. When an old colleague asked him, therefore, whether he would be interested in lecturing at Hue University, he was easily convinced. "Out of this impasse," Wulff reflected, "the call of Vietnam seemed a way out."⁷³

Interestingly, the recurrent theme in the doctor's adventures was public hatred towards the "despotic and nepotistic" Ngo regime. Wulff had heard stories about concentration camps filled with innocent inmates, about how the ruling family was filling its pockets with American dollars, and how private armies were terrorising the local inhabitants. It is safe to say, then, that Wulff was already ill-disposed towards the president. There was no attempt to rationalise his way of governing. Neither did he appreciate that the mechanisms in place were different to those in the West. Wulff would later admit that he had personalised his antipathy. After all, the people he met were individuals with names, faces and past histories. It was easy to judge the regime with the same surge of emotion.⁷⁴

On that historic evening, however, Wulff could not have imagined the sequence of events which would unfold. The 7 May was a tropical summer night. Passing the packed cafés, Wulff saw students, locals and seniors talking animatedly to each another. "The atmosphere was akin to a victory celebration," he recalled. "We felt that something special was in the air." A group member informed Wulff that, the day before, Archbishop Thuc had dispatched a telegram to Hue, banning the display of Buddhist flags. The following morning, one of the pennants was torn down from the altar. And, in the afternoon, police officials broke into private

Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Subject, Personal Name, and Country Files, 1960-1963, POL-2 General Reports & Statistics, Box 21, POL - Political Affairs, POL-1, July-December, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Dr Erich Wulff and Paul M. Kattenberg. Subject: Situation in South Viet-Nam, 24 September 1963'

⁷³ G. Alsheimer [alias of Erich Wulff], *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre. Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam, 1961-1967* (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), pp.11-12. On the ties between the University of Freiburg and the University of Hue, see S. Reuter, *Im Schatten von Tet. Die Vietnam-Mission der Medizinischen Fakultät Freiburg (1961-1968)* (Frankfurt am Main, 2011)

⁷⁴ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.12-13 pp.20-21, pp.23-24, pp.36-37, pp.113-114

houses to confiscate the religious symbols.⁷⁵ What was not mentioned, though, was that *all* displays of religious flags had been banned in public areas. Still, the timing of the decree seemed pertinent. Not only was it issued prior to Gautama's birthday, but, in the same week, Papal flags had flown during the eulogistic celebrations of the archbishop's silver jubilee.⁷⁶ Since the Ngo-clan was ardent Catholic and had accorded preferential treatment to their affiliates, it was logical for the Buddhists to interpret this ruling as another example of religious discrimination. As a result, the clergy, along with a large group of followers, had called upon the provincial administration office and demanded that it rescind the order. Surprised by the vociferous protests, the province chief gave his consent for the flags to be flown and agreed that the traditional pilgrimage should take place.⁷⁷ "The [...] feelings of happiness," Wulff explained, "thus sprang from the demonstrations achievements. The people were beginning to become aware of the power they possessed."⁷⁸ Even against state authority.

The next morning, Wulff overslept the start of the festivities and had to satisfy himself with watching events from his balcony window. Nothing unusual seemed to be happening. In the afternoon, two friends reported that the Bonze of Annam, Thich Tri Quang, had raised the subject of religious discrimination and warned that the Buddhists would no longer accept provocations without resistance. He had, however, ended his speech on a conciliatory note, thanking the province chief for rescinding the ban. The procession had disbanded peacefully. It seemed that the dispute would have no further political consequences.⁷⁹

This was what Wulff thought. In fact, he was so sure that there would be no further commotion that he decided to visit the local cinema. On his way there, he could not help but notice the mass of people gathering in the city centre. Recognising one of his students, a young man named Ty, Wulff was told that Tri Quang was about to give his annual speech. Joining

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.131-132. On the hauling down of Buddhists pennants as well as the pilgrimage to Tu-Dam Pagoda, see also NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, 1963, Box 4047, Political Affairs & Religion, Pol 13, Non-Party Blocs, 2/1/63, S Viet, 'Attachment I, A-781, Saigon. A Narrative, Killings of Buddhists at Hue, n.d.'

⁷⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Unruhen in der Provinzstadt Hue anlässlich Buddhas Geburtstag, 15. Mai 1963.' See also LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-69, NSF, National Intelligence Estimates, Box 7, 53, South Vietnam, 'Special National Intelligence Estimate, Number 53-2-63. Subject: The Situation in South Vietnam, 10 July 1963'; TNA, FO371/170144, 'From Hohler to the Lord Privy Seal, 6 July 1963.' It is worth mentioning that the initial ban on flags had been decreed by Emperor Bao Dai in 1950. In practice, though, the decree had never seriously been implemented.

⁷⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Unruhen in der Provinzstadt Hue anlässlich Buddhas Geburtstag, 15. Mai 1963'; Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.132

⁷⁸ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.132

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.137. According to British sources, Tri Quang declared that the Buddhists should be prepared to make "any sacrifice" for their religion. See TNA, FO371/170142, 'From Murray to Williams. Subject: An ugly incident in Hue on (sic) May, the anniversary of Buddha's birthday, 16 May 1963,' p.9. On Thich Tri Quang, see also J. McAllister, "Only Religions Count in Vietnam": Thich Tri Quang and the Vietnam War,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 42, Number 4 (July 2008), pp. 751-782

the approximately 6.000 large crowd, he and Ty made their way to the front of the radio station.⁸⁰ Yet, 8:05 p.m., the time at which the transmission was due to start, came and went. Wulff's narrative contradicts itself at this point. In his memoirs, he claims that rumours began to spread that the broadcast had been cancelled, whereas his article in *the Observer* states that the gathering was explicitly *told* that it had been cancelled.⁸¹ Anyhow, the gathered masses were asked to remain calm. One student, who had hoisted the Buddhist flag onto the roof of the building, was ordered to take it down. "The head of the province is coming to negotiate," a Buddhist monk announced. "We are not against the government, we are simply demanding our traditional rights and are willing, if necessary, to die for our faith."⁸² A short while later, a motorcade arrived at the scene. "We thank the provincial chief for coming," Tri Quang's voice boomed, "make way for him!" Tensions relaxed. To loud applause, the state official pushed his way through the crowd and disappeared into the radio station. Everyone was convinced, Wulff observed, that the government would, once again, grant the Buddhists their wish. "This would mean," he emphasised, "that a new political era had begun, in which the population would no longer be will-less objects of their leaders' heavenly mercies."⁸³

And yet, the sanguine atmosphere was punctured by the sound of five armoured trucks approaching. One of the vehicles snaked its way into the courtyard, stopping only a few meters from where Wulff was standing. In white letters, the doctor read "Ngo Dinh Khoi" on the steel plates - a tribute to the president's dead brother. "Let's get out of here. Quick." Ty urged. "He belongs to one of Diem's totally devoted elite-units."⁸⁴ Panic set in. Onlookers tried to push towards the exit, but realised that it was too small. Wulff and Ty jumped over the high fence, only to watch as the soldiers sprayed water-jets at the scattering crowd. The pressure, though, was too weak and merely elicited bemused laughter.⁸⁵ And then, without warning, shots were fired. Wulff counted ten sharp detonations. Men and women flung themselves to the ground. A momentary silence. A further burst of small armed fire. Before the terrified crowd finally scattered.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.137-138

⁸¹ *The Observer*, 'Revolt of the Buddhist Monks by Erich Wulff, 18 August 1963,' p.1; Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.138. For the time at which the broadcast was originally planned, see NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, 1963, Box 4047, Political Affairs & Religion, Pol 13, Non-Party Blocs, 2/1/63, S Viet, 'Attachment I, A-781, Saigon. A Narrative, Killings of Buddhists at Hue, n.d.'

⁸² *The Observer*, 'Revolt of the Buddhist Monks by Erich Wulff, 18 August 1963,' p.1; Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.138-139. To compare with a slightly different narrative, see Miller, 'Religious Revival,' pp.20-21

⁸³ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.139

⁸⁴ *Times Herald*, 'West German Gives Account of Incidents to U.S. Officials, 28 July 1963,' p.18; Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.139

⁸⁵ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.140

⁸⁶ *Times Herald*, 'West German Gives Account of Incidents to U.S. Officials, 28 July 1963,' p.18

The teacher and his pupil fled the crime scene, only stopping once they had reached Hans Hölterscheidt's house. After Wulff had explained what had happened, the two doctors decided to visit the hospital and offer medical assistance. Continuing their discussion along the way, they ran into a U.S. military advisor, who revealed that the officer responsible for the shooting, Major Dang Si, had told him that he was under orders to disperse the mob "whatever the cost." The Major's close association with Thuc suggested to Wulff that it had been the archbishop, who had made the final decision. At the hospital, though, Wulff and Hölterscheidt were assured that nothing serious had happened. About twenty people were nursing bruises, but there had been no fatalities. "Go home," the head surgeon said, "this is none of your business." The two Germans were about to leave, when an unlikely source changed the course of history. Wulff and Hölterscheidt would never have known the truth had it not been for a nurse's whisper to look inside the morgue.⁸⁷ There, in the faint glow of the candle-light, they found seven bloody bodies and a chunk of another. ARVN soldiers had aimed high, Wulff reflected, but "not high enough."⁸⁸ Five of them were children, whose heads had been decapitated. Sickened by the gruesome sight and sympathetic to the parents' pleas, they took photographs of the decapitated corpses.⁸⁹

It is crucial to point out that the doctors acted out of a moral obligation. They considered themselves "witnesses to a crime."⁹⁰ What they wanted was for the world to know the truth. There is no doubt that Wulff and Hölterscheidt were shaken by the ordeal. Especially Hölterscheidt, who was a believer himself, could not fathom how a "so-called Catholic government" could employ such nefarious methods. On 9 May, he went straight to the American consulate and rounded on the startled John Helble. "Hölterscheidt was in an extremely excited state," the consul informed Dean Rusk. The doctor went so far as to insist that Washington reverse its policy on account of what "he considered [a] revelation [of the] true character [of] the Diem's regime."⁹¹ The phrase "what *he* considered" was key. Not only

⁸⁷ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.140-142. See also *Times Herald*, 'West German Gives Account of Incidents to U.S. Officials, 28 July 1963,' p.18

⁸⁸ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Subject, Personal Name, and Country Files, 1960-1963, POL-2 General Reports & Statistics, Box 21, POL - Political Affairs, POL-1, July-December, 'Memorandum of conversation between Dr Erich Wulff and Paul M. Kattenberg. Subject: Situation in South Viet-Nam, 24 September 1963.' Wulff explicitly told the State Department that the deaths were "not due to the explosion of plastic charges (as the GVN has steadfastly alleged), since plastic would have caused injury to other parts of the body."

⁸⁹ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.140-141

⁹⁰ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Brief von Dr. Hans Hölterscheidt an das Auswärtige Amt der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 18. Juli 1963'

⁹¹ *Ibid.*; JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box. 197A, Vietnam, General, 6/25/63-6/30/63, 'Helble to Secretary of State, 30 June 1963.' Wulff, likewise, told State Department officials that Diem needed to be replaced. See NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs.

were Wulff and Hölterscheidt determined to expunge the government's lies, but both had decided that Diem's position was untenable. The two men wanted him replaced and, thus, offered their services to the Buddhists. According to Wulff, Tri Quang's objective was to remove the Ngo family and reinstate the "traditional rights" of his faith. The morning after the killings, Tri Quang informed youth leaders that "the struggle, which begins today, will only end with peace."⁹²

Over in Saigon, Wendland's interpretation of the incident was completely different. Instead of applauding his fellow Germans, he complained that the "professors" had shown "too much interest."⁹³ Rather than disseminate the story, he wanted to erase it. Wulff was wrong to describe Wendland as "blind" to the government's "obvious weaknesses."⁹⁴ The ambassador was furious *because* he recognised these weaknesses. He appreciated just how brittle the RVN state was. Wendland had already told his superiors that he could not imagine Diem surviving in peace time. It was, above all, the media's reaction, which disturbed him. "Unfortunately," he noted, "it seems that those journalists, who have been to Vietnam several times in the past, think they can now evaluate and analyse the situation through agency reports."⁹⁵ The international press, he complained, was inclined to accept "communist views" at face value and here was a story that could be blown out of all proportions. Wulff and Hölterscheidt, he contended, had bequeathed the enemy with additional weapons.⁹⁶ Indeed, the photographs found their way into the hands of Hanoi's information service. And it did not help that the GDR

Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Subject, Personal Name, and Country Files, 1960-1963, POL-2 General Reports & Statistics, Box 21, POL - Political Affairs, POL-1, July-December, 'Memorandum of conversation between Dr Erich Wulff and Paul M. Kattenberg. Subject: Situation in South Viet-Nam, 24 September 1963'

⁹² Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.154-155. Wulff's reminiscences about Tri Quang coincide with the bonze's own statements. At the height of the Buddhist Crisis, Tri Quang told the U.S. Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, that the government's refusal to abolish its religious discrimination had led him to advocate the removal of the Nhus. He claimed that Diem "had no real power." See JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 199, Vietnam, General, 9/1/63-9/10/63, State Cables, Part I, 'From Lodge to Secretary of State. Subject: Discussion with Tri Quang, 5 September 1963.' On the 9 May meeting, see also Miller, 'South Vietnam's 1963 'Buddhist Crisis,' p.33

⁹³ NARA, RG0084, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry# UD3340-E: Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon. Classified General Records, 1956-1963, Container #76, 500 Economic Matters - Aid Programme Vietnam, 'Informal Summary Record Viet-Nam Aid. Coordination Group Meeting, 26 July 1963'

⁹⁴ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, pp.164-165

⁹⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Verlauf der inneren politischen Situation in Vietnam, 11. Juli 1963'

⁹⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Unruhen in der Provinzstadt Hue anlässlich Buddhas Geburtstag, 15. Mai 1963'

general-consul in Cambodia was publicly claiming that the two doctors had shared their story with him.⁹⁷

Nor did Wendland believe that the crisis had much to do with faith. He acknowledged that the Buddhists were disgruntled about the “privileged position” of the Catholics and that in Hue bilateral relations had been deteriorating.⁹⁸ He pointed out, however, that most citizens did not practice Buddhism, but worshiped their ancestry. If religious discrimination were the prime incentive, Wendland reasoned, it would not have been characterised by such an outpouring of popular discontent. In the aftermath of Thich Quang Duc’s famous self-immolation on 11 June, the demands of the Buddhists had, rather, become a spearhead for other malcontent groups. The people, he emphasised, were “sick of war.” “Since 1939, they have not found peace. Every night shots are fired. Day and night ambushes are taking place.”⁹⁹ Far from perceiving the demonstrations as a religious crusade, Wendland argued that it needed to be placed in a wider context. The people were rallying against their current existence.¹⁰⁰ The Buddhist Crisis was an expression of popular discontent, which had finally spilt over.

It is rather startling, though, how little moral indignation Wendland conveyed. He seemed unperturbed by Quang Duc’s self-sacrifice, or by the Buddhists warnings of further pyre deaths. The contrast between him and the two doctors was palpable. Wulff had a point when he condemned Wendland’s “elitist ideals.”¹⁰¹ After all, the ambassador had been born into an aristocratic family. He had lived a life of luxury and privilege. In Saigon, he was notorious for raising his own water-deer.¹⁰² It was natural for Wendland to examine events from the elite’s perspective. Whereas Wulff and Hölterscheidt were actively working towards regime change, Wendland’s wanted the government to survive. Diem, he reflected, faced two interrelated problems: The national and the international. First, the media’s emphasis on “religious persecution” had discredited South Vietnam’s global prestige, particularly with

⁹⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Beteiligung deutscher Ärzte an den Unruhen in Suedvietnam, 19. Juni 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Tätigkeit der deutschen Ärzte Dr. Wulff und Dr. Hölterscheidt gegen die Regierung Diem, 2. August 1963’

⁹⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Unruhen in der Provinzstadt Hue anlässlich Buddhas Geburtstag, 15. Mai 1963’

⁹⁹ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Verlauf der inneren politischen Situation in Vietnam, 11. Juli 1963.’ In a further report to the Foreign Ministry, Wendland contended that there were no more than four million practicing Buddhists in the country. See PA AA, B44, Bd.13, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Religionsgemeinschaften in Vietnam, 4. September 1963.’ Interestingly, President Diem, likewise, told Wendland the following September that only “15%” of Vietnamese were Buddhists and that he had been more tolerant towards Buddhism than any of the past Vietnamese rulers. See PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.90 vom 9. September 1963’

¹⁰⁰ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Verlauf der inneren politischen Situation in Vietnam, 11. Juli 1963’

¹⁰¹ Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, p.165

¹⁰² *Der Spiegel*, Nr.15/1972, “Der Grad von Opportunismus ist ungeheuer,” 3. April, 1972,’ p.30

Buddhist countries.¹⁰³ Second, if Diem yielded to the Buddhists' ultimatums, he would be confronted with additional "exaggerated demands."¹⁰⁴ And then, of course, there was the Vietcong, lurking in the background, believing that the crisis provided an "effective starting point" to topple Diem.¹⁰⁵ In Wendland's eyes, the president was in an "uncomfortable position." He was confronted with the question of what mixture of conciliation and firmness to adopt. "The crisis," Wendland warned on 18 July, "is reaching a climax without a certain outcome."

Adenauer's Defeat

It is surprising, in hindsight, that although national newspapers were filled with articles and commentaries about the Buddhist Crisis, it was only raised once in Adenauer's presence. Marguerite Higgins, a renowned American journalist and ardent supporter of Diem, admitted that "the government in Vietnam is certainly not perfect or flawless, but probably the best available alternative." "There is a saying," she reflected, "One does not change horses in midstream." Adenauer's reply was curt and blasé. Rather than pick up on Higgins' implied question about whether Diem should stay or go, he responded: "We [Germans] have that saying too."¹⁰⁶ Once again, Adenauer had underlined his indifference towards Vietnam. That Diem was faced with the most serious crisis of his presidency was barely worth a footnote to him. The chancellor's realism, his framing of international relations in power-political terms, meant that he remained fixated on the Great Powers. More than anything else, Adenauer feared the spectre of Soviet-American rapprochement.

At this juncture, it is crucial to appreciate that, in the aftermath of the Cuban Crisis, a fundamental disagreement arose inside the Western World over future strategy. Bonn (with French support) advocated a "hard line." The lesson drawn was that firmness paid off and that

¹⁰³ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Verlauf der inneren politischen Situation in Vietnam, 11. Juli 1963'; PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.54 an das Auswärtige Amt, 11. Juni 1963'

¹⁰⁴ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Auseinandersetzung der Regierung mit dem Buddhismus in Vietnam, 19. Juni 1963'

¹⁰⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.69 an das Auswärtige Amt, 18. Juli 1963.' On Wendland's concern that the Vietcong were trying to exploit the crisis, see also PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.72 an das Auswärtige Amt, 27. Juli 1963'

¹⁰⁶ H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen. Gespräche, Interviews und Reden. Band I: Oktober 1963 - September 1965* (Paderborn, 2009), p.58. For West German press commentary on South Vietnam, see for instance, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr.142/1963, 'Die Empörung der Buddhisten, 24. Juni 1963, p.5; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr.163/1963, 'Der schmutzige Krieg, 15. Juli 1963,' p.1; *Die Zeit*, Nr.34/1963, 'Terror gegen Buddhisten: Ausnahmezustand in Süd Vietnam - Ngo Dinh Diem vor dem Sturz?', 23. August 1963'; *Der Spiegel*, Nr.35/1963, 'Südvietnam. Bürgerkrieg: Madame schießt, 28. August 1963,' p.44; *Der Spiegel*, Nr.35/1963, 'Südvietnam. Privatarmee: Kommando 77, 4. September 1963,' pp.42-43

Moscow would shrink back from a thermonuclear war. In turn, FRG officials contrasted Cuba with Berlin, estimating that the enemy would refuse to trigger Armageddon for the sake of limited goals. The USSR should, hence, be pushed to make concessions.¹⁰⁷ Both Washington and London, contrariwise, felt that its ally was misjudging the October Crisis. During a NATO conference at the end of 1962, Dean Rusk warned that it would be “dangerous” to assume that the Cuban experience had “created a situation more favourable to the resolution of this major point of confrontation.”¹⁰⁸ Moscow’s “immediate security,” the Foreign Office stressed further, was directly involved in Berlin, whereas it had not been in Cuba. Instead of advocating the continuation of Cold War tensions, the Anglo-American powers wanted to deal with Berlin in the context of greater international stability. They wanted to coexist. “It is this general policy of stabilising and ameliorating the status quo,” London reported to its embassy in Washington, “which will need to be sold to Adenauer.”¹⁰⁹

As the chancellor’s leading biographer, Hans-Peter Schwartz, emphasises, it was Adenauer’s angst about an arrangement over Berlin that made him sign the Franco-German agreement.¹¹⁰ JFK’s public description of the GDR as a “vital” Soviet interest was considered “proof” that America had lost interest in German reunification. Furthermore, Adenauer viewed Kennedy’s decision to supply Britain with Polaris Missiles as an attempt to build a “nuclear club” without Bonn. “Evidently,” he noted, “this is happening for the sake of the Soviet Union, which has always demanded that the FRG should not receive nuclear weapons. Nothing was seemingly asked from the Soviet Union in return.”¹¹¹ Fearing that the two behemoths were moving towards a compromise at Germany’s expense, Adenauer embraced de Gaulle’s vision of an independent Europe. The timing of the Élysée Treaty was crucial. On 14 January, a week before Adenauer was due to visit Paris, de Gaulle gave a remarkable press conference, in which he brutally rejected British admission into the Common Market, declaring that it would initiate

¹⁰⁷ NATO Archive, C-R(62)58, ‘Summary Record of a Meeting of the Council held at the Permanent Headquarters. Paris, XVIe., on Thursday, 13. December 1962, at 10.15 a.m.’ p.19; *AAPD, 1962*, p.1805, pp.1864-1865; TNA, PREM11/3806, ‘From Foreign Office to Washington, Telegram No.7757, 1 November 1962’

¹⁰⁸ NATO Archive, C-R(62)58, ‘Summary Record of a Meeting of the Council held at the Permanent Headquarters. Paris, XVIe., on Thursday, 13. December 1962, at 10.15 a.m.’ p.9. Rusk correspondingly warned the president that the visiting Adenauer would suppose that “we can now insist upon a major change in the Soviet attitude on Berlin.” See JFKL, Presidents Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection, Meetings. ‘Tape 55. Subject: Adenauer Meeting, 9 November, 1962.’ On the Kennedy administration’s determination to stabilise the status quo in Europe, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp.379-380

¹⁰⁹ TNA, PREM11/3806, ‘Foreign Office to Washington, Telegram No.7757, 1 November 1962’

¹¹⁰ Schwartz, *Adenauer* pp.814-815

¹¹¹ Osterheld, “*Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens...*”, p.167, p.169; Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Briefe, 1961-1963*, p.215. According to Paul Adenauer, Konrad’s son, the chancellor feared that the FRG’s weak military position would have harmful repercussions on his attempts to improve the lives of the Germans in the East. See H. Küsters (Hrsg.), *Konrad Adenauer - Der Vater, die Macht und das Erbe. Das Tagebuch des Monsignore Paul Adenauer, 1961-1966* (Paderborn, 2017), p.219

the creation of an Atlantic Community under American control.¹¹² Adenauer was, thus, placed in an awkward position, a position that would preoccupy the FRG throughout the Vietnam War: Bonn's two central allies were advocating disparate policies, they were not following a cohesive programme. Nevertheless, despite both national- and international pressure to prevent him from identifying with Gaullism, Adenauer signed the agreement on 22 January.¹¹³

It is worth expatiating on the agreement's significance. The previous autumn, McGeorge Bundy had tersely told Adenauer that "in the next fifteen years, none of the three countries [Britain, France or Germany] will be the leading European power." "That," he insisted, "will be the United States."¹¹⁴ The Bonn-Paris axis, therefore, exemplified a challenge to American leadership. Washington had been aware of de Gaulle's European venture, but had chosen to ignore it. Adenauer's official endorsement meant that it could be ignored no longer.¹¹⁵ It was the ostentatious charade which shocked the Americans. Two pictures, Secretary of State, Karl Carstens, reported, had left an "indelible imprint": First, "like in the theatre," the press conference had opened with curtains being drawn and de Gaulle denouncing the Anglo-Americans on a golden armchair. Second, barely a week later, Adenauer had kissed and embraced the French president. Those images suggested that the FRG was backing de Gaulle and, in turn, renouncing the Atlantic Alliance.¹¹⁶ American bitterness was embodied by none other than JFK himself. On 23 January, Ambassador Knappstein was treated to a stern lecture. The president charged Bonn with "taking sides" against Washington, as well as denouncing the treaty as a "stab-in-the-back." Right at the point when cracks had become visible in the communist world, Kennedy complained, de Gaulle's policies were offering a "spectacle" of Western divergence. "That," he stressed, "is insane. What will happen in other

¹¹² BA-Koblenz, Nachlass Karl Carstens, N1337/650, 'Aus der Pressekonferenz des französischen Staatspräsidenten, General Charles de Gaulle, 14. Januar 1963,' p.11. De Gaulle similarly complained to Adenauer that there was, at present, "no counterweight against American omnipotence." See *AAPD, 1963*, p.143. On de Gaulle's foreign policy, see Bozo, 'France, "Gaullism," and the Cold War,' p.165-168

¹¹³ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.5/1963, 'Bonn. Außenpolitik. Entweder-Oder, 30. Januar 1963,' p.17. For further attempts to stop Adenauer from signing the treaty, see for instance, Yale University Library, Manuscript Collections, The Dean Gooderham Acheson Papers, General Correspondence, Group No. 1987, Series Number I, Box Number 1, Folder Number 6, Konrad Adenauer, 1948-63, 'Acheson to Chancellor Adenauer, 18 January, 1963'; StBKAH, Abtlg I, Bestand 13.03, 'Ernst Majonica an den Herrn Bundeskanzler, 18. Januar 1963,' p.216; Amherst College Archives & Special Collections (hereafter, AC), John McCloy Papers, Box No.GY1, Number 3, Germany, Konrad Adenauer, Correspondence with (3 of 3), January 1961-June 1966, 'Adenauer an John McCloy, 28 January 1963'

¹¹⁴ Osterheld, "*Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens...*", p.148. According to Osterheld, Adenauer was deeply angered by Bundy's comment and frequently referenced it in conversation.

¹¹⁵ *AAPD, 1963*, p.189, Fußnote 11; ACDP, Nachlass Heinrich Krone, 01-228, 033/2, 'Notizen die ich auf Grund von Meldungen und Informationen niederschreiben liess. Betreff: Die Haltung der USA zu dem Verhältnis Deutschland-Frankreich, 5. Februar 1963'; TNA, FO371/169312, 'Draft Record of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and Herr Brandt at 3:45 p.m. on 31 January 1963'

¹¹⁶ BA-Koblenz, Nachlass Karl Carstens, N1337/650, 'Aufzeichnung Karl Carstens. Betreff: Meine Reise nach Washington, 9. Februar 1963' p.36

parts of the globe, in Laos, South Vietnam, in all of East Asia [...] if the Free World falls apart?”¹¹⁷ It was a telling statement. Kennedy did not reference either Berlin or reunification. He was concerned, instead, about the effects on “other parts of the globe,” especially, Indochina. The German problem had become a trivial concern.

Although Adenauer had been right to fear the spectre of Soviet-American rapprochement, he had misjudged not only the international-, but also the domestic response. The German people wanted reunification, yet they were unwilling to pursue a policy detrimental to the Atlantic Alliance. In an opinion poll conducted that year, only 9% of respondents favoured stronger ties with de Gaulle over Kennedy.¹¹⁸ Even worse for Adenauer, his administration began to rebel. In a cabinet meeting, the Federal Minister of Economics, Ludwig Erhard, compared the Élysée Treaty to the rise of the NSDAP: “Thirty years ago, Hitler forced the Germans under his yoke. Yesterday, de Gaulle did the same with Europe.”¹¹⁹ The comparison with Hitler was testament to just how angry the “Atlanticists” were. The opposition was overwhelming. On 23 April, Adenauer reluctantly agreed to step down in autumn. Three weeks later, the *Bundestag* added a preamble to the Franco-German agreement, reaffirming state loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance.¹²⁰ It was a personal defeat for Adenauer. His reign was coming to a close. But it was more than that. The change in personnel would shape Bonn’s stance towards the Vietnam conflict. Despite de Gaulle’s insistences, the FRG government would refuse to challenge American decision-making in the new global era.

Pausing the Cold War

The historiography of the Cold War has interpreted the Partial-Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) in different ways. Anders Stephanson has claimed that the Cold War itself had “ended.”¹²¹ Maybe. John Gaddis has stressed that the Cold War *should* have ended.¹²² Possibly. Whereas

¹¹⁷ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 77, Germany, General 1/63-2/63, ‘From Rusk to embassy in Bonn, 23 January 1963’; *AAPD, 1963*, p.164; *AAPD, 1964*, p.111. It is clear that JFK was genuinely furious and worried about the Élysée Treaty. In a subsequent NSC executive meeting, he told his advisors that “if it appears that the Europeans are getting ready to throw us out of Europe, we want to be in a position to march out.” See Sampson and Miller (eds.), *FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume XIII*, ‘Document 169. Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 38 (Part II), 25 January 1963’

¹¹⁸ StBKAH, Abtlg 2. Bestand 100, ‘Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach am Bodensee. Frage: Wenn wir eines Tages zu entscheiden hätten, ob wir in unserer Außenpolitik zuerst auf de Gaulle oder auf Kennedy setzen sollen - was würden Sie dann vorschlagen?, September 1963’

¹¹⁹ Kleinmann (Hrsg.), *Krone, Tagebücher, Zweiter Band*, p.155

¹²⁰ T. Geiger, *Atlantiker gegen Gaullisten. Außenpolitischer Konflikt und innerparteilicher Machtkampf in der CDU/CSU 1958-1969* (München, 2008), p.214

¹²¹ A. Stephanson, ‘The United States,’ in D. Reynolds (ed.), *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (London, 1994), p.25; A. Stephanson, ‘Liberty or Death: The Cold War as US Ideology,’ in O. Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London, 2000), p.84

¹²² J. Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, 1997), pp.290-291

John Hershberg has spoken of an “essential transformation” of the conflict.¹²³ Definitely. And yet, it is surprising that none of the above chroniclers offer a voice to those, who experienced the event. Nobody living through 1963 would have endorsed Stephanson’s claim that the Cold War was over.¹²⁴ When asked about the agreement, Mao Zedong, for example, dismissed its significance:

There are two big countries that believe they are the leaders of the world without having to ask anyone. Have you asked General de Gaulle? The Moscow Treaty is a sham. It is unacceptable that these two countries dance on our head.¹²⁵

Adenauer similarly labelled the talk of détente “ridiculous” and the PTBT as having “neither sense, nor purpose.”¹²⁶ In practical terms, too, the struggle between East and West had not ended. The Vietcong, Wendland warned, was still fighting.¹²⁷

These comments reveal much to the historian. They reveal that certain states opposed the status quo. Germany and Vietnam remained mutilated. The PRC was demanding the return of Taiwan. De Gaulle sought the reestablishment of France’s “rank” on the world stage.¹²⁸ As a result, the PTBT was met with dismay and rejection in those particular countries.¹²⁹ The superpowers were imposing coexistence. And coexistence equated to the status quo. Indeed, it was remarkable just how hard Adenauer worked to thwart rapprochement. Despite being a lame duck, the chancellor used his remaining months to return again and again to the Sino-Soviet relationship. His obsession had become so blatant that others began to remark upon it. Dean

¹²³ J. Hershberg, ‘The Crisis Years, 1958-1963,’ in O. Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London, 2000), p.319

¹²⁴ The British Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, came closest, when he declared that the West “might see in the coming year or so that we’re really at the end of the Cold War.” See *New York Times*, ‘Home Predicts End of Cold War Soon, 23 December 1963,’ p.36

¹²⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1276, ‘Bestand: Politbüro. Betreff: Information über einige Fragen der “Theorie” der chinesischen Führer über die “Zwischenzone” und deren praktischen Auswirkungen, 11. September 1964,’ p.1. On French refusal to accept the status quo, see Couve’s comments to Foreign Minister Schroeder in ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder, 01-483-281/1, ‘Aufzeichnung: Gespräch zwischen Herrn Couve de Murville und Herrn Gerhard Schröder im Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 17. September 1963’

¹²⁶ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 21. September 1963 um 16:00 Uhr in Rambouillet ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten General de Gaulle,’ p.150, p.162

¹²⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.104 an das Auswärtige Amt, 2. Oktober 1963’

¹²⁸ During a conversation with the GDR politburo member, Hermann Matern in 1961, Che Yi stated that the reason why Beijing was shelling the islands of Quemoy and Matsu was to “make clear to the USA and the whole world, that we will not accept the current state of affairs.” See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/20/123, ‘Aktenermerk über den Abschiedsbesuch beim stellv. Ministerpräsidenten und Minister für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der VR China, Tschen I, am Montag, den 30. Januar 1961,’ p.86. Bozo, ‘France, “Gaullism,” and the Cold War,’ p.165. See also BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 4. Juli 1963 um 11:00 Uhr ein Gespräch unter vier Augen mit Staatspräsident de Gaulle,’ p.137

¹²⁹ *Der Spiegel* listed China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Albania, France as well as France’s “satellite” Madagascar as those countries which had refused to sign the treaty. See *Der Spiegel*, Nr.33/1963, ‘Deutschland-Frage. Bonn. Der Preis, 14. August 1963,’ p.15. Lüthi notes further that Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Cambodia, Guinea, the two Congos, Zanzibar and the Vatican refused to sign the agreement. See Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, pp.269-270

Acheson informed JFK that the chancellor had “*for the fifth time*” told him about his “talks with Khrushchev in ‘55. Each time the story changes, each time it gets more fantastic.”¹³⁰ One of Adenauer’s closest advisors noticed that when discussing the premier’s “concerns” about China, his “descriptions” and “trains of thought” were almost always accompanied with the “same words and the same gestures.”¹³¹

It is possible that Adenauer was suffering from cognitive dissonance. After all, he was eighty-seven years’ old. Age was catching up with him. Nevertheless, it is imperative to appreciate his conviction that an opportunity had presented itself, an opportunity “which will never come again.”¹³² The USSR, he believed, was facing a whole series of interrelated problems. Armed with information from the Foreign Ministry, Adenauer told the head of the CIA, John McCone, that Moscow was investing in Eastern Siberia because of the Chinese threat. Due to a lack of modern agricultural equipment, he continued, the USSR was chronically plagued by bad harvests. “According to German specialists,” Adenauer emphasised, “Russia has not enough skilled labour to simultaneously continue its [military] build-up and raise its overall level of economic development.” The Kremlin was, thus, incapable of solving its domestic difficulties, as well as arm against both China and the West. If Khrushchev agreed to a settlement, the chancellor insisted, then it was an “admission of weakness.”¹³³

At the heart of Adenauer’s analysis, then, was a certainty that the Kremlin was in a precarious position. Rather than build “golden bridges” (in the words of Hans Kroll), he wanted to take advantage of the situation and “press for the freeing of Berlin and the reunification of Germany.”¹³⁴ It was evident, however, that the U.S. was turning away from Europe and towards Asia. During a conversation with Heinrich von Brentano, the president insisted that Bonn needed to contribute to the defence of other regions. America, JFK pointed out, was providing

¹³⁰ JFKL, Presidents Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collections, Meetings: Tape 116/A52. ‘Meeting with Dean Acheson, Meeting on Civil Rights, 23-24 October 1963.’ Acheson’s emphasis.

¹³¹ Osterheld, “*Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens...*”, p.216

¹³² Mensing (Hrsg.), *Teegespräche, 1961-1963*, p.451

¹³³ StBKAH, III/27 ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler empfing am 6. Mai 1963 um 11 Uhr den Leiter des amerikanischen Geheimdienstes, Mr. McCone, zu einer Unterredung.’ For the Foreign Ministry’s report which Adenauer requested, see StBKAH, III/27, ‘Kurzfassung der Aufzeichnung des Auswaertigen Amtes vom 24. April 1963 über den Ausbau Nordsibiriens und die Volksrepublik China sowie über die voraussichtliche Entwicklung der indisch-chinesischen Spannung,’ pp.119-120. Adenauer subsequently highlighted the same Soviet weaknesses to de Gaulle. See BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 4. Juli 1963 um 11:00 Uhr ein Gespräch unter vier Augen mit Staatspräsident de Gaulle,’ p.126

¹³⁴ AC, John McCloy Papers, Box No. CI, Folder No. B5, Berlin, Memorandum of Talks with German leaders during visits to Berlin and Bonn, October-November 1963, ‘Memorandum of Talks with German leaders during period of visit to Berlin and Bonn, 11 October through 18 October 1963’; ACDP, Nachlass Globke, 01-070-003/4, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kroll. Betreff: Kann die Sowjetunion die wirtschaftlichen Jahresplaene durchführen und gleichzeitig ihre weitere Aufrüstung finanzieren? Steht der sowjetische Vorschlag auf Abschluss eines Nichtangriffspakts zwischen den NATO- und den Warschauer Pakt-Mächten mit dieser Frage im Zusammenhang, 14. März 1963’

all the assistance for South Vietnam and he expressed concern that the NATO members would, ultimately, decide that “Chinese domination of Southeast Asia” was not “harmful” to the West.¹³⁵ A difference of opinion had clearly arisen. Whereas the chancellor perceived Maoism on the Soviet’s flank as a bargaining chip, Washington considered it the greatest present danger to peace.

What Adenauer, perhaps, did not fully appreciate was that the U.S. objective was not to “remake the world, but to balance power within it.”¹³⁶ This had (more or less) been achieved on the European continent. When asked in the spring of 1963 how serious the situation was, only 11% of West Berliners considered it “very serious.” To compare, in the autumn of 1961, it had been 50%.¹³⁷ Even Willy Brandt, who knew the city better than anyone, claimed that the Berlin Crisis had “ended.”¹³⁸ It was noticeable, too, that American officials were making plans for a Germany without Adenauer.¹³⁹ He had caused much disgruntlement with the Élysée Treaty. And, in any case, he would be gone soon. There was no need to take much notice of him. Ahead of the president’s famous visit to Berlin, JFK was handed a briefing book, in which Adenauer’s “wishful thought” that the USSR’s present difficulties would “sooner or later redound to Germany’s advantage” was highlighted.¹⁴⁰ The dismissive language was plain. Washington had heard it all before.

True to form, after thanking Kennedy for his visit to the FRG on 24 June, Adenauer almost instantly began recounting his experiences in Moscow, how Khrushchev had told him that he could not cope with both China and America, how the premier had asked for German assistance in combatting the concurrent threat. Adenauer reminded the president that Mikoyan had refused to answer his question about the prospects of future Sino-Soviet relations. There was, moreover, a further component to the chancellor’s argument. In strict confidence, he revealed that Khrushchev had recently indicated a willingness to visit Bonn himself. Adenauer’s conclusion was that, because of its “relatively difficult situation,” Moscow was

¹³⁵ BA-Koblenz, Nachlass Heinrich von Brentano, N1239/111, ‘Aufzeichnung über das Gespräch des Vorsitzenden der CDU/CSU Bundestagsfraktion Dr. Heinrich von Brentano mit Präsident Kennedy im Weissen Haus am 22. März 1963,’ p.222. Kennedy made the same point to the FRG’s Defence Minister, Kai-Uwe von Hassel. See Troche, “*Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt*,” pp.271-272, Fußnote 254

¹³⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p.200

¹³⁷ AdSD, 1/WBA–BER-0043, ‘Bericht für den Herrn Regierenden Bürgermeister über die Ergebnisse einer Westberliner Umfrage im März/April 1963,’ p.2

¹³⁸ TNA, FO371/169312, ‘Draft Record of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and Herr Brandt at 3:45 p.m. on 31 January 1963’

¹³⁹ JFKL, The Personal Papers of George W. Ball, Box 4 of 9, West Germany, ‘Telecon, Bundy & Ball, 20 June 1963, 5:20 p.m.,’ p.47

¹⁴⁰ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, Vice Presidential Security File, Box 3, Vice Presidential Security File, President Kennedy’s Travel, President’s European Trip Briefing Book, June 1963 (I), ‘President’s European Trip, June 1963. President-Chancellor Adenauer (Talking Points), 12 June 1963’

searching for compromises and trying to keep its “back free,” so that it could turn towards China. “Perhaps,” he reflected, “[...] there is a certain opportunity to make progress with the Soviet Union on the German question.” Adenauer voiced particular concern that after eighteen years of division, the desire for national unity could diminish. The president, however, remained unmoved. He doubted whether the USSR’s quandaries were as serious as Adenauer was suggesting. In Latin America, Greece and Turkey, he noted, there were reasons for the Soviets to be encouraged. Furthermore, JFK estimated that the expansion of China’s “sphere of influence” across Southeast Asia might propel the USSR to extend its own authority in other parts of the world.¹⁴¹ Once again, Kennedy had made his indifference towards German reunification plain. The truth was that the two leaders were pursuing disparate objectives: Kennedy wanted to ease Cold War tensions. Adenauer wanted to exploit them.

Unfortunately for the chancellor, he was incapable of stopping history from turning. On 5 August 1963, America, Britain and Soviet Russia signed the PTBT in Moscow. At first glance, it did not resemble much. The agreement prohibited the testing of atomic devices underwater, in the atmosphere, or in the cosmos, as well as forbidding the signatories from encouraging or participating in the carrying out of a nuclear explosion.¹⁴² Underground testing would resume and there was no formal East-West settlement. Even so, test-ban negotiations had come to represent an almost institutional barrier to improved American-Soviet relations, symbolising the two superpowers inability to reach consensus on fundamental Cold War issues. The agreement suggested that both sides were *willing* to cooperate, not only on minor problems (such as Laos), but on matters, which affected their own national interests. It was, therefore, the mood that had changed. As Kennedy told the United Nations Assembly a month later: “We meet today in an atmosphere of rising hope, and at a moment of comparative calm.”¹⁴³ The Cold War between the two superpowers had been paused.

Both German leaders interpreted the treaty as the beginning of a new historical period. The postwar world, Ulbricht declared, had “consolidated itself.” Mankind had entered the era of “peaceful coexistence,” in which states with different social systems would live side-by-

¹⁴¹ AAPD, 1963, pp.661-666

¹⁴² BA-Koblenz, Nachlass Hans-Christoph Seeböhm, NL178/10e, ‘Anhang I zum Nachrichtenspiegel I vom 26. Juli 1963,’ pp.28-29

¹⁴³ *The Guardian*, ‘Kennedy points way to agreements, 21 September 1963,’ p.7. *Neues Deutschland* aptly described the Test-Ban Treaty as the “document of hope.” See ND-Archiv, Nr.213/1963, ‘Unter den Augen der Welt wurde in Moskau das Dokument der Hoffnung unterzeichnet, 6. August 1963’ p.1. See also West German analysis of the “pause,” in PA AA, B32, Bd.184, ‘Aufzeichnung vom Referat II, Betreff: Kennedy-Rede vor der Vollversammlung der Vereinten Nationen am 20. September 1963, 25. September 1963,’ pp.322-323. The first mention of a “pause” was made by Walter Lippmann. See, *Times Herald*, ‘Today and Tomorrow. The Pause and a Look Around, by Walter Lippmann, 1 January 1963,’ p.17

side.¹⁴⁴ This was illustrated best by the GDR's own signature. For the first time, it was invited to join an international political contract. Its state existence had been recognised de-facto and was guaranteed for the foreseeable future. Adenauer's assessment was far more sombre. He complained to Robert McNamara that Moscow had been made the "centre of foreign policy." By beginning the "new era" in the Kremlin, Washington had strengthened Khrushchev's personal prestige. Even worse, the enemy had not needed to pay "one Pfennig" for the contract, nor had there been an attempt to link rapprochement with the German question. McNamara's insistence that the agreement was designed to widen the rift between Moscow and Beijing made no sense to him.¹⁴⁵ By recognising Khrushchev as the "pope" of the communist world, the U.S. had assisted Russia *against* China.¹⁴⁶ Kaiser Wilhelm II, he pointed out, had previously warned of the "yellow peril" and this fear returned once in a while. "The Red China danger," Adenauer emphasised, "was for the future, the Soviet danger [is] in the present. Yet the U.S. is now strengthening Khrushchev's position."¹⁴⁷ If he himself were able to influence American foreign policy, Adenauer complained to Richard Nixon, then he would not commit so exclusively against China.¹⁴⁸

But although the signing of the PTBT was heralded as the start of a new era, there was no atmospheric change on either side of the 17th parallel. GDR policymakers were left in no doubt that Hanoi would desist from joining. The reason given was that it would harm their liberation struggle and "indirectly support" the enemy. On 6 and 9 August, *Nhan Dan* published two editorials, declaring that the PTBT had "no practical worth whatsoever" and that it allowed the "imperialists" to prepare for "local-" and "special wars."¹⁴⁹ Characteristically, the East

¹⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2/931, 'Ulbricht an Erhard, 26. Mai 1964,' p.11

¹⁴⁵ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 80A, Germany Subjects, McNamara Visit to Germany, 8/1/63-8/6/63, 'From Bonn to Secretary of State, 5 August 1963'; AAPD, 1963, pp.921-922. Adenauer was subsequently livid about the United States selling wheat to the Russians without linking it to the German question.

¹⁴⁶ Mensing (Hrsg.), *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1961-1963*, p.412

¹⁴⁷ Osterheld, "*Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens...*", p.244; JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 80A, Germany Subjects, McNamara Visit to Germany, 8/1/63-8/6/63, 'From Bonn to Secretary of State, 5 August 1963'

¹⁴⁸ AAPD, 1963, p.788. Interestingly, in March 1967, Nixon again visited Adenauer to discuss the Sino-Soviet split and how to exploit it. Adenauer advised him not to align the U.S. with the USSR. See H. Mensing, (Hrsg.) *Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen. Gespräche, Interviews und Reden. Band II: September 1965 - April 1967* (Paderborn, 2009), pp.408-413

¹⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, 'Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam im MfAA. Betreff: Die Haltung zum Abkommen über den teilweisen Kernteststopp, 21. August 1963,' pp.195-197; PA MfAA, A8570, 'Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Genossen Dao Trong Vuong, 2. Sekretär der vietnamesischen Botschaft in der VR China mit Gen. Hubert Resch am 15. August 1963,' pp.76-77; PA MfAA, G-A331, 'Information über die derzeitige Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV) zu den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten. (Ausgearbeitet durch die 1. AEA nach Materialien der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam), 11. Oktober 1963,' p.52

Germans placed this rebuttal within the Sino-Soviet vortex. Hanoi was not polemicizing against Moscow, Bibow noted, but it was, nonetheless, “openly supporting” the policies of the PRC. On the ground, the process of isolating the “Marxist forces” had proven successful. According to inside information, Le Duan had pressurised Ho Chi Minh to either accept the politburo’s decisions, or “stand outside the leadership.” General Giap has been placed under “house arrest” and was no longer permitted to manage his political or military duties. And rumours were circulating that Pham Van Dong’s secretary had been accused of “treason” for passing on “state secrets” to the Soviets. “The time when President Ho Chi Minh and his group were still capable of using their great authority [...] to either slow down, or prevent the party from deviating onto the Chinese line [...]” Bibow reported, “has, in our opinion, past.”¹⁵⁰ Hanoi’s refusal to sign the treaty, then, signified a new development. For the first time, it had publicly defied Soviet leadership on the global stage.

And yet, it was Wendland’s interpretation of the PTBT that stood out. For some time, he had taken an interest in developments above the 17th parallel. He had learnt from Gordon Cox, the Canadian commissioner, that a power struggle was taking place and that the younger generation, which leaned towards Beijing, was gaining greater influence. The DRV, Cox asserted, was in a “quandary.” It was under Chinese pressure to adopt a more offensive approach and assist the Pathet Lao with Vietcong partisans. Indeed, Soviet embassy officials had even admitted that they could not restrain the “dogmatists.”¹⁵¹ After discussing the situation with the head of the Polish ICC delegation in September, Wendland concluded that “a military political collapse of South Vietnam” was “no longer in Moscow’s interest.”¹⁵² Quite the reverse. It would repudiate peaceful coexistence, as well as validate Maoist militarism. As a result, Wendland began to rethink the interconnection between Saigon and Berlin:

¹⁵⁰ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Einschätzung der derzeitigen Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams in den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten, 19. August 1963,’ pp.31-33. On the ostracising of the pro-Soviet faction in the politburo, see also BArch-MA, DVW1/6426a, ‘Aufzeichnung von Oberst Schütz. Betreff: Einschätzung der Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams zum Ergebnis der Moskauer Verhandlungen über den Atomteststopp, 30. August 1963.’ A document found by Mari Olsen in the Soviet archives suggests that Ho did, in fact, subsequently “retire.” See Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, p.130

¹⁵¹ PA AA, Bd.44, Bd.50, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Haltung Nord-Vietnams zu Rot-China und allgemeine Lage, 3. Mai 1963,’ p.229. On West German belief that North Vietnam had aligned itself with Beijing, rather than Moscow, see also PA AA, B12, Bd.678F, ‘Aufzeichnung von Hans-Albert Reinkemeyer. Leiter des Referats 704 “Sowjetunion” an NATO-Germany, Paris. Betreff: Haltung der KP Ost- und Südostasien im Konflikt Moskau-Peking, 1. Juli 1963’

¹⁵² PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.93 an das Auswärtige Amt, 12. September 1963.’ See also PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.72 an das Auswärtige Amt, 27. Juli 1963’

The thesis [...] that Berlin is being protected at the Mekong [...] is seemingly losing its logic; if America were dealing with the Soviet Union in North Vietnam as the sole- and authoritative discussion partner, then the wave of public euphoria triggered by the Test-Ban Treaty would have transferred over to Vietnam as well.¹⁵³

Put differently, Hanoi's reaction to the PTBT revealed that Saigon and Berlin were no longer conjoined by the Cold War. In 1961, when Kennedy had asked whether American difficulties on the Indochinese peninsula would increase the chances of trouble in Berlin, the FRG's foreign minister had replied in the affirmative. The outbreak of armed conflict in one part of the world, he implied, would have a convulsive reaction in another.¹⁵⁴ Now, though, Wendland saw no correlation. If Soviet influence had been usurped, and the two behemoths were openly polemicizing against each other, then it followed that Berlin and Saigon were fighting different adversaries.

Just how serious the Foreign Ministry took Wendland's remarks was demonstrated by Bassler's request for the embassies in Paris, Washington, as well as the general-consulate in Hong Kong to comment on Wendland's cable.¹⁵⁵ It was unlike the East Asian expert to show an interest in anything that his colleague said. These remarks, however, challenged the Foreign Ministry's entire rationale for supporting the RVN. In March, Ministerial Director, Josef Jansen, had approved fiscal succour on the grounds that it would "bind communist forces in East Asia" and "alleviate" pressure on Berlin.¹⁵⁶ There had, likewise, been serious contemplation of Bassler's proposal to dispatch *Bundeswehr* doctors and paramedics, disguised as civilians.¹⁵⁷ Yet if the Soviets had neither influence, nor control, then, a new situation had arisen. To be sure, the FRG's embassy in Russia echoed Wendland's claim that the fall of Saigon was "no longer in Moscow's interest." Press reaction to the Buddhist Crisis, it was noted, had been markedly "restrained," for the Soviets feared that, in the long-term, the fall of Saigon would crystallise Chinese domination of the entire Southeast Asian region.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.104 vom 2. Oktober 1963'

¹⁵⁴ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box Number 1274, 611.62A/1-561, 'Memorandum of a Conversation between President Kennedy and Heinrich von Brentano. Subject: US-German Relations, 17 February 1961'

¹⁵⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Bassler an die Botschaften der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Paris, Washington und an das Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Betreff: Fernschreiben Nr.104 vom 2. Oktober aus Saigon, 4. Oktober 1963'; PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Bassler an das Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Betreff: Fernschreiben Nr.104 vom 2. Oktober aus Saigon, 4. Oktober 1963'

¹⁵⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Aufzeichnung von Josef Jansen. Betreff: Lage in Südvietnam, 12. März 1963.' On the Foreign Ministry's contention that FRG support for the RVN was in its own interest, see also PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Fischer. Betreff: Deutsch-vietnamesische Beziehungen, 11. Juli 1963'

¹⁵⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.63, Aufzeichnung von Carstens, Betreff: Technische Hilfe für Vietnam, 18. März 1963. The reason why the Foreign Ministry ultimately decided against the decision was because of the "bad experiences" with Wulff and Hölterscheidt. See Bassler's remarks on the memorandum. PA AA, B37, Bd.63, 'Aufzeichnung von Referat III, B7. Betreff: Vietnam. Entsendung einer chirurgischen Einsatzgruppe, 1. August 1963'

¹⁵⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Fernschreiben von Scholl aus Moskau, Nr.966 an das Auswärtige Amt, 20. September 1963'

Only two out of the three responses have survived. They, nevertheless, offer an illuminating insight into how both FRG- and French officials judged North Vietnam. Although the Quai d'Orsay's Indochina expert refused to endorse Wendland's claim that Moscow no longer advocated the collapse of the RVN, he acknowledged that Hanoi had, "voluntarily or involuntarily," aligned itself with Beijing and was pursuing a militant programme.¹⁵⁹ Bach, in contrast, agreed completely with Wendland. He remained convinced that the Sino-Soviet dispute was about "power-political" interests and that China was attempting to absorb Southeast Asia into its domain. Since the end of 1962, he contended, Beijing's Vietnam policy had become more aggressive. Whilst it had, at first, supported a two-state solution under communist control, its present demands were: Complete American withdrawal; cessation of Western material assistance; and reunification through armed struggle. At an international trade union meeting, he pointed out, the differences between the Soviet and Chinese objectives had been "particularly noticeable." Whereas the Soviet Bloc delegation had spoken of "liberation, democracy, freedom, neutrality and (finally) reunification (whilst not even mentioning "reunification" in the draft resolution)," the PRC and DRV diplomats had called for "liberation and reunification." This striking contrast led Bach to conclude that there was an "open contradiction" between Moscow and Beijing.¹⁶⁰ They were pursuing different interests. The geostrategic framework of a binary Cold War had disintegrated.

Neutralism and Coups

East- and West German frustration about having to differentiate between foreign political interests was complicated further when de Gaulle issued a public statement on 29 August. Barely three weeks after the signing of the PTBT, de Gaulle expressed concern about the present situation below the 17th parallel: "The serious events taking place in Vietnam are being followed in Paris with attention and emotion." Referring to its old colonial ties, de Gaulle professed that France understood "particularly well" the "misfortunes of the Vietnamese people." He pledged cooperation, not only in an effort to reunite Vietnam, but to ensure that it attained "independence from exterior influences."¹⁶¹ What de Gaulle was proposing, Yuro

¹⁵⁹ PA AA, B44, Bd.13, 'Blankenhorn an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Lage in Vietnam, 16. Oktober 1963,' p.150

¹⁶⁰ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Aussenpolitik der VR China gegenüber Vietnam, 13. November 1963.' On the DRV, Bach merely stated that it had "adopted the Chinese demand[s]" as its own.

¹⁶¹ *Times Herald*, 'French Statement on Viet-Nam Hints Criticism of U.S. 30 August 1963,' p.14; *New York Times*, 'De Gaulle offers to Help Vietnam End Foreign Role, 30 August 1963,' p.1

Torikata explains, was the “neutralisation” of Vietnam, meaning a right to sovereignty and freedom from foreign involvement.¹⁶²

Whether the president considered his own proposal realistic is doubtful. On Adenauer’s subsequent visit to Paris, de Gaulle highlighted the spectre of *German* neutralisation, warning that it would, ultimately, precipitate Soviet dominance of the entire European continent. It is reasonable to assume that he imagined something similar befalling Southeast Asia, albeit under Chinese hegemony.¹⁶³ Still, de Gaulle’s statement caused a stir, for it came at a critical moment. A couple of hours earlier, Wendland had dispatched a warning to Bonn, which read “the Republic of Vietnam is isolating itself more and more.”¹⁶⁴ Although Diem had initially tried to negotiate with the Buddhists, in mid-July his government changed tack. Walking through the streets of Saigon, Wendland watched as armed guards “ruthlessly beat-up” and “carted off” the demonstrators.¹⁶⁵ On 21 August, under the cover of darkness, Special Forces raided several Buddhist pagodas. By the following morning, Diem had declared a “stage of siege,” thereby, placing the RVN under martial law.¹⁶⁶ Domestic bedlam, above all, the self-immolation of another four Buddhists, Wendland reported, had led the flailing regime to adopt “Gestapo-methods.”¹⁶⁷

It is worth outlining in detail just how tumultuous the domestic crisis was. Picture the scene. Not only were citizens burning themselves alive, but, throughout the metropolises, thousands of incalcitrant students were rioting. Among the intellectuals, Wendland reported, there was hardly a family left, which had not seen a relative being thrown into an “education camp.” High-ranking officials were, in turn, abandoning the regime. Foreign Minister Mau, as well as the ambassador in Washington and the permanent observer to the UN, tendered their resignations. Privately, Wendland doubted whether Diem was still in charge of the decision-making process. The imprint of brute force suggested that Nhu and his wife were orchestrating the clampdowns. The timing of the pagoda clearances had been particularly significant, for

¹⁶² Torikata, ‘Reexamining de Gaulle’s Peace Initiative,’ p.918

¹⁶³ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 21. September 1963 um 16:00 Uhr in Rambouillet ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten General de Gaulle,’ p.157. On de Gaulle’s belief that Indochina would inevitably fall under “Chinese domination,” see TNA, FO371/175091, ‘Subject: Meeting between General de Gaulle and Sir P. Dixon, 16 June [1964]! Views on S.E. Asia by General de Gaulle,’ p.179

¹⁶⁴ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Belagerungszustand in Süd-Vietnam, 28. August 1963’

¹⁶⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.69 an das Auswärtige Amt, 18. Juli 1963’

¹⁶⁶ Miller, ‘South Vietnam’s 1963 ‘Buddhist Crisis,’ pp.55-56. Interestingly, when discussing the pagoda raids with President Diem, Wendland was told that the Generals had “wrung” the decision from him. PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.90 and das Auswärtige Amt, 9. September 1963’

¹⁶⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.61, ‘Chi-Brief von Wendland in Saigon, Nr.8/63 an das Auswärtige Amt, 26. August 1963’

they had coincided with the arrival of the newly-appointed American Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge.¹⁶⁸ Wendland was convinced that the clampdown had been a warning to Washington that the RVN regime was determined to preserve Vietnamese independence. From an international perspective, the scenario was hardly better. Madame Nhu's belligerent outbursts were alienating world opinion. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, she expressed nothing but contempt for the demonstrators, insisting that the "fake monks'" glorification of the suicides was the "most barbaric thing" she had ever witnessed.¹⁶⁹ It is difficult to imagine a more horrendous scenario. South Vietnam was a *mess*.

On reflection, the logical decision for the U.S. would have been to disassociate itself from Diem and abandon its nation-building project. After all, both domestic- and foreign opinion had turned against the regime. Nor did it help that Madame Nhu was accusing Washington of conspiring with the Buddhists to overthrow the government.¹⁷⁰ All things considered, the best alternative would have been to accept reality and work towards some sort of fig-leaf settlement. In this regard, de Gaulle's proposal offered a starting point. Wendland, though, appreciated that the problem was more complicated. Defending South Vietnam was not an end in itself. He had always insisted that the fall of Saigon would crystallise the loss of all Southeast Asia. The ambassador had not changed his mind in five years and he was not going to start now. Furthermore, abandonment would cause the U.S. to "lose face," and shift the regional "balance of power" in Beijing's favour, not to mention encourage military revolutions in other Third World countries.¹⁷¹ Even *if* Kennedy wanted to withdraw, Wendland claimed, he could not afford another political setback ahead of the 1964 presidential elections.¹⁷² Then, of course, there was the matter of French motives. It was no secret that de Gaulle was pursuing an independent programme, tinged with anti-Americanism. The French ambassador admitted to Wendland that he had encouraged Nhu to adopt "special measures" ahead of Lodge's arrival. It was no wonder, therefore, that Wendland interpreted de Gaulle's orphic words as a "concealed criticism" of the U.S., as well as an attempt to bolster French

¹⁶⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Belagerungszustand in Sued-Vietnam, 28. August 1963'

¹⁶⁹ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.37/1963, "Die falschen Mönche tranken Coca-Cola." Spiegel-Gespräch mit Südvietnams Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, 11. September 1963,' p.79

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.77. On Madame Nhu's interview with *Der Spiegel* and her assertion that the U.S. was planning a coup, see also LOC, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 519, Special Files, Public Service, JFK-LBJ administrations, Vietnam, General, September-November 1963, 'From: Thomas E. Hughes to the Secretary of State. Subject: State of Mind of the Nhus, 6 September 1963'

¹⁷¹ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.105 an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Ergebnis McNamara-Besuch, 5. Oktober 1963'; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.72 an das Auswärtige Amt, 27. Juli 1963'

¹⁷² PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.72 an das Auswärtige Amt, 27. Juli 1963'

authority on the Indochinese peninsula.¹⁷³ In any case, he doubted whether the proposal could work. The Laos experience had set a bad precedent for “neutralisation.” And, the neutralisation of South Vietnam did not guarantee the neutralisation of all Vietnam. “The Hanoi government,” Wendland warned, “has made this unequivocally clear.”¹⁷⁴

If Washington could neither retreat, nor control its subordinate, then alternatives were scarce. Privately, Wendland felt that as long as the Americans stayed in Indochina, the region would not find peace. Telescoping into the future, he was cognisant that the civil war was “heading towards an explosion on a larger scale.” He could envision an international war between the U.S. and the PRC, with Russia being obligated to support the latter.¹⁷⁵ Wendland continued to wrestle with the problem, but repeatedly hit dead-ends. On 3 September, he told Lodge that South Vietnam would never be fully consolidated under Diem and that dissatisfaction in the urban areas made failure “almost inevitable.” The regime, he maintained, was too autocratic. Its methods were reminiscent of the old imperial court in China. At the same time, Wendland opposed a political reshuffle, insisting that there was no opposition “worthy of the name.” Diem’s rule was dire, but a “violent overthrow” would create a “dangerous vacuum” and precipitate eventual communisation. All Wendland could recommend was that Lodge make “one final attempt” to “liberalise and modernise” the regime.¹⁷⁶

To be sure, it was not all bad. Despite the political turmoil, the embassy was convinced that the war effort had not been jeopardised. Two weeks after events in Hue, Herrmann had gone so far as to claim that, “as things stand, the Vietcong can no longer win the war militarily.”¹⁷⁷ At the beginning of October, the head of the Canadian ICC delegation, echoed these words, telling Wendland that Hanoi “no longer believes that it can win the liberation struggle.” Rather, the “almost catastrophic food situation” and widening Sino-Soviet rift had

¹⁷³ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Die Erklärung General de Gaulle’s über Vietnam, 2. Oktober 1963’

¹⁷⁴ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Wie steht es um die Zukunft Südvietsams?, 26. September 1963.’ It was not only the Laos experiment, which made Wendland wary of neutralisation. He stressed that Edvard Benes of Czechoslovakia had tried to form a coalition government, but had eventually been toppled by the communists in 1948. See PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.87 an das Auswärtige Amt, 3. September 1963’

¹⁷⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.86 an das Auswärtige Amt, 2. September 1963’

¹⁷⁶ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 199, Vietnam, General, 9/1/63-9/10/63, State Cables, Part I, ‘From Lodge to Secretary of State, 3 September 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Telegramm von Wendland aus Saigon, Nr.87 an das Auswärtige Amt, 3. September 1963’; PA AA, B37, Bd.64, ‘Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Wie steht es um die Zukunft Südvietsams?, 26. September 1963’

¹⁷⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.66, ‘Aufzeichnung von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.15/63. Sicherheitslage in Südvietsam 22. Mai 1963’

caused both “dejection” and “confusion.” The DRV was, in sum, confronted by its own crippling problems and longed for an end to the civil war.¹⁷⁸ Although this sort of reasoning was, perhaps, a sign of overconfidence and certainly did not persuade Franz-Josef Bach, it reinforced West German belief that the war was going well.¹⁷⁹ During a three-week tour of the countryside, the visiting Major, Alfred Sagner, attested that the construction of strategic hamlets was still showing signs of progress. It was true, he acknowledged, that the programme was overstretched and that, especially in Can-Mau, partisans had exploited the feeble defences. Sagner was, nevertheless, encouraged by the number of hamlets built, as well as the Vietcong’s tactical switch from guerrilla raids to coordinated regimental assaults. This, he explained, not only meant that the Vietcong had lost its previous mobility, but that its soldiers were easier to spot and more vulnerable to the ARVN’s own skirmishes.¹⁸⁰

Then again, Sagner saw no evidence that the Vietcong was abandoning the war effort. Citing G-2 intelligence reports, he warned that an intensified training programme was underway in North Vietnam and that communist guerrillas were equipped with modern weapons. Although the ARVN had destroyed Vietcong depots and military bases, Sagner pointed out that the supply-line through the adjacent borders remained uninhibited. Nor had the NLF’s manpower declined. Irrespective of its continual losses, Sagner estimated the active combatants at around 25.000 regular- and 85.000 guerrilla units. All the same, he insisted that continual progress was being made and that there was “no doubt” that the war “could be won militarily.”¹⁸¹

The most astonishing facet of Sagner’s and Wendland’s reports, though, was how much they diverged from those in Bonn. Rarely has there been such a fissure between a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic mission. The different tone was remarkable. Whereas Wendland’s memorandums had an undercurrent of tragedy to them, his colleagues were filled with disdain. The full extent of this disdain was illustrated in the aftermath of the pagoda raids. Responding to the foreign minister’s request for an appraisal, Bassler pulled no punches.

¹⁷⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.104 an das Auswärtige Amt, 2. Oktober 1963’

¹⁷⁹ In response to the Canadian statement, Bach asserted that although it was probably true that the “economic” and “psychological” situation were dire in the DRV, he saw little evidence that Hanoi was giving up on its reunification struggle. Rather, it appeared to Bach as if Hanoi had already made the decision to let North Vietnam “bleed” and “starve” so that it could continue the war effort. See PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bach. Betreff: Außenpolitik der VR China gegenüber Vietnam, 13. November 1963’

¹⁸⁰ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Militärattache Sagner an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht (S) 4/63, 28. Oktober 1963’

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Sagner’s estimations were roughly the same as those of Robert McNamara and Maxwell Taylor, although their report claimed that there were 22.000 “hardcore” and 98.000 irregular Vietcong. To compare, see JFKL, The Roger Hilsman Papers, Countries, 93/38/G/2/4, Box No.4, Vietnam, McNamara-Taylor Trip Report, 10/1/1963, ‘Memorandum to the President. Subject: Report of McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, 1 October 1963’

Washington's military objectives, he declared, had failed. Notwithstanding the huge number of advisers and economic assistance, ARVN soldiers had been unable to expunge even "one single district" of communist partisans. Bassler repeated what he had argued before: Too much emphasis was being placed on solving the problem in military terms, rather than winning the hearts and minds of the people. The Diem regime had, accordingly, failed to gain the peoples' trust. To make it worse, RVN statesmen were disregarding the warnings of both Pope Paul VI and the United Nations. They were, instead, attempting to crush the Buddhists' resistance. "There can be no doubt," Bassler declared, "that the USA has miscalculated." Diem's reign was drawing to a close. It would not last much longer. He recommended that the approved financial assistance be frozen and that Bonn disassociate itself from South Vietnam.¹⁸²

Given Bassler's entrenched and invariable pessimism, it could be presumed that he would have at least *considered* neutralisation. If the crisis was as dismal as he thought, then it was surely logical to deliberate alternatives. Besides, he and foreign ministerial colleagues were aware that communist cohesion had broken down. During an Anglo-German Far East conference, they estimated that as long as Mao and Khrushchev remained in power, the split was "irreversible."¹⁸³ And yet, regardless of the rift, Bassler did not doubt the essentiality of defending South Vietnam. Disengagement could not have been further from his mind. The French proposals were "sheer nonsense." Bassler's pessimism, instead, led him down a different path. For him, Korea was precedent. He told an American colleague on 20 September that there was only one remaining choice: Diem's regime needed to be overthrown and replaced by a military junta.¹⁸⁴ Whereas Wendland feared that a political reshuffle would trigger more chaos, Bassler judged it the last hope of saving South Vietnam.

Above the 17th parallel, the East Germans were becoming increasingly concerned about Hanoi's own militant language. Consistent with the previous year, the Vietnamese were frank in their admittance that reunification would not occur overnight. In a private conversation with the general secretary of the NLF, Bibow was told that the struggle would be difficult and long-

¹⁸² PA AA, B37, Bd.62, 'Aufzeichnung von Abteilung I dem Herrn Bundesminister vorzulegen. Betreff: Lage in Vietnam, 22. August 1963.' Both Wilfried Mausbach and Alexander Troche have claimed that the memorandum was written by Josef Jansen. However, in a subsequent report, Jansen noted that "Department I" (Bassler's department) had inked the document. See PA AA, B37, Bd.62 'Aufzeichnung von Josef Jansen Betreff: Abberufung des vietnamesischen Geschäftsträgers Dr. Phuong, 30. August 1963.' From the tone and style of writing, it is also evident that Bassler inked the document.

¹⁸³ PA AA, B42, Bd.7, 'Kurzprotokoll über die deutsch-britische Gespräche in London über den Fernen Osten, sowie Süd- und Ostasien vom 6. September 1963,' pp.149-150

¹⁸⁴ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files 1963. Box No.4137, POL- Political Affairs & Rel. Viet, 'From Hillenbrand to Secretary of State, 20 September 1963'

lasting (“about another seven or eight years”).¹⁸⁵ On 6 July, however, Vinh hinted at the prospect of the DRV “openly intervening,” if the U.S. enlarged its presence further.¹⁸⁶ Pommerening, likewise, cited rumours of North Vietnam’s intention to dispatch “100.000 men to the South.”¹⁸⁷ This was the “great danger,” which East Berlin wanted to avoid. The DRV, Bibow complained, had embraced China’s stance on militant revolutionary struggle. Decision-makers, he pointed out, were refraining in their “practical policy” from trying to solve the dispute through peaceful means. Neutralisation, Vinh had emphasised, would only be acceptable once the NLF had achieved a “certain degree of success” and the opponent had suffered devastating defeats. In sum, the NLF’s “present inferiority” meant that the principal objective was to bring about a more favourable “balance of power.” Hanoi, Bibow concluded, was “not thinking about a neutralisation of South Vietnam at the present time.”¹⁸⁸ In fact, the embassy received evidence to suggest that Ho Chi Minh had been accused of making two fatal errors, namely of negotiating both in 1945 and 1954.¹⁸⁹

Again, the subject of methods was at the centre of East German thinking. Although officials remained sympathetic towards Vietnamese reunification, it needed to transpire through peaceful means. In their eyes, the DRV was placing too much emphasis on militancy, rather than attempting to solve the dispute through diplomatic means.¹⁹⁰ As a result, there was an implicit East German interest in de Gaulle’s public proposal. Neutralisation offered hope of

¹⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Anhang zum Aktenvermerk Nr. 59/63, 5. April 1963,’ p.24

¹⁸⁶ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Komitees für Wiedervereinigung der DRV vom. 6 Juli 1963 über die Situation in Südvietnam im 1. Halbjahr 1963 sowie der Haltung der DRV zu einigen wichtigen Fragen des Südvietnam-Problems,’ p.4, p.9; PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Information über die derzeitige Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV) zu den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten. (Ausgearbeitet durch die 1. AEA nach Materialien der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam), 11. Oktober 1963,’ p.61

¹⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi für Monat August 1963, 20. August, 1963,’ p.194. According to Soviet reports, the DRV was planning to organise a “500 thousand army in the South by 1965.” See ‘Secret Telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw) [Ciphergram No. 7353], 31 May, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AMSZ, Warsaw, 6/77, w-102, t-625, obtained and translated by Margaret Gnoinska. Published in *CWIHP Working Paper No.45*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118950>

¹⁸⁸ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Komitees für Wiedervereinigung der DRV vom. 6 Juli 1963 über die Situation in Südvietnam im 1. Halbjahr 1963 sowie der Haltung der DRV zu einigen wichtigen Fragen des Südvietnam-Problems,’ p.4, p.8. On North Vietnamese insistence that only “military victories” could lay the foundations for an international solution, see also Bibow’s conversation with the former DRV ambassador to East Germany and the head of the Soviet Union & East European Department, PA MfAA, A8716, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.76/1963 über ein Essen zu Ehren des bisherigen Botschafters der DRV in der DDR Genossen Pham Ngoc Thuan, am 14. Mai 1963,’ pp.151-152

¹⁸⁹ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Einschätzung der derzeitigen Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams in den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten, 19. August 1963,’ p.37

¹⁹⁰ PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Komitees für Wiedervereinigung der DRV vom. 6 Juli 1963 über die Situation in Südvietnam im 1. Halbjahr 1963 sowie der Haltung der DRV zu einigen wichtigen Fragen des Südvietnam-Problems,’ p.9; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi für Monat August 1963, 20. August, 1963,’ p.194; PA MfAA, A8705, ‘1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung an Bibow, 14. August 1963,’ p.30

some sort of political settlement. To be sure, there were signs that the VWP might be willing to adopt a more “flexible” approach. A couple of weeks before de Gaulle’s press conference, Ho had publicly raised the prospect of a ceasefire. Between those two statements, GDR officials estimated, there was a “whole range of common departure points.”¹⁹¹

It was clear, then, that the East Germans were keen to find a way of counteracting escalation and settling the dispute diplomatically. There remained, moreover, an undercurrent scepticism about the NLF’s supposed successes. Bibow was unconvinced that they were, in fact, “incapacitating two-hundred persons per day.”¹⁹² Neither did the Vietnamese pretend that they were the masterminds of the Buddhist Crisis. On the contrary, they appeared as startled as everyone else. On 27 August, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Hoang Van Tien, pointed out to Bibow and his ambassadorial colleagues that not only had the South Vietnamese inhabitants attained world sympathy, but that the pagoda raids had been a “serious political defeat” for both Diem and Washington. Still, at the meeting, as well as in a subsequent private chat with Bibow, Hoang admitted that, despite NLF’s endeavours to take advantage of the uproar (primarily to increase its support in the cities), the Buddhists were rarely willing to collaborate. “Due to the pro-American attitude of the leaders of the Buddhist movement,” he revealed, “there was no contact at the central level.”¹⁹³

A sceptic reader might dismiss these remarks and counter that the Vietnamese were unlikely to disclose top-secret information, especially in the context of the Sino-Soviet split. Yet it is interesting to note that the DRV ambassador in Laos had no qualms about telling Naumann that a U.S. journalist had approached him with an offer from Ambassador Lodge to discuss reunification.¹⁹⁴ Irrespective of the rift, DRV-GDR relations remained cordial. True,

¹⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/441, ‘Aufzeichnung von Kurt Schneidewind. Betreff: Zur Erklärung de Gaulles vom 29. August 1963 zur Lage in Vietnam, 27. September 1963,’ p.212, p.217, p.219. See also PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Information über die derzeitige Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV) zu den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten (Ausgearbeitet durch die 1.AEA nach Materialien der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam), 11. Oktober 1963,’ pp.60-62

¹⁹² PA MfAA, A8687, ‘Einschätzung des Berichtes des Komitees für Wiedervereinigung der DRV vom 6. Juli 1963 über die Situation in Südvietnam im 1. Halbjahr 1963 sowie der Haltung der DRV zu einigen wichtigen Fragen des Südvietnam-Problems,’ p.3

¹⁹³ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.114/63 über eine Information des stellv. Aussenministers der DRV, Genossen Hoang Van Tien, im MfAA zur Lage in Südvietnam am 27. August 1963,’ pp.227-231; PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.129/63 über ein Gespräch mit dem stellv. Aussenminister Genossen Hoang Van Tien, am 16. September 1963,’ p.233

¹⁹⁴ PA MfAA, A8716, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.136/63 über ein Gespräch des Genossen Bibow mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter, Gen. Tovmassian, am 27. September 1963,’ p.26. On the U.S. journalists approaching the DRV embassy in Laos, see also ‘Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Vietnam, Xuan Thuy discusses Chairman Ho’s Unpublished Approval of de Gaulle’s Suggestion, 15 November 1963,’ History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 106-01409-06, 101-103. Translated by Jake Tompkins. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118721>; LOC, The Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 484,

Martin Großheim has cited an anecdote by Pommerening, wherein the director of Viet-Duc hospital had sneered “yes, the beer from the GDR is good, but your policy is bad.”¹⁹⁵ This, however, was an aberration. Reporting on bilateral ties, the commercial sector of the embassy assured East Berlin that exchanges with Vietnamese officials were “pleasant, friendly” and that one could speak of an “open atmosphere.”¹⁹⁶ In contrast to the Chinese, therefore, the DRV was going out of its way to avoid ideological confrontations.¹⁹⁷

But if the East Germans had hoped that Hanoi would embrace de Gaulle’s neutralisation proposal, they were disappointed. For some time, DRV decision-makers had voiced their eagerness to *exploit* Franco-American discord.¹⁹⁸ There was even talk of improving economic and political ties with Paris.¹⁹⁹ There is little evidence to suggest, though, that Hanoi was ever interested in exploring neutralisation. Firmly rooted in the nation’s past, a palpable mistrust was discernible about French objectives. De Gaulle’s statement, Hoang emphasised to Bibow, was nothing more than a “cleverly disguised neo-colonial manoeuvre.”²⁰⁰ He was merely trying to exploit the crisis below the 17th parallel and recover France’s lost influence. De Gaulle’s motive was not mediation, but exploitation.

Rumours concerning a secret Polish peace initiative were also quashed. The so-called “Maneli-Affair,” in which the head of the ICC delegation supposedly acted on Hanoi’s behalf to broker a deal with Saigon received widespread interest, both from contemporary onlookers, as well as future historians.²⁰¹ The East Germans first read about these overtures in the American press. On 18 September, the *Herald Tribune* published an article claiming that Mieczyslaw Maneli had carried a “personal message” from Pham Van Dong to Nhu and that

Folder, Service Files, Public Service, JFK-LBJ, Administration, Henry Cabot Lodge, ‘Memorandum from H.C. Lodge. Subject: Towards the Neutralisation of North Viet-Nam, 30 October 1963’

¹⁹⁵ Großheim, “‘Revisionism’ in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam,” p.456. For Pommerening’s anecdote, see SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur politischen Situation in der DRV, 18. September 1963’

¹⁹⁶ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Information: Einschätzung der politischen und handelspolitischen Entwicklung in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam (DRV). (Aus Schreiben des Gen van der Becke, Handelspolitische Abteilung Hanoi, vom 14. bis 18. September 1963 an das MAI),’ p.33

¹⁹⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur politischen Situation in der DRV, 18. September 1963’

¹⁹⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr. 59/63 über eine Konsultation zum Klassenkräfteverhältnis in SV beim Mitarbeiter der SV im MfAA der DRV, Genossen Toan Anh, am 23. März 1963,’ pp.11-12; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, ‘Anlage zum AV über eine Unterredung zwischen Genossen Minister König und dem vietnamesischen Geschäftsträger, Pham Bang, 11. Juli 1963,’ p.37

¹⁹⁹ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.137/63 über ein Gespräch in der Sektion Südvietsnam des MfAA der DRV am 19. September 1963,’ p.236

²⁰⁰ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.129/63 über ein Gespräch mit dem stellv. Aussenminister Genossen Hoang Van Tien, am 16. September 1963,’ p.233

²⁰¹ For the best analysis of the Maneli-Affair, see M. Gnoinska, ‘Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the “Maneli Affair,”’ *CWIHP, Working Paper #45* (March 2005), pp.2-77

the prime minister had “begged” the diplomat to open negotiations on the basis of Ho’s ceasefire proposal.²⁰² The histrionic language caught GDR interest and, no doubt, surprise. Maneli was a familiar acquaintance, who had previously hinted to Nohr that the DRV wanted an “international solution,” but that the conditions were not yet ripe.²⁰³ Nevertheless, after consulting with the Soviet and Polish ambassador, Bibow dismissed the editorial as a “deliberate hoax.” It was true, he informed his superiors, that Maneli had dined with Nhu. There had, however, been no letter and the exchange had merely revolved around “trivial matters.”²⁰⁴ In short, the “affair” was a damp squib.

GDR archival records, thus, offer little evidence to support Fredrik Logevall’s claim that Hanoi was sympathetic towards negotiations.²⁰⁵ If the DRV had been sympathetic, then surely, they would have adopted a more proactive stance. Neither East Berlin, nor its socialist allies, were asked for assistance in working towards a diplomatic solution. Within the wider context, Logevall’s argument makes no sense either. At the very moment when de Gaulle made his statement, Hanoi was publicly rejecting peaceful coexistence and embracing Maoist conception of “world revolution.”²⁰⁶ At the beginning of September, Le Duc Tho launched an ideological offensive against party members, who were questioning the VWP’s reunification stratagem and demanded a systematic “ideological education” to expunge “revisionist ideas.”²⁰⁷ It seems paradoxical to assume that DRV policymakers were eager for a truce, right at the point when they were denouncing Soviet ideology. It seems much more logical, as the East Germans emphasised, that past experiences, as well as the adoption of Maoist dogma, had encouraged North Vietnam to advocate victory on the battlefield.

In any case, even if Hanoi was contemplating negotiations, the Diem coup rendered it superfluous. On 2 November, ARVN officers, under the command of General Duong Van Minh, murdered the two Ngo brothers and overthrew the government. For eight years, Diem had ruled South Vietnam, yet his presidential reign had come to a brutal and gory finale. Pierre

²⁰² *Times Herald*, ‘Matter of Fact, Very Ugly Stuff, 18 September 1963,’ p.17

²⁰³ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.39/63 über ein Gespräch mit Dr. Mieczyslaw Maneli, Leiter der polnischen Delegation der CIC in Vietnam, Sitz Saigon, 11. März 1963,’ p.223

²⁰⁴ PA MfAA, A8716, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.136/63 über ein Gespräch des Genossen Bibow mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter, Gen. Tovmassian, am 27. September 1963,’ p.26; PA MfAA, A8713, ‘Telgramm von Bibow an Loebel. Betreff: Übergabe eines Briefes Pham Van Dong an Ngo Dinh Nhu, 16. Oktober 1963,’ p.50

²⁰⁵ Logevall, *Choosing War*, p.8

²⁰⁶ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Einschätzung der derzeitigen Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams in den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten, 19. August 1963,’ p.38

²⁰⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3847, ‘Aufzeichnung von Pommerening. Betreff: Zur politischen Situation in der DRV, 18. September 1963’; PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Information über die derzeitige Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV) zu den ideologisch-politischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten. (Ausgearbeitet durch die 1. AEA nach Materialien der Botschaft der DDR in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam), 11. Oktober 1963,’ p.56

Asselin has argued that DRV leaders were “alarmed,” for they feared that Diem’s successors would enjoy more success in rallying popular support.²⁰⁸ This was not the reaction which the East Germans witnessed. Quite the reverse. The atmosphere was one of excitement and triumph. It is not difficult to understand why. After all, the NLF had been advocating Diem’s removal since its foundation. The coup offered it to them for free. Furthermore, the Vietnamese were convinced that Washington had been the orchestrator. The bankruptcy of its policies, Hoang emphasised, had compelled the Kennedy administration to take drastic measures in the hope of escaping the quagmire. He, nevertheless, predicted that the “activation of the revolution” would augment, rather than diminish the enemies’ disagreements and precipitate “new upheavals.” The only solution, he declared, was the “violent overthrow of the new regime.” It was ominous for the newly-arrived GDR Ambassador Wolfgang Bergold that his Chinese counterpart hailed Hoang’s assessment as “entirely correct.”²⁰⁹ Just how crucial the Diem coup was is illustrated best during a conversation between Pham Van Dong and Erich Honecker in 1969. At the apex of the war, Pham described the putsch as a “political event” of “profound significance.” “For us,” he explained, “it already signified a great victory. After Diem’s death, the political and military struggle of the South Vietnamese people took a huge upturn and reached its first peak in 1964.”²¹⁰ The fact that Pham was referring to the event *six years* after it had occurred was testament to its magnitude. Returning from his visit to Dalat, Wendland would soon appreciate just how magnitudinous it was.

²⁰⁸ Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to War*, p.160

²⁰⁹ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.141/63, über eine Botschaftsinformation des stellv. Aussenministers Hoang Van Tien, am 2. November 1963 im MfAA der DRV zu den Ereignissen in Südvietnam,’ pp.241-243

²¹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/2493, ‘Stenografische Niederschrift des Berichts des Genossen Pham Van Dong auf dem Treffen mit dem Genossen Erich Honecker im Hause des ZK der SED, 11. Oktober 1969,’ p.12

Chapter 5
Inside the Polycentric World
January–October 1964

Bonn, 5 May 1964. At a dinner, hosted for the venerated journalist, Walter Lippmann, an argument broke out over the international situation. Invited by Ambassador McGhee to share his thoughts, Lippmann declared that he was “now quite optimistic that there would not be a major East-West conflict.” Between the Cuban Crisis and the PTBT, he reflected, “the atmosphere had changed.” A “watershed” had been crossed. “I now look forward to a long period of peace between the two major powers.” In most countries, these words would have been greeted with euphoria and applause. Not this time, though. His audience was distraught, especially when Lippmann surmised that German reunification would not transpire “until a new generation had grown up.” Responding to Lippmann, the CDU’s foreign political expert, Ernst Majonica, stressed that “every time I go back to my constituency, I am asked about reunification.” Nobody knew how it would come about, he acknowledged, but he was inclined to believe that unity would result less from what the Germans did, than from developments in Eastern Europe and perhaps in Asia, including the Sino-Soviet dispute.¹

Historians have primarily explained the origins of the Second Indochina Conflict through a Cold War prism. It is argued that escalation was a “logical” outgrowth of this particular “world view,” that the Cold War’s “powerful spell” precipitated armed involvement.² Reading Lippmann’s comments, one is struck by his conviction that the atmosphere had changed, by his belief that a global conflict was improbable. Attentive readers, however, will have noticed his emphasis on the *two major powers*. Lippmann was implying that if America and Russia were opposed to war, then a “major East-West conflict” would not occur. This was specious reasoning. Military supremacy did not equate to uncontested omniscience. Rather, the diffusion of power made it evermore difficult for Washington and Moscow to project their will onto weaker nations. It is essential to appreciate, once again, that the structure of world power had changed. Comparing a map of the world in 1961 with a map of 1964, the naked eye would not have spotted much difference. In practice, though, the geopolitical structure had become

¹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 183, Folder 7, Germany, Vol. III, Cables, 5/64-6/64, ‘From Thomas J. Dunnigan to Department of State. Subject: Walter Lippmann’s Visit to Bonn, 8 May 1964’

² Herring, *America’s Longest War, Fifth Edition*, p.xii; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, p.334

much more complicated. It was, as Mao Zedong said, “not a world that one or two powers can control.”³

Mao was not the only person who had noticed. Three days after Diem’s death, Gerhard Schröder announced at a press conference in Hong Kong that Bonn no longer wanted to perceive the issue of trade with Asia as “black and white,” or even whether a “country was communist or not.”⁴ In front of the gates of the PRC, Schröder was proposing the strengthening of bilateral ties. At the same time, the polycentric world order caused a fundamental problem for the FRG. Ever since its creation, the state’s alliance structure had rested on two central pillars: America and France. Yet, because of the Gaullist challenge to U.S. leadership, the Erhard government found itself in the uncomfortable position of having to square the circle. Above all in Vietnam, its allies were pursuing disparate objectives.

East Berlin, likewise, approached the conflict through the lens of a polarised international order. Visiting Moscow at the beginning of spring, a high-ranking GDR delegation was told, in no uncertain terms, what had been unmistakeable for some time: “The Chinese leaders have, de-facto, split the socialist camp, there is no unified socialist camp anymore.”⁵ In turn, Hanoi’s decision to shift further towards the PRC led to a cooling of relations and growing suspicion between the two countries. East Berlin was under no illusions that Soviet Bloc influence was being asphyxiated, that the pro-Chinese faction was ascendant. This, then, was the setting which shaped the FRG’s and GDR’s foreign policy in Indochina. Polycentrism had blurred the lines between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. State interests, rather than ideological doctrines, were the guiding principles of their respective programmes.

Macabre Spectacle

On reflection, it is difficult not to concur with Mark Moyar that the slaying of the Ngo brothers was a “debacle.”⁶ In Bonn, however, its full significance was not initially appreciated. Press reaction was a mix of regret and fatalism.⁷ The centrist newspaper, *die Zeit*, reported that

³ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Asia and the Pacific, China, Box 238, China, Vol. II, Memos, 9/64-2/65, ‘Minutes of the meeting of the French Delegation with President Mao Tse-tung at Hangchow on 11 September 1964’

⁴ PA AA, B7, Bd.47, ‘Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Bundesregierung will Asienpolitik überprüfen, 5 November 1963’; TNA, FO371/172163, ‘From R. Brash to Central Department, Foreign Office. Subject: Schröder’s remarks in Hong Kong on West German Chinese Trade, 14 November 1963’

⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3514, ‘Albert Norden an Walter Ulbricht. Betreff: Vermerk über eine Information des Genossen Tolkunow, Stellvertreter des Genossen Andropow zu Fragen der Beziehungen zur Kommunistischen Partei Chinas, 5. März 1964,’ p.25

⁶ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, p.275

⁷ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.47/1963, ‘Südvietnam. Präsidententod. Wie bei Shakespeare, 20. November 1963,’ p.90. See also *Der Spiegel*, Nr.46/1963, ‘Südvietnam. Putsch. Sieg der Dicken, 13. November 1963,’ p.86

Diem's brutal repression of the Buddhists, as well as his nepotistic autocracy, had caused the people to turn against him. Remarking upon Vietnamese joy and elation in the aftermath of the putsch, it was hoped that the political reshuffle would allow the generals to transform the conflict into a "national" crusade.⁸ The lack of sympathy for the Ngo-clan was unmistakable. It was a far cry from the outpouring of grief witnessed a few weeks later, when news arrived that JFK had been fatally shot.⁹

Only one person conveyed genuine sorrow. In his appraisal of the coup, which found its way onto the chancellor's desk, Ambassador Wendland reflected on the slain president's life. The central theme was that Diem had ruled under difficult circumstances. He had taken control of a former colony and had, against all odds, constructed a sovereign nation. Nevertheless, particularly from 1960 onwards, Wendland reflected, the Vietcong had undermined these encouraging developments. Echoing *die Zeit*, he claimed that the pagoda crackdowns had caused citizens to lose faith in their country's leadership. More significant for him, however, had been the international spectre. The widespread antipathy of U.S. public opinion, de Gaulle's "untimely" call for neutralisation, as well as rumours of Nhu flirting with Hanoi, had led Washington to freeze its fiscal aid, thus, encouraging ARVN officers to remove their sovereign. And so, the Diem era had met its "tragic end." But despite his grief, Wendland tried to finish on a positive note. He insisted that South Vietnam was "not yet lost." If the military junta adopted a cohesive tactic, and if they received the support of the "Free World," then "everything could still work out."¹⁰

But reality swiftly eclipsed hope. Rather than amalgamate the various factions, Diem's death crystallised unprecedented turmoil. It is not hyperbolic to say that the RVN ceased to exist as a functioning nation-state. Historians, of course, should not lionise Diem. His rule had been built on tyranny and despotism. Political opposition was not tolerated. Any hint of revolt was crushed.¹¹ Still, he had been the only politician, who had commanded something resembling control. The removal of his paternalistic regime meant that the entire system broke

⁸ *Die Zeit*, Nr.45/1963, 'Putsch im Taifun-Land, Noch aber ist die Krise in Südvietsnam nicht beendet, 8. November 1963.' On the FRG's press reaction to the coup, see also *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 'Nach gelungenem Putsch regiert das Militär in Südvietsnam, 4. November 1963,' p.1, p.5; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 'Ungewissheiten in Saigon, 6. November 1963,' p.1

⁹ NARA, RG5, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Box 4049, POL 15-1, Head of State, US Johnson, 'From the American Consulate in Stuttgart to the Secretary of State, 25 November 1963'

¹⁰ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3656, 'Aufzeichnung von Wendland. Betreff: Das Ende von Präsident Ngo-Dinh-Diem, 7. November 1963'

¹¹ J. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, 2013), p.192; Miller, *Misalliance*, pp.144-145, p.230

down.¹² The Quai d'Orsay's Asian specialist, Étienne Manac'h, spelt it out to Hilmar Bassler. Diem's rule, he explained, had been the authority of a dictator. His demise had precipitated the total collapse of South Vietnam's civil administration. Now, there were merely "two realities": Vietcong partisans and American influence. The RVN government, Manac'h insisted, could not be classified as a "power factor."¹³

This was precisely what Wendland was witnessing. Within the junta, a "pro-American," a "pro-French" and a "middle" group were all jostling for authority. General Minh, Wendland pointed out, had failed to provide the inhabitants with an "attractive political programme." All he was offering was the continuation of an unpopular conflict.¹⁴ News from the battlefield reinforced these alarming trends. Both Fritz Sagner and Klaus Herrmann warned that the enemy was capitalising on Saigon's irresolution. In the Delta region, rebel skirmishes had skyrocketed by 150%, whilst, in the Third and Fourth Corps, it was closer to 300%.¹⁵ Provinces bordering the capital, notably Long-Anh, had been overrun completely and were not even safe in the day-time.¹⁶ "Among the population," Sagner stated, "there is widespread belief that the Vietcong is winning the war." Although the metropolises had celebrated Diem's downfall, the reaction in rural areas was quite the reverse. "Panic" had set in. The lack of military successes, Sagner recorded, were furthering atavism and helplessness.¹⁷ *Pessimism* was, hence, the leitmotif of the reports compiled. *Pessimism* about the Minh regime's political competence. *Pessimism* about the administrative paralysis. And *pessimism* that the frontline could be stabilised.

¹² PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.143 an das Auswärtige Amt, 10. Dezember 1963'; PA AA, B37, Bd.66, 'Aufzeichnung von Jena für den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.20/64. Die Schlagkraft der südvietnamesischen Streitkräfte nach den beiden Staatsstreich, (Anfang April 1964), 9. April 1964'

¹³ PA AA, B24, Bd.517, 'Niederschrift über die deutsch-französische Konsultationen vom 5. Februar 1964,' pp.115-122

¹⁴ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Bericht von Wendland. Betreff: Die ersten Wochen nach dem Staatsstreich in Vietnam, 21. November 1963'; PA AA, B40, Bd.31, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler über den beiliegenden Bericht der Botschaft Saigon vom 21. November 1963, 29. November 1963'

¹⁵ PA AA, B40, Bd.31, 'Bericht von Sagner an das Bundesministerium für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht (S) 8/63, 13. November 1963'; PA B37, Bd.66, 'Bericht von Herrmann an das Bundesminister für Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht (S) 6/63, 15. November 1963'

¹⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Chi-Brief von Wendland an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Beurteilung der Lage zu Jahresbeginn, 17. Januar 1964'

¹⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.66, 'Aufzeichnung von Sagner. Betreff: Militärpolitische und militärische Aspekte in Südvietnam, 23. Januar 1964.' Interestingly, on his farewell visit in May 1964, Wendland was told by Vice-President Nguyen Xuan Oanh that Diem's overthrow had "brought six million people under communist rule." Karl Carstens repeated this figure to Chancellor Erhard. See PA AA, B37, Bd.61, 'Telegramm von Wendland Nr 57 an das Auswärtige Amt, 21. Mai 1964'; ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/1, 'Vermerk von Carstens. Betreff: Gespräch des Herrn Bundeskanzlers mit General de Gaulle am 3./4. Juli 1964'

As 1963 drew to a close, Wendland reassessed his position. For more than five years he had been the FRG's principal diplomat. Throughout that time, he had been consistent in his belief that Vietnam was the "key to the Pacific region" and that neutralisation would "precipitate the loss of all Southeast Asia."¹⁸ On 16 December, he shifted his stance. That same day, during a "serious and very frank discussion," Wendland shared his concerns with General Minh, who agreed that Diem's demise had created an "unavoidable administrative vacuum." Minh complained, too, about "deep war-weariness," and that the "Franco-American differences" were "being played out on the back of Vietnam." It must have come as a shock for Wendland that the architect of the coup failed to offer any hint of encouragement. Minh, instead, seemed to confirm his worst fears. Something snapped inside of him. "If the situation does not radically improve in the near future," Wendland predicted, "then a neutralisation of South Vietnam will, ultimately, constitute the only way of provisionally safeguarding it, without resorting to international war." It was the first time that a FRG representative had signposted neutralisation as the best bad option. Wendland remained adamant that it would precipitate the "loss" of all Southeast Asia. Yet the way in which the ambassador phrased his thoughts suggested that he did not consider Vietnam worth an "international war." The point at issue was not whether escalation was feasible, but whether Hanoi and Beijing would be willing to accept a neutralist RVN.¹⁹

To appreciate how extraordinary Wendland's comments were, it is worth recalling that two months earlier, the head of the Canadian ICC delegation had told him that Hanoi no longer believed it could win. Juxtaposing these two statements tells us a lot about the volatility of the conflict. It reveals, above all, that the concept of "winning" was flawed. Hitherto, the West Germans had insisted that victory was possible, that the Vietcong could be conquered. None of them, however, offered a clarification as to what "winning" meant, or how to achieve it. The objective was to ensure the RVN's continued existence and hope that the slaying of rebels would, eventually, persuade the communists to surrender. Besides, the nature of the conflict allowed the NLF to command the tempo. Its task was to destroy and disrupt, whereas the government had to preserve order, protect the population and promote social welfare. Surveying the crumbling picture, Wendland concluded that the signs of deterioration were so many and so great that neutralism resembled the only prospect of "saving" South Vietnam.

¹⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.48, 'Bericht von Wendland. Betreff: Die Reaktionen des Prinzen Sihanouk von Kambodscha auf den Staatsstreich in Vietnam, 21. November 1963'

¹⁹ AAPD 1963, p.1647-1649

The Foreign Ministry's initial reaction was one of distrust. As was his wont, Bassler cautioned about taking Wendland's words too seriously, labelling him a "strong partisan" of the former government.²⁰ Yet, after repeated warnings, Bassler began to realise that he had been wrong to suppose that a reshuffle would herald an improvement. The Americans, he later argued, had failed to make the necessary preparations for a takeover and had underestimated the rural populations' reluctance to work with Diem's successor.²¹ In mid-January, during a colloquium on the Sino-Soviet split, Bassler informed his superiors that there "could be no doubt" that Washington's attempt to stabilise Southeast Asia had "completely failed." But not only did Bassler estimate that it had failed, he contended that the U.S. "would not and could not" launch an "open war."²² And yet, barely a month later, Bassler changed tack, insisting to American officials that Washington "*must*" escalate, even if it meant another Korean-style conflict.²³

Herein lies the great mystery of Bassler. Alexander Troche is right to underline his hawkishness.²⁴ As we have seen, Bassler had concluded as early as 1961 that escalation was inevitable. It is simplistic, though, to dismiss him as a warmonger. It is even doubtful whether he believed that militarism offered much hope for a "successful outcome."²⁵ True, the news of a further, bloodless coup, orchestrated by General Nguyen Khanh, rekindled German hope that much-needed leadership could be found and state paralysis overcome.²⁶ But it was nothing more than a brief interlude. Bassler did not even bother challenging Manac'h's assessment that the situation was "serious," that no ruling government existed, or that national apathy made it impossible to win the war. Instead, Bassler focused on his counterpart's solution, rather than

²⁰ See Bassler's hand-written remarks in PA AA, B37, Bd.60, 'Aufzeichnung der Abteilung I zum Bericht der Botschaft vom 21. November 1963, 29. November 1963'

²¹ PA AA B37, Bd.61, 'Stellungnahme von Bassler für das Ministerbüro. Betreff: Brief des Herrn Abgeordneten Dr. Kanka, 16. März 1964.'

²² PA AA, B42, Bd.8, 'Der sowjetisch-chinesische Streit (Bedeutung im Weltkommunismus für die Weltpolitik und für die deutsche Politik). Wortprotokoll (auszugsweise) des aussenpolitischen Kolloquiums, 17.-18. Januar 1964,' p.253

²³ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations, POL Asia SE 1/1/64 to POL 27-13 Neutrality Asia, SE 1/1/1964, Box 1898, POL 1 Gen. Policy. Asia SE. Background. 1/1/64, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler and Thomas J. Dunnigan. Subject: Southeast Asia, 26 February 1964.' My emphasis

²⁴ Troche, "*Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt*," pp.303-304

²⁵ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations, POL Asia SE 1/1/64 to POL 27-13, Neutrality Asia, SE 1/1/1964, Box 1898, POL 1 Gen. Policy. Asia SE. Background. 1/1/64, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler and Thomas J. Dunnigan. Subject: Southeast Asia, 26 February 1964.' On Bassler's scepticism that the Vietcong could be beaten, see also PA AA, B37, Bd.61, 'Stellungnahme von Bassler für das Ministerbüro. Betreff: Brief des Herrn Abgeordneten Dr. Kanka, 16. März 1964'

²⁶ TNA, FO371/175489, 'Robert Brash to Southeast Asian Department. Subject: German Views on the Political Situation in S. Vietnam, 7 February 1964'; PA AA, B37, Bd.59, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Erneuter Staatsstreich in Südvietsnam, 30. Januar 1964'

his evaluation. "We are asking ourselves," he countered, "after the bad experiences in Laos, who can guarantee the neutralisation of Vietnam?" He could hardly have been impressed with Manac'h's admittance that it was "a little theoretical."²⁷

Perhaps the explanation for Bassler's dichotomous stance lies in his classification of alternatives. John Gaddis has criticised the American government for defining the options too narrowly, that "quite a lot - negotiations on Hanoi's terms, a gradual relinquishment of responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese, even a phased withdrawal in the anticipation of an eventual North Vietnamese-Viet Cong victory - would have been preferable to the strategy actually followed."²⁸ All of these suggestions, though, would have preordained the same outcome: Abandonment of South Vietnam. Bassler was far too cynical to expect otherwise. Nor did he believe that America's present plan (assisting with advisers and fiscal aid) offered any hope of curbing the downward trend.²⁹ If diplomacy was nothing more than a synonym for a communist takeover and if the status quo was untenable, Bassler reasoned, then only escalation offered "any chance of ending the conflict."³⁰

Nevertheless, the vague and negative way in which Bassler phrased the alternatives revealed his trepidation about all of them. In subsequent exchanges with both the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, William Bundy, and his Deputy, Marshall Green, Bassler emphasised that victory in South Vietnam was "crucial" and that the U.S. had a "special role to play." This bullishness, however, faded in light of Bassler's own private doubts. Two pressing problems concerned him. First, he had little confidence in General Khanh's ability to persuade the local inhabitants that they could win. The endemic war-weariness meant that there was no incentive to fight and, in Bassler's words, "bringing the insurgents near success." Not weapons and money, but a preparedness to die for freedom, he remarked, "will end the war." Second, rebel forces were exploiting the porous borders to terrorise RVN citizens. Vietcong training grounds in Cambodia, as well as the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, Bassler estimated,

²⁷ PA AA, B24, Bd.517, 'Niederschrift über die deutsch-französische Konsultationen vom 5. Februar 1964 in Bonn über Ostasien und Südostasien,' p.119, pp.121-122

²⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p.258

²⁹ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations, POL Asia SE 1/1/64 to POL 27-13 Neutrality Asia, SE 1/1/1964, Box 1898, POL 1 Gen. Policy. Asia SE. Background. 1/1/64, 'From Coburn Kidd to Department of State. Subject: Foreign Office Views on Southeast Asia, 28 February 1964'

³⁰ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations, POL Asia SE 1/1/64 to POL 27-13 Neutrality Asia, SE 1/1/1964, Box 1898, POL 1 Gen. Policy. Asia SE. Background, 1/1/64, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler and Thomas J. Dunnigan. Subject: Southeast Asia, 26 February 1964'

were offering the rebels outlying sanctuaries. For him, South Vietnam resembled nothing less than a “macabre spectacle.”³¹

What Bassler did not explain, however, was why he judged South Vietnam so “crucial” in the first place. It was certainly not because of its impact on the balance of power. He pointed out to Green that Soviet influence in the Far East had “diminished” and that Moscow “does not welcome the increasingly dominant Chinese position.” Bassler went so far as to predict that, within six months, the schism would lead to the abrogation of the Sino-Soviet defence treaty. Washington and Moscow, he argued, were pursuing parallel objectives: The containment of China. Neither did Bassler consider American escalation necessary for contractual reasons, dismissing SEATO as “outdated and ridiculous.”³² Nor did he appear concerned about defending a free people from external aggression. On the contrary, he admitted that the Vietnamese people desired peace “even at the expense of communist rule.”³³ And yet, Bassler remained adamant that a “Korean-style intervention” was the “only solution he saw.”³⁴ His analysis was based on the premise that the other side wanted to “destroy the United States’ position” and “Free World’s influence” needed to be upheld.³⁵ That there was a national element to the Vietcong’s struggle did not interest him. It was, rather, *Beijing’s* objectives, which his thoughts revolved around. Although Bassler doubted that China wanted war, he considered it a hostile power, determined to advance its position through “subversive actions.”³⁶ Vietnam, he maintained, was the “crux” of the region. If it were “lost,” then other

³¹ NARA RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations POL Asia 1/1/64 to POL Asia SE, 1/1/1964, Box 1897, POL - Political Affairs & REL, Asia SE, 1/1/1964, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler, Werner Klingeberg, Marshall Green and William Watts. Subject: Discussions on Southeast Asia, 2 April 1964’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations POL 1 Asia SE, 1/1/64 to POL 1 Asia SE 1/1/64, Box 1898, POL 2 Gen. Reports and Stat. Asia SE, 1/1/64, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler, Werner Klingeberg, William Bundy and William Watts. Subject: Discussions on Southeast Asia, 2 April 1964’

³² NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations POL 1 Asia SE, 1/1/64 to POL 1 Asia SE 1/1/64, Box 1898, POL 2 Gen. Reports and Stat. Asia SE, 1/1/64, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler, Werner Klingeberg, William Bundy and William Watts. Subject: Discussions on Southeast Asia, 2 April 1964’

³³ PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Abteilung I. Betreff: Vietnam, n.d.’ Although the memorandum is undated, the context strongly suggests that it was drafted just before McNamara’s visit to South Vietnam in March 1964.

³⁴ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic AID (GER W) Viet-S 1/1/66 to AID (IBRO) 9, 10/1/66, Box 508, AID (GER W) Viet-S, 64-65, ‘From Coburn Kidd to Secretary of State. Subject: German Views on Vietnam, 19 May 1964’

³⁵ PA AA, B24, Bd.517, ‘Niederschrift über die deutsch-französische Konsultationen vom 5. Februar 1964 in Bonn über Ostasien und Südostasien,’ p.121; PA AA, B37, Bd.60, ‘Aufzeichnung von Abteilung I. Betreff: Vietnam, März 1964, n.d.’

³⁶ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations POL Asia 1/1/64 to POL Asia SE, 1/1/1964, Box 1897, POL - Political Affairs & REL, Asia SE, 1/1/1964, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler, Werner Klingeberg, Marshall Green and William Watts. Subject: Discussions on Southeast Asia, 2 April 1964.’ On Bassler’s dismissal of

countries would be “compelled to come to an arrangement” and, subsequently, turn into “Chinese satellites.”³⁷ It is moreover crucial to appreciate that Bassler was a man of his time, that his view of the future was shaped by the past. Regardless of whether it was the Korean War, Mao’s triumph over the Kuomintang, or Hitler’s annexation of Czechoslovakia, the principal lesson was that action was better than inaction.³⁸ Bassler saw no other alternative, but to press on.

The VWP’s 9th Plenum

Reading these lugubrious appraisals, it is reasonable to assume that the atmosphere in the GDR embassy would be one of jubilation. After all, South Vietnam was disintegrating. NLF guerrillas were swarming the countryside. A communist takeover had become more likely than ever before. Alas, it was not. There remained a palpable angst that the conflict was spiralling out of control. The militant language of their DRV counterparts left the East Germans in no doubt that they intended to accelerate the liberation struggle.³⁹ This came through loud and clear in private exchanges. The ICC Liaison Officer, Colonel Ha Van Lau, emphasised that partisans had “made good use” of the “uncertain situation.” In the aftermath of the coup, Eckhart Bibow was informed that more than 560 strategic hamlets and approximately 3.000 enemies had been liquidated.⁴⁰ Bibow received a similar report from the central committee member, Doang Thang. “A new situation has developed,” he said. Whereas the Diem regime had at least succeeded in gaining “some influence” among the masses, the military junta had

French view that Ho Chi Minh was “not a communist” and that the DRV president would “continue to be aligned with the Chinese,” see TNA, FO371/175501, ‘Mr J.L. Taylor to J.E. Cable. Subject: Account of Mr. Cabot Lodge’s visit to Bonn on 24th August for Discussions on Viet-Nam: German commitment to Viet-Nam, 27 August 1964’

³⁷ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations POL Asia 1/1/64 to POL Asia SE, 1/1/1964, Box 1897, POL - Political Affairs & REL, Asia SE, 1/1/1964, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler, Werner Klingeberg, Marshall Green and William Watts. Subject: Discussions on Southeast Asia, 2 April 1964’; PA AA, B37, Bd.105, ‘Aufzeichnung von Abteilung I. Betreff: SEATO-Konferenz in Manila, 5. Mai 1964’

³⁸ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic AID (GER W) Viet-S 1/1/66 to AID (IBRO) 9, 10/1/66, Box 508, AID (GER W) Viet-S, 64-65, ‘From Coburn Kidd to Secretary of State. Subject: German Views on Vietnam, 19 May 1964’; NARA RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Political & Defence, Political Affairs & Relations POL Asia 1/1/64 to POL Asia SE, 1/1/1964, Box 1897, POL - Political Affairs & REL, Asia SE, 1/1/1964, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Hilmar Bassler, Werner Klingeberg, Marshall Green and William Watts. Subject: Discussions on Southeast Asia, 2 April 1964’

³⁹ PA MfAA, G-A326, ‘Einschätzung der Haltung der Führung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams und der Regierung der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam zu den ideologischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten in der internationalen kommunistischen Arbeiterbewegung sowie zu innen- und aussenpolitischen Problemen, 14. November 1963,’ p.55

⁴⁰ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.153/63 über eine Information, gegeben von Gen. Oberst Ha Van Lau, Chef der Verbindungsmission der Volksarmee der DRV bei der CIC, 28. November 1963,’ p.274

no support whatsoever. “The VWP,” Bibow was told, “is sticking to its old reunification conception. The enemy has to be fought and beaten until he is ready to negotiate with the NLF.” Thanh did not deny that the struggle would be “long” and “difficult.” He was, nevertheless, adamant that there was a “real possibility” of “shortening” it.⁴¹

East German reaction to this explicit endorsement of armed struggle was telling. Josef Hegen proposed to the DRV’s chargé d’affaires that Hanoi take advantage of “legal organisations.” It was not an outlandish idea. Both the November Coup and the rebels’ triumphs on the battlefield had strengthened North Vietnam’s bargaining position. Besides, the DRV’s military measures were fraught with risk. It was testing the patience of the most powerful state in existence. Washington, Hegen warned, aided and abetted by Bonn, would utilise its financial might to win over the inhabitants.⁴² His intimation was plain: Hanoi was underestimating the other side’s superiority and should counteract escalation through mediation.⁴³ Hoang Bac was unimpressed. Drawing on de Gaulle’s proposal, he emphasised that North Vietnam could “not agree with such a viewpoint.” The people, he argued, needed to choose their own government. And, in any case, the DRV could not “revert from a socialist-back to a neutralist policy.”⁴⁴

Despite their comrades’ bullishness, the East Germans were mindful of Hanoi’s own domestic problems. As Tuong Vu points out, it is “easy to overlook the weaknesses of North Vietnam” - especially when surveying the chaos below the 17th parallel.⁴⁵ Perhaps the reason why these weaknesses have been overlooked is because chroniclers have little access to

⁴¹ PA MfAA, A8570, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.148/63 über ein Gespräch zwischen dem Genossen Doan Thanh, Leiter des Sekretariats der Kommission für Aussenpolitik im ZK der PWV und dem Genossen Bibow am 21. November 1963,’ pp.261-263. Interestingly, the DRV chargé d’affaires in Beijing likewise told Josef Hegen that whereas the Diem regime had secured some support from certain sectors of the population, the military did not have any public endorsement. See SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A2/20 441, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Gen. Botschafter Hegen mit dem Geschäftsträger der DRV, Gen. Hoang Bac, am 11. November 1963,’ p.278.

⁴² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20 441, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Gen. Botschafter Hegen mit dem Geschäftsträger der DRV, Gen. Hoang Bac, am 11. November 1963,’ pp.278-284

⁴³ On East German emphasis on the Moscow Declaration, see PA MfAA, A8741, ‘Schneidewind an Berggold, 24. März 1964’ pp.68-70. On GDR concern that their ally was placing too much weight on militarism see, for instance, PA MfAA, G-A326, ‘Einschätzung der Haltung der Führung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams und der Regierung der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam zu den ideologischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten in der internationalen kommunistischen Arbeiterbewegung sowie zu innen- und aussenpolitischen Problemen, 14. November 1963,’ p.23; PA MfAA, A8713, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. AEA. Betreff: Information über die Lage in Südvietnam und die gegenwärtige Haltung der Nationalen Front für die Befreiung Südvietsams sowie der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam zur Lösung der nationalen Frage, 3. Dezember 1963’ pp.29-30; PA MfAA, C936/76, ‘Übersetzung aus “Thong Nhat” (“Einheit”) vom 27. Dezember 1963. Die Revolution in Südvietnam ist ein goldener Prüfstein für einen Revolutionär,’ p.33

⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20 441, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Gen. Botschafter Hegen mit dem Geschäftsträger der DRV, Gen. Hoang Bac, am 11. November 1963,’ pp.278-284

⁴⁵ T. Maddux and D. Labrosse (eds.), ‘Tuong Vu, Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology,’ *Roundtable Review*, Volume 20, Number 2 (September 2018), p.31

available documentation. But make no mistake, the DRV was stagnating. The previous spring, Le Duan had stressed that North Vietnam needed to create its “own autarchic economy” and, echoing Maoist dialectic, build socialism “out of our own strength.”⁴⁶ During his inaugural meeting with Duan, Ambassador Bergold was told that the present agricultural situation was “not bad,” yet the people “needed to make sacrifices” and that a “revolutionary spirit” was required.⁴⁷ Still, Duan’s mantras were nothing more than platitudes. The DRV leadership, Bergold pointed out, was perfectly aware of the “catastrophic, economic situation.” Other policymakers, he emphasised, often conveyed signs of “hopelessness” and “helplessness.”⁴⁸ The deputy chairman of the committee for science, for example, claimed that starvation had led more than five-hundred citizens to commit suicide in 1963. A particularly serious omen, Bergold reflected, for a country with Buddhist traditions.⁴⁹

From a certain standpoint, then, North Vietnam resembled a house of cards. Its people were emaciated and starving. But not only were they starving, they were, as Duan had implied to Bergold, being encouraged to make personal sacrifices. According to the GDR’s cultural attaché, during the so-called “week of struggle,” workers forwent an entire month’s worth of wages and even little girls handed over their jewellery for the “blood-related South.”⁵⁰ Quoting the deputy chief of the protocol, Bergold recorded that the food shortage was further aggravated by Hanoi’s need to support its “troops in South Vietnam and Laos.”⁵¹ Clearly, DRV leaders were making a vigorous effort to enlist the help of all its citizens and rally them around the flag. Duan, in the words of Hang Nguyen, “was going for broke.”⁵²

Notwithstanding this national mobilisation, East German interest remained fixed on Hanoi’s stance in the Sino-Soviet split. Its framing of the VWP’s 9th Plenum was a case in point. Just like contemporary historians, they recognised its significance. Yet Vietnamese

⁴⁶ PA MfAA, A8705, ‘Avançons ardemment pour l’accomplissement avec succès du premier plan quinquennat (Causerie du Camarade Le Duan, devant la Conférence de diffusion des Résolutions du 8ème Plénum du CC du Parti, 18 Mai, 1963),’ pp.4-27. To compare Le Duan’s words with Mao Zedong’s emphasis on self-reliance, see Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.180

⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktennotiz 144/63 über Besuch des Genossen Bergold bei Genossen Le Duan, Erster Sekretär der PWV, am 12. November 1963,’ p.112

⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, ‘Übersicht und Einschätzung der Antrittsbesuche des Botschafters Wolfgang Bergold in der Zeit vom 2. Oktober bis zum 9. November 1963, 13. November 1963,’ p.77

⁴⁹ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Information Nr. 2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,’ p.61

⁵⁰ PA MfAA, A8713, ‘Aufzeichnung von Matzke. Betreff: Information über die Durchführung der “Kampfwoche gegen die USA-Imperialisten und ihre Lakaien, zur Steigerung der Produktion und zur Unterstützung der Landsleute im Süden” vom 15. bis 22. Dezember 1963, 8. Januar 1964,’ pp.24-25

⁵¹ PA MfAA, A8713, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.152/63 über ein Gespräch zwischen Botschafter Bergold und Botschafter Tovmassian am 30. November 1963,’ p.10. On Hanoi sending troops, see also Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to War*, p.159

⁵² Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, p.65

reunification was no more than a sideshow. Only Rolf Müller, the GDR's military attaché, emphasised the magnitude of the decisions taken. Relying on intelligence from Colonel Nguyen Van Thanh, he reported that the plenum judged the South Vietnamese people "victorious" in the first phase of the struggle, and that "a new stage" had begun, meaning a "race between both sides for victory." 1964 was defined as "the most important year," with the DRV being the "hinterland" of the revolution. "The central committee estimates that, in two or three years, favourable conditions for final victory will be guaranteed in South Vietnam," Müller wrote.⁵³ Nevertheless, for the East Germans, the summit embodied first and foremost Duan's endeavour to expunge the party's "wavering elements," as well as dictate its future political programme.⁵⁴

Researchers still know far too little about the 9th Plenum. Access to archival evidence remains guarded and elusive. At the beginning of the summit, Ho warned that anyone who divulged information would be considered a "traitor to the party."⁵⁵ For GDR officials, though, these silences were, in their own way, crucial pieces of evidence. The fact that not even the dates of the plenary session were published offered them hope that Duan had failed to impose his own personal will.⁵⁶ Furthermore, notwithstanding Vietnamese reticence, the embassy was provided with a surprising amount of material. This material, of course, needs to be treated with care. The informants were Ung Van Khiem (described by Bergold as the "centre of the Marxist-Leninist faction"), Duong Bach Mai (one of Le Duan's foremost critics) and Ambassador Tovmassian, all of whom were pro-Soviet and inclined to skew the narrative. There is no reason to be cynical, however. Coinciding themes between the GDR's account and present-day historians are unmistakable. Tovmassian revealed to Bergold that the session had

⁵³ BArch-MA, DVW1/6427, 'Information von Militärattache Rolf Müller in Hanoi. Inhalt: Stellungnahme zum Kommuniqué' des 9. Plenums des ZK der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 6. Februar 1964'

⁵⁴ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Vermerk des Genossen Botschafter Bergold vom 10. Dezember 1963 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei,' p.125; PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Einschätzung der Entwicklung der politischen Situation in der DRV nach dem 9. Plenum des ZK der PWV im Dezember 1963/Januar 1964, 27. Mai 1964,' p.72

⁵⁵ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Information Nr. 2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,' p.62; PA MfAA, A8749, 'Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi. Betreff: Information über den 9. Plenum des ZK der PdWV, 8. Februar 1964,' p.65. Scholarly evaluations of the debates have so far relied on anecdotal history. Pierre Asselin has even suggested that the discussions might not have been recorded. See Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to War*, p.163 and Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, p.537. Some of the speeches, though, have been published. See, for instance, Le Duan, *Some Questions Concerning the International Tasks of our Party. Speech at the Ninth Plenum of the Third Central Committee of the Viet Nam Workers' Party (December 1963)* (Peking, 1964), as well as a truncated version of the Chief Editor of Nhan Dan, Hoang Tung's address in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/437, 'Auszüge aus der Rede des Genossen Hoang Tung auf der Tagung zum Studium der Resolutionen des 9. Plenums des ZK der Partei (Zeitschrift Tuyen Huan, 4/64),' pp.90-98

⁵⁶ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Vermerk des Genossen Botschafter Bergold vom 10. Dezember 1963 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei,' p.125

initially been scheduled for September, but Duan's initial gambit was rebuffed. After assuring Khiem that the plenum would "bring no surprises," that it would merely profess support for the Moscow Declaration, as well as offer a discussion on "revisionism" and "dogmatism," the general assembly opened on 22 November. Duan's inaugural address lasted the entire day. Between 23- and 27 November, working groups were formed to study the report and, after twenty-four hours' rest, party members assembled to debate the VWP's future political programme. On 5 December, the plenum was adjourned, but reconvened at the beginning of the new year. After a further week of discussions, the plenum came to an end on 11 January.⁵⁷

The desultory fragments of information, which the East Germans accrued, reveal that two items were on the agenda: First, the situation within the international communist movement, as well as the VWP's relationship with other parties. And second, the situation in South Vietnam.⁵⁸ The discussions were intensive and extensive. Every attendant was given an unlimited time to express their opinion. Underwriting William Duiker's analysis, the GDR ambassador reported that Ho Chi Minh had "made a helpless impression."⁵⁹ Khiem, in contrast, spoke for three solid hours, insisting that the VWP resolve its disagreements with Moscow. His proposal was backed by fifty middle-ranking functionaries, who voiced concern that public endorsement of China would cripple the DRV's frail economy.⁶⁰ According to Pommerening, the sessions also included separate reports on the fraternal parties. Aside from Albania, all European states were judged to have "revisionist tendencies."⁶¹ A further component was foreign interference. Although the embassy complained that Beijing was trying to influence the

⁵⁷ PA MfAA, A8713, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.152/63 über ein Gespräch zwischen Botschafter Bergold und Botschafter Tovmassian, am 30 November 1963,' p.11; PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Information Nr.2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,' p.60

⁵⁸ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Information Nr. 2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,' p.60. For the resolutions of the 9th Plenum, see LBJL, *The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson. President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country - Vietnam, Box 157, 'Resolution of the 9th Plenum of the Viet Nam Workers' Party Central Committee, December 1963'*; E. Miller (ed.), *The Vietnam War: A Documentary Reader* (Oxford, 2016), pp.96-99

⁵⁹ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Vermerk des Genossen Botschafter Bergold vom 10. Dezember 1963 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei,' p.127; Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, p.537

⁶⁰ PA MfAA, A8749, 'Abschrift von Pommerening: Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht für Monat November 1963 des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi, 19 Januar 1964,' p.64; PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Information Nr. 2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,' pp.59-60

⁶¹ PA MfAA, A8749, 'Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi. Betreff: Information über den 9. Plenum des ZK der PdWV, 8. Februar 1964,' p.65. This evidence appears to hold true, when juxtaposed with information received by other Soviet Bloc countries. Although the Poles knew surprisingly little about the 9th Plenum (far less, it seems, than the East Germans) Margaret Gnoinska notes that, among the materials prepared for the discussions, Poland was singled out as a "prime example" of a socialist nation returning to capitalism. See Gnoinska, 'Poland and East and South East Asia,' pp.713-714

debate through the printing press, Tovmassian informed Bergold that the Kremlin was playing the same game. On the third day of the summit, Le Duan received a personal invite from Khrushchev to visit Moscow.⁶²

Overall, GDR diplomats felt that the pro-Chinese faction had misjudged its influence.⁶³ In his appraisal, Bergold contended that the “brave conduct” of certain central committee members, as well as respected party affiliates, had forced Duan to “compromise.”⁶⁴ There was noticeable relief when Bach Mai disclosed that the “anticipated party cleansing” would not take place and that the VWP intended to maintain strong fraternal ties.⁶⁵ In practice, this held true. Both before and after the 9th Plenum, Bergold remarked upon the “accented warmth” of the Vietnamese. On 14 January, for example, two renowned Sinophiles invited Bergold to an “intimate dinner” and thanked him for his country’s fiscal support.⁶⁶ There was an appreciation, therefore, that key differences persisted between Beijing and Hanoi.⁶⁷ Whereas the former was attacking East Berlin nearly as much as Moscow, the latter remained averse to polemicizing directly against the Soviet Bloc. In fact, the embassy noted that its press organs were writing far more about East Germany than any other socialist state.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Bergold warned that it might be nothing more than a fleeting triumph. Although the ambassador was pleased that Duan had accepted Khrushchev’s invitation, he

⁶² PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Abschrift von Pommerening. Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht für Monat November 1963 des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi, 19 Januar 1964,’ p.64. For Tovmassian’s own account of the Khrushchev-Le Duan correspondence, see PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Aktenvermerk über Aussprachen des Genossen Bergold mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter in der DRV, Gen. Tovmassian, am 11. Januar 1964 in der sowjetischen Botschaft,’ p.69. On East German complaints about Chinese pressure, see PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Vermerk des Genossen Botschafter Bergold vom 10. Dezember 1963 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei,’ pp.124-125; PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Abschrift von Pommerening: Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht für Monat November 1963 des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi, 19 Januar 1964,’ p.63

⁶³ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Information Nr. 2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,’ pp.61-62; PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Einschätzung der Entwicklung der politischen Situation in der DRV nach dem 9. Plenum des ZK der PWV im Dezember 1963/Januar 1964, 27. Mai 1964,’ p.72

⁶⁴ PA MfAA, A8725, ‘Information über das am 21. Januar 1964 veröffentlichte Kommuniqué des 9. Plenums des ZK der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV), 23. Januar 1964,’ p.29

⁶⁵ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Vermerk des Genossen Botschafter Bergold vom 10. Dezember 1963 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei,’ pp.126-127. See also PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi. Betreff: Information über den 9. Plenum des ZK der PdWV, 8. Februar 1964,’ pp.64-65

⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktennotiz 144/63 über den Besuch des Genossen Bergold bei Genossen Le Duan, Erster Sekretär der PWV, am 12. November 1963,’ p.112; PA MfAA, A8734, ‘Aktennotiz Nr.6/64 über Gespräche mit Gen. Nguyen Van Vinh, Präsident des Zentralen Wiedervereinigungskomitees und Stellv. Außenminister Hoang Van Loi, während eines Abendessens im Sitz des Komitees, am 14. Januar 1964,’ pp.241-243

⁶⁷ PA MfAA, A8725, ‘Information über das am 21. Januar 1964 veröffentlichte Kommuniqué des 9. Plenums des ZK der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams (PWV), 23. Januar 1964,’ p.27

⁶⁸ PA MfAA, G-A324, ‘Aktenvermerk über Aussprachen des Genossen Bergold mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter in der DRV, Gen. Tovmassian, am 11. Januar 1964,’ pp.70-71; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/444, ‘Protokoll über die Mietgliederversammlung am 3. Dezember 1963,’ p.74

worried about the first secretary's expanding influence. The addition of three Sinophiles to the politburo (most notably, Xuan Thuy) had allowed Duan to place his followers in key positions.⁶⁹ True, the party "cleansing" had been shelved, yet *Nhan Dan* announced on 21 January that an "ideological rectification" programme would take place. The objective, in the words of Le Duc Tho, was to overcome the "spirit of right-wing deviation" through "freedom of thought," but, simultaneously, maintain "organisation and discipline." Le's language struck Bibow reminiscent of Mao's "let 100 flowers bloom" campaign. The pro-Chinese faction, he argued, wanted to isolate and repress those who represented the Marxist-Leninist line, as well as prepare the VWP "ideologically" to withstand outward influences.⁷⁰ Hanoi had reached a crossroad. On the domestic front, it was mirroring Beijing, yet, internationally, there had been no change in its stance. The East Germans were unsure how long this would last.

Attempting to Unfetter Hanoi

February was a busy month in the GDR capital. Ulbricht's office files are testament to that. An endless stream of news criss-crossed between East Berlin and Moscow. The leitmotiv was always the same: Communist cohesion had broken down, socialist unity had ceased to exist. The Chinese had snubbed all appeals to stop the polemics. They stood accused of launching a "broad campaign" against the socialist camp, as well as amplifying its "subversive, splitting activities."⁷¹ On 4 February, the polemics reached a climactic tone. Beijing charged the CPSU with reversing "enemies and comrades," as well as "seeking Soviet-U.S. cooperation for the domination of the world."⁷² Just how serious the Ulbricht government took this challenge was evident in its rhetoric. Beijing's methods and political substance were denounced as "Trotskyism under new historical conditions."⁷³ It had opened up a "new ideological front."⁷⁴ The schism, thus, necessitated a response.

⁶⁹ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Information Nr. 2 über das Novemberplenium der PWV und die Entwicklung innerhalb der Partei (Nach Informationen aus Gesprächen mit Botschaftern und vietnamesischen Genossen), 15. Januar 1964,' pp.61-62

⁷⁰ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Einschätzung der Entwicklung der politischen Situation in der DRV nach dem 9. Plenum des ZK der PWV im Dezember 1963/Januar 1964, 27. Mai 1964,' pp.72-74

⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3609, 'Brief vom ZK der KPdSU an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 13. [12.] Februar 1964,' p.2

⁷² Editorial Departments of Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) and Hongqi (Red Flag), *The Leaders of the CPSU are the Greatest Splitters of our Times: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (VII)* (Beijing, 1964), pp.1-62

⁷³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/921, 'Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands Zentralkomitee an die 1. Sekretäre der Bezirks- und Kreisleitungen der SED. Betreff: Stellungnahme zur Spaltertätigkeit der Führung der KP Chinas (Beschluss des Politbüros vom 18. Februar 1964), 16. März 1964,' p.17, p.19

⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3536, 'Der Kampf der KPdSU um die Geschlossenheit der kommunistischen Weltbewegung. (Bericht auf dem Februar-Plenum des ZK der KPdSU 1964), 31. März 1964,' p.104

The response, as so often the case, was formulated in Moscow. On 12 February, East German policymakers received an adjuration from the CPSU to confront Beijing's "splitting activities." "Now," the memorandum read, "the true goals of the CCP leaders are perfectly clear: Not only are they calling for the communist movement to split, but they are implementing it through their practical activities." "The Marxist-Leninists," it continued, "have no higher duty than to protect the unity of the international communist movement and defend its Leninist principles."⁷⁵ A week later, as Sergey Radchenko observes, the chief ideologue in the Kremlin laid down the "basis for public action against China." The time had come, Mikhail Suslov declared, for "collective measures" and a "more resolute rebuff against Beijing's factional activities."⁷⁶ These words were nothing less than a call to arms.

It was in this context that East Berlin evaluated its bilateral ties with Hanoi. A day after assuring Khrushchev of GDR patronage, Ulbricht sent Ho Chi Minh a personal letter.⁷⁷ The word *personal* is key. Ulbricht's coldness, his disregard for empathy and kindness, is well-documented in the reflections of those who knew him best. The words "thank you" or "please" did not exist in his vocabulary. For him, they were time-consuming and pointless.⁷⁸ Yet this letter was different. It was one of those rare occasions when Ulbricht showed affection. He reminisced at length about Ho's visit to East Berlin in 1957 and underlined the GDR's "great respect" for the president's "tireless efforts" in constructing socialism. Interestingly, at the end of the letter, Ulbricht included an invitation. He proposed that the "esteemed comrade" visit the GDR over the summer as his own personal guest. "It would be a great pleasure," he wrote, "to receive your thoughts and your confirmation."⁷⁹

It can hardly be a coincidence that Ulbricht inked his letter at the exact moment when the Soviet Bloc was preparing a united ideological crusade. It was, rather, part of the attempt to "smash" the CCP leaders' programme "theoretically, politically and ideologically."⁸⁰ In the same week, the head of the MfAA's Vietnam section, Kurt Schneidewind, drafted the annual

⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3609, 'Brief vom ZK der KPdSU an das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 13. [12.] Februar 1964,' pp.1-5

⁷⁶ Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens*, p.96. For Suslov's entire report, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3536, 'Der Kampf der KPdSU um die Geschlossenheit der kommunistischen Weltbewegung. (Bericht auf dem Februar-Plenum des ZK der KPdSU 1964), 31. März 1964,' pp.1-144

⁷⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3609, 'Ulbricht an Chruschtschow, 19. Februar 1964,' p.14

⁷⁸ A. Linke, "Ab morgen bist du Leibarzt." *Vom Provinzarzt zum Krebsforscher* (Berlin, 1999), pp.246-247. On Ulbricht's character, see also Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, p.314; *Die Zeit*, Nr.26/1963, 'Der Ulbricht, den ich kannte. Erinnerungen aus Moskau und Ostberlin, 28. Juni 1963'

⁷⁹ PA MfAA, A8733, 'Ulbricht an den Vorsitzenden der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, Genossen Ho Chi Minh, 20. Februar 1964,' pp.31-32

⁸⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11604, 'Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Internationale Verbindung. Betreff: Information an die Mitglieder und Kandidaten des Politbüros über die Auseinandersetzungen der KPdSU mit der Politik und den Auffassungen der chinesischen Führer in der Zeit vom 3. April bis 23. Mai 1964, 26. Mai 1964,' p.36

plan for future relations. He acknowledged that the majority of the VWP's headship supported Beijing's "left-wing opportunistic" position and that the 9th Plenum had provided Duan with a platform to impose his pro-Chinese line. He pointed out, however, that, contrary to Beijing, the "progressive forces" were challenging the Sinophile agenda. It was crucial, Schneidewind contended, that East Berlin offer assistance and thwart Beijing's "harmful" influence. Schneidewind drew a straight line between counteracting China and Vietnamese reunification. The GDR, he argued, should continue to support Hanoi in finding a "peaceful solution," as well as publicize a "broad solidarity campaign" for the "struggling patriots." Active political, moral and material support, he emphasised, would challenge China's claim to leadership over the national liberation movement. Accordingly, Schneidewind noted that East Berlin had decided to elevate the Vietcong's press agency to an "official representation."⁸¹

Schneidewind's blueprint, then, revealed that fraternal assistance was a means, rather than an end. Its purpose was to confront and curtail the CCP's erroneous dogma. This is not to argue that East Berlin opposed the communisation of South Vietnam. On the contrary, Schneidewind stressed that all national liberation movements were receiving active support and every NLF victory would be celebrated. Nevertheless, concern persisted about tactics.⁸² In the aftermath of the 9th Plenum, there was a feeling that reunification had acquired a "new" and "dangerous" component.⁸³ Hanoi's embrace of Mao's "erroneous and out-dated" theories, Müller warned, meant that there was a very real prospect of war breaking out.⁸⁴ Sure enough, on 14 March, Hoang Van Tien informed Bergold that Washington might expand the conflict to boost RVN morale and, in turn, create an "atmosphere of war psychosis" above the 17th parallel. Hoang did not even pretend that the prospect of maintaining peace was "very remote."⁸⁵

Cognisant of the gravity of the situation, East Berlin sought alternatives. As chronicled in the previous chapter, there had been mounting interest in de Gaulle's neutralisation proposal. Bergold and Tovmassian affirmed each other's belief that the French had sought to broker a

⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, 'Aufzeichnung von Abteilungsleiter, Kurt Schneidewind. Betreff: Jahresplan für die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der DRV im Jahre 1964, 13. Februar 1964,' pp.98-107

⁸² PA MfAA, A8741, 'Schneidewind an Bergold, 24. März 1964,' pp.68-69

⁸³ PA MfAA, A8741, 'Bibow an das Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 1.AEA, Sektion Vietnam, Genosse Löbel, 20. Februar 1964, p.72

⁸⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/443, 'Protokoll der Berichts- und Wahlversammlung der SED in der Grundorganisation Hanoi am 4. Mai 1964,' p.35

⁸⁵ PA MfAA, A8734, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.30/64 über eine Information des Aussenministers über die Lage in Südvietnam, gegeben am 14. März 1964 für die Botschafter der sozialistischen Länder durch den stellv. Aussenminister der DRV, Gen. Hoang van Tien,' pp.204-205

deal between the DRV and Diem.⁸⁶ There remained uncertainty, however, about what de Gaulle's objectives were, especially in light of his subsequent decision to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing. East German eagerness to learn more led Bibow to call upon Charles Fourniau, a correspondent for the French communist magazine *L'Humanité*. A historian by trait, Fourniau had lived in Hanoi for the past three months and enjoyed personal contacts with Truong Chinh and To Huu. On this occasion, Bibow asked him to share his thoughts on French foreign policy. Fourniau estimated that de Gaulle was taking advantage of America's weak position to recover French influence in Southeast Asia, as well as speculating on the schism within the communist world. De Gaulle, Fourniau relayed, was "uniformly anti-Soviet" and the purpose of recognising China was to weaken the USSR. The French leader judged Moscow a much bigger threat, Fourniau explained, and was predisposed to assist Beijing in its ideological dispute.⁸⁷

This exchange captures beautifully just how complicated the quagmire had become. It illustrated that the bipolar order had crumbled. The two blocs had lost their functionality and cohesion. It no longer mattered either what side of the 17th parallel the participants were on, or what ideology they subscribed to. What mattered were state interests. And the East Germans were convinced that Paris and Beijing had, temporarily at least, mutual aims: To thwart the reduction of global tensions, as well as expunge U.S. and Soviet presence in Southeast Asia. At the heart of Vietnam, then, was a contest for *influence*. It was about regional hegemony, about challenging the authority of the two superpowers. What was most remarkable in this regard was that the GDR endorsed de Gaulle's idea. "France," its officials in Moscow asserted, "has [...] developed a concept that largely accounts for the realities in Asia and meets the expectations of the leading politicians in Southeast Asia."⁸⁸ From East Berlin's own standpoint, neutralisation offered a cheap and easy way of resolving an evermore dangerous problem. It would circumvent armed conflict and, in time, lead to Vietnamese unity through peaceful means.

Two chunks of evidence shared with Bergold offered hope that Hanoi might rethink Maoist militarism and consider de Gaulle's proposal. The first was Tovmassian's report on Le Duan's visit to Moscow. More often than not, chroniclers have portrayed the visit as a failure,

⁸⁶ PA MfAA, A8713, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.152/63 über ein Gespräch zwischen Botschafter Bergold und Botschafter Tovmassian am 30. November 1963,' p.9

⁸⁷ PA MfAA, A8733, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.18/64 über ein Gespräch des Genossen Bibow mit dem Korrespondenten der "L'Humanite" in Hanoi, Genossen Charles Fourniau, am 23 Januar 1964,' pp.19-22

⁸⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/159, 'Aufzeichnung der politischen Abteilung in Moskau. Betreff: Information zu einigen Aspekten der chinesischen Politik und der Haltung der Sowjetunion, 11. Februar 1964,' pp.18-21

insisting that Khrushchev rejected fraternal assistance.⁸⁹ The Soviet ambassador's first-hand account offers a different perspective. According to Tovmassian, at the preliminary meeting, Suslov had complained about Vietnamese polemics, which, he argued, were "directed against the CPSU." Duan in turn, insisted that they were designed to quash "misconceptions" within his party, above all, the misconception that the struggle in South Vietnam had "hit a dead-end." Suslov was unimpressed. "If the 9th Plenum report had not contained shrouded attacks against the central committee of the CPSU," he remarked, "we would have basically been in agreement." He warned Duan that if the polemics did not cease, then the CPSU would have to respond. But it was the four-and-a-half-hour discussion between Khrushchev and Duan that was most illuminating. Even from Tovmassian's partial account, the premier's contempt for the Chinese was palpable. There was genuine anger in his words, as he offered a long list of justifications for his policies, above all, on peaceful coexistence. Still, Khrushchev assured Duan that if, for instance, an American aircraft provoked the GDR, it would be shot down "without mercy," because that violated "sovereignty and security." These words would take on a new significance during the Tonkin Gulf Crisis. At the end of the discussion, Khrushchev jokingly introduced "Stalinist" Suslov, before asking the DRV delegation whether they were now willing to pose for pictures. Duan went along with the joke. Tovmassian's avowal that the meetings had been "extremely useful" and that they would no doubt have a positive impact on future relations were welcomed by Bergold.⁹⁰

But it was not only Tovmassian, who offered words of encouragement. The following week, Fourniau hinted to Bergold that Sino-Vietnamese relations were not as genial as presumed. In a meeting with French parliamentarians, Mao had responded with a "dismissive hand gesture," when he was told that they would be visiting Hanoi. "Why," he complained, "aren't you going to Korea?" This comment, Fourniau pointed out, had been made only a short while after Duan's stopover in Beijing.⁹¹ It was hardly an endorsement of Xuan Thuy's "as

⁸⁹ See for instance, Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, pp.7-9; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp.127-128; Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War*, p.180; Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, p.131. According to Margaret Gnoinska, the Soviets were surprised that the North Vietnamese never asked for military or economic aid. See Gnoinska, 'Poland and the Cold War,' p.710

⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.27/64 über ein Gespräch zwischen Genossen Bergold und Genossen Tovmassian am 5. März 1964 im Gebäude der sowjetischen Botschaft,' pp.151-156. The anecdote about Suslov being introduced as the "Stalinist" is mentioned in Olsen's work too. See Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, p.131

⁹¹ PA MfAA, A8733, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.31/64 über ein Gespräch mit dem Korrespondenten der "Humanite," Gen. Fourniau, am 11 März 1964 in der Botschaft der DDR,' p.27. Fourniau's information is corroborated by a report from the British consul-general in Hanoi, who received the same information from his French counterpart. Apparently, Mao's precise words were "Why are you going to North Vietnam? There is nothing to see there. Rather go to North Korea, where they know how to work." See LBJL, *The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969*, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, Box 3 [1 of 2], Folder 3, Vietnam Vol. VI, Memos, 3/63 [1

close as lips are to teeth” maxim the previous year. Besides, Fourniau felt that a distinction needed to be drawn when examining Hanoi’s reunification strategy. Whereas the propagated slogans of armed conflict were intended for the masses, he quoted Pham Van Dong privately admitting that the DRV was under no illusion about the length of the war and that it desired a “neutralist South Vietnam.”⁹²

On the surface, bilateral relations remained amiable too. Bergold’s plea for assistance in organising a solidarity campaign received broad support. He was invited to give a press conference on Bonn’s “militarism” and disclose “new information” about its manufacturing of missiles. In every conversation, Bergold reported, the Vietnamese had made it clear that they were offering so much support because of East Berlin’s own patronage for the NLF. He estimated that the mutilation of both Vietnam and Germany remained a strong bond. Decision-makers in Hanoi were inclined to equate the GDR’s policies with their own reunification struggle and, thus, predisposed to join ranks. Nevertheless, Bergold could not help but notice that the press coverage failed to mention East Berlin’s endeavours to solve the German question through *peaceful* means. This silence, he estimated, not to mention Hanoi’s public attacks against peaceful coexistence, were warning signs of how far Vietnamese policymakers had embraced Maoist militarism.⁹³

Bergold’s suspicions were confirmed a couple of days later at the so-called “Special Political Conference.” Interestingly, Pierre Asselin and Tuong Vu have interpreted the presidential speech in different ways. The former has surmised that Ho Chi Minh’s emphasis on peaceful reunification was an attempt to “use his popularity inside and outside the party to reassert more moderate policy lines.”⁹⁴ The East Germans, however, concurred with Vu that the address held symbolic significance.⁹⁵ Ho’s official endorsement of the 9th Plenum, above all, the perseverance to safeguard Marxist-Leninist “purity,” was judged an “important step” in Hanoi’s implementation of the “Chinese line.” Indeed, the East Germans found it far more difficult, thereafter, to assist the “progressive forces.” Those who had voiced misgivings about

of 2], ‘From Melvin L. Manfull to Department of State. Subject: Visit of French Parliamentary Delegation to Hanoi (7-12 February), 10 March 1964.’ On Le Duan telling Mao that he hoped to maintain cordial relations with the USSR, see Yang, ‘Changes in Mao Zedong’s Attitude,’ pp.27-28

⁹² PA MfAA, A8733, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.31/64 über ein Gespräch mit dem Korrespondenten der “Humanite,” Gen. Fourniau, am 11 März 1964,’ pp.27-29

⁹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Die Berichterstattung der Presse der DRV über den Kampf der DDR gegen das Streben Bonns nach Atomwaffen und die beabsichtigte Schaffung der multilateralen Atomstreitmacht, 24. März 1964,’ pp.157-163

⁹⁴ Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to War*, p.187. See also A. Cheng, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective* (London, 2002), pp.79-80

⁹⁵ Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution*, p.180. Ho’s entire speech can be found in PA MfAA, A8733, ‘Bericht des Präsidenten Ho Chi Minh auf der politischen Sonderkonferenz, März 1964,’ pp.33-50

Duan's agenda were either silenced or liquidated. The most blatant example was the sudden death of Duong Bach Mai. As previously noted, Bach Mai had shared top-secret information with the East Germans and had challenged Le Duan at the 9th Plenum. Bibow even went so far as to argue that he was at the centre of a forming group.⁹⁶ Yet, on 3 April, the 60-year-old collapsed during a National Assembly meeting and was pronounced dead twenty-four hours later.⁹⁷

It is difficult to know whether personal attachment caused GDR diplomats to dramatise the event. Martin Großheim points out that the Soviets were unconvinced that Bach Mai had been at the helm of an "organised group."⁹⁸ There are some signs, though, that Bibow was right to link Bach Mai's death with the pro-Chinese faction's "Stalinist methods."⁹⁹ Despite being a long-standing party member, as well as an old associate of Duan (both had been prison companions on Poulo Condore Island), his passing received surprisingly little news coverage.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, although VWP politburo members attended the funeral, the homage merely listed Bach Mai's titles and accolades within the party. Not one mention was made of either his past or his private life. Bibow noticed, too, that the attending Ung Van Khiem did not mingle with the DRV leadership, but remained on his own throughout the service.¹⁰¹ These observations do suggest, at the very least, that the Duan group was not particularly upset about Bach Mai's death.

Tellingly, it was at this point that Hanoi began to distance itself more openly from the Soviet Bloc. Rather than receive a reply from Ho about visiting East Berlin, Ulbricht was sent a letter from the central committee, which, like Beijing, rejected Khrushchev's proposal of convening an international conference. "We fear," it read, "that a hastily convened and not yet sufficiently prepared conference [...] will lead to a deep division in the socialist and the international communist movement."¹⁰² The VWP's open refusal to attend a summit, as well as its insistence on "thorough preparations," fuelled East German concern that Chinese influence was dominant. The central reason why North Vietnam had, so far, refrained from

⁹⁶ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: Einschätzung der Entwicklung der politischen Situation in der DRV nach dem 9. Plenum des ZK der PWV im Dezember 1963/Januar 1964, 27. Mai 1964,' pp.79-80

⁹⁷ PA MfAA, A8725, 'Bibow an Löbel, 9. April 1964,' p.63

⁹⁸ Großheim, "Revisionism" in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam,' p.460

⁹⁹ PA MfAA, A8725, 'Bibow an Löbel, 9. April 1964,' p.63

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. For Bach Mai's recollections about Le Duan's past, see PA MfAA, A8750, 'Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten in Hanoi über die ideologische Kampagne der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, 24. April 1964,' p.90

¹⁰¹ PA MfAA, A8725, 'Bibow an Löbel, 9. April 1964,' p.63

¹⁰² SAPMO-Barch, DY30/3667, 'Abschrift des Telegramms VVS 107/64 vom 22. April vom Genosse Bergold - Hanoi,' p.142

openly siding with Beijing, Bibow asserted, was due to its weak economy and its fear of losing fraternal support for the struggle in the South.¹⁰³

But even Hanoi's refusal to polemicize against the Soviet Bloc was coming into question. In April, the embassy was handed a transcript of Luu Qui Ky's "confidential report," entitled "Concrete Facts."¹⁰⁴ The director of the propaganda section went through the various stages of the schism and explicitly blamed the Soviet leadership. According to Luu, the Kremlin had, since 1956, attempted to force its will upon the other socialist countries. He attacked Khrushchev's treatment of Albania, his decision to deploy and remove the missiles from Cuba, as well as his refusal to sponsor national liberation movements. It was moreover remarkable that Luu echoed Chinese charges of the USSR "exploiting" North Vietnam, thus, blaming Soviet rulers implicitly for the domestic economic problems.¹⁰⁵ Nor was it Moscow alone, which felt the brunt of Luu's criticism. For the first time, East Germany was named. The SED, Luu contended, had both snubbed Hanoi's proposal for an international conference and disparaged the Chinese at its party congress.¹⁰⁶ Luu's bellicose tone was shocking. It was no longer disagreement, but resentment. As Schneidewind pointed out, Luu's speech was the "most open attack against the CPSU and Comrade Krushchev himself."¹⁰⁷

Just how serious the rift had become between the two countries was illustrated in East Germany's endeavour to counteract Hanoi's decision-making. On 5 June, the DRV ambassador informed the head of the cultural department, Horst Grunert, that many of the residing students would be returning home for the summer. Although he insisted that they would be back before

¹⁰³ PA MfAA, G-A324, 'Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: Einschätzung der Entwicklung der politischen Situation in der DRV nach dem 9. Plenum des ZK der PWV im Dezember 1963/Januar 1964, 27. Mai 1964,' p.78

¹⁰⁴ Martin Großheim has argued that Luu's report was published in the newspaper *Thong Nhat*. East German documentation, however, does not explicitly state this. On the contrary, the document is labelled "confidential" and "strictly confidential" by two different embassy officials. Luu's tone also makes it unlikely that it was, in fact, published. Instead, Gnoinska's claim that the Poles attained a copy of the report and subsequently shared it with the other Eastern European embassies seems probable. See Großheim, "Revisionism" in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam' p.474, Footnote 91; Gnoinska, 'Poland and East and Southeast Asia,' p.712. For the embassy describing the document as "confidential" and "strictly confidential," see PA MfAA, A8725 'Telegramm von Bibow an das Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 27. April 1964,' p.73; PA MfAA, A8725, 'Vertraulicher Bericht des Leiters der Abteilung Propaganda des ZK der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams über die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit mit sozialistischen Ländern, 20. Mai 1964,' p.77

¹⁰⁵ PA MfAA, A8725, 'Vertraulicher Bericht des Leiters der Abteilung Propaganda des ZK der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams über die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit mit sozialistischen Ländern (Aus einer Einschätzung des Gen. von der Becke, Handelspolitische Abteilung Hanoi, über vertrauliche Ausführungen des Gen Luu Quy Ki, Leiter der Abteilung Propaganda des Zentralkomitees der Partei der Werktätigen der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, Vizepräsident des Komitees für die kulturellen Verbindungen im Ausland und Direktor der Zeitschrift „Thong Nhat,“ vom 25. März 1964), 20. Mai 1964,' p.79

¹⁰⁶ PA MfAA, A8725, "Konkrete Fakten" - Bericht von Luu Qui Ky, Vizepräsident des Komitees für kulturelle Beziehungen mit dem Ausland, Leiter der Propagandaabteilung beim ZK der Partei, Direktor der Zeitschrift *Thong Nhat*, n.d.' pp.84-85

¹⁰⁷ PA MfAA, A8750, 'Schneidewind an Bergold, 22 April 1964,' p.84

the start of term, it struck Grunert as suspicious. There was no doubt in his mind that the decision had been taken for “political” reasons, more specifically, to ensure that the students received a “thorough political education” in Hanoi’s image. This, he informed his superiors, “was not in the interest of the GDR.”¹⁰⁸ It was an incredible statement. Grunert was proposing that East Berlin *interfere* in its ally’s national affairs. Even more remarkably, Erich Honecker agreed. On 16 June, he informed the politburo that, under international law, East Berlin was not obligated to insist that the students leave. It was, therefore, decided that those who did not want to return could stay.¹⁰⁹ Honecker seemed unperturbed about damaging bilateral ties. Perhaps he did not think it would make much difference. Two days beforehand, the MfAA had sent him and Ulbricht a memorandum, which estimated that Hanoi had “now definitively given up” both its “vacillating position” and “role as mediator.”¹¹⁰ It was against this backdrop that executives not only feigned ignorance as to the whereabouts of approximately fifteen absconded students, but expressed a willingness to offer them asylum.¹¹¹

Honecker’s ruling can be considered an act of humanitarianism. Already at the turn of the year, two pupils had complained to the MfAA that they were under systematic surveillance and, owing to their rejection of the official party line, in danger of being sent home. Their angst was self-evident.¹¹² The students feared for their personal fate, above all, the prospect of

¹⁰⁸ PA MfAA, A8738, ‘Grunert an Krolikowski. Betreff: Fernheimreise der in der DDR studierenden vietnamesischen Studenten, 18. Juni 1964,’ pp.91-92

¹⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2/935, ‘Protokoll Nr.20/64 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am Dienstag, den 16. Juni 1964,’ p.3

¹¹⁰ PA MfAA, A8725, ‘Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams bezieht eindeutig chinesische Position (Information der 1. AEA vom 12. Juni 1964 für Gen. Ulbricht, Matern, Stoph, Honecker, Prof Hager und Axen),’ pp.96-97. The politburo received a further memorandum two weeks later, which also estimated that the DRV had, essentially, completed its transition onto the Chinese line. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/8, ‘Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen. Betreff: Information an die Mitglieder und Kandidaten des Politbüros. Einschätzung der Situation in der internationalen kommunistischen Bewegung (Mitte Juni, 1964), 23. Juni 1964,’ p.47

¹¹¹ PA MfAA, A8738, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung zwischen Gen. Schneidewind und den Botschaftsrat der Botschaft der DRV in der DDR, Gesandten Nguyen Duc Thien, am 27. Juli 1964,’ p.51; PA MfAA, A8738, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Schneidewind mit dem Rat der Botschaft der DRV in der DRV, Genossen Nguyen Duc Thiem, im MfAA am 20. August 1964,’ pp.25-28; BStU, Archiv der Zentralstelle, Nr.339, ‘Aufzeichnung von Leiter der AIG, Hauptmann Franke. Betreff: Einschätzung der Lage unter den vietnamesischen Studenten in Leipzig, 11. November 1966.’ The exact number of students, who refused to return home is not entirely clear. Großheim estimates the figure at around twenty. Two Stasi memorandums claimed that fifteen students (nine in Leipzig and six in Dresden) had “disappeared” in July 1964. The same number was cited in an MfAA memorandum in August 1964. The same memorandum, however, noted that a further three students had been identified; one in Berlin-Lichtenberg and two more in Leipzig. See PA MfAA, A8738, ‘Aufzeichnung von Helbing. Betreff: Vietnamesischen Studierende in der DDR, 18. August 1964,’ p.30. For the figures cited by the Stasi, see BStU, Vietnam Abt. X MfS-Abt. X, Nr.652, Hauptabteilung XX/3/III, ‘Aufzeichnung von Leutnant Schwanz. Betreff: Information über die Situation unter den vietnamesischen Studenten und Aspiranten der DDR, 17. Dezember 1966,’ pp.572-573

¹¹² PA MfAA, A8738, ‘Aufzeichnung von Lange. Betreff: Vietnamesische Studierende in der DDR, 24. Januar 1964,’ p.116

political persecution and a prison cell.¹¹³ These fears were not unfounded. According to a Vietnamese translator, who worked for the GDR's news agency, the returning students had to attend a four-week seminar on both the VWP's "correct" political outlook and GDR revisionism. The same informant disclosed that dissenting students were branded "traitors" of the party.¹¹⁴ It was striking, too, how grateful the students were for East German assistance. One individual sent a heart-warming letter to the minister for internal affairs, thanking him for the "great help" during those "dark hours" in the summer of 1964. The note revealed that Hanoi had considered Maoist dogma "the most revolutionary" and had prohibited students from interacting with GDR citizens.¹¹⁵

But despite East German willingness to assist apostates of the "pro-Chinese" line on their own soil, the attempt to unfetter Hanoi from Beijing had clearly failed. There was no opposition in the VWP strong enough to challenge Le Duan. Ho and Khiem had been sidelined. Bach Mai was dead. Any influence, which the East Germans had enjoyed, seemed to have vanished. Hanoi and East Berlin were pursuing disparate aims and objectives. Bilateral relations had broken down.

The Obligation of Alliance

Maintaining strong state relations was exactly what plagued Adenauer's successor in the run up to the Vietnam War. On 16 October 1963, Ludwig Erhard was sworn in as chancellor. It was Erhard's great misfortune to become leader right at the point when the geopolitical structure was undergoing major modifications. In the post-war world, Germany had been at the heart of the East and West dispute. For almost two decades, it had dominated the international scene. Yet the signing of the PTBT, as well as the superpowers' tacit agreement to respect each other's sphere of influence, pushed reunification into the background. In the same week, John McCloy warned Adenauer that he should not presume that the world only revolved around a "German axis." There were "other great forces about" and

¹¹³ BStU, Archiv der Zentralstelle, Nr.339, 'Einschätzung der vietnamesischen Studenten an der Technischen Universität Dresden. Telefonische Aufforderung des Gen. Oberstleutnant Irmeler,' 11. November 1966, p.17; BStU, Vietnam Abt. X MfS-Abt. X, Nr.652, Hauptabteilung XX/3/III, 'Aufzeichnung von Leutnant Schwanz. Betreff: Information über die Situation unter den vietnamesischen Studenten und Aspiranten der DDR, 17. Dezember 1966,' pp.573-574

¹¹⁴ PA MfAA, A8738, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.71/64 über verleumderische Äußerung gegenüber der DDR von den vietnamesischen Studenten, die sich z.Zt. zur Schulung in der DRV befinden, 25. August 1964,' p.35

¹¹⁵ BStU, Vietnam Abt. X, 339-340, Archiv der Zentralstelle, Nr.339, 'An den Herrn Minister für Innere Angelegenheiten der DDR, [Name geschwärzt], 27. Januar 1969,' pp.10-13

Bonn needed to place these “forces” into its own “perspective.”¹¹⁶ Ambassador McGhee elaborated on this theme. “The more dangerous and irreconcilable enemy of the United States and the whole West,” Erhard was told, “are the Chinese.”¹¹⁷ Troubling as these trends in American thinking were, even more disconcerting was the disparate positions of the FRG’s two principal allies. And nowhere, in the words of Adenauer, was this “terrible disagreement” more “acute” than in Vietnam.¹¹⁸ De Gaulle’s recognition of China reminded the FRG that the picture of a politically united alliance had been “irreversibly shattered.”¹¹⁹ This, in short, was the scenario which Erhard inherited: The German question had lost its uniqueness, and cohesion within the “Free World” had broken down. When examining the chancellor’s policymaking, it is essential to keep this in mind. It is important to appreciate that the constellation of the international order would have made it difficult for anyone to conduct a successful foreign policy.

Then again, as Alfred Mierzejewski points out, Erhard was not a political person.¹²⁰ Throughout his life, he never joined a party, nor did he hide his contempt for power, dismissing it as “boring,” “dangerous” and even “stupid.”¹²¹ At first glance, it is curious that this man ended up leader of a nation-state. Aside from circumstances and serendipity, it was Erhard’s grasp of economics, which propelled him into government. He became associated with the FRG’s rapid industrial growth and identified himself as an “American discovery.”¹²² Erhard was convinced that only Washington could guarantee state protection and that trust in the superpower was a matter of life and death.¹²³ Indeed, terms such as “trust” and “honesty” meant a lot to the chancellor, who, by nature, was an ethical person. He wanted to develop a “new

¹¹⁶ AC, John McCloy Papers, Box No. CI, Folder No. B5, Berlin, ‘Memorandum of Talks with German leaders during period of visit to Berlin and Bonn, 11 October through 18 October, 1963’

¹¹⁷ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51022, Band 5, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler empfing am 22. Oktober 1963 um 15.15. Uhr den amerikanischen Botschafter McGhee,’ p.37. See also McGhee’s speech to the ‘German Society for Foreign Policy, E.V.’ in February 1964, which similarly argued that ‘Chinese Communism’ was more brutal than ‘Soviet Communism,’ in ACDP, Nachlass Hans Globke, 01-070-028/2, “‘Die ost-west Beziehung heute.’” Vortrag seiner Exzellenz des Botschafters der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, George C. McGhee, gehalten in Bad Godesberg am 18. Februar 1964,’ p.5

¹¹⁸ H. Mensing (Hrsg.), *Konrad Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967, Band I*, p.153

¹¹⁹ ACDP, Nachlass Heinrich Krone, 01-028, 008/4, ‘Bericht von Bach in Hong Kong an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Anerkennung Rotchinas durch Frankreich, 17. Februar 1964’

¹²⁰ A. Mierzejewski, *Ludwig Erhard: A Biography* (London, 2004), p.28

¹²¹ *Der Stern*, ‘Ludwig Erhard war nie CDU-Mitglied, 25. April 2007’; *Der Spiegel*, Nr.42/1963, ‘Kanzler Erhard. Macht ist dumm, 16. Oktober 1963,’ p.46

¹²² AC, John McCloy Papers, Box GY1, Folder No.23, Germany, Ludwig Erhard, Correspondence with + about; reliable material (1 of 2), September 1956-December 1965. ‘Atlantik-Brücke e.V. Newsletter. Subject: Ludwig Erhard, a portrait, 8 May 1963’

¹²³ *AAPD, 1964*, p.1472; BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51022, Band 5, ‘Niederschrift über die Besprechung im Palais de l’Elysee, Paris, am 22. November 1963,’ p.252

philosophy,” encompassing a profession of faith in the values of the “Free World.”¹²⁴ “Our politics,” he told Pope Paul VI, “must be carried by the spirit of humanity.”¹²⁵ Erhard’s conception applied likewise to the fulfilment of political ends. Adenauer had thought of politics in categories of *power*. To achieve an end, power was pivotal. Erhard, contrariwise, placed his confidence in compassion.¹²⁶ The “open-minded discussion,” as one official remarked, “dominates everything.”¹²⁷ And for Erhard, this open-mindedness was imperative in anchoring Bonn to Washington.

Erhard was equally determined to reverse Adenauer’s principal alignment with France. Under his predecessor’s reign, he felt, de Gaulle had been able to rely on unqualified German support.¹²⁸ Erhard’s perception was no doubt coloured by his personal dislike of de Gaulle. The French leader’s ideas were anathema to him, in particular, his attempts to usurp American hegemony on the continent. “When de Gaulle speaks of Europe,” Erhard complained, “he has in mind a power bloc that would be independent of the United States.”¹²⁹ What Erhard refused to acknowledge, however, was that American and German interests deviated from each other. On his first official visit to the U.S., the new president told him, in no uncertain terms, that America was, “with or without others,” “going down the road to peace” and that he expected Erhard to be more “flexible” than Adenauer.¹³⁰ Nor did the chancellor realise that de Gaulle did not want him to “choose” between France and America, but, rather, refrain from subordinating his policies to Washington (which, ironically, had been Erhard’s own critique of Adenauer’s Francophile stratagem).¹³¹

¹²⁴ *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 42/1963, ‘Kanzler Erhard. Macht ist dumm, 16. Oktober 1963’ pp.46-47; AC, John McCloy Papers, Box GY1, Folder No.23, Germany, Ludwig Erhard, Correspondence with + about; reliable material (1 of 2), September 1956-December 1965. ‘Atlantik-Brücke e.V. Newsletter. Subject: Ludwig Erhard, a portrait, 8 May 1963’

¹²⁵ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51024, Band 7, ‘Gespräch seiner Heiligkeit mit Herrn Bundeskanzler Prof. Dr. Ludwig Erhard bei der Audienz vom 29. Januar 1964,’ p.12

¹²⁶ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.42/1963, ‘Kanzler Erhard. Macht ist dumm, 16. Oktober 1963’ p.46

¹²⁷ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-005/1, ‘Jansen an Strätling, 26. März 1964’

¹²⁸ *AAPD*, 1964, pp.46-47

¹²⁹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 183, Folder 4, Germany, Cables and Memos, Vol. I, 11/63-3/64 [2 of 2], ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Under Secretary George Ball and Chancellor Erhard. Subject: European, Economic and Political Developments, 26 November 1963’

¹³⁰ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe & USSR, Germany, Box 190, Folder #6, Germany, Erhard Visit, 12/63 [3 of 3], ‘Memorandum for the Record. Subject: President Johnson’s Private Talks with Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, 28-29 December 1963’

¹³¹ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51022, Band 5, ‘Niederschrift über die Besprechung im Palais de l’Elysee, Paris, am 22. November 1963,’ pp.250-251; BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51026, Band 9, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 3. Juli 1964 um 11 Uhr ein erstes Gespräch unter vier Augen mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten de Gaulle,’ p.67

Understanding the dynamics at work is essential to understanding Erhard's stance towards Vietnam. Joachim Scholtyseck has argued that the FRG had one sole option, which was to adopt a "pro-American" course.¹³² Erhard certainly thought so. To upset Washington, he feared, would initiate troop withdrawals. It was noticeable how LBJ played upon this angst, warning the chancellor that his people were becoming increasingly insistent that American soldiers return home.¹³³ Besides, more so than his predecessor, Erhard appreciated his nation's "special position." In his mind, the FRG needed to demonstrate that it had "purged itself of moral guilt," as well as "contribute constructively" to the cause of freedom.¹³⁴ But, above all, Erhard was adamant that an alliance demanded that one partner support another, that it was the FRG's "duty" to back Washington. "It would not be a good alliance," he told McNamara, "if each partner were only concerned with those matters affecting its immediate geographic area."¹³⁵ It was "beyond doubt," he declared during a press conference, that in Vietnam "Red-Chinese influences were visible [...] not only ideologically, but also militarily," and that for the U.S., Beijing was "an exposed nerve."¹³⁶

When Ambassador McGhee requested that Erhard "make every effort" to dissuade de Gaulle from rapprochement with Beijing, the chancellor was, thus, predisposed to be sympathetic. Erhard was already annoyed that he had not been informed about French movements in the Far East. "This is the way they treat us," he bemoaned. "They expect us to consult with them about everything and here they are taking this step without consulting us." "Tell your president," Erhard tellingly remarked, "we will do what we can."¹³⁷ He was true to his word. On 14 February, the chancellor invited de Gaulle to comment on both his recognition

¹³² Scholtyseck, 'Frankreich, Deutschland und Vietnam,' p.436

¹³³ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, pp.45-47. On Erhard's fear about American troop withdrawals, see also BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51022, Band 5, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler empfing am 22. Oktober 1963 um 15.15. Uhr den amerikanischen Botschafter McGhee,' p.41; *AAPD 1963*, p.1385, p.1700; *AAPD, 1964*, p.137. See also LBJ's interview with QUICK Magazine in BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/3614, 'Bemerkungen des Präsidenten in einem Interview mit dem Redakteur des QUICK Magazins von München, April 1964'

¹³⁴ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe & USSR, Germany, Box 190, Folder #6, Germany, Erhard Visit, 12/63 [3 of 3], 'Memorandum of Conversation between the president & the chancellor. Subject: De Gaulle and Relations with France, 28 December 1963'

¹³⁵ NARA, RG200, National Archives Gift Collection, Records of Robert S. McNamara, Memoranda of Conversation, Germany and United Kingdom, Box 133, Mem Cons W/Germany; Items 23-36, Vol. II Sec, 1 'Memorandum of Conversation between Ludwig Erhard and Robert McNamara, 24 June 1964'

¹³⁶ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 183, Germany, Vol. III, Cables, 5/64-6/64, 'From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Erhard Press Conference, 19 June 1964'; PA AA, B38/Referat II A 1, Bd.4, 'Pressekonferenz mit Bundeskanzler Erhard im Bundeshaus, CDU-Fraktionssaal, Freitag, 19. Juni, 9.00 Uhr'

¹³⁷ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Countries, France, Box 176, Folder 7, Recognition of Communist China, Vol.1 [3 of 3], 'From McGhee to Department of State, Subject: French Recognition of Communist China, 17 January 1964'

of Beijing, as well as his “neutralisation” proposal. The French leader explained, in great detail, that global “uncertainty” required France to “go its own way.” “I believe,” de Gaulle stated, “that the world is concluding an epoch in history, which could be called the “post-war epoch,” and moving towards a new epoch [...] that will not be built on the same elements as those since the end of the war.” China, he insisted, personified one of these “new elements” and was a “potential enemy” of the Kremlin.¹³⁸ This must have sounded familiar to Erhard, for his predecessor had time and again made the exact same argument.¹³⁹ Indeed, Adenauer had privately urged de Gaulle to establish diplomatic relations with China.¹⁴⁰

De Gaulle continued his monologue by linking recognition of Beijing with the Vietnam question. To initiate an armed conflict with the “anti-communist elements in Indochina,” he stressed, could “never lead to victory.” There were only two remaining alternatives. Either, Washington would have to “wage actual war,” which meant the use of atomic weapons. Or, the West had to make diplomatic overtures to China and propose the neutralisation of both Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Beijing, de Gaulle estimated, would accept such a proposal, given that policymakers needed to “organise” their own state.¹⁴¹ But it was Erhard’s response that was most illuminating. Rather than offer his own personal opinion, he argued from an American perspective. Echoing McGhee, Erhard pointed out that the U.S. considered “Chinese communism” to be the “most aggressive communism.” Although he acknowledged that the FRG, in contrast, judged Russia the “greatest enemy,” Erhard insisted that China “must be taken into account.” “[The *Americans*],” he emphasised, “believe that the aggressive stance in Cambodia and Laos is being directed from China and needs to be confronted. The *Americans* do not believe in neutralisation, and are rather of the opinion that these countries would sooner or later turn communist, thereby extending the Chinese-dominated belt to Indonesia.”¹⁴²

Erhard’s remarks take on a new significance when examining the information, he was receiving from his own intelligence. In large parts, they contradicted each other. The previous

¹³⁸ AAPD, 1964, pp.204-212

¹³⁹ See Erhard’s comments on Adenauer to Johnson, in LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe & USSR, Germany, Box 190, Folder #6, Germany, Erhard Visit, 12/63 [3 of 3], ‘Memorandum of Conversation between the chancellor and the president. Subject: Germany and East-West Negotiations (Part 2 of 2 Parts), 29 December 1963’

¹⁴⁰ BA-Koblenz, B136/51021, Band 4, ‘Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundeskanzler führte am 21. September 1963 um 16:00 Uhr in Rambouillet ein Gespräch mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten General de Gaulle,’ p.156; Kleinmann (Hrsg.), *Krone. Tagebuch, Zeiter Band*, p.256

¹⁴¹ AAPD, 1964, pp.204-212

¹⁴² AAPD, 1964, pp.212-214. My emphasis. Although it is not mentioned in the actual conversation between de Gaulle and the chancellor, Erhard told McGhee that he, too, had described Chinese communism as the “most aggressive” form. See AAPD, 1964, p.257. This is also mentioned in Horst Osterheld’s memoirs. Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.70

November, the head of the Eastern Bloc department, Erwin Wickert, had briefed Erhard on the Sino-Soviet split. “For the time being and foreseeable future,” he stated, “the Soviets are the most dangerous opponent.”¹⁴³ Unlike Bassler, Wickert was able to take one step back and survey the bigger picture. Although he accepted that Beijing was a regional threat, the unanswered question for Wickert was whether the stakes justified the means, whether it actually mattered, if Saigon, Indochina, or Southeast Asia, came under Chinese domination. And Wickert was inclined to think it would not, dismissing the mainland as “peripheral.” “The centres of the Free World,” he argued, “[...] remain directly threatened by the Soviet Union. It - not China - owns a large arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.”¹⁴⁴ If Erhard had any doubts about the “Chinese threat,” he received another memorandum following his visit to Paris, which made it clear that the Foreign Ministry did not accept Kaiser Wilhelm II’s hypothesis of the “yellow peril.” Again, it was not denied that Beijing was a “danger” for Southeast Asia. But rather than imagine a belligerent giant running amok, the Foreign Ministry agreed with de Gaulle that China’s attention was fixated on its domestic morbidities.¹⁴⁵

This is not to contend that FRG officials endorsed neutralisation. On the contrary, if there was one recurring strand, it was that de Gaulle’s proposal was nonsense.¹⁴⁶ Nor did they oppose Washington’s stratagem of containing the PRC.¹⁴⁷ Michael Ruddy is mistaken, however, to argue that “few Germans at the time doubted the capacity of the U.S. to prevail in

¹⁴³ JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 79, Germany, Subjects, Erhard Visit, 11/24/63-11/27/63, ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Erhard Visit, 18 November 1963’

¹⁴⁴ PA AA, B40, Bd.7, ‘Aufzeichnung von Dr. Wickert, über den Herrn Staatssekretär dem Herrn Minister vorgelegt. Betreff: Der Konflikt zwischen der Sowjetunion und der Volksrepublik China, 22. November 1963,’ pp.249-250. Schröder was evidently convinced. During a subsequent NATO discussion, he contended that an “objective assessment” should be made of the relative dangers presented by Moscow and Beijing. He, akin to Wickert, argued that despite Chinese bluster, it had been Khrushchev, who had led the world to the “brink of nuclear conflict.” See NATO Archive, C-R(63)73-ENG, ‘Summary Record of a Meeting of the Council held at the Permanent Headquarters, Paris, XVIe, on Monday, 16th December 1963 at 10.15 a.m.’

¹⁴⁵ PA AA, B42, Bd.3, ‘Aufzeichnung von Luedde-Neurath. Betreff: Gesprächsthema anlässlich des Besuchs des Herrn Bundeskanzlers in Den Haag, 25. Februar 1964,’ pp.166-167

¹⁴⁶ For West German rejection and scepticism of neutralisation, see E. Majonica, *Das politische Tagebuch, 1958-1972* (Düsseldorf, 2011), p.328; ACDP, Nachlass Heinrich Krone, I-028-008/4, ‘Franz Josef Bach an Heinrich Krone. Betreff: Anerkennung Rotchinas durch Frankreich, 20. Februar 1964’; PA AA, B37, Bd.62, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler für den Herrn Bundeskanzler. Betreff: Vorschläge für Gesprächsthemen anlässlich des Empfangs des vietnamesischen Botschafters beim Herrn Bundeskanzler, 8. Mai 1964’; TNA, FO371/175091, ‘From Sir F. Roberts to Foreign Office, Telegram, No. 609. Subject: French Policy in South East Asia, 9 June 1964’; ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/1, ‘Vermerk von Carstens. Betreff: Gespräch des Herrn Bundeskanzlers mit General de Gaulle am 3./4. Juli 1964’; AAPD, 1964, pp.763-764

¹⁴⁷ PA AA, B42, Bd.3, ‘Aufzeichnung von Luedde-Neurath. Betreff: Gesprächsthema anlässlich des Besuchs des Herrn Bundeskanzlers in Den Haag, 25. Februar 1964,’ p.167

Southeast Asia.”¹⁴⁸ Instead, an atmosphere of resignation persevered, which William Bundy captured well:

The plain and unpleasant fact is that the Germans [...] simply do not see the stakes in Asia and particularly in Southeast Asia, as we ourselves see them, and their Far East “experts” tend to be fatalistic and to suppose that the Western influence in Asia, at least in the military and security sense, is on the wane in any case.¹⁴⁹

But that was not all. Although Erhard himself was sceptical about his predecessor’s belief that the Sino-Soviet schism would redound to Germany’s advantage, others embraced the idea.¹⁵⁰ Dedo von Krosigk admitted to his American colleague that the “real reason” for both the government’s and the *Bundestag*’s sensitivities was their belief that active support needed to take into account its effect on “Germany’s evolving position in light of the Sino-Soviet split.” Bonn, he emphasised, “welcomed Chinese pressure on the Soviet Union, from which Germany could hope to gain, possibly even as regards to eventual reunification.”¹⁵¹

Indeed, there were reasons to be encouraged. Ministerial Director, Hans Krapf, informed Erhard that Chinese officials in Bern had proposed Sino-German talks on a trade- and cultural agreement. Especially now, Krapf emphasised, at a time when the Western Alliance was apathetic towards reunification initiatives, it was essential that Bonn “widen its room to manoeuvre” and “exploit” China’s dispute with the USSR. Krapf was perhaps thinking of the alliance conference at The Hague the previous week, where he and Schröder had received unenthusiastic responses. Paul-Henri Spaak, for instance, had contended that the German problem was “not acute” and that the “real danger lies in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia.”¹⁵² As a result, FRG officials were worried that their nation’s central objective was being pushed aside and that a new political tactic was required. The Sino-Soviet dispute provided just that.

¹⁴⁸ T. [Michael] Ruddy, ‘A Limit to Solidarity: Germany, the United States and the Vietnam War,’ in D. Junker, P. Gassert, W. Mausbach and D. Morris (eds.), *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990. A Handbook, Volume 2: 1968-1990* (Cambridge, 2004), p.127

¹⁴⁹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 45, Vietnam 11/64, Courses of Action in Southeast Asia, ‘Draft from William Bundy. Subject: US Objectives and Stakes (Continued), 11 November 1964.’ In a similar memorandum, Bundy asserted that whilst America’s “major allies in Europe,” notably West Germany, “accept the importance of Asia and our basic strategy of containing Communist China and its allies in principle, [...] it all seems very far away and not worth all that much trouble.” He moreover pointed out that America’s “strong action” in the Korean War had “fortified our position in Europe,” whereas in Vietnam, “the picture may be the reverse!” See Princeton University, Seeley G. Mudd Library, The William P. Bundy Papers, MC #189, 1950-2000 [bulk: 1969-1999], Series 1. Correspondence, Subseries 1, Government Service Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 9, DOD/DOS: Memorandums, 1962-1964, ‘Memorandum from William Bundy. Subject: The Choices We Face in Southeast Asia, 15 October 1964’

¹⁵⁰ For Erhard’s scepticism, see JFKL, The Papers of President Kennedy, NSF, Countries, Box 77A, Germany, General, 9/63, ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State, 17 September 1963’

¹⁵¹ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic AID, AID (GER W) Viet S, 1/1/64 to AID (IBRO) 9, 10/1/66, Box 508, AID (GER W), Viet S, 64-65, ‘Nes to Secretary of State. Subject: Aid to Vietnam, 4 June 1964’

¹⁵² BA-Koblenz, Nachlass Karl Carstens, N1337/623/10, ‘Aufzeichnung. Betreff: Vertrauliche Sitzung des NATO-Rats am 13. Mai 1964’

Information from East Berlin, Krapf was keen to point out, suggested “great nervousness” about both the possibility of a trade deal, as well as the PRC’s search for an ally on the “Soviet Bloc’s western flank.”¹⁵³

It was no surprise, then, that Washington’s “more flags” campaign - designed with the purpose of compelling other countries to contribute to the war effort - was met with ambiguity.¹⁵⁴ The LBJ administration wanted Bonn to assist in four distinct ways: Offer a direct contribution, such as dispatch a medical unit; denounce the French neutralisation plan; make a strong statement of support for the South Vietnamese effort to defeat the NLF; and publicly sponsor the assistance programme for Saigon.¹⁵⁵ It was Wendland of all people, who offered the U.S. a justification for its demands. Although the ambassador had previously rejected the contention that “Berlin was being protected at the Mekong” and estimated that America was “fighting a losing battle,” he, nevertheless, advised his U.S. colleagues to link the fate of Berlin with that of South Vietnam.¹⁵⁶ This was what McNamara did during his subsequent visit to the FRG. In what McGhee later described as a “hard-hitting appeal,” the defence secretary demanded that Bonn assist with the protection of “Free World” areas outside Europe. If America was forced to pull out and South Vietnam lost, he declared, then Germany “would suffer” as well.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ AAPD, 1964, pp.543-547

¹⁵⁴ On LBJ’s “more flags” campaign, See Logevall, *Choosing War*, p.180, p.182, p.274-75; J. Colman and J. Widén, ‘The Johnson Administration and the Recruitment of Allies in Vietnam, 1964-1968,’ *The Historical Association and Blackwell Publishing* (2009), p.486-491

¹⁵⁵ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 4, Folder 2, Vietnam, Vol. VIII, Memos, 5/64 [1 of 2], ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Vietnam, 11 May 1964’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966. Political & Defence, POL 1 General Policy Background, Ger W-USSR to POL Political Aff. & Rel. Ghana, Box 2231, POL – Political Affairs & Rel. Ger W-V, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Martin J. Hillenbrand and Joseph Mendenhall. Subject: German Statement of Support for Government of Viet-Nam, 15 April 1964’; AAPD, 1964, p.448, p.541

¹⁵⁶ NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic Aid FR India 1/1/1964 to Aid (GER W) 2 Gen 1. Reports & Stats, 1/1/1964, Box 505, ‘Telegram from Lodge to Secretary of State, 28 April 1964’; PA AA, B37, Bd.49, ‘Telegramm von Wendland, Nr.48 an das Auswärtige Amt, 25. April 1964.’ It is interesting to note that Wendland openly objected to the sending of *Bundeswehr* units, as well as insisted that they should “on no account” allow the Americans to push the FRG into a position, which could “predetermine our subsequent relations with Red-China.” PA AA, B37, Bd.63, ‘Fernschreiben von Wendland, Nr.58 an das Auswärtige Amt, 25. Mai 1964’

¹⁵⁷ G. McGhee, *At the Creation of a new Germany: From Adenauer to Brandt: An Ambassador’s Account* (New Haven, 1989), p.143; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 183, Folder 6, Germany, Cables and Memos, Vol. II, 4/64-5/64 [2 of 2] ‘Telegram from McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: McNamara-von Hassel Meeting, 11 May, 1964’; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 183, Folder 6, Germany, Cables and Memos, Vol. II, 4/64-5/64 [2 of 2], ‘Telegram from McGhee, to SecState. Subject: Vietnam, 11 May, 1964.’ It is striking just how much pressure Washington put on Bonn to actively participate in Vietnam. The president had already sent Erhard a personal message and made a public appeal, whilst Rusk raised the subject during the corresponding NATO conference. See LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Box 2, Folder 3, Chron File, March 1964 [3 of 3], ‘President Johnson to

There was a certain logic to McNamara's argument. Wilfried Mausbach has pointed out that the FRG perceived itself as a post-nation state, which needed supranational frameworks to create its own identity. The concept of the so-called "Free World" offered "inclusion, refuge and a new sense of belonging." Both Bonn and Saigon were considered part of an imagined community, united in their determination to contain communism.¹⁵⁸ In a different sense, though, there was no logic to this argument at all, as McNamara knew perfectly well. He admitted to Ambassador Knappstein that Beijing was "acting by itself now," whereas Moscow was providing "no military support and very little, if any, real political support."¹⁵⁹ If the Kremlin had lost its influence above the 17th parallel and was not working alongside Hanoi, then it seemed vacuous to purport that there was a connection between the two countries. It was telling that, irrespective of McNamara's insistences, the FRG government refused to equate Berlin and Saigon in the joint communiqué.¹⁶⁰

Besides, although the Erhard government felt an obligation to offer "Western solidarity," it was difficult to provide anything substantial. The chancellor increased Bonn's economic assistance, but, given the security situation, it was doubted whether financial injections would make much difference. In any case, Washington was demanding more than mere fiscal succour. It wanted boots on the ground. It wanted active participation.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, within the CDU/CSU, murmurs of discontent were growing. Ten days after McNamara's pitch, party leaders held a "little summit conference" to discuss its future foreign political agenda. Surprisingly, no record of the meeting has ever surfaced. There is enough evidence, though, to deduce what was said. According to Erhard, the former Defence Secretary,

Ludwig Erhard, 4 March 1964'; PA AA, B37, Bd.159, 'Abschrift von Knappstein. Betreff: Besuch des Herrn Bundeskanzlers, 13. Mai 1964'; NATO Archive, C-R(64)22-ENG, 'Summary Record of a Meeting of the Council held in the Princess Juliana Building, 12 May 1964,' p.6

¹⁵⁸ Mausbach, 'European Perspectives on the War in Vietnam,' pp.78-81. On the Berlin-Saigon analogy, see also Mausbach, 'Triangle of Discord,' pp.172-174, pp.177-178; Troche, "*Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt*," pp.288-289; Arendt, *Johnson, Vietnam und der Westen*, pp.191-193

¹⁵⁹ NARA, RG59, Department of State Document, 1964, POL 25-25, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Ambassador Knappstein, Chairman of the CSU, Franz Josef Strauss and the Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, 8 June, 1964.' On West German belief that Moscow would "do little to help out China, if she got into trouble over sponsoring revolutionary adventures in Laos or Vietnam," see TNA, FO371/177903, 'E.H. Peck to E. E. Tomkins. Subject: Visit of Franz Breer, German Embassy, London to discuss Indochina, 26 June 1964,' p.120

¹⁶⁰ Kleinmann (Hrsg.), *Krone, Tagebücher, Zeiter Band*, p.288; PA AA, B37, Bd.66, '*New York Times* (europäische Ausgabe), Bonn Resisting Saigon Aid Role, 27. Mai, 1964'

¹⁶¹ TNA, FO371/175496, 'Mr Brash to SEAD, Subject: Possibility of German Medical Unit Going to Viet-Nam, 14 May 1964'; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, POL 7 Visits. Meetings. GER-W to POL 7 Visits. Meetings. GER-W, Box 2211, POL 5/1, 'From Hillenbrand to Secretary of State. Subject: Erhard Visit (Vietnam AID), 9 June 1964.' For American dissatisfaction with Bonn's assistance, see NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic AID, AID (GER W) Viet S, 1/1/64 to AID (IBRO) 9, 10/1/66, Box 508, AID (GER W) 8, Viet S, 1/1/64, 'From Rusk to Embassy in Bonn, 26 June 1964'

Franz Josef Strauss, chastised him for being too “pro-American.” The superpower, he insisted, was “falling for a détente with the Soviet Union” and urged Erhard to “become more friendly” with de Gaulle. The chancellor rebuffed these accusations, maintaining that the record showed that America was far more reliable than de Gaulle, as well as labelling Strauss’ “nationalism” both “dangerous” and “out of place.” On Vietnam, however, a consensus was reached. It was decided that a “Red Cross hospital ship” and perhaps a contribution to the strategic hamlet programme would be “preferable.”¹⁶² Under no circumstances, though, would *Bundeswehr* soldiers fight in Indochina.¹⁶³

Notwithstanding this momentous decision, neither Vietnam, nor the Franco-American dispute went away. It was moreover striking that, aside from Bassler (who remained adamant that escalation was the only conceivable alternative), decision-makers were at a loss as to how Washington should resolve the quagmire. Erhard was, hence, keen to learn what other foreign observers were thinking. Ahead of the chancellor’s visit to America in June, his close friend, Edgar Faure (the harbinger of Sino-French rapprochement) told him that Diem’s overthrow had been a “mistake.” Washington’s venture, Faure emphasised, had reached a dead-end and, if he were LBJ, he would open secret negotiations with Beijing.¹⁶⁴ The chancellor must have thought about these words, for the following week, during his stopover in Ottawa, he queried both Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, and the minister for foreign affairs on whether China would consent to a compromise, whether the prize of diplomatic recognition might encourage it to adopt a palatable foreign policy. The Canadians demurred. “Aggressive expansionism,” they contended, was an “essential component” of Maoist doctrine and South Vietnam “had to be held at all cost.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² *Times Herald*, ‘Erhard Still Facing Tug-of-War: Divergent Foreign Policy Views Not Solved by “Little Summit,” 22 May 1964,’ p.A16; BA-Koblenz, Nachlass Karl Carstens, N1337/630, ‘Notizen von Karl Carstens, Tegernsee, 20. Mai 1964,’ p.50; AC, John J. McCloy Papers, Cuban Missile Crisis, Box No GY2, Folder No. 14, Germany, Franz Joseph Strauss, 1969, ‘From Shepard Stone to John J. McCloy. Subject: Luncheon Today, 16 June, with F. J. Strauss, 12:45 at the Century in a private room, 12 June 1964.’ On the Tegernsee conference and criticism of Erhard, see also *Der Spiegel*, Nr.22/1964, ‘Tegernsee-Konferenz. Einer stand allein, 27. Mai 1964,’ pp.23-24; Geiger, *Atlantiker und Gaullisten*, pp.283-284; Kleinmann (Hrsg.), *Tagebuch, Zeiter Band*, p.290

¹⁶³ BA-Koblenz, N1371/49, Nachlass Rainer Barzel, ‘Notizen. Hotel Bauer Grunwald, Venezia, n.d.’ p.89; J., Henke und U., Rössel, (Hrsg.), *Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, Band 17, 1964* (München, 2007) p.283

¹⁶⁴ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.87

¹⁶⁵ *AAPD, 1964*, p.638; BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/51025, Band 8, ‘Fernschreiben von Botschafter Hartlieb an das Auswärtige Amt. Betreff: Gespräche des Bundeskanzlers mit dem kanadischen Ministerpräsidenten und des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen mit dem kanadischen Aussenminister in Ottawa, am 9./10. Juni 1964,’ p.319. Pearson’s and Martin’s retorts are rather startling, given that the Canadian government was, at the same time, trying to broker a peace deal between Washington and Hanoi. On the Seaborn Mission, see Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp.156-164; A. Preston, ‘Mission Impossible. Canadian Secret Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace in Vietnam,’ in Gardner and Gittinger (eds.), *The Search for Peace*, pp.118-127

The tone was even more ominous in Washington. On 12 June, during a private meeting, LBJ informed Erhard that he would have to make “profound” and “far-reaching” decisions in the next 60 days. The U.S. found itself in a “very critical period,” he explained. The struggle had been raging for ten years and, in the last few months alone, there had been three different RVN governments. Johnson did not hide his frustration about the Americans being the “only ones,” who were trying to prevent the “communists” from gobbling up the entire peninsula. He complained that the French, in particular, were “causing great problems,” both for the U.S., as well as between himself and his people. Republican leaders, he pointed out to Erhard, were asking him what other countries were doing and stressed that German assistance would be advantageous not only for South Vietnam, but for U.S morale. In typical fashion, Erhard expressed sympathy for his counterpart’s “feeling of bitterness” and assured him that the FRG would never forget American generosity.¹⁶⁶

Even so, the chancellor must have noticed that Johnson evaded his plea for a new reunification initiative. At the start of the meeting, Erhard had reminded the president that 1965 was an election year and that the national press was wondering when the “most important question, which lay at the heart of everything” would be discussed. The timing was apposite. On the same day, Moscow and East Berlin signed a treaty of friendship, reaffirming the inviolability of the GDR’s frontiers. Erhard’s tactic was plain. By listing a plethora of examples to prove his loyalty, he hoped that the president would offer him something in return.¹⁶⁷ But despite LBJ’s fulsome praise, his actions offered little comfort. Not only did the American government reject a new German initiative, it demanded that Bonn abort its secret talks with Beijing. “We face a serious situation with the Chinese in Southeast Asia,” Dean Rusk emphasised to Schröder. “Any action, which would encourage the Chinese Communists to believe they were on the right course, would make things more dangerous.”¹⁶⁸

It was an illuminating statement. Rusk was essentially saying that Germany’s own problems were of minor importance and that the FRG had to follow American protocol. As a result, Erhard’s loyalty had become self-defeating. Rather than reciprocate German support on Vietnam (which, in any case, American policymakers found unsatisfactory), the U.S. was

¹⁶⁶ AAPD, 1964, pp.651-659; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Germany, Box 191, Germany, 12-13/6/64, Erhard Visit [6/64], [1 of 3], ‘Memorandum of Conversation Between the President and Chancellor Erhard, 12 June 1964’

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.90; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Germany, Box 191, Germany, 12-13/6/64, Erhard Visit [6/64], [1 of 3], ‘Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Communist China, Part II of IV Parts, 12 June 1964’

obstructing reunification initiatives. Deep down, the chancellor must have realised that his emphasis on allied loyalty was not working. *Der Spiegel* reported that a “miffed” Erhard left the White House garden party “barely before the American Philharmonics had begun to play Dvoraks Ninth.”¹⁶⁹ And Horst Osterheld noticed that a “more serious” chancellor returned home.¹⁷⁰ The central purpose of his visit had been an abject failure.

Worse was to follow. Whereas America criticised Erhard for his lack of assistance, de Gaulle attacked him for offering too *much* support. The chancellor’s signing of a joint statement, which endorsed LBJ’s Vietnam policies, was perceived as a “slap in the face.”¹⁷¹ On his visit to Bonn at the beginning of July, the French leader confronted Erhard and accused him of being an American “vassal.” “Why,” he demanded to know, “does Germany support U.S. policy in Southeast Asia?” Erhard admitted that the FRG “did not know much about” the region, nor did it have “strong feelings about what policies should be pursued there.” He remained adamant, however, that loyalty to Washington obligated him to provide assistance.¹⁷² The French president was unimpressed. “American policy of today,” de Gaulle warned, “spots China surfacing on the horizon and every day America sees China grow a little bigger before its very eyes and, with every passing day, it, in turn, judges Khrushchev a little friendlier and will eventually become convinced that not Khrushchev, but China is the enemy.”¹⁷³ The FRG, de Gaulle warned, was “encouraging train of events for which it will have to pay the price.” Johnson would be forced to finalise the division of Germany, as well as recognise the GDR, to ensure Soviet neutrality in a future Sino-American war.¹⁷⁴ Hitting the country’s sore-spot, he told Erhard that reunification would never be attained through an American blueprint. The rise of China, as well as its ambitions in Southeast Asia, he argued, compelled both Paris and Bonn to adopt cohesive policies.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.30/1964, ‘Rotchina-Kontakte. Eins, zwei, drei, 22. Juli 1964’ p.19

¹⁷⁰ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.91

¹⁷¹ *AAPD*, 1964, p.810. See also LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. V, Memos, 9/64-12/64, ‘McGhee to Secretary of State, 8 September 1964’

¹⁷² LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables, 7/64-8/64, ‘McGhee to Secretary of State, 10 July 1964.’ See also Couve de Murville’s criticism of the FRG’s stance on the Vietnam question to Schröder. *AAPD*, 1964, p.764

¹⁷³ *AAPD*, 1964, pp.771-772

¹⁷⁴ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables, 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to the President, Secretary and Under Secretary, 6 July 1964’; NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State. Office of Asian Communist Affairs, LOT File 69D277, Records of Negotiations About Vietnam, 1965-1969, Box 1, French Track 1965, ‘Charles E. Bohlen to Department of State. Subject: Conversation between Ambassador Bohlen and Ambassador Klaiber of Germany, 1 May 1965’

¹⁷⁵ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country Files, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany Memos, Vol. IV, 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to the president, secretary and undersecretary only, 6 July 1964,’ *AAPD* 1964, pp.770-771, p.784

These words clearly shook Erhard. In his mind, the French leader was demanding that West Germany forsake its ties with the superpower and “sign blank checks” for his own ideas.¹⁷⁶ Although Volker Hentschel has portrayed the chancellor as weak and incompetent, others were also unimpressed with de Gaulle’s “arrogant demeanour.” Franz Krapf, as well as the FRG chargé in Paris, considered him “unfairly” critical of Erhard. The “plain implication,” Krapf complained to McGhee, “had been that the French were entitled to express an opinion about Southeast Asia, but not the Germans.”¹⁷⁷ Even so, Erhard could not deny that his foreign political record was disappointing. He had been unable to arouse global interest in German reunification. Nor had his Vietnam policy appeased either America or France. Worse still, within the CDU/CSU “a civil war” broke out. Both Adenauer and Strauss made public demands for a joint Franco-German initiative to bolster European integration.¹⁷⁸ The latter was particularly annoyed that Erhard had abandoned prospective trade relations with Beijing.¹⁷⁹ The chancellor was, hence, in an unenviable position. Beleaguered at home and spurned by his two major allies, he had been pushed into a corner largely through events beyond his control. Perhaps the most frustrating aspect, though, was his failure to learn the central lesson, namely that his stance on Vietnam was weakening, rather than strengthening the alliance structure. Erhard’s foreign political programme had stagnated and he refused to consider alternatives. This feebleness would, once again, become glaringly self-evident during the Tonkin Gulf Crisis.

Dangerous Waters

Events in the Gulf of Tonkin marked a turning point. At the beginning of August, the Johnson administration seized upon sketchy and inconsistent evidence of two North Vietnamese naval attacks to launch an airstrike against the DRV. Operation Pierce Arrow was the prequel to Washington’s subsequent bombing campaign. The historiography has first and foremost concerned itself with whether LBJ and his advisers deceived both the American

¹⁷⁶ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country Files, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany Memos, Vol. IV, 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to the president, secretary and undersecretary only, 6 July 1964’

¹⁷⁷ V. Hentschel, *Ludwig Erhard: Ein Politikerleben* (München, 1996), p.502; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables, 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State, 29 July 1964’

¹⁷⁸ TNA, FO371/177903, ‘Cabinet Brief. Subject: German Political Situation, 16 July 1964’

¹⁷⁹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables, 7/64-8/64, ‘From Coburn Kidd to Department of State. Subject: Conversation with Former Defence Minister Franz Josef Strauss 10 July 1964’

public and world opinion.¹⁸⁰ In Bonn, however, no doubts were raised about U.S. candour. Instead, a consensus ran through the press that China had been the “behind-the-scene initiator” and that its strike had been directed primarily at both “peaceful coexistence,” as well as “Khrushchev.”¹⁸¹ There was, likewise, a consensus that the assault against U.S. vessels was a “political challenge, which required a hard response.” Nonetheless, a curious fissure between the media’s and the peoples’ reaction was noticeable. Whereas several newspapers juxtaposed Vietnam with the “history of Sarajevo fifty years ago,” the man on the street was visibly “uninterested.” “In contrast to August 1914 and August 1939,” *Der Spiegel* observed, “a world war seems unfathomable to the people in August 1964.” The editorial was not even joking, when it claimed that the “increase in telephone charges” had stirred citizens more than the airstrike.¹⁸² Picking up on the theme, *Der Kurier* explained the absence of “tension” on the fact that Beijing did not have nuclear weapons, as well as the belief that Moscow would “not take its treaty with China seriously.”¹⁸³

The FRG government mirrored this lax response. Neither Erhard nor his foreign minister bothered to break off their summer holidays. In response to the president’s justification for the bombing, Erhard hailed it as “further evidence” of strong bilateral ties. But whilst the chancellor assured his correspondent that the German people were grateful for U.S. resolve to maintain “peace and freedom,” he refrained from making any commitments. Instead, he merely wished Johnson “every success” in his endeavour.¹⁸⁴ Schröder, likewise, refused to offer tangible assistance. True, he invited McGhee to brief him on these “alarming developments” at his holiday resort and expressed both approval and understanding for American involvement. Nevertheless, with an eye on the “Gaullist wing” of the CDU/CSU Party, he explained that

¹⁸⁰ The most thorough analysis of the Tonkin Gulf Crisis is R. Hanyok, ‘Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2-4 August 1964’ *Cryptologic Quarterly* (Declassified in 2005), pp.1-55. See also E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, 1996). On the LBJ government’s “deception,” see for instance, Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp.196-203; H. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, 1997), pp.121-136; G. Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (London, 2005), p.193

¹⁸¹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File – Vietnam, Box 227, Vietnam, Maddox Incident, 2/8/64, [1 of 2], ‘Daily Report Supplement. World Reaction Series, No.2 - 1964. Subject: Foreign Radio and Press Reaction to the Gulf of Tonkin Incidents, 6 August 1964’

¹⁸² TNA, FO371/175498 ‘Sir F. Roberts, Addressed to Foreign Office, Telegram, No. 807. Subject: American Action against North Vietnam, 6 August 1964’; *Der Spiegel*, Nr.34/1964, ‘Bonn. Doppelkrise 64 und 64 in 64, 19 August 1964’ p.17

¹⁸³ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Czechoslovakia, Box 182, Folder #6, Berlin Cables, Vol. II, 6/64-8/64, ‘From Calhoun to Secretary of State. Subject: Review of West Berlin Press Commentary on Southeast Asian Situation, 6 August 1964’

¹⁸⁴ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 229, Vietnam, Gulf of Tonkin, Heads of State Correspondence, 8/64, [1 of 2], ‘From Westrick to Ambassador McGhee, 6 August 1964’

Bonn was “not a Southeast Asian power” and not in a position “to do anything to support” America. Public statements, Schröder contended, should be “restrained.”¹⁸⁵

Inside the Foreign Ministry, however, a mixture of frustration and concern was palpable. Bassler did not hide his “personal unease.” America’s choices, he estimated, were either “capitulation or increased involvement.”¹⁸⁶ The bombing attacks, he warned McGhee, had damaged Beijing’s and Hanoi’s prestige. Bassler predicted that the enemy would escalate the guerrilla war, meaning that Washington would have to fight violence with violence. At the same time, Bassler doubted whether further aerial bombardments would have a decisive impact. After all, Vietcong rebels were not dependent on Hanoi for their own supplies. The “best policy,” he argued, would be to limit DRV involvement as much as possible and concentrate on “wiping out” the Vietcong.¹⁸⁷ Replying to Karl Carsten’s request for an overview, Bassler fleshed out his thoughts. Echoing his memorandum from the previous August, he maintained that the U.S. had been incapable of expunging one single district of Vietcong influence. NLF partisans had captured the “entire Mekong-Delta” and were on the outskirts of the capital. Most importantly, Washington had failed to restore the peoples’ trust. Given that the Laos conference had “proven” the futility of neutralisation, Bassler reasoned that South Vietnam could only be saved through “military measures.” Highlighting both the retaliatory airstrike, as well as Henry Cabot Lodge’s imminent round-trip to Europe, he asserted that Washington “seems to have realised this.” He proposed that Bonn be “receptive” towards Lodge and endorse U.S. willingness to defend Vietnamese freedom “under any circumstances.”¹⁸⁸

Curiously, four days later, another memorandum was drafted on Vietnam, which, in large parts, contradicted Bassler’s evaluation. It was signed by the Ministerial Director, Josef Jansen. A renowned Francophile, Jansen had supervised and negotiated the signing of the

¹⁸⁵ McGhee, *At the Creation*, pp.150-151; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables 7/64-8/64

‘From McGhee to the Secretary, Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary Tyler, 7 August 1964’

¹⁸⁶ Majonica, *Das politische Tagebuch*, p.349; NARA RG59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Economic AID (GER W) Indon 1/1/64, to Uganda, Box 507, AID (GER W), Laos, 1/1/64, ‘From James A. Bovey to Department of State. Subject: Lao-German Relations, 7 October 1964’

¹⁸⁷ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Viet-Nam, 6 August 1964’

¹⁸⁸ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/2098, ‘Aufzeichnung von Abteilung I. Betreff: Besuch des US-Sonderbotschafters H. Cabot Lodge, 20. August 1964.’ Although the document is signed “Dr. Jansen,” there is no doubt that it was Bassler, who drafted it. The tone and style are typical. Besides, Bassler himself mentioned to McGhee that he had “incorporated his views in a memo to Carstens.” See LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Viet-Nam, 6 August 1964’

Élysée agreement. In the Foreign Ministry, he had been the only individual, who had voiced support for neutralisation and it was noticeable that this particular memorandum offered a more detailed outline of French thought.¹⁸⁹ Jansen's central theme was that for the past four years, the United States' record was one of failure. Basing his analysis on a conversation between Lodge and the acting French foreign minister, Jansen stressed that the demise of the Diem regime had both crystallised the collapse of state authority and allowed the rebels to "infiltrate 90% of the nation." "The prospect of domestic stability and pushing back the Vietcong," he argued, "have never been as low as they are today." Appraising the future, Jansen warned that Washington on the one side, as well as Beijing and Hanoi on the other, were preparing for armed conflict. "France," he stressed, "is of the opinion that even a greater American commitment will be unable to break the military might of the Vietcong." As a result, Jansen proposed that the Foreign Ministry use its own discussions with Lodge to stress the need for a "political solution."¹⁹⁰

Despite the glaring discrepancies between these two appraisals, on one issue there was agreement: "Under no circumstances" should the FRG offer more than economic succour.¹⁹¹ Prior to Lodge's arrival, the Erhard government arranged for extensive television and press coverage of a commodity credit.¹⁹² The intention was plain. Policymakers were trying to magnify their own assistance and provide Washington with evidence of further support. Besides, it was no secret that out of all the "Free World" countries, West Germany had contributed the most fiscal aid (about 93 million D-Mark), a fact, which officials were only too eager to emphasise.¹⁹³ But what was most astounding about both Bassler's and Jansen's assessment was not their steadfast opposition to FRG involvement, or their disagreement on how to resolve the quagmire. It was, rather, their remarkable omission of the USSR. It was as if the most powerful communist state did not exist, as if it had no role to play. That same week, on 18 August, executives in Moscow reported that Soviet reaction had been "noticeably

¹⁸⁹ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-005/1, 'Josef Jansen an Botschafter Dr. Berger in Den Haag, 3. April 1964'

¹⁹⁰ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/2098, 'Aufzeichnung von Josef Jansen. Betreff: Die Haltung der Bundesregierung zur Südvietsnam-Frage, 24. August 1964'

¹⁹¹ Ibid.; PA AA, B37, Bd.65, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Europa-Reise Cabot Lodge, 17. August 1964'

¹⁹² LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 7, Vietnam, Vol. XVI, Memos, 16-31/8/64 [1 of 2], 'From Hillenbrand to Lodge, 20 August 1964'

¹⁹³ BA-Koblenz, Bundeskanzleramt, B136/2098, 'Aufzeichnung von Hardenbeg für den Herrn Staatssekretär und dem Herrn Bundeskanzler, 18. August 1964'; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 7, Vietnam, Vol. XVI, Memos, 16-31/8/64 [1 of 2], 'Memorandum for the Record. Subject: Ambassador Lodge's Conversation with German Officials, 24 August 1964'; TNA, FO371/175501, 'Mr J.L. Taylor to J.E. Cable. Subject: Account of Mr. Cabot Lodge's visit to Bonn on 24th August for Discussions on Viet-Nam: German commitment to Viet-Nam, 27 August 1964'

restrained and cautious.” For three whole days, the media had remained tight-lipped. Only after the crisis had died down did the tone begin to sharpen. “Whoever initiated the peace-threatening tensions in the Gulf of Tonkin,” the embassy argued, “it was certainly not the Soviet Union.” If the crisis had demonstrated anything, it was that Moscow had “lost its influence in Southeast Asia to China.” Khrushchev, FRG diplomats concluded, was “no longer willing to endorse the expansion of Beijing’s power and influence.”¹⁹⁴

In any case, for the West Germans, internal- rather than external developments were the more pressing problem. Wendland’s replacement, Günther Schlegelberger, saw little evidence to suggest that the RVN government had consolidated its position.¹⁹⁵ Quite the reverse. Khanh’s attempt to exploit the Tonkin Gulf incident and invoke emergency decrees crystallised domestic upheaval. On the anniversary of the pagoda raids, Thich Tri Quang accused the current leadership of religious persecution and organised protests across South Vietnam. Three days later, a class of students broke into Saigon radio station and took delight in wrecking government offices.¹⁹⁶ This refusal to join ranks in the face of communist annexation baffled the West Germans. South Vietnam was tearing itself apart. It was almost as if it did not want to be saved. Indeed, questions on both the peoples’ “inner conviction” and “non-communists” fighting one another were put to Lodge during a foreign ministerial luncheon. Jansen and Bassler must have thought it paradoxical that the American envoy spoke of Vietnamese “self-determination,” but, at the same time, claimed that only “20%” of the rural inhabitants supported the government.¹⁹⁷ At the Tegernsee, Lodge went so far as to tell Erhard that “85% of the population” was made up of “politically uninterested peasants.” Although the chancellor did not ask whether South Vietnam was worth all this effort, he expressed bewilderment as to how 200.000 armed Frenchmen had previously failed to pacify Indochina. In other words, he did not understand how Washington would fare any better.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ PA AA, B41, Bd.21, ‘Aufzeichnung der Botschaft in Moskau. Betreff: Sowjetische Haltung während der jüngsten Indochinakrise, 18. August 1964,’ pp.101-102, pp.104-105. In a further memorandum four days later, the minister counsellor of the embassy, estimated that the USSR would protect a member of the socialist camp if it were attacked, but that it would not support Beijing’s “arbitrary actions.” See PA AA, B41, Bd.21, ‘Fernschreiben von Sante in Moskau, Nr.691 an das Auswärtige Amt, 22. August 1964,’ pp.98-99

¹⁹⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.65, ‘Aufzeichnung von Krosigk. Betreff: Hiesige Beurteilung der amerikanischen Vergeltungsaktion gegen nordvietnamesische Marinebasen und Versorgungslager, 12. August 1964’

¹⁹⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.61, ‘Aufzeichnung von Schlegelberger. Betreff: Entwicklung in Vietnam, 24. August 1964’

¹⁹⁷ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 7, Vietnam, Vol. XVI, Memos, 16-31/8/64 [1 of 2], ‘Memorandum for the Record. Subject: Ambassador Lodge’s Conversation with German Officials, 24 August 1964’; PA AA, B32, Bd.225, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler, 25. August 1964’

¹⁹⁸ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File – Vietnam, Box 8, Vol. 17 & 18, Folder 1, Vietnam, Vol. XVII, 1-15/9/64, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Subject: Vietnam, 25 August 1964’

The West Germans had a right to be sceptical. At the exact moment when Lodge was assuring the chancellor that Khanh would “survive,” Schlegelberger received notice that Khanh had, in fact, stepped down as president.¹⁹⁹ Irrespective of the FRG’s profound scepticism, there was nevertheless a reluctance to challenge American reasoning. Bassler admitted to British diplomats that the Foreign Ministry had been unimpressed by Lodge’s appraisal of future developments, above all, his belief that the people could be won over without direct U.S. involvement. Neither he, nor his colleague raised objections, though, for they feared that it would “spoil the atmosphere.”²⁰⁰ This was precisely the kind of reasoning which frustrated the French. On Vietnam, Couve de Murville had told Schröder that the “best way to express solidarity was to say what one thought.”²⁰¹ The FRG government, in contrast, remained adamant that the “right course” was to “show support.”²⁰² What showing support meant, however, was never quite clear. True, Erhard publicly reaffirmed German patronage, as well as his willingness to offer fraternal assistance.²⁰³ But when Lodge emphasised that it was crucial to get young nationals, preferably doctors, out into the jungle, Erhard was evasive. Vietnam, he pointed out, was a “major source of difference” between Bonn and Paris. De Gaulle, the chancellor relayed, had gone so far as to accuse him of violating the “content and spirit” of the Élysée Treaty.²⁰⁴ Thus, Erhard maintained a middle-course. He refused to dispatch a medical unit, yet continued to underwrite America’s Vietnam policies. It was, he reasoned, “the very least one can expect of a friend and ally: That he give his friend moral support in a good cause.”²⁰⁵

It is useful at this stage to juxtapose West German reaction to the Tonkin Gulf Incident with its Eastern counterpart. As one would expect, the SED press organs judged Washington “fully responsible” for the heightening of tensions and fired pot-shots at Bonn for endorsing

¹⁹⁹ PA AA, B37, Bd.59, ‘Fernschreiben von Schlegelberger an das Auswärtige Amt, Nr.104 vom 25. August 1964’; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File – Vietnam, Box 8, Vol. 17 & 18, Folder 1, Vietnam, Vol. XVII, 1-15/9/64, ‘Memorandum of Conversation between Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Subject: Vietnam 25 August 1964’

²⁰⁰ TNA, FO371/175501, ‘Mr J.L. Taylor to J.E. Cable. Subject: Account of Mr. Cabot Lodge’s visit to Bonn on 24th August for Discussions on Viet-Nam: German commitment to Viet-Nam, 27 August 1964’

²⁰¹ AAPD, 1964, p.624

²⁰² TNA, FO371/175498, ‘Sir F. Roberts, Addressed to Foreign Office, Telegram, No. 806. Subject: German Reaction to U.S. Action in North Vietnam, 6 August 1964’; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Cables 7/64-8/64 ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Viet-Nam 6 August 1964’

²⁰³ Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Carton 36 of 67, H.C. Lodge II, Vietnam - European Visit, ‘Hillenbrand to Lodge. Subject: Press Roundup on Lodge visit, 26 August 1964’

²⁰⁴ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 7, Vietnam, Vol. XVI, Memos, 16-31/8/64 [1 of 2], ‘From Ambassador Lodge to Secretary of State, 26 August 1964’

²⁰⁵ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. V, Memos, 9/64-12/64, ‘Memorandum from Carl T. Rowan for the president. Subject: Chancellor Erhard supports U.S. on Vietnam, 16 October 1964’

U.S. actions. At the same time, emphasis was placed on solving the crisis through diplomatic means, in particular, through the United Nations.²⁰⁶ Barely 24 hours after the airstrike, State Secretary, Otto Winzer, asked the DRV ambassador whether Hanoi would be willing to send a delegation to the next Security Council meeting. The UN, Winzer insisted, had changed since the Korean War, pointing out that countries, such as France, had begun to challenge American views.²⁰⁷ In the historiography, certain chroniclers have seized upon comments made by U Thant to argue that North Vietnam was sympathetic. The secretary general's retelling of events went as follows: At the beginning of August, he had approached Hanoi through a Soviet representative to ask whether it would consent to secret U.S.-Vietnamese discussions. "Ho [Chi Minh] himself," Thant claimed, had given the green light. American equivocating, though, prolonged the initiative and, ultimately, caused it to break down.²⁰⁸ There is no doubt that, like the secretary general, East Berlin was searching for a way to broker a dialogue between the two sides. The sense of urgency was reinforced on 14 August, when Ulbricht received word that the Kremlin intended to propose a resolution on the "renunciation of force in territorial and border disputes" at the next UN General Assembly.²⁰⁹ That same day, the North Vietnamese ambassador was, once again, asked about the summit. Bui Lam's response was sharp and definite. Hanoi had "no intention" of making an appearance, he said, for the Americans simply wanted to "legalise their attacks," as well as "liquidate" the Geneva Accords.²¹⁰

Of course, it could be countered that the secret nature of Thant's brokering would have made it unlikely that Bui Lam had known about the initiative. One person, who was fully informed, though, was Pham Van Dong. Mari Olsen has cited a private conversation between the prime minister and the Soviet attaché to contend that Hanoi was "not against such a proposal."²¹¹ Fortunately, on 18 August, Privalov himself told Bergold exactly what was said. He and Pham had met twice in the past ten days and, during the first exchange, Pham had cut

²⁰⁶ ND-Archiv, Nr.215/1964, 'USA-Bomben auf Vietnam. UNO-Sicherheitsrat tagte, 6. August 1964,' p.1; ND-Archiv, Nr.216/1964, 'Welt fordert Einstellung der USA-Provokationen, 7. August 1964,' p.1; ND-Archiv, Nr.218/1964, 'UdSSR verteidigt Rechte Vietnams. Gromyko verurteilt Aggression,' p.7. See also the MfAA's instructions on what stance to adopt on the American bombing in PA MfAA, C1059/73, 'Argumentationshinweise zu den aggressiven Handlungen der USA gegenüber der DRV, 6 August 1964,' pp.166-169

²⁰⁷ PA MfAA, A17974, 'Vermerk über eine Besprechung Staatssekretär Winzers mit dem Botschafter der DRV zur Lage der USA-Aggression in Vietnam 1964, 7. August 1964,' p.1, p.4

²⁰⁸ LBJL, The Papers of William Bundy, Box 1, 'Unpublished Manuscript.' See also W. Johnson, 'The U Thant-Stevenson Peace Initiative in Vietnam, 1964-1965,' *Diplomatic History* Volume 1. Number 3 (summer 1977), pp.285-295. For historians who have argued that the North Vietnam consented to the U Thant initiative, see Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp.210-213; Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations*, p.133; J. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Stanford, 2012), pp.15-16, pp.749-750

²⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3292, 'Honecker an Ulbricht, 14. August 1964,' p.130

²¹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, 'Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Botschafters der DR Vietnam, Genossen Bui Lam, am 14. August 1964 in der Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen des ZK,' p.136

²¹¹ Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnamese Relations*, p.133

across the usual formalities to ask about the Security Council meeting. Privalov, who had only heard about it in the press, replied that the Soviet representative had denounced the “one-sided, aggressive American attacks.” Echoing Winzer, he proposed that Hanoi dispatch a delegation to New York. The prime minister appeared receptive and asked for more information. Privalov moved swiftly, cabling Moscow for help and instructions. At the second meeting, Pham informed Privalov that he had, in the meantime, received an official invite from U Thant. The prime minister made it clear, however, that North Vietnam had “no intention” of accepting it.²¹² Hanoi, in short, had been offered assistance from both the Soviet Bloc and the United Nations’ secretary general to solve the dispute diplomatically. It had refused.

The claim that Ho Chi Minh was somehow involved in these overtures makes no sense either. On 24 September, members of the Free German Trade Union Federation, who were in Hanoi for the DRV’s 19th state anniversary, were granted a special meeting with the president. Ho’s entire demeanour was one of nostalgia and defeatism. He asked his visitors to thank Ulbricht for his personal invitation, but that he “could not leave the country at the present time.” Ho reminisced at length about living in the Weimar Republic and joining Ernst Thälmann at a communist youth convention. He also reminded the GDR unionists of his second trip, in particular, his walks with Otto Grotewohl down the *Stalinallee*. “At least I was free then and could move around freely,” he said. “Here in Hanoi that is not the case.”²¹³ It was an astounding off-hand comment. The father of the Vietnamese people was implying to the East Germans that he was a prisoner in his own state. He was underwriting what diplomats had argued all along: The pro-Soviet forces within the VWP were powerless and North Vietnam had sided with China in the ideological schism.

Just how seriously Bergold took the president’s words was illustrated by the fact that he quoted them to the newly-arrived Soviet ambassador, Ilya Shcherbakov, who admitted that he was “extremely worried.” Yet it was not the airstrike which concerned the two men the most. No, it was that they were in the dark about what Hanoi and, above all, Beijing were up to. Both ambassadors were aware that the PRC had transferred a number of jetfighters to southern China, and Shcherbakov cited troop movements near Guilin. When Bergold warned him that Pham Van Dong had expressed “disappointment” about Soviet support, Shcherbakov exploded and made it repeatedly clear that the Kremlin would “not blindly follow everything

²¹²SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.79/64 über eine Besprechung mit dem Geschaeftsträger der UdSSR in der DRV, Genossen Priwalow, 18. August 1964,’ pp.185-188

²¹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20 440, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.99/64 über den Besuch der FDGB-Delegation bei Gen. Ho Chi Minh am 24. September 1964,’ pp.4-6

the DRV does, and what Beijing wishes.” The Chinese objective, he complained, was to “provoke clashes between the Soviet Union and the USA wherever possible.” They did not succeed in Cuba, he said. “Now they are trying it in Vietnam.” Furthermore, Shcherbakov decried Hanoi’s refusal to use the United Nations and settle the crisis through diplomatic means. “The DRV doesn’t want to negotiate,” he said, “because Beijing doesn’t want to.” Despite the rising tensions, however, Bergold was assured that an international war would not come to pass. The Kremlin, Shcherbakov relayed, was confident that Washington would not allow itself to get sucked into a “major conflict.” After the presidential election in November, there would be an opportunity to resolve the crisis “politically.”²¹⁴

The conversation between the two ambassadors was mindboggling. No other word does it justice. It revealed just how deeply the Sino-Soviet split structured their view of the unfolding events. China, not the United States, was the central source of concern. China, not the United States, was perceived as the main threat to peace. And, remarkably, the United States, not China was considered the more likely to refrain from escalating. This kind of rationale would have been unfathomable two years ago. Polycentrism had turned the world upside down. It was striking, too, that the communist states interpreted the U.S. bombardment differently, that they viewed it through their own ideological prisms. Above the 17th parallel, GDR officials reported that the government was using every opportunity to signpost the airstrike as proof that the “revisionists” theories were vacuous. Typical of this standpoint were remarks by the DRV’s first secretary in Beijing, who complained to the East Germans that their “treaty of friendship” with Moscow had not only alleviated tensions in Europe, but allowed “the imperialists to concentrate all of their strength in South Vietnam and Laos.”²¹⁵ Conversely, whilst discussing the crisis with the Soviet counsellor, Foreign Minister, Lothar Bolz, expressed regret that Hanoi had failed to coordinate its policies, and vented particular criticism against the Chinese leadership, whose “historical guilt” had led “certain imperialist circles” to have “misconceptions” about the “balance of power.” Bolz was insinuating that if the PRC had not split the Marxist-Leninist world, then the LBJ administration would never have dared strike a socialist country.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.106/64 über den Antrittsbesuch des neuen sowjetischen Botschafter Gen. Schtscherbakow beim Gen. Bergold am 30. September, 1964,’ pp.192-195

²¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, ‘Telegramm von Franz Faber an Wieland, 14 Oktober 1964’; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/229, ‘Zusammenfassende Übersicht über Gespräche mit ausländischen Diplomaten (31. Juli - 10. August), 20. August 1964,’ pp.104-105

²¹⁶ PA MfAA, A597, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Dr. Lothar Bolz, mit dem Gesandten der sowjetischen Botschaft, Genossen Subkov, 10. September 1964,’ pp.1-2. On East German correlation between U.S. aggression and the differences within the socialist world, see also

Most important from the East German vantage point, however, was that relations with Hanoi and Beijing had reached a new low. Neither of them wanted to cooperate with the Soviet Bloc and resolve the crisis through diplomatic means. Lorenz Lüthi has contended that as late as 5 October, (whilst discussing U Thant's initiative) Mao Zedong advised Pham Van Dong not to reject negotiations.²¹⁷ What he fails to mention is that forty-eight hours later, the PRC's deputy foreign minister officially rebuffed the Soviet ambassador's proposal of resolving the dispute through the UN.²¹⁸ Instead of advocating a peaceful solution, the East Germans considered it more likely that China and North Vietnam would both intervene in the "chaotic situation" below the 17th parallel.²¹⁹ Military escalation, then, had become a very real prospect. Worse still, the GDR and its allies were under no illusions that, because of their vestigial influence, they could merely react to events, rather than control them. As Pommerening's replacement, Franz Faber pointed out, he and his colleagues were nothing more than "irritating foreigners" to the VWP.²²⁰ There did not seem any hope of political rapprochement, or of recovering Soviet Bloc influence. Something radical needed to happen, some sort of political shake-up to revivify communist cohesion. Oddly enough, it was at that moment, on 15 October, that Erich Honecker received a telephone call, informing him that Nikita Khrushchev had stepped down as Soviet premier.²²¹

PA MfAA, C607/75, 'Aufzeichnung der 1.AEA. Betreff: Einschätzung der USA-Aggression gegen die DRV (Anfang August 1964), n.d.' p.151

²¹⁷ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.307. For the conversation between Pham Van Dong and Mao Zedong, see O. Westad (ed.), '77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977,' *CWIHP, Working Paper No.22* (May, 1998), pp.72-75

²¹⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/229, 'Vermerk über eine Information des sowjetischen Botschafters Genossen Tschewonenko zu den Vorschlägen der Sowjetunion an die UNO, 16. Oktober 1964,' pp.138-139

²¹⁹ BArch-MA, DVW1/6426/a, 'Aufzeichnung von Rolf Müller. Betreff: Maßnahmen in der DRV zur Erhöhung der militärischen Verteidigung, 10. Oktober 1964'

²²⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DC900/3926, 'Telegramm von Franz Faber an Wieland, 14 Oktober 1964'

²²¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3514, 'Akttenotiz über das Telefongespräch zwischen Breshnew und Honecker am 15. Oktober 1964,' p.155

Chapter 6
Choices and Escalation
October 1964–January 1965

Khrushchev's sudden exit from the world stage, the man who had dominated Soviet affairs for the past decade, heralded a period of uncertainty. In Bonn, his political eclipse came as a shock.¹ More than anyone, Khrushchev had been identified with peaceful coexistence. While the West Germans doubted that his successors would reverse Soviet policies, it was assumed that his removal provided an opening to restore a semblance of socialist cohesion.² The week of upheaval and global disquiet was shaken further by Beijing's detonation of a nuclear device. A public opinion poll recorded that 50% of FRG citizens believed that Chinese ownership of the bomb "greatly increased the danger of a world war."³ Surveying the hardening of frontlines, NATO's annual report went so far as to warn that the "pause" could "end at any moment" and singled out Vietnam as a spectacle of diffused crisis.⁴

But although the Kremlin took steps to mend the alliance and reassert Soviet influence in Southeast Asia, the Erhard government saw no evidence that Beijing and Moscow had adopted a concerted programme. Both were still envisioned as rivals that were vying for political authority. The struggle in Vietnam appeared to be following its own laws. Moscow, Beijing and Washington were simultaneously competing against one other. Franco-American discord about whether to negotiate or escalate blurred the distinction between friend and foe further. Nevertheless, wanting to be a loyal ally and determined to preserve the Atlantic Alliance, Erhard ignored the Foreign Ministry's advice to remain silent and offered vocal support for U.S. involvement.

All the while, the screws of escalation continued to turn. At the ambassadorial conference in February, FRG executives discussed the available choices. The conflict was a

¹ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.115

² LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Memos, 7/64-8/64, 'From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: German Views on Soviet Leadership Changes, 19 October 1964.' See also Erhard's comments to Ambassador McGhee, in LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Memos, 7/64-8/64, 'From McGhee to Secretary of State, 24 October 1964'

³ NARA, RG0306, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Entry# P64: Research Memoranda: 1963-1999, Container #15, 'M-37-65, USIA-IRS/AE, Current Brief, No.24. Subject: West Germans see Communist Chinese Nuclear Bomb as Greatly Increasing War Danger, 8 February 1965.' For the FRG press reaction to the successful atomic test of the Chinese, see NARA, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, POL 2-1 Joint Weekas, GER-W, to POL People Biographic Data, GER-W, Box 2209, POL 2-1 Joint Weekas, GER W, 1 January 1964, 'From Embassy Bonn to Department of State, 23 October 1964'

⁴ NATO Archive, C-M(65)40-E, 'Annual Political Appraisal. Report by the Secretary General, 24 April 1965,' p.7

disaster. No national cohesion existed. Both politically and militarily, the RVN was falling apart. Washington had, in short, reached a crossroad. It could no longer equivocate. It could no longer ignore reality. South Vietnam was unable to pull itself together. The alternative was to either drastically increase, or decrease state involvement.

In East Berlin, contrariwise, Khrushchev's ouster was greeted with unconcealed joy. Walter Ulbricht expressed quiet confidence that the political reshuffle would ensure a return to the old order. For sure, the Vietnam conflict provided an excellent pretext to set aside past differences and close ranks against a common adversary. In practice, though, Ulbricht's hope of returning to a cohesive bloc structure proved futile. The entrenched ideological differences were unbridgeable. Furthermore, despite Soviet endeavours to end the war through a political settlement, GDR officials realised that the conflict above and below the 17th parallel was conjoining. The initiation of Operation Rolling Thunder shattered any hope of peaceful coexistence and compelled East Berlin to assist in the defence of North Vietnam.

Rewinding the Clock

In popular culture, Walter Ulbricht has become to personify the nefarious legacy of the GDR. Mocked for his Saxon dialect, his goatee and his height, Ulbricht will forever be remembered as the man who built the Berlin Wall.⁵ Buried underneath the jokes and abhorrence, however, there is something almost resembling respect. Historians, such as Hope Harrison and Johanna Granville, have highlighted two impressive characteristics he possessed: His ability to survive. And his instinct for political opportunity.⁶ Ulbricht's reaction to the premier's dismissal was a prime example. For some time, he had been worried about Soviet movements. From Ulbricht's standpoint, the reduction of Cold War tensions, especially the East European countries' willingness to sign trade agreements with Bonn, had furthered a sense of isolation.⁷ Even worse, during an unprecedented visit to West Germany in July, Khrushchev's son-in-law had made malicious remarks about how Ulbricht was "old" and would "die soon."⁸ Indeed, the national press quoted Aleksei Adzubei telling Erhard that the USSR's "historic task" was to defend West Germany from "the yellow peril." Reports of

⁵ On Ulbricht, See E. Kranz (Hrsg.), *Walter Ulbricht. Zeitzeugen erinnern sich* (Berlin, 2013); Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, p.314

⁶ J. Granville, 'East Germany in 1956: Walter Ulbricht's Tenacity in the Face of Opposition,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 52, Number 3 (2006), pp.417-438; Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall*, p.13

⁷ Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, p.220

⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3497, 'DDR Militärattache in Moskau an Walter Ulbricht. Betreff: Information über Stimmungen und Meinungen im Zusammenhang mit den Beschlüssen des Oktoberplenums des ZK der KPdSU, 27. Oktober 1964,' p.259

Khrushchev having accepted an invitation to visit Bonn himself no doubt reinforced Ulbricht's alarm that the GDR would be sacrificed for some sort of deal.⁹

It is unsurprising, then, that on hearing the news of Khrushchev's dismissal, the GDR leader could not contain his delight. "That really was high time, though," Ulbricht exclaimed to his personal physician, "for he had become impossible lately!" Khrushchev's "erratic" policies, he lamented, had been a "great danger" for the "entire socialist camp."¹⁰ Under his watch, cohesion had broken down.¹¹ Now that Khrushchev had been replaced by the diarchy of Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin, Ulbricht was confident that the schism could be reversed. He was certain that *personalities*, rather than fundamentals, had been to blame. He moved quickly. On 20 October, Ulbricht proposed to Brezhnev that the Warsaw Pact members convene a conference, and subsequently dispatched a high-profile delegation to his eastern neighbours.¹² The purpose was to synchronise foreign policies and show Marxist-Leninist concord. A week later, Ulbricht received a telephone call from the CPSU politburo, informing him that Zhou Enlai had suggested sending Chinese representatives to the 47th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.¹³ Ulbricht reciprocated. On 3 November, he signalled his own party's willingness to develop ties between "China, the Soviet Union, the GDR and the other peoples' democracies."¹⁴ Ulbricht's naming of China, as well as his omission of both the DRV and North Korea, reveals that he considered rapprochement with Beijing key. He seemed to think that if China could be persuaded to re-establish convivial relations, the other, smaller states would follow suit.

⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3497, 'Material [für Walter Ulbricht] über einige Aspekte der Reise von Adshubej nach Westdeutschland und über Äusserungen des Herrn Kroll, 3. November 1964,' p. 262, p.265. On GDR concern about Soviet-West German rapprochement, see also SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3497, 'Abteilung Internationale Verbindung an Genosse Ulbricht, 27. Oktober 1964,' pp.255-257; Axen, *Ich war ein Diener der Partei*, pp.234-235

¹⁰ Linke, "Ab morgen bist du Leibarzt," p.272. It is interesting that in contrast to previous Soviet leadership changes, the SED was given a full explanation as to why Khrushchev was replaced. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1311, 'Bestand: Politbüro: Zur Ablösung des Genossen Chruschtschows. 26. Oktober 1964'; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3514, 'Vermerk über eine Aussprache mit dem Genossen Andropow, Sekretär der ZK der KPdSU am 19. Dezember 1964,' pp.201-207

¹¹ Indeed, both Beijing and Hanoi had restated their blank refusal to attend an international summit. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/219, 'Antwortbrief des ZK der KP Chinas auf den Brief des ZK der KPdSU vom 15. Juni 1964,' pp.19-29; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Antwortbrief des Zentralkomitees der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion, 15. Oktober 1964,' pp.143-145

¹² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3387, 'Ulbricht an Breshnew, 21. Oktober 1964,' pp.100-101; SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/957, 'Anlage Nr.2 zum Protokoll Nr.42 vom 20. Oktober 1964,' p.9; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2/959, 'Anlage Nr.4 zum Protokoll Nr.44/64 vom 27. Oktober 1964,' p.63

¹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3609, 'Aktennotiz über das Telefongespräch mit Genossen Podgorny am 29. Oktober 1964,' p.227

¹⁴ TNA, FO371/177904, 'General Peel Yates to Bonn, Telegram No. 748. Subject: Ulbricht on Khrushchev's Dismissal and on Relations with China, 4 November 1964'

This certainly explains why Ulbricht refrained from meeting Pham Van Dong during the festivities and, instead, chose to discuss Vietnam with Zhou. On 10 November, inside the GDR embassy, Ulbricht made his pitch. He opened the dialogue by expressing confidence that the summit provided an opportunity for rapprochement. Both the domestic- and international situation, he stressed, necessitated coordinated support. He reminded Zhou that it had always been Adenauer's "central foreign political thesis" to sharpen differences between Beijing and the socialist states. Pointing to Germany and East Asia, Ulbricht insisted that these were, at present, the "main areas of conflict" and that there was a need for the two nations to inform each other about present developments. Whatever ideological disagreements existed, he said, each and every Marxist-Leninist was fighting "imperialism."¹⁵ Ergo, the maintenance of world peace obligated the socialist camp to return to its cohesive form.

Zhou was unimpressed. In contrast to Ulbricht, he focused on what divided, rather than united, the camp. Irrespective of the Soviet reshuffle, he complained, there had been no change whatsoever in its policies. The Kremlin's past programme, he stated, had been to "ally itself with the USA, so that it can solve the world's problems." Moscow, Zhou continued, was still treating bilateral ties as a relationship between father and son, with themselves representing the "high command." Offering specific examples, he disclosed to Ulbricht that a Soviet marshal had not only derided his Chinese counterpart's uniform as a "carnival costume," but had proposed that the CCP get rid of Mao, just like the CPSU had done with Khrushchev. "That is an extremely serious defamation of the Chinese people and the Chinese party," Zhou warned. Yet it was the premier's analysis of Ulbricht's East Asia-Germany connection which stood out. Although he acknowledged that both sides should support one other, he pointed out that Washington's central concern was Indochina. "U.S.-imperialism does not want two fronts," he remarked. The situation in Germany would, hence, become "easier." Nor did Zhou seem perturbed about the widening conflict. Instead, Ulbricht was told that the U.S. would not withdraw from Southeast Asia and that it would be a "long-term struggle." "In this question," Zhou noted, "we socialist countries in the East shoulder the responsibility of fighting U.S.-imperialism." The Kremlin should focus its attention towards the West. "We only demand the following of the Soviet leadership," Zhou added, "that it supports us politically in this matter and that it does not, as Khrushchev did, make contact with the USA."¹⁶

¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/201/712, 'Besprechung der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der DDR mit der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der VR China (10. November 1964 in der Botschaft der DDR in Moskau)'

¹⁶ Ibid.

The Ulbricht-Zhou discussion illustrated that, irrespective of their mutual adherence to Marxist-Leninist scripture, the two men's analysis of global politics were at opposite ends of the spectrum. Whereas the former wanted to draw a straight line underneath the past and work in tandem towards safeguarding peace, the latter was adamant that socialist cohesion could only be restored if the USSR changed its attitude. The same held true for Vietnam. From what Zhou was telling Ulbricht, it seemed that he had accepted the inevitability of war, even expressing opposition to the idea of using Soviet power to settle the dispute - just like Khrushchev had tried in Laos. It was moreover striking that Zhou not only made a distinction between "eastern" and "western" states within the socialist world, but that he spoke of an "international division of labour." He seemed to be implying that Indochina was Beijing's, rather than Moscow's responsibility. "So we will only come to an understanding under the conditions of an expanded war in Southeast Asia," Ulbricht asked? "We believe that one has to come together now and pre-empt the imperialists." The premier merely reaffirmed that Beijing would not allow Moscow to impose its "concept."¹⁷

If Ulbricht needed any confirmation that the socialist world remained torn, information passed on to the Stasi provided it. According to a "reliable source," the PRC ambassador had told his French counterpart in Moscow that "at present, reconciliation is out of the question."¹⁸ Khrushchev's ouster had failed to turn back time. Uncertain about the next move, East Berlin requested a consultation meeting with the CPSU.¹⁹ On 19 December, Yuri Andropov informed his German audience that rapprochement with the CCP needed to be attained through the "emergence of common standpoints." The Kremlin would, therefore, propose "joint political action with regards to South Vietnam." Andropov made it clear that the bloc was not abandoning peaceful coexistence and needed to "defend" its ideological concept.²⁰ Nevertheless, unity of action in Vietnam was, to quote Brezhnev, judged the "most effective lever to normalise Sino-Soviet relations."²¹ There was a key reason to be hopeful. Andropov

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ BStU, Archiv der Zentralstelle, MfS Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung, Nr. 207, Teil 1 von 2, 'Einzel-information über eine Unterredung zwischen Kreisen der französischen und der chinesischen Botschaft in Moskau über das Verhältnis Sowjetunion-Volksrepublik China, 27. November 1964,' p.102

¹⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3514, 'Honecker an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion, 30. November 1964,' p.188

²⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3514, 'Vermerk über eine Aussprache mit dem Genossen Andropow, Sekretär der ZK der KPdSU am 19. Dezember 1964,' p.203

²¹ A Brezhnev, *Kitai: ternisty put k dobrososedstvu: vosponminaniya i razmyshleniya* (Moscow, 1998), p.103

pointed out that, contrary to Beijing, Hanoi had refrained from resuming polemics and was making “serious efforts” towards reconciliation.²²

It was a fascinating volte-face. Whereas Khrushchev had virtually disengaged the USSR from Indochina, the new leadership was determined to reassert its influence and use the conflict as a means to advance socialist cohesion. Hanoi’s refusal to imitate Beijing’s movements, suggested that it could be a useful assistant. For sure, the GDR embassy recorded a shift in emphasis. Khrushchev’s ouster had taken the VWP leadership by surprise. So surprised in fact, that they failed to remove a polemic article in the November edition of *Hoc Tap*, which criticised the Kremlin’s “chattering talk of peaceful coexistence with imperialism.”²³ Embarrassed, Le Duan called on the Soviet ambassador and apologised for the “mistake.” Furthermore, GDR officials noticed that Duan spent an unusually long time attending the October Revolution festivities in Hanoi and even “flung his arms around a Soviet singer.”²⁴ Just like Ulbricht, the DRV expected Khrushchev’s removal to precipitate a reunited bloc. “Lately,” the deputy head of the party school revealed to Ambassador Bergold, “we can breathe again.” The highest representatives of all the fraternal states, he pointed out, had gathered to discuss how the socialist camp could be consolidated. For the Vietnamese, this offered “new hope.”²⁵

It would be wrong to overstate this shift. In the aftermath of the Moscow congregation, the MfAA estimated that there had been no change in Hanoi’s “strategic attitude.” Rather, the broad festivities had been premised on the belief that the CPSU would abandon its ideological concept.²⁶ It was pertinent that when Pham Van Dong stopped over in Beijing on his return home, he remarked to the awaiting Chinese functionary that “he and his delegation had no

²² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3514, ‘Vermerk über eine Aussprache mit dem Genossen Andropow, Sekretär der ZK der KPdSU am 19. Dezember 1964,’ pp.203

²³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/442, ‘Auszüge aus dem in Nr.11 der Zeitschrift “Hoc tap” ursprünglich veröffentlichten und dann zurückgezogenen Artikel,’ p.206; PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam im MfAA. Information: Einige Bemerkungen zur gegenwärtigen Politik der Partei- und Staatsführung der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam gegenüber der UdSSR, 19. November 1964,’ p.172

²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/442, ‘Aufzeichnung von Guhl. Betreff: Artikel aus “Hoc tap” Nr. 11/1964, 14. November 1964,’ p.202

²⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/438, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.125/64. Am 12. November 1964 gab Genosse Bergold ein Abendessen für die Delegation der Parteihochschule,’ p.6

²⁶ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam im MfAA. Information: Einige Bemerkungen zur gegenwärtigen Politik der Partei- und Staatsführung der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam gegenüber der UdSSR, 19. November 1964,’ p.175; PA MfAA, A8750, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Einschätzung der Haltung der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams nach den Veränderungen in der sowjetischen Partei- und Staatsführung, 13. Januar 1965,’ p.210. Information passed on to Ulbricht also noted that Vietnamese students in Moscow had expressed unconcealed delight on hearing the news. They emphasised that it “proved” the correctness of the PRC’s dialectic. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3497, ‘Winzer an Ulbricht. Betreff: Information über Stimmungen und Meinungen im Zusammenhang mit den Beschlüssen des Oktoberplenums des ZK der KPdSU, 27. Oktober 1964,’ p.241

questions” to discuss.²⁷ Still, a crucial difference between Beijing and Hanoi offered the East Germans hope. Whereas the former wanted to thwart socialist unity, the latter was trying to “normalise” relations.²⁸ Nowhere was this cleft more apparent than at the “international solidarity conference” in Hanoi. Held between 25 and 29 November, the Chinese went to great lengths to stop the “modern revisionists” from attending. Before the session began, Beijing encouraged a proxy ally to propose that only representatives of countries that were fighting an “anti-imperialist” or “armed” conflict should be invited.²⁹ After the proposal was rejected, the CCP switched tactics and obstructed the Russian delegation’s stopover in Beijing for seventy-two hours. The excuse given was that there were “no seats left on the plane.”³⁰ Once the conference got underway, however, the Vietnamese demanded that the CCP desist from provoking their guests. Hanoi’s willingness to confront Beijing was unprecedented and it must have pleased East Berlin that a “not very happy” Chinese delegation departed Hanoi.³¹

It is difficult to ascertain why North Vietnam began challenging Beijing’s policies. GDR onlookers believed that the answer lay not in changes within the socialist world, but in the ever-growing threat of an expanded war. Truong Chinh informed the visiting Paul Wandel that the purpose of the solidarity conference had been to obtain “moral and material assistance.”³² It could not be denied that the battle was entering a dangerous phase. Lyndon Johnson’s presidential landslide on 3 November meant that he was no longer inhibited by

²⁷ PA MfAA, A6835, ‘Aufzeichnung von Grabowski. Betreff: Information über einige Aspekte der Auseinandersetzung mit der chinesischen Führung, 26. November 1964 (Die Information wurde angefertigt auf der Grundlage von Gesprächen von Mitarbeitern des ZK der KPdSU während einer Veranstaltung in der Botschaft am 20. November 1964),’ p.81

²⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.1/65. In einer gemeinsamen Aussprache zwischen dem Gen. Schtscherbakow und den Botschaftern der MVR, Bulgarien Ungarns, der CSSR und der DDR informierte der sowjetischen Botschafter über einige Probleme der Solidaritätskonferenz in Hanoi vom 25.-29. November 1964,’ p.218; PA MfAA, A8733, ‘Zum Verlauf der internationalen Solidaritätskonferenz in Hanoi (FS des Gen. Bibow, Hanoi, vom 27 November an die 1.AEA - siehe auch Information Nr.147/XX vom 24. November 1964), 28. November 1964,’ p.196

²⁹ PA MfAA, A8733, ‘Zum Verlauf der internationalen Solidaritätskonferenz in Hanoi (FS des Gen. Bibow, Hanoi, vom 27 November an die 1.AEA - siehe auch Information Nr.147/XX vom 24. November 1964), 28. November 1964’ pp.195-196; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.1/65. In einer gemeinsamen Aussprache zwischen dem Gen. Schtscherbakow und den Botschaftern der MVR, Bulgarien Ungarns, der CSSR und der DDR informierte der sowjetischen Botschafter über einige Probleme der Solidaritätskonferenz in Hanoi vom 25.-29. November 1964, 5. Januar 1965,’ p.217

³⁰ PA MfAA, C1066/73, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.131/64 über ein Gespräch zwischen dem sowjetischen Botschaftsrat, Genossen Priwalow, und dem Genossen Bibow am 23. November 1964,’ p.50

³¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.1/65. In einer gemeinsamen Aussprache zwischen dem Gen. Schtscherbakow und den Botschaftern der MVR, Bulgarien Ungarns, der CSSR und der DDR informierte der sowjetische Botschafter über einige Probleme der Solidaritätskonferenz in Hanoi vom 25.-29. November 1964, 5. Januar 1965,’ p.218

³² PA MfAA, A8733, ‘Zum Verlauf der internationalen Solidaritätskonferenz in Hanoi (FS des Gen. Bibow, Hanoi, vom 27 November an die 1.AEA - siehe auch Information Nr.147/XX vom 24. November 1964), 28. November 1964,’ p.195

electoral concerns.³³ Bergold understood that South Vietnam held “great strategic importance,” which allowed America to “maintain its influence” in the region. And yet, despite the enemy’s formidable power, its position had deteriorated. Since Diem’s overthrow, the ambassador mused, it had failed to construct a stable, pro-American government. The choices were narrowing. Bergold did not think that the U.S. would seek a political compromise. Nor did he believe that it would launch a full-scale invasion of the North. Instead, he estimated that Washington intended to employ “armed violence” below the 17th parallel and initiate further bombing raids. “The military preparations point to this,” he added.³⁴

Impending escalation, then, loomed large over the peninsula. North Vietnam was on the verge of fighting the greatest military power that had ever existed. It was only natural that decision-makers would seek all the help they could get. But there was more. The GDR embassy appreciated that support for rebel forces in the South, as well as emphasis on self-reliance, had stretched the economy to breaking-point.³⁵ Mutterings of discontent were growing louder. Hoang Van Loi, the Deputy Foreign Minister, revealed that Operation Pierce Arrow had made the government realise that segments of the inhabitants were not firmly behind the VWP. An expansion of the war, he noted, could cause both the Catholic population and national minorities to turn against the regime.³⁶ In fact, the East Germans became aware of a “certain discontent and insecurity” among DRV citizens, above all, about the “one-sided orientation” towards Beijing. Appraising the 10th Plenum, convened at the turn of the year, Bibow recorded that this disillusionment had spread to leading circles of the party. Although China’s successful detonation of a nuclear device was hailed in Hanoi as an upshot of its “firm revolutionary will,” the truth was that Beijing did not have the resources to meet its ally’s demands.³⁷ Bibow’s view, therefore, was that the DRV had grown tired of false promises and had come to a “more realistic idea” about Chinese aid.³⁸ A conversation between Nguyen Huu Tho and Erich

³³ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, p.340

³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20 441, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.132 über eine Information des Genossen Ha Van Lau, Leiter der Verbindungsmission der DRV zur CIC, am 10. Dezember 1964 im MfAA der DRV,’ pp.408-410

³⁵ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Beziehungen Demokratische Republik Vietnam-Frankreich (Information der I.AEA vom 2. Oktober 1964) an den Genossen Ulbricht, Stopf, Honecker, Axen,’ p.153

³⁶ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Zur Lage in Vietnam (Aus dem Aktenvermerk des Gen. Bergold über den Gegenbesuch beim sowjetischen Botschafter, Gen. Schtscherbakow, am 17 Oktober 1964),’ p.200

³⁷ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: 1. Einschätzung der 10. Tagung des ZK der PWV vom Dezember 1964, 4. Februar 1965,’ p.215; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/226, ‘Einschätzung der Reaktion auf den ersten Kerntest der VR China und über das internationale Echo auf den Brief von Ministerpräsident Tschou En-lai, 11. Januar 1965,’ p.10

³⁸ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bibow. Betreff: 1. Einschätzung der 10. Tagung des ZK der PWV vom Dezember 1964, 4. Februar 1965,’ p.215. On East German belief that the DRV had been “disappointed” by the economic cooperation with China, see PA MfAA, A8750, ‘Information: Zu Ergebnissen der 10. Plenartagung der Partei der Werktätigen der D.R.V. für den Aussenhandel (Aus einem Vermerk des Handelsrates, Gen von der Becke, Hanoi) 1. April 1965,’ p.239

Honecker in 1978 adds an additional element to Bibow's appraisal. Reminiscing about the conflict's origins, the former chairman of the NLF recalled that he and Vietnamese policymakers had been infuriated by Mao's interview with Edgar Snow. "In 1964, the "special war" had failed," he recalled. "Johnson wanted to intervene directly, but the USA was hesitant, because it worried that China would get involved [...] At the time, Mao Zedong stated that China did not want to wage war outside of its borders. That was the green light for Johnson's direct involvement."³⁹

These comments certainly suggest that the Sino-Vietnamese relationship had reached its zenith, that there was an opening for the Soviet Bloc to regain influence. It was not coincidental that GDR reports became more sanguine. This was noticeable, too, in its analysis of the war effort. In contrast with their Soviet counterparts, officials were cautiously optimistic.⁴⁰ The Vietcong's successes were described as "remarkable." 75% of terrain was under its control.⁴¹ True, Bergold doubted whether a "complete military victory" was possible (citing the NLF's substantial losses in men and material). He, nevertheless, contended that the present stalemate worked to the rebels' advantage. The kaleidoscopic political turmoil, as well as the mass demonstrations against the RVN regime offered the rebels a propitious opportunity. The one way of resolving the crisis, he believed, was for the Vietcong to rally domestic, as well as international support, with the objective of seeking a "political compromise." Bergold, in short, wanted the NLF to use both its strong position and the enemy's paralysis, to end the war on advantageous terms.⁴²

How to bring the conflict to a conclusion. This was at the forefront of East German appraisals of the conflict below the 17th parallel. On 21 December, during a private exchange with Hoang Van Loi, Bibow invited him to share his thoughts about the present situation. Hoang expressed confidence that America was trapped. It did not know which way to turn - whether to escalate, or seek a political agreement. "Inside the USA," he relayed, "there are an increasing amount of forces, which are condemning the dirty war in South Vietnam and demanding its termination. This was not the case a year ago." But it was Hoang's subsequent comments that struck Bibow:

³⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/2493, 'Aktenvermerk über das Gespräch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker mit dem Vizepräsidenten der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam, Genossen Nguyen Huu Tho, am 22. September 1978'

⁴⁰ On Soviet doubt about the NLF and its chances of victory, see Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p.309

⁴¹ BArch-MA, DVW1/6426/a, 'Aufzeichnung von Müller. Betreff: Einschätzung über die Situation in den befreiten Gebieten Südvietnams auf politischem, ökonomischem und kulturellem Gebiet, 4. November 1964'

⁴² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20 441, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.132 über eine Information des Genossen Ha Van Lau, Leiter der Verbindungsmission der DRV zur CIC, am 10. Dezember 1964,' pp.409-410

If the USA wants to end the war, it should say it directly or through emissaries and enter into talks with the NLF. The NLF will be ready to negotiate, but it will not propose negotiations itself. It will continue the struggle until the USA is compelled to begin talks.

To be sure, Hoang had not said anything out of the ordinary. In fact, he had restated what the East Germans had been told all along: The NLF would fight for as long as it took the other side to propose peace talks. Yet there was a sense of urgency about these utterances. Bibow decided to push the matter: “Does the DRV support talks between the NLF and the USA?” “Yes,” was Hoang’s response. “Both sides must have a realistic understanding of the situation.” He acknowledged that Washington feared the loss of prestige and voiced his opinion that America needed to suffer its own Dien-Bien-Phu. Yet he did not suggest that war was inevitable. Instead, he named France as a possible broker and emphasised that reunification was not an immediate concern. Pointing to the 3rd Party Congress, he reminded Bibow that the VWP had already ruled that there would be an interregnum between the existence of two regimes and a united Vietnam.⁴³

The chargé took these words at face value. Hoang’s reference to Paris as an intermediate seemed particularly significant. In his mind, it explained the frequent meetings between Pham Van Dong and the French delegate-general.⁴⁴ Bibow’s superior must have read a transcript of the conversation, for Bergold raised the subject of negotiations with Ambassador Shcherbakov, pointing out that the press organs had begun to publish more articles on peace talks. Both men agreed that Khrushchev’s removal had led to a remarkable turnaround. Bergold noted that General Giap had provided an extensive commentary on the German question and that the GDR had been named ahead of the national liberation struggle. Shcherbakov, in turn, revealed that twenty Soviet delegations had visited Hanoi since October. This, he stated, would have “been unthinkable a couple of months ago.” During an enlarged meeting with pro-Soviet diplomats the following week, Shcherbakov picked up on these deliberations. He relayed to his audience that some Vietnamese had begun to perceive themselves as a “tool” for Chinese policymaking. “Particularly in the South,” he continued, there was disappointment about a lack of aid, which debarred the NLF from launching “military campaigns.” Hanoi was, hence, moving away from Beijing’s “adventurist plans” and showing a readiness to negotiate. They had mentioned two stages: First, withdrawal of American troops and subsequent talks. Second, reunification of both parts of the country on the basis of the Geneva Accords. He added a caveat, however.

⁴³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/442, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.8/65 über ein Gespräch zwischen dem stellvertretenden Aussenminister, Hoang van Loi, und dem Gen. Bibow am 21. Dezember 1964,’ pp.222-225

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.225

Bergold and his colleagues were warned that Beijing was simultaneously trying to create an East Asian front against the USA, stretching from South Korea to Taiwan. The East Germans were, thus, in no doubt about the high risk of war.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite Shcherbakov's ominous forewarning, the atmosphere in the GDR capital was remarkably calm. As 1964 became 1965, attention centred on nuclear proliferation and Ulbricht's visit to Cairo, rather than Indochina. Not once between Khrushchev's ouster and Operation Flaming Dart was the subject broached during politburo meetings.⁴⁶ At the Warsaw Pact Conference in the new year, Ulbricht's speech merely cited South Vietnam as one of many American "trouble spots" in the world.⁴⁷ Brezhnev's remark that Soviet representatives would soon leave for Hanoi to discuss bilateral cooperation, especially military cooperation, did not faze him.⁴⁸ Quite the reverse. A day before Kosygin's departure, Ulbricht proposed that the CCP dispatch a delegation to Beijing and resume bilateral talks. He recommended further that Kosygin inform the DRV leadership about current preparations for an international conference.⁴⁹ Yet, in contrast to the Cuban Crisis, there was no hint of trepidation. No sign that the GDR was making plans to fight a cataclysmal war.

The question is why. After all, East Berlin was at the forefront of the Cold War. It was the state most likely to get obliterated in a capitalist-communist confrontation. The answer was simple. Policymakers had realised the *changing nature* of the geopolitical structure. They appreciated that it no longer embodied a clear-cut conflict between East and West. The dissipation of power and authority on both sides of the Berlin Wall had precipitated a pluralistic international order. In its appraisal of American foreign policy, the MfAA noted that, for the first time, a president had drawn a distinction between peaceful and belligerent communists.⁵⁰ Johnson's exact words in his state of the union address were that America sought "peaceful understandings" with the USSR and went so far as to propose that the superpowers "lessen the danger to freedom" together. At the same time, the president warned that "in Asia, communism

⁴⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/442, 'Aktenvermerk Nr.2/65 über Gespräche mit Genossen Schtscherbakow über Entwicklungstendenzen in der DRV am 22 und 28. Dezember 1964,' p.226-228

⁴⁶ The first time that Vietnam was discussed was on 9 February 1965. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2/974, 'Protokoll Nr.6/65 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am Dienstag, dem 9. Februar 1965, im Sitzungssaal des Politbüros,' p.2

⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3388, 'Rede von Walter Ulbricht auf der Tagung der Politischen Beratenden Ausschusses der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages am 19. Januar 1965,' p.323

⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3388, 'Rede des Genossen L.I. Breshnew auf der Tagung des Politischen Beratenden Ausschusses der Warschauer Vertrages, 19. Januar 1965.' p.134

⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV/2/2/973, 'Anlage Nr.2 zum Protokoll Nr.5 vom 2. Februar 1965. Betreff: Brief vom Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands an das Präsidium des ZK der KPdSU, 3. Februar 1965,' pp.19-20

⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1386, 'Einschätzung der Politik der USA im Ergebnis der Präsidentenwahlen 1964, 26. Februar 1965.' The memorandum was drafted in January 1965

wears a more aggressive face.”⁵¹ Marxism-Leninism itself, therefore, was not a threat, but rather, the Asian interpretation. The MfAA drew two conclusions. First, Washington considered the European status quo “relatively stable” and had no intention of challenging it. Second, the LBJ government was unwilling to end the war in South Vietnam. And yet, the memorandum added a caveat. Given the realities on the ground, given that the war was “utterly hopeless,” Washington had considered a number of alternatives. “The U.S. government’s immediate problem,” it reflected, “is to prevent the political collapse and military surrender of the South Vietnamese regime, before a political solution, acceptable to American imperialism, can be attained.”⁵²

On the eve of Kosygin’s voyage, then, Vietnam appeared on a knife-edge. The East Germans were uncertain about what would happen. They hoped that the visit would bolster Marxist-Leninist unity and counteract military escalation. No doubt Ulbricht was pleased that Kosygin decided to stopover twice in Beijing and resume discussions with the CCP. Still, in more than one way, East German hopes were disappointed. Most importantly for Ulbricht, the Chinese leadership showed no interest in overcoming the rift. Instead, the Soviets informed him that Beijing intended to fight an “irreconcilable struggle against the idealistic positions of the Marxist-Leninist parties.”⁵³ Nor did the CCP want to cooperate on finding a peaceful solution to the Indochina conflict. On 6 February, Kosygin remarked to Zhou Enlai that “we need to help them [the Americans] find a way out of Vietnam.” Zhou, however, maintained that Washington was refusing to withdraw and that they should “let the United States get bogged down there up to its mud-covered legs.”⁵⁴ Similar themes were apparent during Kosygin’s return from Hanoi. On 11 February, Mao Zedong rejected peaceful coexistence as merely beneficial for the “imperialists.” “Tension will increase,” he told Kosygin. “There is no relaxation. That is [...] an illusion. One has to prepare for war.” Indeed, the chairman made communist cohesion directly *dependent* on the outbreak of hostilities. “In 10-15 years,” he predicted, “when the imperialists raise their hand against you or us, we will come together. The

⁵¹ *New York Times*, ‘Transcript of the President’s Message to Congress on the State of the Union, 5 January 1965,’ p.16

⁵² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1386, ‘Einschätzung der Politik der USA im Ergebnis der Präsidentenwahlen 1964, 26. Februar 1965’

⁵³ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, ‘Information No.098 vom ZK der KPdSU an die Bruderparteien, 24. Februar 1965,’ p.153

⁵⁴ ‘Record of the First Contact between Premier Zhou and Vice Premier Chen Yi and Kosygin, 6 February 1965,’ History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC, FMA, 109-03957-04, p.1-21. Translated by Stephen Mercado, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/165488>. Kosygin’s claim that it was “necessary to help the USA find a way out of Vietnam” is also quoted in a Chinese letter to the CPSU. See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3610, ‘Brief des ZK der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas an das ZK der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion, 14. Juli 1965,’ p.33

conflict will unite us.” On the struggle below the 17th parallel, Mao insisted that there was “nothing terrible” about the number of Vietnamese casualties and that the people in the South would “chase the Americans out.”⁵⁵ Reading the report, Ulbricht was forced to conclude that the Chinese remained opposed to either reconciliation or cooperation. Not only did its leadership have no interest in normalising relations, it refused point-blank to adopt a common stance on Vietnam.

But it was events above the 17th parallel that had a more immediate impact. Although the VWP stressed its opposition to an expanded conflict and Pham Van Dong admitted to Kosygin that the “idea of a political solution” had been discussed, it had been decided that the conditions were “not yet ripe.”⁵⁶ Interestingly, Shcherbakov later told Bibow that the DRV’s “concrete plan” had been to take advantage of the low volume of American troops and launch “major campaigns.”⁵⁷ Framed in this context, it is pertinent that Rolf Müller reported on 14 February that “major campaigns” were being prepared in North Vietnam and that rebel attacks in the Pleiku area, as well as around Saigon, had caused “considerable losses for the USA in men and material.”⁵⁸ Müller felt that there was a correlation between the skirmishes and Kosygin’s visit. It all seemed too coincidental. The Vietcong had struck two hours after the traditional Tet-ceasefire and on the same day as the Soviet leader’s arrival.⁵⁹ DRV decision-makers, Müller argued, had assaulted American bases in the hope of provoking the other side and, thus, obtaining “greater political and economic concessions” from the Soviets.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, ‘Information No.098 vom ZK der KPdSU an die Bruderparteien, 23. Februar 1965,’ p.152-156

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.147; PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit den Botschaftern der anderen sozialistischen Länder in der Botschaft der UdSSR am 2. April 1965,’ p.77; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/49042, ‘Information Nr.47/XII. Zur Politik der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam (Aus einem Aktenvermerk des Gen. Bibow, Hanoi vom 26. November 1965 über eine Besprechung beim sowjetischen Botschafter, Gen. Tscherbakow am 25. November 1965), 8. Dezember 1965’

⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/49042, ‘Information Nr.47/XII. Zur Politik der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam (Aus einem Aktenvermerk des Gen. Bibow, Hanoi vom 26. November 1965 über eine Besprechung beim sowjetischen Botschafter, Gen. Tscherbakow am 25. November 1965), 8. Dezember 1965.’ See also Hoang Quot Viet’s comments at the Indochinese People’s Conference in February 1965 to Soviet journalists that “we [the DRV] do not understand why the USSR supports de Gaulle’s neutralisation concept,” in PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Bergold an Schneidewind, 29. März 1965,’ p.70

⁵⁸ BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, ‘Information von Rolf Müller. Inhalt: Einschätzung der gegenwärtigen Lage in Südvietnam und in der DRV, 14. Februar 1965’

⁵⁹ *New York Times*, ‘Seven G.I.’s Slain in Vietcong Raid; 80 are Wounded, 7 February 1965,’ p.1; PA MfAA, A8734, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.28/65 über eine Information durch Grossoberst Ha Van Lau am 11. Februar 1965,’ p.120

⁶⁰ BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, ‘Information von Rolf Müller. Inhalt: Einschätzung der gegenwärtigen Lage in Südvietnam und in der DRV, 14. Februar 1965.’ Although there is no proof that the attack coincided with Kosygin’s visit, it is unquestionable that the Vietcong was specifically targeting American installations. A Vietcong document captured by the ARVN on 31 January makes this clear. See LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, Box 48, Folder 5, Southeast Asia, Volume III. Special Intelligence Material, 11/64-2/65, ‘CIA Intelligence Memorandum. Subject: Report of Viet Cong Terrorist Plans Against US Installations, 12 February 1965’

If Müller was correct in his belief that the attacks had been timed to punctuate Kosygin's visit, then they fulfilled their purpose: They triggered a chain reaction. On 8 February, Lyndon Johnson chose to retaliate and ordered bombing raids against four North Vietnamese targets.⁶¹ That same day, Hanoi declared a state of national emergency. The armed forces were put on high alert. School lessons were cancelled. Children living in big cities were evacuated. The DRV had, in essence, become a war zone.⁶² Contrary to tentative statements at the beginning of 1965, Bergold stressed that the word "negotiations" had "completely disappeared." The Vietnamese, he informed Schneidewind, were of the opinion that only "[military] blows" would compel the USA to enter into talks and that a "second Dien-Bien-Phu" would solve the reunification problem. "That is the reason," Bergold emphasised, "why the Vietnamese have certain reservations about the Soviet Union's steps towards a peaceful settlement." They had concluded, instead, that "their own policy was and is correct."⁶³ In short, Bergold was informing his superior that peaceful coexistence had failed on the Indochinese peninsula. The Vietnam War had begun.

Unenviable Choices

In the final months prior to Americanisation, the Erhard government could congratulate itself on having withstood strong political pressure for an FRG presence below the 17th parallel. At the beginning of 1965, no more than "twenty-six personnel" were stationed in South Vietnam.⁶⁴ Whatever happened, whichever course the participants decided to take, Bonn would remain uninvolved. Even so, the tenor of the reports was becoming increasingly despondent. The central problem, Ambassador Schlegelberger complained, was "political anarchy." Since Diem's demise, South Vietnam had failed to overcome its executive paralysis.⁶⁵ Neither of the juntas under General Minh or General Khanh had been able to build a functioning nation-state. Nor did a brief experiment with a civilian administration prove successful. What was missing was the image of a government capable of amalgamating the political and military factions.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Logevall, *Choosing War*, p.326; Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, p.353

⁶² BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, 'Information von Rolf Müller. Inhalt: Einschätzung der gegenwärtigen Lage in Südvietnam und in der DRV, 14. Februar 1965'

⁶³ PA MfAA, G-A331, 'Bergold and Schneidewind, 29. März 1965,' p.70-72

⁶⁴ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, Box 15 [1 of 2], Vietnam Memos (A) [3 of 3], Vol. XXXI, 12-31 March 1965, 'World Sitrep on Free World Assistance to Viet-Nam, 11 March 1965'

⁶⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.61, 'Aufzeichnung von Schlegelberger. Betreff: Allgemeine Situation in Saigon, 1. Dezember 1964'

⁶⁶ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Aufzeichnung von Jena. Betreff: In Erwartung der Entscheidung des amerikanischen Präsidenten über die Weiterführung des Krieges in Viet-Nam nach den bevorstehenden Gesprächen mit

The FRG embassy, concurrently, observed a widening American-Vietnamese rift. Michael Hunt has argued that high-level meetings sounded “more than ever like exchanges between impatient parents and irresponsible unruly children.”⁶⁷ On Christmas Eve, Schlegelberger caught a glimpse of what he meant. With “remarkable openness,” Prime Minister, Tran Van Huong, complained to him about the “rough nature” of U.S. criticism. The previous week, he relayed, during a dinner with William Westmoreland and Maxwell Taylor, ARVN officers were reprimanded about meddling in governmental affairs. When the guests challenged these words, the U.S. generals expressed exasperation that the dinner had been a “waste” and that the food should have been “given away” instead.⁶⁸ It was rather “unfair” and “annoying” to the Vietnamese, Schlegelberger noted, that they were being “lectured” by the “mighty Americans.”⁶⁹

If the chronic political crisis remained unresolved, the situation on the battlefield was hardly better. Echoing his GDR counterpart, Herrmann estimated that the Vietcong controlled about 75% of terrain, which included more than 50% of the inhabitants.⁷⁰ Even U.S. installations were endangered. On 1 November, rebel forces shelled the airbase at Bienhoa, killing four Americans and wounding twenty-nine. Although the damage inflicted was negligible, it was the psychological impact that troubled FRG observers. Bienhoa was no further than twenty-four kilometres from Saigon.⁷¹ “For most observers,” Schlegelberger intoned, “it is incomprehensible how the greatest military power in the world, which has dispatched several élite personnel, cannot even protect one of its non-isolated bases.”⁷² To be sure, the other side had its own problems. Typhoons and heavy rainstorms had inundated the provinces Quangnam and Quangnai, thereby wrecking large parts of the Vietcong’s provisions. The Military Attaché, Fritz von Jena, estimated that the doubling and even tripling of taxes in the NLF’s dominions “prove more than anything else just how bad the ordnance and supply chains of the insurgents are.”⁷³ Nevertheless, the cardinal difference between the

Botschafter Taylor, 22 November 1964’; PA AA, B37, Bd.64, ‘Bericht von Jena an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Militärisches im November 1964, 9. Dezember 1964’

⁶⁷ Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson’s War*, p.80

⁶⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.59, ‘Telegramm von Schlegelberger an das Auswärtige Amt Nr.163 vom 24. Dezember 1964’

⁶⁹ PA AA, B37, Bd.158, ‘Aufzeichnung von Schlegelberger. Betreff: Politische Lage in Saigon, 6. Januar 1965’

⁷⁰ PA AA, B37, Bd.61, ‘Bericht von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Bericht Nr.49/64. Die Lage in Südvietnam Ende Dezember 1964, 22. Dezember 1964’

⁷¹ BArch-MA, BL1/5, ‘Kurzorientierung West: Lage Südostasien (Zusammengestellt nach Presseberichten, nach Bericht MilAtt Bangkok vom 19. October 1964 und Bericht der Botschaft in Caberra vom 22. September 1964, 3. November 1964’

⁷² PA AA, B37, Bd.61, ‘Aufzeichnung von Schlegelberger. Betreff: Der 1. November 1964 in Saigon, 4. November 1964’

⁷³ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, ‘Bericht von Jena an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Militärisches im November 1964, 9. Dezember 1964’

two sides was that the Vietcong could smell victory. Yes, its partisans were malnourished. Yes, it was suffering substantial casualties. But the truth was that it had never been closer to its final objective. In turn, the West Germans appreciated that ARVN soldiers saw no end to their despair. On 11 December, an entire unit of more than two-hundred men lay down their arms and deserted to the other side.⁷⁴

Back in Bonn, the Bienhoa raid was judged indicative of American failure to curb political disintegration and thwart rebel advances. Substantial amounts of men and material had made no difference.⁷⁵ South Vietnam was incapable of either pulling itself together, or winning the war.⁷⁶ The situation had reached a crossroads. Saigon's fate hinged on decisions taken in the White House. Only external forces could, perhaps, reverse the alarming trend.⁷⁷ There was uncertainty, though, about how Washington should employ its awesome power. One attractive option was to invade the North. Herrmann, however, squashed this idea. General Westmoreland, he emphasised, had pointed out that the Vietcong was largely self-sufficient and that occupation would magnify the problem, rather than solve it.⁷⁸ On 8 December, diplomats in Washington reported that the American government intended to bomb infiltration centres and supply lines, instead. It was imperative, Marshall Green explained, to bolster morale and send a signal of U.S. determination to Hanoi. This was no doubt true, FRG officials remarked, but could infiltration through the Laotian corridor be inhibited? Would it have a decisive impact on the Vietcong? Somehow, they thought not.⁷⁹ So concerned was Hilmar Bassler about the spectre of a "neutralist government" that he advised the Foreign Ministry to freeze its development projects.⁸⁰ Communist conquest had become more likely than ever before.

In order to review the "crisis situation in Southeast Asia," a remarkable summit meeting was organised. For four consecutive days, between 1 and 4 February 1965, Foreign Ministry

⁷⁴ PA AA, B37, Bd.61, 'Bericht von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Bericht Nr.49/64. Die Lage in Südvietnam Ende Dezember 1964, 22. Dezember 1964'

⁷⁵ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Aufzeichnung von der Abteilung I, 10. November 1964'

⁷⁶ Ibid.; PA AA, B37, Bd.159, 'Dienstanweisung für den neuen Botschafter in Saigon, 2. November 1964'; PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Fernschreiben von Lilienfeld an das Auswärtige Amt, Nr.3344 vom 13. November 1964'

⁷⁷ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Aufzeichnung von der Abteilung I, 10. November 1964'

⁷⁸ PA AA, B37, Bd.64, 'Bericht von Herrmann an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: Bericht Nr.45/64. Die Lage in Südvietnam Anfang Dezember 1964, 2. Dezember 1964'

⁷⁹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. VI, Cables, 12/64-1/65, 'From Rusk to Embassy in Bonn, 8 December 1964.' On West German scepticism about bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail and inhibiting Vietcong subversion, see also PA AA, B37, Bd.158, 'Bericht von Jena an den Bundesminister der Verteidigung. Betreff: OB Nr.2/S/65. Streiflichter zur militärpolitischen Lage in der Republik Viet-Nam Ende Januar 1965, 26. Januar 1965.'

⁸⁰ PA AA, B37, Bd.159, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Investitions Garantien für Süd-Vietnam, 20. Januar 1965'; PA AA, B37, Bd.159, 'Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Deutsche Entwicklungshilfe für Vietnam, 21. Januar 1965'

officers and diplomats scattered across East Asia assembled to share their thoughts. The timing of the conference was crucial. It convened on the eve of Kosygin's voyage to the Far East. Just like East Berlin, Bonn had been surprised by the reshuffle in Moscow. The "crucial element" for Khrushchev's ouster, Sino-Soviet experts claimed, had been the breakup of the socialist world.⁸¹ Schröder revealed to Dean Rusk that Adzubei had suggested the possibility of using nuclear weapons against Beijing, and that he had described Khrushchev as "extremely eager" to visit Bonn. "Presumably," Schröder reflected, "to enlist Western backing in [the] Soviet's struggle with Red-China."⁸² But whilst the Kremlinologists were certain that Soviet leaders would try and restore communist cohesion, they were convinced that Khrushchev's removal had not altered fundamental realities. Ideologically and power politically, the differences cut too deep.⁸³ Sure enough, the resumption of CCP polemics against the CPSU, not to mention both parties' refusal to abandon their ideological programmes, confirmed to the West Germans that they were pursuing disparate objectives.⁸⁴ As a result, Vietnam remained situated within a polycentric- rather than a bipolar context.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the draft of Schröder's opening address. It began by acknowledging that "substantial political changes and shifts in the balance of power" had taken place. Most importantly, China had unfettered itself from the "monolithic bond" with the USSR and was fighting a bitter struggle for Marxist-Leninist leadership. "In Southeast Asia," Schröder continued, "China is trying to expand its sphere of influence through designated proxies. In turn, following the British and French retreat from East- and Southeast Asia, Washington had assumed the role of "paramount power." At the outset, Schröder argued, "the objective of U.S. policy in Asia had been to politically and militarily repress Moscow and

⁸¹ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Memos, 7/64-8/64, 'From Hillenbrand to Secretary of State. Subject: Khrushchev Replacement, 16 October 1964'; LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Memos, 7/64-8/64, 'From McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: German Views on Soviet Leadership Changes, 19 October 1964'

⁸² LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Memos, 7/64-8/64, 'Uncleared Memocon of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and Foreign Minister Schröder, 23 November 1964

⁸³ *AADP, 1964*, p.1191, Fußnote 23. See also the American-German discussions on Soviet foreign policy in Georgetown University, Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library, Special Collections Research Centre, George C. McGhee Papers, Box 32, Berlin Trip November 1-15, 1964, 'Report on the Fourth American-German Conference, 12-15 November 1964'

⁸⁴ PA AA, B40, Bd.71, 'Aufzeichnung von Hans Waiblinger. Betreff: Intensivierung des sowjetisch-chinesischen Konflikts, 27. November 1964,' pp.370-371; PA AA, B40 IIA3, Bd.69, 'Aufzeichnung von Hans Waiblinger. Betreff: Beurteilung neuer sowjetischer Machthaber hinsichtlich Ost-West-Verhältnis, 30. November 1964,' p.46. See also Klaus Mehnert's comments at the American-German Conference in Georgetown University, Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library, Special Collections Research Centre, George C. McGhee Papers, Box 32, Berlin Trip November 1-15, 1964, 'Report on the Fourth American-German Conference, 12-15 November 1964'

the Sino-Soviet alliance.” Shifts in the balance of power, though, had caused the Sino-American rivalry to eclipse the original confrontation.⁸⁵

Reading the speech decades later, it is difficult not to marvel at the complete indifference towards both Vietnamese states. For Schröder, the war was part of a struggle for regional dominance. Southeast Asia was nothing more than a battleground. There was no mention of the NLF, no acknowledgement that Hanoi was fighting for reunification. Instead, Schröder surveyed the bigger picture and the possible erosion of “Western influence.”⁸⁶ It was unsurprising, therefore, that at the heart of the subsequent speeches, China’s objectives took centre-stage. Herrmann’s speech, in particular, echoed this theme. He told his audience that after a long period of “noticeable restraint,” Beijing had, since the end of the Sino-Indian conflict, increased its activity in Indochina. He even went so far as to speak of “China and its satellites.” The war, he argued, was first and foremost part of a “greater struggle between Red-China and the USA.” Although CCP policymakers wanted to avoid a direct collision, they were pursuing their objectives through “propaganda,” “subversion” and “guerrilla warfare.” The endangered countries, he concluded, were incapable of withstanding this onslaught. Only America could, conceivably, thwart Chinese expansionism.⁸⁷

After a staggering sixteen speeches, which lasted almost seven hours, the situation was summarised as follows: The Vietnam conflict was taking place “against the backdrop of the Chinese threat.” Beijing’s aim was to become a “great power in East Asia.” As for the RVN, it had suffered “continual military setbacks” since November 1963. Although the armed forces were “better than their reputation” and parts of the country could still be defended for a “considerable amount of time,” there was no political base and the local inhabitants had lost its will to win. Surveying the opinions of the individual Asian states, they were categorised into three groups. South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines were advocating a “hard, military course.” Japan and India had sympathy for America’s policy, yet the former was determined to stay out of the war, whilst the latter believed that President Ho was “not entirely” under Beijing’s dominance, thus, making a political settlement easier. Whereas the other states - Pakistan, Cambodia and Ceylon - were all in favour of solving the dispute at the negotiation table.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ PA AA, B130, 2651A, ‘Stichworte für die einführende Ansprache des Herrn Ministers auf der Botschafterkonferenz, n.d.’

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ PA AA, AV Neues Amt, 6766, ‘Protokoll der Süd- und Ostasien-Konferenz vom 1.-4. Februar 1965. Betreff: Referate der Herren Missionschefs’

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Having listened to these pensive thoughts, Karl Carstens chaired a debate on possible solutions. In his typical pessimistic manner, Bassler claimed that the only hope was for Washington to dispatch at least 500.000 troops. He opposed an invasion of the North, fearing that it would crystallise a “massive guerrilla-war.” But if the struggle was confined to South Vietnam, he projected, then it was possible that this grim scenario could be avoided. He did admit, however, that a “colonial war” would be “very unpopular.” Not one official expressed confidence that escalation would lead to victory. Although Schlegelberger and Carstens were not as pessimistic as Bassler about an imminent collapse, there was a consensus that the war could no longer be won. A second idea, raised by Carstens, was “neutralisation.” French colleagues, he pointed out, were convinced that even if Saigon was communised, a united Vietnam would transform into a “new Yugoslavia.” They were under the impression that Ho was a nationalist, who had no intention of being a “Chinese satellite.” Again, however, a consensus was quickly reached that de Gaulle’s proposal would not work in practice. After all, the Laos experiment had failed. Most of the kingdom was under communist control. It seemed silly to assume that South Vietnam would fare any better. There was, though, some interesting debate on whether a “Vietslavia” was realistic. Both ambassadors to Thailand and Japan voiced their scepticism, believing that the state’s geographical proximity would expose Hanoi to the “overwhelming pressure of the Chinese colossus.” Others, though, suggested that Vietnam’s “deep-rooted aversion towards China” made it conceivable that Hanoi would preserve some independence.⁸⁹

What comes across in the debates is that both alternatives were deemed “almost equally hopeless.”⁹⁰ Neither a continuation of the war, nor a political settlement, Schröder informed Erhard, offered much promise for a favourable outcome.⁹¹ Even so, on 17 February, Bassler fleshed out the “constructed theses” of the conference. It had been decided that the only possible “way out” was for Washington to employ a combination of increased military power and negotiations (including with the Vietcong) to “gain time.” Meanwhile, the other Western powers should thwart “dangerous repercussions” in the adjacent countries and “strengthen the dams against a further expansion of communist influence.”⁹² It was a vague course of action. There was no clear-cut objective for America to work towards. Instead, the West Germans were proposing that it hold out for as long as possible in the hope of muddling through. The RVN’s

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ PA AA, B130, Bd.2651A, ‘Schröder an Erhard, 25. Februar 1965’

⁹² PA AA, B130, Bd.5958A, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Die aufgestellten Thesen für eine deutsche Aussenpolitik in Süd- und Ostasien, 17. Februar 1965’

fate seemed sealed. And yet, abandonment would have a “severe impact on American prestige throughout Asia” and thereby “weaken the Western position as a whole.”⁹³ The repercussions of withdrawal were, hence, considered worse than perseverance in an unwinnable conflict.

No doubt this was curious reasoning. It required justifying war on the belief that nothing could be worse for Washington than to simply write-off South Vietnam and retreat to the next line of defence. This argument becomes even more difficult to understand when noting the lack of concern about Beijing’s economic and military might. China was incapable of matching U.S. power in a conventional war. Its air force was weak and its army lacked modern equipment. True, its successful atomic detonation had made a “psychological” impact on its neighbouring states. Yet it had no immediate military value.⁹⁴ To understand the conclusion reached, it is important to study the existent international situation. Foreign Ministry executives recognised that the Vietnam Crisis was both volatile and polyvalent. It was difficult to know what the regional or global situation would look like in the coming years, whether the Sino-Soviet split would widen, or whether Kosygin’s visit to Hanoi would have a positive impact. Besides, the West Germans saw no need for withdrawal just yet. The United States was a tenacious and unbeaten superpower. Contrary to France in 1954, national morale was high and the domestic front relatively stable. At the very least, Carstens contended, Washington should recover some lost ground to negotiate from a stronger bargaining position.⁹⁵ As a result, during a subsequent telephone conversation, Ambassador Knappstein informed George Ball that the ambassadorial conference had “not come to any other conclusions” than the United States.⁹⁶ It, too, had chosen war. It, too, had decided that retreat was worse than Americanisation, not because there was hope of winning, but because there was fear of losing.

There is much more one could say about this remarkable summit, but it is the link between Berlin and Saigon, which is pivotal. When justifying military escalation in congressional briefings, both George Ball and McGeorge Bundy insisted that withdrawal would have a disastrous impact on America’s “position around the world,” that it would have “echoes in Berlin,” and that the Germans were watching closely to see whether Washington would fulfil its international commitment. “The defence of Berlin,” Bundy declared, “right now, is in Vietnam”⁹⁷ There is a general problem with this justification, however. Quite simply,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ PA AA, AV Neues Amt, 6766, ‘Protokoll der Süd- und Ostasien-Konferenz vom 1.-4. Februar 1965. Betreff: Referate der Herren Missionschefs’

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ LBJL, The Papers of George W. Ball, Box 4, West Germany, II [24 November 1963 - 28 September 1966], ‘Telecon, Knapstein & Ball, 10 March 1965, 10:10 a.m.’

⁹⁷ LBJL, Congressional Briefings on Vietnam, Box 1 of 1, Congressional Briefings (1964-1965)

neither in the draft- or final version of the ambassadorial conferences “formulated theses” was a connection made between Saigon and Berlin, nor was any concern voiced about how the people would react to American withdrawal.⁹⁸ To be sure, during the debate, Schlegelberger raised the subject. He informed his colleagues that both Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and his deputy had told him that if America was incapable of holding firm, it would undermine its national “credibility.” Furthermore, Carstens suggested that U.S. withdrawal might precipitate a more isolationist foreign policy and lead Washington to “vacate positions where we have a good deal more interest.” At the same time, both he and Ministerial Director, Herbert Müller-Roschach, acknowledged that American obsession with Vietnam meant that it would, paradoxically, “neglect other important matters.” In a follow-up discussion, Schröder rejected the Germany-Vietnam link outright. He insisted that it was a “completely different issue” and that the FRG could, “for myriad reasons, not feel entirely comfortable” with this comparison. No concerns were raised about psychological repercussions on the German people.⁹⁹

Neither do national opinion polls offer much evidence that the people were bothered about Vietnam. When asked whether the crisis would crystallise another World War, an impressive 60% of men and 47% of women stated that they were “unconcerned.”¹⁰⁰ That is not to say that the West Germans were *unaware* of American involvement, or that they blamed Washington for launching airstrikes.¹⁰¹ Even so, when asked in February what they thought about the U.S. intervention, no more than 33% expressed approval. When juxtaposed with a public opinion poll conducted in Britain, the results show that fewer Germans supported American militarism than their British counterparts.¹⁰² It was striking, too, with what fervour the press opposed Rusk’s subsequent call for allied support. The nation’s main tabloid, *Bild Zeitung*, flatly rejected any aid increase. In an ironic twist, *Bild* was adamant that refusal to

Congressional Briefing, 5 February 1965 (George Ball/McGeorge Bundy) ‘Transcript from Tape; LBJL, Congressional Briefings on Vietnam, Box 1 of 1, Congressional Briefings (1964-1965) Congressional Reception, 11 February 1965’

⁹⁸ PA AA, AV Neues Amt, 6766, ‘Protokoll der Süd- und Ostasien-Konferenz vom 1.-4. Februar 1965. Betreff: Referate der Herren Missionschefs’; PA AA, B130, Bd.5958A, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Die aufgestellten Thesen fuer eine deutsche Aussenpolitik in Süd- und Ostasien, 17. Februar 1965’

⁹⁹ PA AA, AV Neues Amt, 6766, ‘Protokoll der Süd- und Ostasien-Konferenz vom 1.-4. Februar 1965. Betreff: Referate der Herren Missionschefs’

¹⁰⁰ *Der Spiegel*, Nr.13/1965, ‘Panorama. Deutschland. Kriegsgefahr, 24. März 1965,’ p.20

¹⁰¹ In a nationwide opinion poll conducted in February 1965, nearly all adults (91%) were aware that the U.S. was providing military aid to South Vietnam. Interestingly, only 9% said that America was to blame for the airstrikes, 49% blamed the communists, 20% blamed both sides equally and 13% had no opinion. See NARA, RG0306, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Entry# P64: Research Memoranda: 1963-1999, Container #15, M-98-65, ‘Current Brief, No.63, USIA-IRS/AE, 16 March 1965’

¹⁰² NARA, RG0306, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Entry# P64: Research Memoranda: 1963-1999, Container #15, M-98-65, ‘Current Brief, No.63, USIA-IRS/AE, 16 March 1965’; NARA, RG0306, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Entry# P64: Research Memoranda: 1963-1999, Container #15, M-99-65, ‘USIA-IRS/AE, Current Brief No.64, 17 March 1965’

help “cannot prompt doubt about our loyalty as allies. No state is as loyal to America as we are [...]” “But,” it asked, “what business do Germans have in South Vietnam?”¹⁰³ Writing in the *FAZ*, Adelbert Weinstein, one of the country’s most influential military commentators, emphasised that “the war in Vietnam is not our war” and that there was “no evidence that the Southeast Asian structure of the Western Alliance would fall to pieces if South Vietnam was abandoned.”¹⁰⁴ Finally, when asked during an interview whether Washington’s “firm stand” affected its credibility elsewhere, Willy Brandt responded that “in Berlin, trust in America’s guarantee is strong and firm. It does not require [...] a confirmation through Vietnam.”¹⁰⁵ Bundy’s and Ball’s contention, then, that an American withdrawal would have a detrimental impact on German morale did not fit the facts.

And yet, only one statesman explicitly condemned U.S. actions. Just like before, Konrad Adenauer insisted that Europe was the central battleground of world politics and that it was wrong to give precedence to “Asian questions.” Nor could he shake off the feeling that Washington and Moscow had come to an arrangement on the existing status quo, allowing them to focus their joint attention towards the East.¹⁰⁶ In a long-winded rant to Henry Kissinger, he asserted that U.S. foreign policy had “not been in such a mess” since 1945, that it was leading to the destruction of Europe and that America’s Far East stratagem was “obviously just as much of a failure.”¹⁰⁷ On 5 February, in an interview with the *New York Times*, Adenauer elaborated on his thoughts. The former chancellor accused Washington of becoming “obsessed with Southeast Asia” and “forgetting primordial Europe.” Pointing to the strong communist parties in France and Italy, he expressed alarm that de Gaulle’s departure would make Europe “politically defenceless” and asphyxiate German will to resist Soviet pressure. The United States, he complained, had to stop regarding Europe as a “secondary area.” “If you remain dazed by your Vietnam War,” he warned, “the American people will get fed up. They will reach a psychological limit and impel your withdrawal into isolationism.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ NARA, RG0306, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Entry# P64: Research Memoranda: 1963-1999, Container #15, M-85-65, ‘USIA-IRS/AE, Current Brief, 10 March 1965’

¹⁰⁴ NARA, RG0306, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Entry# P64: Research Memoranda: 1963-1999, Container #15, M-98-65, ‘USIA-IRS/AE, Current Brief, 16 March 1965’

¹⁰⁵ AdsD, WBA, A3, 205, ‘USA-Reise des Regierenden Bürgermeister von Berlin, Willy Brandt. Betreff: Interview mit Associated Press, 10. April 1965’ p.265

¹⁰⁶ Mensing, *Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967, Band I*, p.275, p.359

¹⁰⁷ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany, Vol. IV, Memos, 7/64-8/64, ‘From McGhee to Secretary of State, 17 November 1964.’ The chancellor made the same point a day after the Tonkin Gulf Crisis to the historian Rudolf von Salis. See Mensing, *Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967, Band I*, p.275

¹⁰⁸ *New York Times*, ‘Foreign Affairs: A Gloomy Watch on the Rhine, 10 February 1965,’ p.40

Despite these ominous remarks, the chancellor's advice was greeted with an outpouring of anger. "It represented Adenauer at his worse," Ambassador McGhee noted in his memoirs, "mischievous, even malicious."¹⁰⁹ Yet it also showed just how frustrated and worried the former chancellor had become. Speaking to a sympathetic Charles de Gaulle, Adenauer recalled that he had always hoped that the Sino-Soviet split would encourage the Kremlin to be "more reasonable" about German reunification. America's war in Vietnam, he complained, had "put a spoke in the wheel."¹¹⁰ For him, Washington's policy remained upside down. Russia, not China, was the "most dangerous enemy of the Free World." He also agreed with de Gaulle that the war below the 17th parallel was a disaster and that the entire region would, in any case, fall under Beijing's control. "But Johnson is virtually putting his head through the noose, which the Chinese have hung there," he lamented.¹¹¹ Adenauer's statement underlined, once again, FRG insistence on examining the conflict in a wider context, rather than as an end in itself. But whereas the Foreign Ministry had concluded that Washington should hold out for as long as possible, Adenauer felt it was better to give up *before* losing a war, rather than afterwards.¹¹²

Still, the former chancellor no doubt knew that his comments would have zero impact. On 18 February, Lyndon Johnson authorised sustained bombing raids against North Vietnam and subsequently moved Marines into the South.¹¹³ When Erhard was informed about American airstrikes, he shrugged his shoulders and, "in a very casual way," replied "you had no choice."¹¹⁴ It was the perfect image of his government's position. On the one hand, there was a sense of indifference. On the other hand, there was a sense that no practical alternative existed. It was a leap into the dark. Nothing more.

¹⁰⁹ McGhee, *At the Creation*, p.159. See also Ambassador McGhee's criticism to Schröder in ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder 01-483, 281/2, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundesminister des Auwärtigen empfing am 11. Februar 1965 um 10.30 Uhr den amerikanischen Botschafter McGhee zu einem Gespräch'

¹¹⁰ Mensing, *Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967, Band I*, p.444

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.386, p.452

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.452

¹¹³ CREST, General CIA Records, Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, CIA-RDP80B01676R001300060001-3, 'National Security Council Meeting at the White House at 5:00pm, on 18 February 1965'; University of Virginia, Miller Center of Public Affairs, Conversation WH6503-03-7028, 'Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara, 6 March 1965'

¹¹⁴ Troche, "*Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt*," p.341

Fighting for Friendship

“When a soc[ialist] country gets into difficulties, then all should help [...] An attack against Vietnam is [an] attack against the soc[ialist] camp.”¹¹⁵ Reading Ulbricht’s handwritten notes, it is difficult not to get the sense that he, too, saw no alternative. Washington and Hanoi were locked together, tied down on a path from which they refused to shrink back. A telegram forwarded to him from Bergold on 26 March made it clear that both Hanoi and the NLF were opposed to negotiations. They, rather, intended to continue the “armed struggle until final victory.” Citing Le Duc Tho, Bergold warned that the DRV was willing to sacrifice “dozens of companies” and “tens of thousands of people.” Ulbricht did not need the ambassador to tell him that this was an “expression [of the] Chinese party leadership’s theories.”¹¹⁶ Peaceful coexistence had failed. The outbreak of war was an objective reality. Nevertheless, faced with an accomplished fact, East Berlin felt obligated by proletarian internationalism to assist Hanoi. Twenty-four hours after the bombings, Otto Winzer assured the North Vietnamese ambassador of East Germany’s unqualified support.¹¹⁷

Despite this pledge of national patronage, it was difficult to understand which “socialist camp” Ulbricht was talking about. Although Mao had told Kosygin that war would precipitate unity, the month of March revealed that the ideological schism had widened rather than narrowed.¹¹⁸ Nowhere was this more visible than at the consultative meeting in Moscow. Out of the invited twenty-six communist parties, seven did not bother to show up. The absence of the VWP and the CCP was ominous. Suslov informed Hermann Matern that whilst Hanoi was not opposed to the conference, it was tied by “other commitments.” Interestingly, irrespective of the communiqué’s declaration of support for the “heroic Vietnamese people,” it was not mentioned in the DRV’s press and Bibow was struck by the “very reticent” stance of government executives.¹¹⁹ Tensions were further exacerbated when Vietnamese students

¹¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3293, ‘Notizen von Walter Ulbricht. Betreff: Konsultationen KPdSU-Vietnam-China über gemeinsames Auftreten der soz[ialistischen] Länder, 15. März 1965’

¹¹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, NY182/1270, ‘Winzer an Ulbricht, Stoph und Honecker. Betreff: Abschrift, Telegramm 93/65 vom 26. März 1965 von Genossen Bergold in Hanoi,’ p.82

¹¹⁷ ND-Archiv, Nr.49/1965, ‘Otto Winzer: Wir sind fest an eurer Seite. Unterredung mit Botschafter Bui Lam, 9. Februar 1965,’ pp.1-2; PA MfAA, C1060/73, ‘Aufzeichnung von Mehlig. Betreff: Überblick über die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam im I. Quartal 1965, 7. April 1965,’ p.63

¹¹⁸ This was pointed out by the East Germans in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/993, ‘Aufzeichnung der Abteilung Internationale Verbindung. Betreff: Information Nr.34/65 an die Mitglieder und Kandidaten des Politbüros über die Reaktion der Bruderparteien auf das Moskauer Konsultativtreffen - (Fortsetzung der Information Nr.22/65), 3. Juni 1965,’ p.10

¹¹⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11772, ‘Bericht über die konsultative Beratung der 19 kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien vom 1 bis 15 März [1965] in Moskau,’; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/437, ‘Aktenvermerk Nr.38/65 über ein Gespräch zwischen dem Gen. Doan Thang, Chef des Kabinetts der aussenpolitischen Kommission des ZK der PWV, und dem Gen. Bibow am 12. März 1965,’ p.145

clashed with the Soviet militia during a violent anti-American demonstration outside the U.S. embassy. Information passed on from GDR students revealed that both Chinese and DRV officials had sanctioned the nature of the protest and that the activists were furious about the Soviet crackdown.¹²⁰

The East Germans remained convinced that socialist cohesion was the panacea to the present crisis. In its statement on the consultative meeting in Moscow, the central committee declared that the “vital prerequisites for strengthening the unity of our movement” was, above all, the “active struggle against imperialism.”¹²¹ Speaking to the DRV ambassador, Willi Stoph intoned that “we must show the imperialists the limits of their power” and expressed hope that North Vietnam would, “together with all socialist states, find ways of confronting American imperialism.”¹²² The commonality of fighting “imperialism,” then, was still deemed the “surest way of overcoming the existing disagreements.”¹²³ As a result, East Berlin initiated a national solidarity movement for Vietnam, which encompassed the entire population strata. At the top level, the government published executive statements condemning American airstrikes.¹²⁴ Editorial offices were ordered to expound on the expansion of the war, as well as Washington’s switch from “adviser” to active participant.¹²⁵ On a regional level, general secretaries coordinated protests in industrial plants, cooperatives and public administrations, whilst social institutes arranged exhibitions and offered financial donations.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ PA MfAA, A6835, ‘Aufzeichnung von Grabowski, politische Abteilung in Moskau. Betreff: Information zur Reaktion auf das Konsultativtreffen, 25. März 1965,’ p.9. On the student demonstrations, see Y. Lan, ‘Caught in the Split: Chinese Students in the Soviet Union, 1960-1965,’ *CWIHP e-Dossier No. 52* (August 2014)

¹²¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV/2/2/982, ‘Anlage Nr.1 zum Protokoll Nr.14/65 vom 20. April 1965. Beschluss des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei zu den Ergebnissen des Konsultativen Treffens von Vertretern der kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien (Moskau, 1. bis 5. März 1965),’ pp.4-7

¹²² PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Vermerk über die Unterredung des Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates Willi Stoph, mit dem Ausserordentlichen und Bevollmächtigten Botschafter der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam in der DDR, Bui Lam, am 4 März 1965,’ p.33

¹²³ PA MfAA, A8735, ‘Aufzeichnung von Georg Stibi. Betreff: USA-Piratenakt gegen die Demokratische Republik Vietnam, 3. März 1965,’ p.204

¹²⁴ PA MfAA, C1060/73, ‘Aufzeichnung von Mehlig. Betreff: Überblick über die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam im I. Quartal 1965, 7. April 1965,’ p.63. See also ND-Archiv, Nr.84/1965, ‘DDR in fester Solidarität an der Seite Vietnams, 25. März 1965,’ p.1, pp.6-7

¹²⁵ PA MfAA, A8735, ‘Aufzeichnung von Georg Stibi. Betreff: USA-Piratenakt gegen die Demokratische Republik Vietnam, 3. März 1965,’ p.204. See also the MfAA’s recommendations in PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, Genossen Bham Bang, am 3. März 1965,’ p.24

¹²⁶ PA MfAA, A8735, ‘Aufzeichnung von Georg Stibi. Betreff: USA-Piratenakt gegen die Demokratische Republik Vietnam, 3. März 1965’; ND-Archiv, Nr.45/1965, ‘120.000 Mark für Dong Hoi, 14. Februar 1965,’ p.7; ND-Archiv, Nr.79/1964, ‘Ausstellung. “Hände weg von Vietnam!,” 20. März 1965,’ p.1. On East German solidarity with Vietnam, see also G. Wernicke, “‘Solidarität hilft siegen!’: zur Solidaritätsbewegung mit Vietnam in beiden deutschen Staaten: Mitte der 60er bis Anfang der 70er Jahre,’ *Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte*, (Berlin, 2001), pp.16-17

In bilateral talks, however, the East Germans noticed a distinct coolness. True, the press organs had ceased publishing polemics and DRV diplomats expressed gratitude for the protest marches. Yet Hanoi refrained from responding to formal offers of assistance.¹²⁷ Archival evidence reveals that this refusal to accept aid was most concerning to East Berlin from a domestic standpoint. Stasi agents recorded that citizens were unsatisfied with the socialist camps lack of material support. “There is a feeling of incomprehension,” one report read, “about why the Soviet Union does not equip the North Vietnamese army with the most modern weapons, as was done, for example, in Cuba.”¹²⁸ It was pertinent that the leitmotiv of GDR-DRV meetings revolved around the ideological question of whether armaments or morale were decisive in war. Drawing on his personal experience, Winzer reminded the ambassador that Berlin had been “unrecognisable” in 1945. Whilst acknowledging the “heroic past and victorious struggle” of the Vietnamese people, Winzer insisted that American jetfighters could not be fought with conventional weapons, pointing out that only nine out of 150 planes had been shot down. Modern armaments, he reasoned, would offer more effective protection.¹²⁹ The response was always the same: Consistent with Maoist thought, the Vietnamese were adamant that “until now, there has not been a war in which modern weaponry played the decisive role.”¹³⁰

Neither were the Vietnamese alone in their reluctance to cooperate. The East Germans were furious about Chinese intransigence. Irrespective of Americanisation, Beijing was

¹²⁷ PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Botschafters der DRV in der DDR, Genossen Bui Lam, beim Genossen Staatssekretär Winzer am 12. März 1965’ p.37; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/439, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der DRV in der DDR, Gen Pham Bang, am 17. März 1965,’ p.208; PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung zwischen Genossen Schneidewind und dem Geschäftsträger a.i. der DRV in der DDR, Botschaftsrat Nguyen duc Thieng, am 23. März 1965,’ p.63; PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Geschäftsträgers a.i. der DRV Botschaftsrat Nguyen duc Thieng bei den Gen. Minister Stibi, am 27. März 1965,’ p.71. Bergold informed the MfAA that the VWP was no longer publishing polemics in PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Bergold an Schneidewind, 29. März 1965,’ p.67

¹²⁸ BtSU, MfS HA XX Nr.10224 Teil 2 von 2, Hauptabteilung XX/2/A, ‘Aufzeichnung von Gen. Arnold, [Geheimer Informator] “Trueborg.” Betreff: Information 1/65 Stimmung zu den USA-Überfällen auf die Demokratische Republik Vietnam, 6. März 1965,’ p.383. It seems that Ulbricht himself was closely monitoring public opinion. During a state council meeting on 8 April, he noted that the public was “deeply troubled” that not enough countermeasures were being taken to fight the United States in Vietnam. See MfAA, C700/75, ‘Bericht auf der Sitzung des Staatrates zur Bonner Provokation in Westberlin, 8 April 1965,’ pp.79-80. Interestingly, the following week, Ulbricht even relayed to Leonid Brezhnev the local inhabitants’ concern that the socialist camp was incapable of effectively combatting American “pirate attacks.” See SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3515, ‘Ulbricht an Breshnew, 15. April 1965,’ p.1

¹²⁹ PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Botschafters der DRV in der DDR, Genossen Bui Lam, beim Genossen Staatssekretär Winzer am 12. März 1965,’ pp.36-40

¹³⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A2/20/439, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der DRV in der DDR, Gen Pham Bang am 17 März 1965’ p.207. For further bilateral discussions about whether morale or weapons were more important, see also PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Rat der Botschaft der DRV in der DDR, Genossen Nguyen Duc Thieng, am 19. März 1965,’ pp.54-57; PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Geschäftsträgers a.i. der DRV Botschaftsrat Nguyen Duc Thieng bei den Gen. Minister Stibi, am 27. März 1965,’ pp.70-71

thwarting Soviet defence measures. On 25 February, the CCP received and subsequently rejected the Kremlin's request for an airway to transport both anti-aircraft units and material to Hanoi, as well as station MiG-21s planes at Chinese airports along the Sino-DRV border. It was justified on the grounds that Moscow was trying to "establish Soviet control over Chinese and Vietnamese territory." The Kremlin was, instead, made to send the material by train.¹³¹ In their dealings with DRV representatives, the East Germans were careful to cite news reports about Beijing's unhelpfulness, but these were dismissed as fabricated stories, designed to cause friction within the socialist camp.¹³² After repeatedly raising the subject, the MfAA concluded that Hanoi had not only embraced Maoist militarism, but was tolerating Chinese obstruction of Soviet aid.¹³³

With friends like these, policymakers might have muttered, who needed enemies? It was an altogether bizarre state of affairs. Here they were trying to convince their communist counterparts to accept assistance for a programme, which they *opposed*. The MfAA did not hide its concern that Beijing was attempting to exploit the Vietnam War to highlight the "correctness" of its militant stratagem, not to mention prove the "impossibility" of peaceful coexistence. Most worrying of all was the prospect of China involving the two superpowers in an armed conflict. East Berlin pointed to provocative CCP polemics, which asked whether the Kremlin's Pacific Fleet was simply there to admire the view.¹³⁴ In short, the East Germans appreciated that the Soviet Bloc (especially Moscow) was reacting, rather than steering the present crisis. There was a genuine angst that external forces could back the Kremlin into a corner.¹³⁵ Privately, GDR officials remained doubtful that the Vietcong could win a decisive military triumph. Hanoi's adherence to Maoist doctrine was blamed for its "overestimation" of

¹³¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, 'Brief vom ZK der KPdSU an den ersten Sekretär des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Walter Ulbricht, 2. Juli 1965,' pp.181-182. On Chinese intransigence, see also Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p.150

¹³² PA MfAA, A8734, 'Aktennotiz über das am 30. März 1965 mit dem Vertreter des Leiters der Ständigen Vertretung der FNL, Herrn Thao, geführte Gespräch im Hause des Nationalrats,' p.92. See also PA MfAA, A8745, 'Aktenvermerk über den Besuch des Botschafters der DRV in der DDR, Genossen Bui Lam, beim Genossen Staatssekretär Winzer am 12. März 1965,' pp.38-39; PA MfAA, A8745, 'Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung zwischen Genossen Schneidewind und dem Geschäftsträger a.i. der DRV in der DDR, Botschaftsrat Nguyen Duc Thieng, am 23. März 1965,' p.62

¹³³ PA MfAA, A8745, 'Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Rat der Botschaft der DRV in der DDR, Genossen Nguyen Duc Thieng, am 19. März 1965,' p.57

¹³⁴ PA MfAA, A8749, 'Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam/Laos im MfAA. Betreff: Die Haltung der Führer der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams und der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam zur USA-Aggression, 1. Juni 1965,' pp.262-263. See also BArch-MA, DVW1/13899, 'Aufzeichnung von Oberstleutnant Walter Kautzsch. Information, Inhalt: Haltung der VR China zur Vietnamfrage, 5. September 1965,' pp.40-41

¹³⁵ PA MfAA, A8750, 'Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung im MfAA. Betreff: Haltung der KP Chinas zum Vietnam-Problem, [n.m.] 1965,' p.293

“moral factors,” as well as its “very naïve and simplified” underestimation of technology.¹³⁶ Repeated claims that the struggle would be over by 1966 augmented East German concern that the North Vietnamese were misreading the situation. Indeed, on 24 April, Deputy Prime Minister, Le Thanh Nghi, went so far as to tell Bergold that the conflict was “entering its decisive phase” and that “in the final minutes before victory is secured, the war intensifies.”¹³⁷ The contrast between these remarks and concurrent GDR-Soviets appraisals was stunning. Rather than accept Vietnamese insistences that reunification was “imminent,” Müller concurred with Major-General, Vladimir Ivanov, that there would “not be another Dien-Bien-Phu.”¹³⁸ “The only way out,” Bergold and culture attaché, Klaus Matzke, emphasised was a “political solution.”¹³⁹

Still, the East Germans felt obligated to offer assistance. This came through loud and clear at an embassy meeting in April. Although Hanoi’s policies were openly criticised and concern was voiced about Chinese endeavours to tighten its grip above the 17th parallel, Bergold insisted that “what the DRV says, or does not say, is its business.” “For us,” he continued, “it is important that we always demonstrate and prove that we are firmly on the side of our Vietnamese comrades, even if we have different views on certain questions.” Rather than focus on the ideological rift, Bergold told his colleagues to “never forget” that the United States was pursuing “open aggression” through “cruel,” as well as “criminal means.” Correspondingly, Bibow argued that to overcome the differences, it was crucial to ascertain what united the socialist world and that they should assess the attitudes of VWP with this in mind.¹⁴⁰ Regardless, then, of their ideological opposition to the military programme, irrespective of their doubts that the stratagem was realistic, the GDR had to stand-by North Vietnam.

Since neither Beijing, nor Hanoi, were expressing interest in a concerted strategy, East Berlin turned to the Vietcong. On 19 March, GDR officials approached NLF representatives

¹³⁶ PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam/Laos im MfAA. Betreff: Die Haltung der Führer der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams und der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam zur USA-Aggression, 1. Juni 1965,’ p.260

¹³⁷ BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, ‘Aufzeichnung von Rolf Müller. Information, Inhalt: Bericht von der Nationalversammlung der DRV, 24. April 1965’ p.167; PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über das Gespräch des Genossen Botschafter mit dem stellv. Ministerpräsident und Mitglied des PB, Gensosen Le Thanh Nghi, am 24. April 1965 im Hause des ZK der PWV,’ pp.80-81

¹³⁸ BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, ‘Inhalt: Abendessen mit dem sowjetischen Militärattache und seinen Gehilfen, anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung, 8. Mai 1965,’ p.185

¹³⁹ PA MfAA, A8741, ‘Einschätzung der gegenwärtigen Strategie und Taktik der Nationalen Front zur Befreiung Südvietnams (FNL), 4. Juli 1965,’ p.31

¹⁴⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/443, ‘Protokoll über die Wahlberichtsversammlung der Grundorganisation der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands an der Botschaft der DDR in Hanoi am 10. April 1965,’ pp.83-85

and asked what materials they needed. The response was sympathetic.¹⁴¹ On 23 March, the Acting Director in East Berlin, Duong Dinh Thao, requested an “urgent personal talk” with Schneidewind and informed him that the time had come to “intensify the struggle against the aggressor.” The NLF’s central committee, he said, intended to appeal to the people of the world for weapons and volunteers. This appeal, Duong explained, had, for the moment at least, “symbolic significance” and should be treated as a “political-moral factor.” No “practical steps” were required. Nevertheless, if East Berlin wanted to provide weapons, then it could either supply or sell them.¹⁴² It is worth emphasising that Duong’s proposal coincided with Hanoi’s persistent disregard for the GDR government’s offer of support. In fact, on 22 March, the Council of Ministers ratified an aid package worth approximately 500.000 Marks, but, because of North Vietnamese reticence, East Berlin needed to be patient in its eagerness to show solidarity.¹⁴³

Still, as March moved towards April, there were reasons to be encouraged. At the 11th Plenum of the VWP’s central committee, changes in personnel were recorded, the most important of which was the dismissal of Foreign Minister, Xuan Thuy. No doubt reminded of his appointment two years ago and cognisant of his Chinese sympathies, GDR diplomats could only consider this an improvement. Bergold pointed out that the new man, Nguyen Duy Trinh, was a close associate of Pham Van Dong and, unlike his predecessor, had refrained from publicly allying with Beijing.¹⁴⁴ This liquidation of “extremist elements” at the heart of government, not to mention subsequent reshuffles in the information services, fuelled East German hope that the “Marxist-Leninists” were consolidating their influence and pushing

¹⁴¹ PA MfAA, A8734, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit Vertretern der Befreiungsfront Südvietsams in der DDR, 19. März 1965,’ p.106

¹⁴² PA MfAA, A8734, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem Amtierenden Leiter der Ständigen Vertretung der FNL Südvietsams, Herrn Duong Dinh Thao, am 23. März 1965,’ pp.107-109. Interestingly, Robert Brigham has argued that in March 1965 the NLF was concerned that Hanoi “wanted to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States and would seek a political settlement to limit the war to the South.” See Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, pp.40-41. For further evidence of disagreement between the NLF and Hanoi, see also B. Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953-1966* (London, 1966), p.204

¹⁴³ PA MfAA, C1060/73, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Überblick über die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam im 1. Quartal 1965, 7. April 1965,’ p.63; PA MfAA, C212/75, ‘Kurt Schneidewind an Minister Dr. Kiesewetter und Abteilung Koordination und Kontrolle. Betreff: Ministerratsbeschluss vom 22. März 1965 zur Unterstützung der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam, 15. Mai 1965,’ p.64. It was only two months later that the East Germans received the green light.

¹⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1453, ‘Bestand: Politbüro. Betreff: Zur gegenwärtigen Situation in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam und über die Veränderung in der Regierung 15. Juni 1965 (Aus einer Information der Botschaft Hanoi von 26. Mai 1965 an den stellvertretenden Minister, Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter).’ On the significance of Xuan Thuy’s removal, see also T. Trung, *Collective Leadership and Factionalism: An Essay on Ho Chi Minh’s Legacy* (Singapore, 1985), p.44

Hanoi back towards a more “centrist” stance.¹⁴⁵ The plenum’s resolution seemed to confirm this view. For the first time, Hanoi decreed that it would accept material, moral and political assistance from other countries.¹⁴⁶

Yet the most remarkable transformation was the position of non-other than Le Duan. Despite impressive strides in the historiography, Duan remains an enigmatic and, at times, incomprehensible figure.¹⁴⁷ Ever since 1961, the East Germans had judged him the chief exponent of a Sinophile agenda. He had been the individual, who had caused them utmost concern. All of a sudden, the first secretary’s words and deeds were analysed from a different perspective. Rather than dismiss him as a dogmatist, the East Germans felt that Duan was abandoning his close association with China. The initial hint was his endorsement of the CPSU’s proposal for a united statement.¹⁴⁸ Contrary to Beijing, which rejected the idea, Duan and the VWP leadership approved of both a trilateral declaration, as well as a declaration from all communist countries.¹⁴⁹ According to information shared by Ambassador Shcherbakov, one of the reasons for Duan’s visit to China in April was to “convince” the CCP. His hosts, however, expressed reluctance to either sign a trilateral- or even a Sino-Vietnamese statement.

¹⁴⁵ PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen Gen. Jarck und dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der UdSSR, Gen. Swerjev, am 13. April 1965,’ pp.73-74; PA MfAA, A8749, ‘Aufzeichnung der Sektion Vietnam/Laos im MfAA. Betreff: Die Haltung der Führer der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams und der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam zur USA-Aggression, 1. Juni 1965,’ pp.259-260

¹⁴⁶ PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen Gen. Jarck und dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der UdSSR, Gen. Swerjev, 13. April 1965,’ pp.73-74. For the 11th Plenum’s resolution, see ‘Resolution of the Party Central Committee on the Immediate Situation and Urgent Responsibilities, 27 March, 1965,’ *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Party Central Committee, Hanoi*. Translated for CWIHP by Merle Pribbenow. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113969>

¹⁴⁷ For a good, brief overview of Le Duan’s background, see *New York Times*, ‘Who Called the Shots in Hanoi? 14 February 2017.’ On Le Duan, see also Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, pp.17-47; P. Asselin, ‘Le Duan, the American War, and the Creation of an Independent Vietnamese State,’ *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Volume 10, Number 1/2 (Spring-Summer, 2001), pp.1-27. For some interesting thoughts on Le Duan’s war strategy, see Z. Shore, ‘Provoking America: Le Duan and the Origins of the Vietnam War,’ *Journal of the Cold War Studies*, Volume 17, Number 4 (Fall 2015), pp.86-108. On Le Duan’s shift towards the Soviet Bloc in 1965 see also Vu, *Collective Leadership and Factionalism*, p.46

¹⁴⁸ PA MfAA, G-A319, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine gemeinsame Aussprache mit Botschaftern anderer sozialistischen Länder am 4. Mai 1965 in der ungarischen Botschaft,’ p.1. For the Soviet proposal to coordinate policies, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3610, ‘Brief von Breschnew und Kossygin an den Vorsitzenden des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas, Genosse Mao Tse-tung; an den Premier des Staatsrats der Volksrepublik, Genosse Tschou En-lai, 3. April 1965,’ pp.1-2

¹⁴⁹ PA MfAA, G-A319, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine gemeinsame Aussprache mit Botschaftern anderer sozialistischen Länder am 4. Mai 1965 in der ungarischen Botschaft,’ p.1. For the Chinese rejection, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3610, ‘Brief des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas an das Zentralkomitee der KPdSU, 11. April 1965,’ pp.5-7. For the North Vietnamese reaction, see ‘Cable from Zhu Qiwen. The Vietnamese Side passing on the Soviet Communist Party’s Proposal regarding the Holding of a Three-Party Summit among the Soviet Party, and the Vietnamese Party, and the Chinese Party, 5 April, 1965.’ *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 109-03978-06, 25-26*. Obtained by Taomo Zhou and translated by Fan Chao, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118179>

Despite *Nhan Dan* holding back the front page, no statement was published. As a result, Duan informed the Soviet embassy in Beijing that he intended to fly to Moscow.¹⁵⁰

But there was more. Not only did Duan set foot on Russian soil, he also criticised the CCP, complaining that he “did not understand” its position: First, why did the Chinese leaders reject a bilateral- or multilateral agreement to assist Vietnam? Second, why should the national liberation movement be valued higher than the socialist camp? Third, why did Beijing and Tirana regard themselves as the “only true representatives of Marxism-Leninism?”¹⁵¹ On his return stopover in Beijing, Duan rebuffed Chinese accusations that he was conspiring too much with the “modern revisionists.” He pointed out that the CCP had joined ranks with Chiang Kai-shek against Japan and could not see why Hanoi should refrain from strengthening relations with other socialist states.¹⁵² These were hardly the words of a staunch ideologue. For the East Germans, it was significant that Duan himself had visited Moscow, that he had taken the initiative and was attempting to “unfetter” the VWP from “Chinese paternalism.”¹⁵³ If East Berlin had any doubts about his trip, the Soviet embassy counsellor assured the MfAA that it “could not be overestimated.”¹⁵⁴

Neither did it seem coincidental that the Chinese were showing signs of agitation. On 30 April, Josef Hegen’s replacement, Günter Kohrt, hosted an extraordinary dinner for the head of the CCP’s propaganda department, Lu Dingyi. “Extremely tense” was how the ambassador described it to Ulbricht. In what was now a familiar leitmotiv, Lu accused Moscow of conspiring with Washington to dominate the world. He dismissed its aid as “meaningless.” Just like Khrushchev had wanted to “sell-out” East Germany, the Kremlin wanted to “betray” Vietnam by proposing “unconditional negotiations with the U.S. imperialists.” Kohrt was told in no uncertain terms that China would, if necessary, wage the struggle against Soviet

¹⁵⁰ PA MfAA, G-A319, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine gemeinsame Aussprache mit Botschaftern anderer sozialistischen Länder am 4. Mai 1965 in der ungarischen Botschaft,’ p.1. Even with hindsight, it is difficult to understand why the Chinese refused to sign a bilateral declaration. It would have surely underlined the impression that the Soviet Bloc (especially Moscow) had little influence and that Beijing was Hanoi’s principal ally. One explanation might be James Hershberg’s and Chen Jian’s emphasis on “signals.” In March and April, PRC policymakers were genuinely worried about American escalation and tried to signal to Washington how far it could go. Perhaps Beijing did not want to give Johnson a justification to attack China. See J. Hershberg and J. Chen, ‘Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China’s Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965,’ *The International History Review*, Volume 27, Number 1 (March 2005), pp.63-73

¹⁵¹ SAPMO-BArch, NY182/1270, ‘Für Walter Ulbricht. Betreff: Telegram 161/65 vom 12. Mai 1965 von Botschafter Bergold, Hanoi,’ p.86

¹⁵² PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Jarck mit dem Attache der CSSR-Botschaft, Genossen Freybort, am 2. Juni 1965,’ p.83

¹⁵³ PA MfAA, A8750, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Einschätzung der gegenwärtigen Haltung der PWV (Stand September, 1965), n.d.’ p.296. See also PA MfAA, A8745, ‘Aufzeichnung von Grabowski. Betreff: Information zum Aufenthalt der vietnamesischen Partei- und Regierungsdelegation, unter Leitung von Le Duan, in der Sowjetunion vom 10. bis 17. April 1965,’ p.92

¹⁵⁴ PA MfAA, A266, ‘Stude an Rossmeisl, 29. April 1965,’ p.51

“aspirations” for “10.000 years.”¹⁵⁵ It was a revealing exchange. Lu’s cantankerous and histrionic tone, his accusation of Soviet treachery two weeks after the signing of an aid package worth 145 million rouble, complemented East German estimations that Beijing was displeased about Soviet-Vietnamese rapprochement and that its influence was under threat.¹⁵⁶

In this context, East Berlin saw an opening to “push” the Vietnamese further towards the Soviet Bloc at the 20th anniversary of “Liberation Day.” East German treatment of their comrades in the spring of 1965, when compared to their coolness during the SED’s 6th Plenum, was remarkable. Prior to the festivities, the Ulbricht government sent invites to both the DRV and the NLF. It was moreover decided that the Vietcong would be classified as a “government delegation” and have admission to all the main events.¹⁵⁷ In its appraisal of the visit, the MfAA labelled it a “triumph.” The head of the North Vietnamese delegation, Hoang Van Hoan, had remarked that he was “very happy” with the reception, supervision and itinerary. In particular, he (as well as the Vietcong spokesmen, Tran Hoai Nam) had been “very impressed” by the “fraternal solidarity movement of the GDR people.”¹⁵⁸

These expressions of concord and friendship, however, only went so far. Underneath the surface, an ideological fissure persisted. Echoing its previous analysis, the MfAA criticised both Tran and Hoang for “greatly underestimating the effectiveness of modern weapons.”¹⁵⁹ There was scepticism, too, about their exemplars of American losses when compared to Vietnamese fatalities. During a private conversation with central committee member, Paul Verner, Hoang insisted that the bombing raids were having little impact and that Hanoi did not

¹⁵⁵ SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1222, ‘Winzer an Ulbricht. Betreff: Eingegangenes Telegramm von Genosse Kohrt über die Partei- und Regierungsdelegation, 30. April, 1965,’ p.68; SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1222, ‘Abschrift eines Telegramms von Botschafter Kohrt, Peking, Nr.138/65 vom 4. Mai 1965,’ pp.71-74

¹⁵⁶ PA MfAA, A8750, ‘Aufzeichnung der 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung im MfAA. Betreff: Haltung der KP Chinas zum Vietnam-Problem, [n.m.], 1965,’ pp.292-293. For the Kremlin’s decision to provide 145 million rouble to North Vietnam, see SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3667, ‘Brief vom ZK der KPdSU an Walter Ulbricht, 2. Juli 1965,’ pp.182-183

¹⁵⁷ PA MfAA, A8744, ‘Aufzeichnung von Mothes (Betreuer der Delegation). Betreff: Bericht über den Besuch der Delegation der Nationalen Front fuer die Befreiung Südvietnams zu den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes vom Faschismus, 28. Mai 1965,’ p.20

¹⁵⁸ PA MfAA, A8736, ‘Aufzeichnung von Loebel (Betreuer der Delegation). Betreff: Bericht über den Besuch der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der DRV zu den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes zum Faschismus, 19. Mai 1965,’ p.198. For Tran Hoai Nam’s comments, see PA MfAA, A8744, ‘Aufzeichnung Mothes (Betreuer der Delegation). Betreff: Bericht über den Besuch der Delegation der Nationalen Front für die Befreiung Südvietnams zu den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes zum Faschismus,’ p.22

¹⁵⁹ PA MfAA, A8744, ‘Aufzeichnung von Mothes (Betreuer der Delegation). Betreff: Bericht über den Besuch der Delegation der Nationalen Front fuer die Befreiung Südvietnams zu den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes zum Faschismus, 28. Mai 1965,’ p.24; PA MfAA, A8736, ‘Aufzeichnung von Loebel (Betreuer der Delegation). Betreff: Bericht über den Besuch der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der DRV zu den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes zum Faschismus, 19. Mai 1965,’ pp.186-187

need anti-aircraft defences. “Out of approximately three-hundred downed American planes,” he said, “almost all have been combated with guns.”¹⁶⁰ Verner must have squirmed in his seat as he listened to these words, for a couple of days beforehand he had heard Lu Dingyi quote the exact same statistic.¹⁶¹ It was a clear sign that, notwithstanding the development of stronger ties, the DRV continued to accept Maoist doctrine that man would triumph over machine.

An ideological cleft was, likewise, noticeable on negotiations. Whereas Ulbricht had previously talked of “pre-empting” American belligerence, GDR statesmen now spoke of “restoring peace.”¹⁶² Discussions were viewed as an instrument to work towards a conclusion of the war. Already in Beijing, Ambassador Kohrt had pointed out that Marxists were “never, in principal, against discussions.”¹⁶³ Verner and two other politburo members further emphasised to Lu that even during the hardest of times against Hitler, the German Communist Party had set out its position on a peaceful settlement.¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, there was a distinct reluctance to convey this to the Vietnamese. No doubt the hosts were determined to maintain a cordial atmosphere. Besides, Müller’s reports from Hanoi estimated that, despite both President Johnson’s offer of “unconditional” talks on 7 April, as well as Pham Van Dong’s Four-Point counter-proposal, the DRV government “does not see any possibility for negotiations.” It was, instead, continuing its plans to liberate Saigon.¹⁶⁵ The 11th Plenum had drafted all men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight. Furthermore, South Vietnamese citizens, who had migrated to the North in 1954, were being trained to fight alongside

¹⁶⁰ PA MfAA, A8736, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung des Mitgliedes des Politbüros des ZK der SED, Gen. Paul Verner mit den Mitgliedern der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam am 14. Mai 1965,’ p.202. Although the actual figure in May 1965 is not entirely clear, there is no doubt that the Vietnamese and Chinese figure was grossly exaggerated. According to Jacob Van Staaveren, the United States and South Vietnamese had merely lost eleven planes by 2 March, whilst by 24 June, the losses had increased to no more than fifty-seven. See J. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War Over North Vietnam, 1965-1966* (Washington, 2002), p.86, p.141

¹⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11398, ‘Stenografische Niederschrift der Aussprache einer Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Volksrepublik China mit Vertretern des ZK der SED im Hause des Zentralkomitees am Montag, dem 10. Mai 1965,’ p.13

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.17

¹⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1222, ‘Abschrift eines Telegramms von Botschafter Kohrt, Peking, Nr.138/65 vom 4. Mai, 1965,’ p.74

¹⁶⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/11398, ‘Stenographische Niederschrift der Aussprache einer Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Volksrepublik China mit Vertretern des ZK der SED im Hause des Zentralkomitees am Montag, dem 10. Mai 1965,’ p.41

¹⁶⁵ BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, ‘Aufzeichnung von Müller. Inhalt: Bericht von der Nationalversammlung der DRV, 28. April 1965,’ pp.167-168. Privately, the prime minister had remarked that he had nothing against discussions, yet he had insisted, too, on a “guarantee” that the USA would leave. “Given that this is not possible,” Pham added, “peace cannot be expected at the present time.” See PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit den Botschaftern der anderen sozialistischen Länder in der Botschaft der UdSSR am 2. April 1965,’ p.79

communist guerrillas.¹⁶⁶ When the East Germans asked their visitors about the prospect of a political settlement, they received a similar response. Tran asserted that there was no real willingness in Washington to talk and that American withdrawal constituted the “basis for a solution.”¹⁶⁷ Hoang was even more forthright. He categorically dismissed Johnson’s proposal and declared that the DRV “cannot negotiate on leaving South Vietnam in the hands of the U.S.”¹⁶⁸

Most disappointing for East Berlin, though, was the failure to form a united communist front. The disappointment stemmed, above all, from a nationalist perspective. Policymakers were cognisant that Washington and Bonn were monitoring the split.¹⁶⁹ They were worried that the FRG was intensifying its efforts to spread rumours about Chinese obstruction. Verner shared this concern with Hoang and stressed that it was “extremely important, from a political and military point of view,” that the socialist countries make a joint statement on the Vietnam War. East Berlin, he continued, had suggested the same to the Chinese. Its proposal, however, had received no response. To accentuate the point, Verner implied that his country grasped the seriousness of the situation better than Beijing and pointed out the GDR people were “greatly concerned” about the bombings. Nevertheless, in contrast to Le Duan, Hoang adopted a different viewpoint. He evaded Verner’s proposal and retorted that the Chinese had “given us everything they have.” Although he acknowledged that there was a lack of “proper coordination,” it was striking that he divided the two sides between Beijing and Hanoi on the one hand, as well as a “third party” on the other.¹⁷⁰

Hoang’s comments were significant. They fitted neatly into East German appraisal of the present situation inside the VWP. Despite its shift towards a course of equidistance between the Soviet Bloc and China, the MfAA maintained that there were still “two opposing currents”:

¹⁶⁶ PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch zwischen Gen. Jarck und dem 1. Sekretär der Botschaft der UdSSR, Gen. Swerjev, am 13. April 1965,’ p.73

¹⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV A 2/20/440, ‘Bericht über den Besuch der Delegation der Nationalen Front fuer die Befreiung Südvietnams zu den Feierlichkeiten anlässlich des 20. Jahrestages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes vom Faschismus, 28. Mai 1965,’ pp.56-57

¹⁶⁸ PA MfAA, A8736, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung des Mitgliedes des Politbüros des ZK der SED, Gen. Paul Verner mit den Mitgliedern der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Demokratische Republik Vietnam. am 14. Mai 1965,’ p.202

¹⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/3515, ‘Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten. Betreff: Beratungsthemen für die Partei- und Regierungsdelegation, 31. Juli 1965,’ p.146; PA MfAA, A674, ‘Stellungnahme des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands zur Kopie eines Schreibens des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas an das Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion vom 14. Juli 1965, 13. September 1965,’ p.28

¹⁷⁰ PA MfAA, A8736, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung des Mitgliedes des Politbüros des ZK der SED, Gen. Paul Verner mit den Mitgliedern der Partei- und Regierungsdelegation der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam. am 14. Mai 1965,’ pp.202-205

One “positive,” the other “negative.”¹⁷¹ On 15 June, in a report to the politburo, Bergold contended that Hoang, Truong Chinh and Le Duc Tho embodied Chinese militarism, whereas Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong, General Giap and, intriguingly, Le Duan were more flexible in their outlook.¹⁷² Relying on information from the Polish- and Soviet ambassador, Bergold claimed that Duan had told party cadres there were “more dogmatists” than “revisionists” in North Vietnam and that the transition from capitalism to socialism did not have to transpire through “armed conflict.” In order to improve the party’s ideological work, Duan had moreover encouraged students to read the Marxist-Leninist “classics,” but not the works of living theorists (meaning Mao Zedong).¹⁷³ At the same time, Bergold warned that the position of the pro-Chinese faction was still “very strong,” particularly in the propaganda- and press departments.¹⁷⁴

By the summer of 1965, then, the Ulbricht government found itself in an undesirable position. It had been sucked into an open-ended conflict and was supporting a capricious ally. With the sequence of escalation on either side, there was no hope of a political settlement. On 17 June, Ulbricht received Le Thanh Nghi, who informed him that Hanoi was appealing for widespread financial assistance. Although the initial request had been ten million rouble, SED decision-makers explained that they needed to fulfil their economic plan and could only contribute half. In the end, the figure rose to seven million.¹⁷⁵ The hope of using the Vietnam War to precipitate communist unity, however, had proven futile. Instead, East Berlin, along with its Soviet Bloc allies, had not only abandoned peaceful coexistence on the Indochinese peninsula, but were competing with Beijing for Vietnamese patronage.¹⁷⁶ “We are now in the

¹⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1453, ‘Bestand: Politbüro: Zur gegenwärtigen Situation in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam und über die Veränderung in der Regierung (Aus einer Information der Botschaft Hanoi von 26. Mai 1965 an den stellvertretenden Minister, Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter), 15. Juni 1965’; PA MfAA, A8750, ‘Aufzeichnung von 1. Außereuropäischen Abteilung. Betreff: Einschätzung der gegenwärtigen Haltung der PWV (Stand, September 1965), n.d.’ p.296

¹⁷² SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1453, ‘Bestand: Politbüro: Zur gegenwärtigen Situation in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam und über die Veränderung in der Regierung (Aus einer Information der Botschaft Hanoi von 26. Mai 1965 an den stellvertretenden Minister, Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter), 15. Juni 1965’

¹⁷³ PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch mit dem polnischen Botschafter, Genossen Siedlecki, am 7. Juli 1965, in der polnischen Botschaft,’ pp.85-86

¹⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1453, ‘Zur Haltung der DRV, Berlin 12. Juni 1965 (Brief des Gen. Bergold, Hanoi, vom 7. Juni 1965 an den stellvertretenden Minister, Gen. Kiesewetter)’; SAPMO-BArch, DY30/J IV 2/2J/1453, ‘Bestand: Politbüro: Zur gegenwärtigen Situation in der Demokratischen Republik Vietnam und über die Veränderung in der Regierung (Aus einer Information der Botschaft Hanoi von 26. Mai 1965 an den stellvertretenden Minister, Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter), 15. Juni 1965’

¹⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DC20/12761, ‘Niederschrift: Über eine Aussprache des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates, Genossen Walter Ulbricht, mit dem stellvertretenden Ministerpräsidenten und Mitglied des Politbüros des ZK der Partei der Werktätigen Vietnams, Le thanh Nghi, am 17. Juni 1965,’ p.13; SAPMO-BArch, DC20/12788, ‘Aufzeichnung vom Büro des Ministerrates. Betreff: Protokollauszug, 1. Juli 1965,’ p.183

¹⁷⁶ PA MfAA, G-A331, ‘Aktenvermerk über eine Aussprache mit den Botschaftern der anderen sozialistischen Länder in der Botschaft der UdSSR am 2. April 1965,’ p.79

position,” Major-General Ivanov told Müller, “where, with the assistance we give to the DRV, Chinese policy is being made.”¹⁷⁷ In the historiography, chroniclers have insisted that the end of the conflict was foreordained, that Vietnamese reunification was guaranteed. The East Germans, though, recognised the imponderable nature of it all. There were too many participants pursuing their own interests to know what would happen. All they knew was that Washington and Hanoi were determined to fight to the end.¹⁷⁸

West German Disquiet

It was a curious contrast that whilst the Ulbricht government was making every effort to show public support for North Vietnam, Erhard was advised to remain silent. It is important to appreciate that the ambassadorial conference had been primarily designed to examine the war from an *American* perspective. FRG executives had asked themselves what they would have done in the given scenario. Yet when contemplating their own *national* agenda, the conclusions diverged. In his appraisal of the conference, Bassler noted that it would “only harm German interests” if Bonn committed to a particular political line. It had, therefore, been decided that the FRG should “sit back and maintain a low profile.”¹⁷⁹ Underpinning what Schröder described to Erhard as a “wait-and-see approach” was an appreciation that the Vietnam War was being played out in a polycentric milieu.¹⁸⁰ The Franco-American dispute was ever present. Whichever way the Erhard government tilted, it would, in the words of Hubert Zimmermann, cause “mutual irritation.”¹⁸¹ Silence seemed the best alternative.

Correspondingly, West German assessment of Kosygin’s voyage to the Far East offered no evidence that the ideological schism had been resolved, or that Moscow and Beijing were pursuing parallel objectives.¹⁸² James Hershberg and Chen Jian have highlighted the PRC’s use of signals to convey its intentions.¹⁸³ Bonn, though, was more interested in *Soviet* signals. The Kremlin’s push for bilateral cooperation with France was a prime example. On 3 March,

¹⁷⁷ BArch-MA, DVW1/13899/a, ‘Aufzeichnung von Müller. Inhalt: Abendessen beim sowjetischen Militärattache, 24. Juni 1965,’ p.186

¹⁷⁸ SAPMO-BArch, NY4182/1270, ‘Information über gemeinsame Aussprache der Botschafter sozialistischer Länder am 29. Juli 1965 in der bulgarischen Botschaft, 29. Juli 1965,’ pp.109-110

¹⁷⁹ PA AA, B130, Bd.5958A, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Die aufgestellten Thesen für eine deutsche Außenpolitik in Süd- und Ostasien, 17. Februar 1965’

¹⁸⁰ PA AA, B130, Bd.2651A, ‘Schröder an Erhard, 25. Februar 1965’

¹⁸¹ Zimmermann, ‘The Quiet German,’ pp.63-64

¹⁸² PA AA, B37, Bd.160, ‘Fernschreiben von Groepper aus Moskau Nr.187 vom 1. März 1965’; PA AA, B40, Bd.72, ‘Schriftbericht-Fernschreiben von Groepper, Nr.228 vom 10. März 1965,’ pp.43-45; PA AA, B40, Bd.72, ‘Aufzeichnung von Groepper. Betreff: Ergebnisse der Moskauer Konferenz der kommunistischen Parteien, 18. März 1965,’ pp.83-84

¹⁸³ Hershberg and Chen, ‘Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy,’ pp.47-84

Embassy Counsellor, Karl Knoke, reported that the Soviet ambassador had called upon de Gaulle to express his government's wish for a political solution.¹⁸⁴ Although the initiative failed, the West Germans were no doubt struck by Moscow's eagerness to show restraint. Prior to Willy Brandt's visit to Washington in April, he received a Soviet message through an intermediate, asking him to tell the American government that policymakers "do not wish to become involved" and were "full of regrets at having to take the Vietnam situation in the way they were doing."¹⁸⁵ The USSR, diplomats in Moscow concluded, was not prepared to accede to "Chinese incitement" or abandon détente with America.¹⁸⁶

Irrespective of Soviet restraint, there could be no doubt that the Kremlin was attempting to reassert its presence on the Indochinese peninsula. But rather than view the war as an ideological struggle between East and West, the Foreign Ministry spoke of a *Machtkampf*, involving America, China and Russia. These three powers were competing for regional influence. The clearest appraisal of this relationship came from the First Secretary of the Embassy in Moscow, Alois Mertes. Mertes was one of the nation's most distinguished foreign political thinkers. He had entered public service in 1952 and was initially stationed in Paris, before moving to Russia in 1963. He was later appointed state secretary under Chancellor Helmut Kohl and became an expert on nuclear disarmament.¹⁸⁷ In late March 1965, he penned a memorandum to his friend, Josef Jansen. "Historically," he began, "the fixation of the Moscow-Washington-Beijing power triangle can be identified fairly accurately." For Mertes, the PTBT symbolised the end of the "post-war period," during which the world had, under the leadership of Moscow and Washington, been carved into "two closed camps." Although the Kremlin had not abandoned its revolutionary objectives, he believed that, "in the present historical period," it considered rapprochement with the United States of "vital importance." Mertes argued further that between the two communist behemoths, Washington had a "clear moral and political preference" towards Moscow. In fact, the two superpowers were pursuing

¹⁸⁴ AAPD, 1965, p.441

¹⁸⁵ NARA, General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1966, Political & Defence, POL 7 Visit. Meetings. GER-W to POL7 Visits. Meetings. GER-W, Box 2211, POL7, Visits. Meetings. GER W, 1 January 1965, 'Hulick in Berlin to Secretary of State, 29 March 1965'; TNA, PREM13/694, 'J.O. Wright to J. N. Henderson, 26 April 1965.' After discussing Vietnam with the Soviet representative in Phnom Penh, Klaus Mehnert claimed that the USSR "did not want to be sucked into the conflict under any circumstances." See PA AA, B37, Bd.161, 'Telegramm von Schlegelberger an das Auswärtige Amt, Nr.39 vom 16. März 1965'

¹⁸⁶ PA AA, B40, Bd.72, 'Aufzeichnung von Groepper. Betreff: Ergebnisse der Moskauer Konferenz der kommunistischen Parteien, 18. März 1965,' p.84. See also PA AA, B41, Bd.21, 'Betreff: Deutsch-französische Konsultationen am 25. März 1965,' pp.231-232

¹⁸⁷ On Alois Mertes, see H. Küsters, 'Alois Mertes - Würdigung eines Christlichen Demokraten. Redebeiträge anlässlich der Veranstaltung am 7. November 2012,' *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* (Sankt Augustin/Berlin, 2013), pp.9-42; G. Schneider, *Alois Mertes: 1921-1985: Das außenpolitische Denken und Handeln eines christlichen Demokraten* (Düsseldorf, 2012)

a “status quo policy,” whereas China (irrespective of its own weakness) had both implemented a “political-military offensive” and (“via Hanoi-Vietcong”) “provoked” the Vietnam Crisis.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Mertes warned that it was simplistic to categorise the protagonists as “friend” and “enemy.” He drew a parallel with the pre-war era, pointing out that in 1939, Moscow, Berlin and Paris-London had all attempted to exploit the differences between the other two sides. It seemed to him that something similar was being played out in Vietnam. The USSR, he explained, was willing to provide assistance for the national liberation struggle, yet also wished to counteract “Chinese influence,” as well as prolong “American entanglement.” Its “pivotal” interest, though, was to obviate further escalation. A direct clash between Washington and Beijing, Mertes reasoned, would compel the Kremlin to either uphold the Sino-Soviet alliance, or reveal itself to be a “treacherous coward.” America, in contrast, was eager to widen the split inside the socialist world, but was wary of risking a showdown with China and, thus, restoring communist cohesion. Instead of abandonment, or major war, Mertes argued that Washington had chosen a third alternative: “Limited expansion of its present defence battle against North Vietnam.” Finally, Mertes asserted that Chinese activism was governed by the American-Soviet relationship. There was, in short, a limit to Mao Zedong’s “game of controlled-risk.” Beijing could only challenge U.S. defences for as long as Washington feared the danger of Soviet reprisals. If the Americans, however, became “totally convinced” that Moscow would not intervene, then China would be “lost.”¹⁸⁹

Surveying his broad appraisal, Mertes drew two conclusions. The protagonists, he stated, were competing below the danger of atomic warfare. Neither America, China nor Russia wanted to trigger Armageddon. There could not be a “KO-victory.”¹⁹⁰ Instead, both he and his superior spoke of a “controlled crisis.”¹⁹¹ But it was Mertes’ second point, which juxtaposed German and Chinese interests, that stood out. If the Vietnam War illustrated anything, it was that Beijing wanted to change the status quo in Asia, just like Bonn wanted to redraw the map of Europe. Both countries, Mertes argued, were “troublemakers,” challenging the international

¹⁸⁸ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/3, ‘Alois Mertes an Josef Jansen. Betreff: Das Machtdreieck Moskau-Washington-Peking und der Status Quo in Deutschland, 31. März 1965.’ The West Germans were also aware that the Chinese were obstructing Soviet assistance for Hanoi. See NARA, RG59, General Records of the Department of State, LOT File, 69D277, Records of Negotiations about Vietnam, 1965-69, Box 4, Communist - GEN, ‘Kohler to Secretary of State, 24 March, 1965’; PA AA, B37, Bd.161, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bünger. Betreff: Sowjetische Waffenlieferung an Nordvietnam, 21. April 1965’

¹⁸⁹ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/3, ‘Alois Mertes an Josef Jansen. Betreff: Das Machtdreieck Moskau-Washington-Peking und der Status Quo in Deutschland, 31. März 1965’

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ PA AA, B40, Bd.72, ‘Aufzeichnung von Groepper. Betreff: Ergebnisse der Moskauer Konferenz der kommunistischen Parteien, 18. März 1965,’ p.84

order. The political reality, though, was that the picture was fluid on the Indochinese peninsula, whereas it was “becalmed” in Germany. Washington’s preoccupation with Asia meant that there was no desire for an “offensive.”¹⁹² As a result, Mertes told Jansen that President de Gaulle was “correct.”¹⁹³ The “existence of a second, independent Western Power,” he reasoned, “whose potential atomic development was roughly comparable to China,” would create a “healthier” world situation and be more “conducive” to German interests. It would counteract Soviet endeavours to consolidate its position in Europe, as well as provide an opportunity to regain the “diplomatic-political” initiative.¹⁹⁴

Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the argument, Jansen studied Mertes’ thoughts with “great interest.” He, likewise, complained about an “erroneous assessment” of the “real situation” and informed Mertes that the consequences of a “status-quo thinking” were already apparent. De Gaulle was the only one, who understood that the present equilibrium was detrimental for the West.¹⁹⁵ Still, it would be misleading to take this criticism too far. Mertes’ and Jansen’s analysis ignored both the geographical location and historical past of the FRG. It was all very well to theorise about an independent foreign political concept, but in practice, the Erhard government’s manoeuvrability was limited. Despite the diminished sense of immediate threat, there remained a great fear that the U.S. could withdraw its armed forces. In fact, at the beginning of 1965, Ambassador McGhee warned that Washington would pull troops out, if Bonn partook in the French nuclear research programme.¹⁹⁶ Besides, notwithstanding the state’s achievements, Erhard appreciated that Germany was still “feared and mistrusted” throughout the world.¹⁹⁷

His government was, hence, working within specific national parameters. Bonn remained dependent on American protection and burdened by its militant past. It is understandable that Erhard showed reluctance to either challenge U.S. decision-making, or adopt a more independent foreign policy. Nevertheless, what Erhard must have realised was

¹⁹² ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/3, ‘Alois Mertes an Josef Jansen. Betreff: Das Machtdreieck Moskau-Washington-Peking und der Status Quo in Deutschland, 31. März 1965’

¹⁹³ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/3, ‘Brief von Alois Mertes an Josef Jansen, 31. März 1965’

¹⁹⁴ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/3, ‘Alois Mertes an Josef Jansen. Betreff: Das Machtdreieck Moskau-Washington-Peking und der Status Quo in Deutschland, 31. März 1965’

¹⁹⁵ ACDP, Nachlass Josef Jansen, I-149-007/3, ‘Brief von Alois Mertes an Josef Jansen, 31. März 1965’

¹⁹⁶ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.136; ACDP, Nachlass Horst Osterheld, 01-724-011, ‘Osterheld an den Herrn Minister [Gerhard Schröder], 15. Januar 1965’

¹⁹⁷ BA-Koblenz, ‘Nachlass Heinrich von Brentano, N1239/185, ‘Brief von Brentano an Erhard, 15. Juli 1964,’ p.16; AAPD, 1965, p.115

that his close association with Washington had caused a “number of reversals.”¹⁹⁸ Not only did the Americans veto renewed calls for another reunification initiative, but the public disclosure of arms shipments to Israel (which had been incited by the United States) compromised state relations with ten Arab countries.¹⁹⁹ “Many German officials,” Ambassador McGhee reported on 11 January, were asking themselves whether their foreign policy had “not run into a dead-end.” Gerhard Schröder, himself, told the ambassador that he felt “let down.”²⁰⁰ In short, it seemed the perfect opportunity to organise a full-scale review of the nation’s political programme.

And yet, despite this “crisis of confidence,” West German decision-makers stuck like barnacles to their agenda.²⁰¹ Rather than consider alternatives, the chancellor continued to emphasise “Free World cohesion.”²⁰² This meant offering vocal support for escalation in Vietnam. On 20 February, Erhard placed the FRG behind Washington. Speaking to foreign correspondents, he declared that the whole nation supported the Americans, “who were ready to shed blood in defence of freedom and self-determination.”²⁰³ Joachim Arentz has argued that the chancellor believed in the Saigon-Berlin metaphor, that he considered escalation proof that America would fulfil its commitments.²⁰⁴ It is true that when speaking to U.S. officials, Erhard took the line that “by resisting aggression in Asia,” they were, “in effect, defending Germany as well.”²⁰⁵ A close examination of the internal record, though, suggests that George Ball was not far off when he asserted that Erhard was “telling us what he believes we would like to hear.”²⁰⁶ It is worth recalling the chancellor’s previous remarks on Vietnam. In July

¹⁹⁸ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany Cables, Vol. VI, 12/64-1/65, ‘McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Malaise in Germany, 11 January 1965’

¹⁹⁹ J. Miller, (ed.), *FRUS, 1964-1968, Germany and Berlin, Volume XV*, Document 80, ‘Memorandum of a Conversation. Subject: German Ambassador’s Call on the Secretary Part 1 of 2 - German Reunification, 7 January 1965’ (Washington, 1999); *AAPD, 1965*, pp.37-40. See also Geiger, *Atlantiker gegen Gaullisten*, pp.275-279

²⁰⁰ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Box 184, Germany Cables, Vol. VI, 12/64-1/65, ‘McGhee to Secretary of State. Subject: Malaise in Germany, 11 January 1965’

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *AAPD 1965*, p.274

²⁰³ *New York Times*, ‘West Germany, 21 February 1965,’ p.3. It is worth noting that the author of the article described the effect of defeat in Vietnam on U.S. interests and commitments in Europe as a “new topic” of conversation. It was pointed out, however, that “official sources insist that the two matters are unrelated.”

²⁰⁴ Arentz, ‘Die Bewährungsprobe der Special Relationship,’ pp.162-163; Arentz, *Johnson, Vietnam und der Westen*, p.275

²⁰⁵ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File - Vietnam, Box 13, Folder 3, Vietnam Memos [1 of 2], Vol. XXVIII, 9-19 February, 1965, ‘Memorandum from William Bundy for the President. Subject: Reactions of Non-Communist Countries to US Actions in Vietnam, 16 February 1965’

²⁰⁶ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Box 18, Folder 9, Vietnam, Memoc (C), Vol. XXXV, 1-21 June 1965 [2 of 2], ‘Memorandum from George Ball for the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, Mr George Bundy, Mr William Bundy, Mr John McNaughton, Mr Leonard Unger, 29 June 1965’

1964, he had admitted to de Gaulle that the Germans did not have “strong feelings” about Southeast Asia. In autumn, he had claimed that the “very least one can expect of a friend and ally” was to offer “moral support.” In February 1965, he had greeted the news of American bombings with a casual shrug. Would a leader, who feared repercussions on his own people, have adopted such a lax attitude? Hardly. Of course, it could be countered that Erhard had changed his mind, that he had perhaps received intelligence, which offered a different appraisal. The reports from the Foreign Ministry, though, suggest quite the reverse. If anything, the leitmotiv was to mention Vietnam as little as possible.²⁰⁷

Interestingly, the chancellor voiced no concern about the psychological impact in either Berlin or Germany at the CDU party conference.²⁰⁸ Nor did he mention it to the British prime minister. He returned, instead, to the theme of allied loyalty. When Harold Wilson told him on 8 March that his government was “very anxious” about Vietnam and that London had, with American consent, broached the problem in Moscow to see whether a “common approach could be found,” the chancellor replied that he was on “very good terms with President Johnson” and even claimed that he had “been with him on the day of the incident in the Bay of Tonkin.” The FRG, Erhard continued, had “given full moral support” and was making a “financial contribution to South Vietnam.” He shared his “own impression” that Kosygin’s visit to Hanoi had been “more of a political tactic in order to keep the Chinese out, rather than a demonstration of positive support for North Vietnam.” He was “very glad,” Erhard concluded, that Wilson’s efforts were taken with the knowledge of the United States.²⁰⁹

At first glance, these comments were surreal. It was particularly ominous that Erhard was prepared to lie about being at LBJ’s side during the Tonkin Gulf Crisis. It was also remarkable that the chancellor did not equate Soviet tactics with American escalation, but explained them as a response to *Beijing’s* movements. Deep down, Erhard realised that the defence of Berlin and Saigon were not comparable. He understood that the “world political scene had changed,” that the Cold War was no longer bipolar.²¹⁰ On 4 June, Erhard suggested to Johnson that the Soviet weapons in North Vietnam were “only for demonstrative purposes”

²⁰⁷ PA AA, B130, Bd.2651A, ‘Schröder an Erhard, 25. Februar 1965’; PA AA, B44, Bd.4 ‘Aufzeichnung von Luedde-Neurath. Betreff: USA-Reise des Herrn Bundeskanzlers, 17. Mai 1965,’ p.148; ACDP, Nachlass Horst Osterheld, 01-724-012, ‘Aufzeichnung von Bassler. Betreff: Übersicht über die Lage in Vietnam seit dem Sturz von Staatspräsident Diem, 21. Juni 1965’

²⁰⁸ Protokoll: 13. Bundesparteitag, 28.-31. März 1965 in Düsseldorf. CDU - Es geht um Deutschland,’ www.kas.de/wf/de/71.8935, p.32

²⁰⁹ TNA, PREM13/693, ‘Extract from Record of P.M.’s talk with Chancellor Erhard in Bonn, 8 March 1965,’ pp.202-203

²¹⁰ AAPD, 1965, p.593; Protokoll: 13. Bundesparteitag, 28.-31. März 1965 in Düsseldorf. CDU - Es geht um Deutschland,’ www.kas.de/wf/de/71.8935, p.32

and that Moscow wanted to “avoid a direct confrontation with America at all cost.” As for the German peoples’ faith in U.S. promises, Erhard himself informed the president that, according to a recent opinion poll, the population trusted the Americans “twenty-four times” more than any other ally.²¹¹ The conflict in Vietnam did not appear significant.

But even if we assume that Erhard believed this warped logic that American defeat would shatter national confidence, it would not explain West Germany’s main incentive to support U.S. involvement. For the key reason, we must consider the fundamental changes in the structure of world power. The chancellor viewed Vietnam through the prism of his relationship with Washington on the one hand and Paris on the other. In his mind, de Gaulle’s pursuance of an independent programme compelled him to choose between U.S. deterrence and “French hegemony.”²¹² “Two things,” Erhard argued were “indispensable” for his state: The Atlantic Alliance and cooperation with Washington.²¹³ The chancellor feared, however, that the post-war alliance system was “slowly disintegrating.”²¹⁴ De Gaulle’s resolve to withdraw France from NATO, as well as his endorsement of Soviet peace proposals in Vietnam, were directed *against* the United States.²¹⁵ Erhard was, thus, keen to highlight his own allegiance. Time after time, the chancellor spoke of being America’s “most faithful ally.”²¹⁶ He was determined to avoid any action that might provoke the superpower.²¹⁷ “We cannot conduct policies which will weaken the West,” he argued.²¹⁸

It was in this context that Erhard largely ignored the advice of the Foreign Ministry and continued to offer public support for American involvement in Vietnam.²¹⁹ There is no doubt

²¹¹ AAPD, 1965, p.961. Erhard made the same point to Dean Rusk. See Miller (ed.), *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XV*, Document 116, ‘Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: De Gaulle and NATO, 4 June 1965’

²¹² Miller (ed.), *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XV*, Document 118, ‘Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Europe, 4 June 1965’

²¹³ AAPD, 1965, p.950. See also Erhard’s comments to de Gaulle in AAPD, 1965, pp.142-143

²¹⁴ AAPD, 1965, p.959. See Erhard’s comments to the Norwegian Prime Minister, Einar Gerhardsen, too, that NATO was a “question of life and death” in BA-Koblenz, B136/51093, Band 13, ‘Protokoll der deutsch-norwegischen Regierungsbesprechungen vom 23./25. März 1965,’ p.133

²¹⁵ AAPD, 1965, p.617, p.1124

²¹⁶ See, for instance, AAPD 1965, p.78, p.80; C. Sampson (ed.), *FRUS, 1964-1968, Western Europe Region, Volume XIII*, Document 69, ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State, 15 January 1965’ (Washington, 1995); Miller (ed), *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XV*, Document 88, ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State’; *The Guardian*, ‘W[est] German Promises to LBJ, 7 June 1965,’ p.7

²¹⁷ AAPD, 1965, pp.273-274; Sampson (ed.), *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XIII*, Document 69, ‘Telegram from the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State, 15 January 1965’

²¹⁸ Protokoll: 13. Bundesparteitag, 28.-31. März 1965 in Düsseldorf. CDU - Es geht um Deutschland,’ www.kas.de/wf/de/71.8935, p.34

²¹⁹ *Times Herald*, ‘LBJ, Erhard Reaffirm Alliance After Talk Here, 5 June, 1965,’ p.A1; See also *New York Times*, ‘Erhard Backs U.S. on Vietnam Stand: Also Opposes de Gaulle View by Agreeing with Johnson on Need for Strong NATO, 4 June 1965,’ p.1; *New York Times*, ‘Erhard, in TV Talk, Renews Emphasis on a Strong NATO, 7 June 1965,’ p.44

that it was personal. Erhard hated de Gaulle. The French leader exemplified everything that he disliked: Arrogance, ingratitude and mischief-making. Ever mindful of his predecessor's close friendship with de Gaulle, he saw the shadow of Adenauer, the man, who had insisted that he was not suited for the job of chancellor, who had "often treated him so badly that he did not want to continue."²²⁰ It did not help that a week before de Gaulle was scheduled to visit Bonn in mid-June, Erhard received a transcript of a conversation, wherein the French leader contrasted Franco-German ties during Adenauer's tenure and the present government. Whilst not mentioning Erhard, de Gaulle complained to Willy Brandt that the FRG harboured "old concepts of the Cold War period" and that it was failing to speak out against America's "wrong and dangerous" policies, in cases, such as Vietnam.²²¹

For Erhard, though, it was not the policies that were important, but rather *who* was conducting these policies. The chancellor was perfectly aware that the war situation was grim.²²² He knew that Johnson was under increasing domestic pressure.²²³ The president himself told him that "one-fifth" of the public opposed stronger reprisals, whereas "three-fifth" would "give him hell" if he did nothing.²²⁴ Sympathetic to Johnson's plight and determined to show solidarity, Erhard signed a joint statement, which promised further economic aid and pledged support for "American determination to turn back aggression in Vietnam."²²⁵ Nevertheless, the chancellor failed to realise that his indefatigable endorsement of U.S. actions weakened his own bargaining position. Although Johnson was careful to stress that he valued "no friendship" higher than his personal friendship with the chancellor and that "no alliance" meant more to him than that of the German and American people, it is difficult not to get the sense that he was going through the motions. The private talk lasted barely an hour. No reference was made to reunification. And, just like Adenauer had feared, the president was clearly preoccupied with Vietnam. The German problem had been pushed to the side.²²⁶

²²⁰ Osterheld, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard*, p.124. See also Adenauer's veiled criticism of Erhard at the CDU convention, in which he warned that "one politician can spoil what the people have painfully created," in Protokoll: 13. Bundesparteitag, 28.-31. März 1965 in Düsseldorf. CDU - Es geht um Deutschland,' www.kas.de/wf/de/71.8935, p.32

²²¹ BA-Koblenz, B136/51094, Band 14, 'Fernschreiben von der BRD Botschaft in Paris. Betreff: Gespräch Staatspräsident de Gaulle - reg. Bürgermeister von Berlin, Willy Brandt, 3. Juni 1965,' pp.38-41

²²² AAPD, 1965, p.376; NARA, RG200, National Archives Gift Collection, Records of Robert S. McNamara, Defence Programmes and Operations, Box 76, Foreign Relations Committee, March 1966, 'Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Erhard-McNamara in Washington, 4 June 1965'

²²³ ACDP, Nachlass Horst Osterheld, 01-724-012, 'In Vertretung des Herrn Bundeskanzlers empfing Herr Bundesminister Mende, Herrn Willy Brandt, 24. April 1965'

²²⁴ AAPD, 1965, p.964

²²⁵ *Times Herald*, 'LBJ, Erhard Reaffirm Alliance After Talk Here, 5 June, 1965,' p.A1

²²⁶ AAPD, 1965, pp.961-967

On the eve of the president's July press conference, which announced an increase in the number of U.S. troops to 125.000, Erhard had, thus, anchored his state to American involvement in Indochina. He, more than any other European leader, had voiced approval for military escalation. The chancellor did so, not because he cared about South Vietnam, but because he wanted to maintain strong relations with Washington. His ulterior motive, the strategy behind his unyielding endorsement, was to uphold the Atlantic partnership, as well as the defence framework in a fluctuating international order. In the short term, this objective was successful. On 24 July, Erhard received an assurance from Averell Harriman that the dispatching of American forces to South Vietnam would not result in a degradation of NATO, or precipitate troop withdrawals.²²⁷ In the long-run, however, Erhard's policy led to a dead-end. The United States expected him to keep his promises and assist in the defence of Saigon. His failure to satisfy these demands culminated in him receiving the notorious Johnson treatment at the end of the year. "Now we are going to find out who our friends are," the president snarled.²²⁸ But most importantly, irrespective of U.S. insistences that it was not "neglecting" other parts of the world, the prospect of reunification was more remote than ever.²²⁹ The truth was that German and American interests no longer coincided. Washington was not prepared to upset bilateral relations with Moscow for the sake of Bonn's national objectives. As Heinrich Krone noted in his diary, the superpower was satisfied with the status quo and the FRG had become an "object" of great power politics.²³⁰ Erhard's dependence and acceptance of American decision-making, therefore, inhibited West Germany from striking out in new directions and escape the present paralysis. The chancellor's inability to redefine his foreign political programme, along with his protracted ineffectiveness, would, ultimately, cost him his job.²³¹

²²⁷ LBJL, The Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President, 1963-1969, NSF, Country File, Europe and USSR, Germany, Box 194, Folder 7, Germany, MemCons and Misc: Correspondence, 1965, 'Memorandum of Conversation between Ludwig Erhard and Averell Harriman, 24 July 1965'; BA-Koblenz, B136/51095, Band 15, 'Der Herr Bundeskanzler traf am 24. Juli um 11 Uhr im Hotel Vierjahreszeiten mit dem amerikanischen Sonderbotschafter Harriman zu einem Gespräch zusammen,' p.123

²²⁸ McGhee, *At the Creation*, pp.184-185

²²⁹ BA-Koblenz, B136/51093, Band 13, 'Vermerk: In Vertretung des Herrn Bundeskanzler empfing heute um 10.00 Uhr Herr BM Mende, Herrn RBM Brandt, der sich am 24 April,' p.142; ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder, I-483-282/1, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundesminister des Auswärtigen empfing am 13. Mai 1965 in der Deutschen Botschaft in London um 10.45 Uhr den amerikanischen Aussenminister Rusk zu einem Gespräch unter vier Augen'; ACDP, Nachlass Gerhard Schröder, I-483-282/1, 'Aufzeichnung: Der Herr Bundesminister des Auswärtigen traf am 3. Juni 1965 um 10.00 Uhr mit Mr. Bundy in dessen Büro im Weißen Haus in Washington zusammen'

²³⁰ Kleinmann, (Hrsg.), *Krone, Tagebücher, Zeiter Band*, p.398

²³¹ Koerfer, *Kampf ums Kanzleramt: Erhard und Adenauer* (Stuttgart, 1988), p.754

Conclusion

This thesis has examined both the East- and West German perspective of the Vietnam War. It has argued that between the spring of 1960 and the summer of 1965 rapid changes to the geopolitical system shaped the way in which the conflict was assessed. There is no doubt that the post-war world gave new meaning to Vietnam. It recast the struggle on the Indochinese peninsula as a Cold War battleground, where success for one side meant defeat for the other. Within the dualistic framework of two hostile camps, under the leadership of Washington and Moscow, the parallel struggles in Germany and Vietnam interconnected. For Bonn, as well as Saigon, the mutual aim was to hold the line against Marxist-Leninist expansion, to contain the spread of world communism on the furthestmost front. In the minds of FRG executives, the domino theory was ever present. If South Vietnam were lost or captured, then the entire region would, sooner or later, turn communist. East Germany's own state existence, in contrast, depended upon the preservation of Soviet power, as well as a cohesive bloc structure. Both the GDR and the DRV were joined together through membership of the socialist world, united by the principles of proletarian internationalism. As a result, the Cold War was decisive in Bonn's and East Berlin's initial perception of Vietnam. Both sides believed that their own struggle and the struggle on the Indochinese peninsula were components of a much greater, existential battle between two opposing belief systems.

On the ground, however, FRG officials were cognisant of the perilous scenario. Right from the start, there was an undercurrent of scepticism about America's nation-building project. South Vietnam's geographical location, above all, its porous borders, exposed it to uninhibited enemy subversion. The West Germans were, likewise, at pains to emphasise the government's internal shortcomings. Diem's cloistered policymaking, his adamant refusal to reform, as well as the lack of trust between the state and its inhabitants heightened their personal misgivings. The president merely received FRG endorsement because of his staunch anti-communism and lack of viable alternatives, rather than a genuine faith in his political ability. Even in late 1962 and 1963, at a time when both diplomats and military advisers were recording signs of improvement on the battlefield, there remained a trace of unease about whether the Ngo government could survive.

Above the 17th parallel, GDR executives viewed the struggle in the South through an ideological prism. Hand-in-hand with all Asian, African and Latin American peoples, the NLF personified the national liberation movement, which was endeavouring to smash the system of colonial slavery. The pattern of despotic tyrants being overthrown in the capitalist world suggested that Diem was living on borrowed time and popular discontent would, as Leninist

scripture predicted, overthrow the RVN government. Nonetheless, East German confidence of assured victory seemed to subside the longer the struggle dragged on. The North Vietnamese and other fraternal allies disclosed that NLF partisans were suffering high losses in both men and material. As late as September 1963, the DRV's Deputy Prime Minister, Hoang Van Tien, admitted to Eckhart Bibow that "on account of the balance of power in South Vietnam, it will not be possible for the liberation front to bring about a decision through the present means."¹ It is also easy to forget that Hanoi was beseeched by its own domestic difficulties. The East Germans witnessed for themselves the chronic food shortages, as well as the rapidly expanding population. They were unconvinced that North Vietnam was prepared for a protracted war, or, for that matter, whether the NLF's strategy of inflicting heavy blows, until the other side acceded to negotiations, was realistic.

At the same time, the clear-cut appraisal of the geopolitical structure as an existential conflict between capitalism and Marxism-Leninism came into sharp focus. Both the Eastern- as well as the Western Bloc structure began to transform. The binaries that had governed the FRG's and GDR's worldview were dismantled. These, to be sure, were not longstanding Cold War principles, but short-term realignments. Two particular trends in the world are worth pointing out. First, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Bonn and East Berlin recorded a relaxation of the political climate, as well as a willingness between the two superpowers to coexist with one another. Indeed, the signing of the Partial-Test Ban Treaty in August 1963 not only symbolised a pause in the Cold War, but also the end of the post-war era itself. The sinister shadow of Armageddon receded into the background. Second, GDR and FRG statesmen realised that centrifugal power had dissipated in both ideological camps. Beijing's challenge to Soviet hegemony, North Vietnamese association with Maoist militarism, the signing of the Franco-German agreement, as well as de Gaulle's public appeal to neutralise Southeast Asia, exposed the absence of an authoritative centre to enforce orthodoxy. The shift from bipolarism to polycentrism made the international structure more opaque and unpredictable.

It was in this milieu that Bonn and East Berlin confronted Vietnam. The conflict was no longer a mere bipolar struggle between two diametrically opposed belief systems. Instead, on either side of the 17th parallel, individual states were competing with each other for regional influence. What perhaps stands out most, when chronicling the GDR's and FRG's appraisals, is the glaring weakness of the two superpowers. Despite their awesome economic and military

¹ PA MfAA, A8570, 'Aktenvermerk Nr. 129/63 über ein Gespräch mit dem stellv. Außenminister Genossen Hoang Van Tien, am 16. September 1963,' p.233

strength, neither America, nor the USSR, succeeded in projecting their respective will onto the situation. On the one hand, the West Germans highlighted Washington's failure to construct an efficient RVN nation-state and win the war against the Vietcong. On the other hand, their eastern counterparts underlined the loss of Soviet influence above the 17th parallel, as well as its botched attempts to resolve the conflict in Laos through political means.

What is also remarkable when juxtaposing the FRG and GDR perspective is just how much emphasis they placed on *Chinese* motives. It is worth reminding ourselves that in 1963, both inhabitants judged Beijing a (if not *the*) central threat to world peace. There was an entrenched conviction that CCP leaders were pursuing a militant strategy and sponsoring armed conflict below the 17th parallel. This, it should be emphasised, was a universal phenomenon. Two years after Vietnamese reunification, William Bundy noted that from the summer of 1963, the “feeling of Russia as an overpowering menace tended to recede,” but that, “concurrently, the belief in the Chinese as a threat tended to rise. The two curves crossed.”² Although the two German states did not judge Beijing an existential threat, the executive branches of government considered it a significant problem. Men such as Franz-Josef Bach, York von Wendland and Hilmar Bassler were candid in their belief that the neighbouring countries offered fertile ground for Chinese expansion and warned that the PRC was attempting to absorb Southeast Asia into its domain. North Vietnam, in contrast, was considered nothing more than a client state, a spatial region under the tutelage of Beijing. At the heart of the matter, therefore, was the question of how the United States should respond to the Maoist gambit. Whilst discussing the available alternatives in February 1965, FRG decision-makers and diplomats estimated that neither continuing the conflict, nor a political settlement offered much hope for a satisfactory outcome. And yet, despite their own serious misgivings, the West Germans agreed with the Johnson government that military escalation offered the only possible “way out.” The detrimental effect of withdrawal on American prestige throughout Asia, as well as the weakening of the West's regional influence, were considered too great a price to pay.

In turn, China's break with the socialist camp, its abandonment of fundamental Marxist-Leninist guidelines, caused East Berlin to examine developments on the Indochinese peninsula primarily through the lens of the ideological rift. The gradual liquidation of “pro-Soviet”

² It is similarly interesting to note that on 7 June 1965, a VAR diplomat, who had just returned from China, asked FRG officials in Moscow “who is the greatest statesmen of this century?” The answer, he insisted, was “your Kaiser Wilhelm II,” for he had warned the “people of Europe” to “protect their most sacred possessions” from the Chinese threat. See PA, AA, B12, Bd.678E, ‘Aufzeichnung der Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Moskau. Betreff: Reiseeindrücke eines arabischen Diplomaten in Peking, 7. Juni 1965.’ On global concern about China, see also, *The Guardian*, ‘From one Cold War to the Next, 31 July 1963,’ p.8

elements within the VWP, as well as the growing influence of the Sinophiles, left GDR officials in no doubt that North Vietnam had aligned itself with Beijing, rather than Moscow. Furthermore, the conflict below the 17th parallel came to represent a testing ground for Maoist militarism and, hence, a doctrinal challenge to peaceful coexistence. The East Germans repeated proposals of using state diplomacy and inter-governmental institutions were rejected. In fact, President Diem's demise precipitated a national mobilisation towards armed conflict. Even after the Tonkin Gulf Incident, GDR officials saw no evidence that North Vietnam wanted to resolve the crisis through peaceful means. True, the political shake-up in Moscow did rekindle hope that the socialist camp would return to its cohesive bloc structure and unite against a common adversary. Nevertheless, despite East German and Soviet endeavours to both mend the split, as well as push for negotiations, the Ulbricht government was forced to conclude that Khrushchev's ouster had not changed fundamental realities. Beijing was uninterested in closer cooperation, whereas both PRC and DRV policymakers explicitly restated their opposition to peace talks. As a result, East Berlin found itself assisting the Soviet Union in its attempt to regain influence above the 17th parallel and competing in a bitter and, above all, unwelcome contest for North Vietnamese patronage. The objective of spreading communism had become a minor concern.

Finally, it is crucial to appreciate that individual policymakers examined Vietnam from their own subjective worldview. Konrad Adenauer framed international relations in power-political terms. In his mind, Southeast Asia was no more than a scrap of land, a faraway region that he neither knew nor cared about. The chancellor's principal interest, against which all other issues were weighed, was its impact in Moscow. As early as 1955, he had predicted that the Sino-Soviet alliance would fragment, that the two behemoths would turn against each other. His vatic postulation had been predicated on the belief that the Soviets feared the gigantic mass of the Chinese inhabitants and would, therefore, be compelled to strike a deal with the Western Bloc. Adenauer had always insisted that the United States, as the third great power, needed to opt for one or the other. Washington's decision to turn away from Europe and towards Asia, however, as well as the Kennedy government's refusal to link détente with the German question, thwarted his own national interests. It is telling that in later life Adenauer blamed JFK for the "mess" in Vietnam and expressed sympathy for Johnson having to "eat the stew that Kennedy cooked."³ In the eyes of the chancellor, U.S. involvement below the 17th parallel would always represent a missed opportunity.

³ *New York Times*, 'Foreign Affairs: A Dove in Hawk's Plumage, 7 August 1966,' p.158

It is curious that, akin to Adenauer, Walter Ulbricht concerned himself with Vietnam solely in the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Ulbricht was well aware that the VWP leadership was working hard to maintain communist cohesion. The East German leader received several appeals from Hanoi and read reports chronicling Ho Chi Minh's personal attempts to mediate between the two sides. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that Ulbricht endorsed or had much sympathy with his counterpart's brokering. Instead, there was concern in East Berlin about the DRV's refusal to unequivocally align with the pro-Soviet countries, as well as a suspicion that its movements were being sanctioned by the CCP. To be sure, Ulbricht did take the initiative in February 1964 and invited Ho Chi Minh to visit East Berlin as his personal guest. But, with hindsight, it seems that the head of state was more concerned about China. China was at the heart of the entire problem. When Khrushchev fell, Ulbricht saw an opportunity to use the conflict in Vietnam as a means to promote socialist cohesion. It was telling that he discussed the situation on the Indochinese peninsula with Zhou Enlai rather than Pham Van Dong, and that he urged Alexei Kosygin to resume talks with Chinese policymakers in February 1965, instead of mentioning the conflict below the 17th parallel. Furthermore, consistent with Marxist-Leninist thought, Ulbricht was convinced that a united socialist camp would pre-empt the United States from initiating war. Just like Adenauer, though, Ulbricht was ultimately disappointed. Not only did armed conflict break out, but the international communist movement remained split.

For Ludwig Erhard, West German support for American involvement was a litmus test of allied loyalty. His personal affiliation with the United States, as well as his dislike for Charles de Gaulle, predisposed him to be sympathetic. Although the Foreign Ministry advised Erhard to maintain a low profile, the chancellor insisted on offering "full moral support." He was moreover confident that FRG patronage would be rewarded with American backing for his own reunification initiatives. Erhard's tactic, though, proved futile and ineffective. He never fully appreciated that the United States was content with the status quo in Europe, or that his continual adherence weakened his own bargaining power. Besides, the chancellor's Vietnam policy angered both Washington and Paris. Erhard was incapable of satisfying the former's persistent demands for more assistance, whereas the latter complained that he was offering too much support. The chancellor, therefore, found himself in an unenviable and dichotomous position, a position that he failed to find a way out of. In a sense, Vietnam was Erhard's very own quagmire.

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