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April 17, 1972

To: S/PC - Mr. Cargo

From: Jack Perry JP

Dissent: The Soviet Union and Vietnam

Through the Department's established procedure I wish to submit my strongly held views on this critical subject.

I first sought to affect policy as it was being made. On April 8 I submitted to Mr. Richard T. Davies a draft memorandum from Mr. Hillenbrand to the Secretary, covering a draft memorandum for the Secretary to send to the President. During the week I asked about my drafts, and made several efforts to have them moved forward. Unfortunately Mr. Davies had to leave for Moscow before I could speak with him again, but I believe my assumption is correct that he judged my drafts would not express considered Departmental policy. I of course accept this as proper, but it is for this reason that I turn to the dissent channel. It is my conviction that profound American interests are being jeopardized by our present course in Vietnam insofar as it relates to the USSR. I wish to seek to affect our present policy in any way open to me. As a loyal Foreign Service Officer, I do not believe in leaking or in public dissent, but I do hope my views will be given due consideration.

A word about my credentials for commenting: I began studying Soviet affairs in 1951, have been in Soviet affairs continuously in the Foreign Service since 1959, served in Moscow from 1962 to 1964, and worked on the Soviet side of the Vietnam talks in Paris under both Harriman and Lodge from May 1968 to July 1969. I am now on the Soviet Desk.

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THE SOVIET UNION AND VIETNAM

I will argue in this paper that the present U.S. course of action towards Vietnam places the Moscow summit in jeopardy and endangers American interests of far greater importance than the current military situation in Vietnam.

Keeping the Soviet perspective in mind, the following are the key developments leading to the present Vietnam situation:

(1) Out of the long history of the war, three fundamental facts stand out. First, the Soviet Union has always been committed to the DRV as a socialist ally. Second, the bombing of the DRV, launched when Kosygin was in Hanoi, always put the USSR in an acutely embarrassing situation, especially in the competition with Peking. Third, against Chinese wishes the Soviets worked to get the DRV and NLF to negotiate in Paris. Our policy of "Vietnamization" apparently looked to the Soviets like a turning of our backs on the Paris talks as a serious negotiating channel.

(2) Most recently, the President's trip to Peking exacerbated the USSR's problems in dealing with Hanoi. Competing with the PRC for influence, the Soviets condemned the PRC for ignoring or even betraying the Vietnamese cause. The continuation of Soviet aid to Hanoi was essential in the Sino-Soviet context, although there are strong indications that the USSR refused to give all that Hanoi wanted.

(3) Our new position on the Paris talks, taken by Hanoi to be a boycott, put Moscow--the advocate of the talks--in a weaker arguing position in Hanoi. The approach of the Moscow summit made it harder for the Soviets to show weakness in supporting Hanoi.

(4) The weight of the evidence strongly argues that Moscow did not encourage the present DRV offensive, but was in no position to dissuade Hanoi from launching it. Moscow was obligated to provide aid and express some support. Backing away from military aid commitments was a policy the Politburo could not have agreed on.

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At present our public signals to Moscow, followed by the bombing of Haiphong and Hanoi, have put the Soviets in an acutely embarrassing position. In my opinion, we should not imagine that because of our opening to China we have the Soviets in a position of weakness from which they cannot afford to react to our moves. Almost the opposite is more likely true.. Unless they are to look weak--to the world, and to each other within the Politburo--they will be forced to react. The potential loss for American interests, I believe, is much more serious than any loss we could suffer now in Vietnam.

I believe the Soviets see their own situation at present as follows: Their aid commitment to the DRV cannot be reneged upon. The Soviets do not control Hanoi. They must demonstrate loyalty, must work out their arms delivery policy from a poor negotiating position, and cannot impose political or military advice. In the absence of Paris negotiations or any move back towards the table in Paris, their influence is lessened, and the renewed bombing exposes Moscow to charges of "complicity with imperialism" in moving towards the summit. Larger Soviet purposes dictate continued attachment to the summit, especially the desire to keep up with Peking and not promote further U.S.-PRC rapprochement; but the pressures from the Vietnam situation are more immediate and ~~my~~ become inexorable. Once put on the spot as Hanoi's essential ally, the Soviets must live up to the commitment as a matter of priority over most other things. Cancellation or postponement of the summit would be a probable step, and if the military situation continued bad--if the bombing escalated--then stepped-up military aid measures would have to follow. Some U.S.-Soviet negotiations now in progress might be kept going for specific purposes, but the Soviets would be likely to move towards another "freeze" in U.S.-Soviet relations. This, I repeat, is how I believe the Soviets see their situation now.

I do not know if our current policy is aimed at Moscow as well as Hanoi. I suspect the Soviets think it is, because of the President's public statements over recent days. Regardless of whether our policy is aimed at Hanoi alone or at both Hanoi and Moscow, I would argue that the risks are more important than the possible gains. We have tried bombing before and it failed to accomplish our military aims, although the political damage to the United States around the world was incalculable. Even if our bombing attains short-term military ends, I

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strongly believe that a long-range U.S. policy in Indochina cannot be based upon it. My own conviction is that the potential benefits of concrete improvements in U.S.-Soviet relations, of East-West relations in Europe and elsewhere, enormously outweigh the short-term military advantages we hope to gain by our present course in Vietnam.

The fact is that we cannot compel the USSR to alter its own policy towards Vietnam or Hanoi's policy on the ground, and I believe those who know Vietnam better than I do would also say that our military pressure cannot compel Hanoi to alter its tactics except over a very limited time span. And meanwhile the harm to American interests elsewhere, beginning with our Soviet relationship, can be lasting and deep.

Therefore I would plead for a cessation of U.S. statements tending to put responsibility on the Soviet Union for events in Vietnam, and would urge an avoidance of the type of bombings of the DRV which might force the Soviets to take compensatory political or military steps.