



DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~

November 27, 1967

MEMORANDUM

TO: White House - Mr. Roche  
FROM: S/P - Zbigniew Brzezinski *ZB*  
SUBJECT: China, the Soviet Union and Vietnam

In response to the President's request of this morning, the following are my thoughts on the subject:

I. Chances of Chinese Involvement

1. Although the Chinese do not wish to become involved, the likelihood of Chinese involvement will grow as the light at the end of tunnel begins to be brighter.

2. The Chinese wish the war to go on as long as possible: it ties down both the United States and the Soviet Union, while also increasing US-Soviet animosity. Moreover, stability in Southeast Asia, achieved essentially through a successful US policy, is the last thing they want.

3. In the event of a settlement or simply the gradual fading of hostilities, some internal conflict in the Hanoi leadership is to be expected. The more militant fraction may see no choice but to invite Chinese assistance. To assume that no North Vietnamese would ever call for Chinese aid is to underestimate the degree of ideological fervor and anti-US hostility that today exist in Hanoi.

4. Either responding to such a call, or even on their own initiative, the Chinese may feel that the gradual introduction of limited forces either into Laos or the DMZ would be sufficient to bolster sagging North

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NLS 90-122 (#5)  
By cbm/wsp, NARA, Date 4-25-02

~~SECRET~~



Vietnamese morale and to perpetuate the conflict, without risking excessive US response. To the Chinese, both the Korean War and the very measured character of US escalation against North Vietnam provide psychological assurance that the likely US response to initially limited Chinese involvement would be measured and tempered.

## II. The Soviet Attitude towards the Vietnamese War

1. At first, the Soviet leaders were concerned that the war may complicate the US-Soviet relationship or prompt unacceptable risks. This fear is probably much less today than a year or so ago.

2. As the war went on, the Soviet leaders began to see some major benefits themselves from the US involvement. In their thinking:

a. The war weakened US posture in Europe and created new openings for Soviet diplomacy;

b. it reduced the effectiveness of US bridge-building to East Europe;

c. it intensified domestic strains in the United States while consuming major US resources;

d. it diverted Chinese hostility from the Soviet Union and reduced the likelihood of a US-Chinese rapprochement.

3. Without a doubt the war also has created liabilities for the Soviet Union. The Soviets have been embarrassed by their inability to deter the US from bombing a Communist state. The war did reduce the possibility of increased US-Soviet trade, which at least some Soviet leaders desired. Nonetheless, the assumed political benefits of the war certainly must outweigh in the minds of most Soviet leaders the loss of somewhat marginal and essentially only potential economic benefits.



4. It would appear that today the Soviet leaders are primarily concerned with containing the risks of the war; not with the war itself. Furthermore, if one bears in mind the over-all Soviet view of their relationship with the United States -- including the allegedly more "aggressive" US policy -- it is difficult to see why the Soviet leaders should not view the war as, on balance, convenient, though posing certain obvious risks. A prolonged and painful continuation is preferable either to a US victory or even to a compromise settlement, which would simply free the United States to pursue more effectively its policies in Asia or Europe. Prolonging the war but minimizing its risks -- that in essence appears to be the Soviet posture in regard to the Vietnamese conflict.