

1965 because it was determined to check the spread of Communism wherever it could, and it saw Hanoi as Peking's tool in achieving mastery of Southeast Asia.

China became involved in the conflict not because Hanoi was its tool but because Peking could no more allow the Americans to establish a military foothold on the Vietnamese side of its borders than it could allow this in Korea in 1950. The Chinese involvement in the war was costly in weaponry supplied and in rice, in the 40,000-50,000 men who helped to sustain communications in North Vietnam, and in industrial equipment. Half a century ago, on a visit to a huge machine-building plant in Shansi Province, I saw scores of crates with machinery destined for North Vietnam. Such crates, I have no doubt, could have been found in the warehouses of many other Chinese factories in those years.

The Soviet Union entered the conflict for a variety of reasons. It could not allow its Communist ally to be crushed by the Americans. It became increasingly pleased to see the United States mired in a war that was straining its economy and, even more, rending its social fabric. It wanted to test its weapons (it did in Spain 30 years earlier). And, as important as any of these, it wished to prevent China's dominance in this corner of Asia.

But, by late 1969, all three decided independently that it was time for relative disengagement in Vietnam, for other interests were far more important.

Soviets as rivals

China became convinced that the "American Century" in Asia, which began with the conquest of Japan in 1945, had just run its course. Now the United States no longer seemed to be the prime threat it was in the mid-Sixties, while the Soviets were increasingly seen as the principal rivals. It therefore seemed advisable to establish contacts with Washington — if only to prevent the creation of a Washington-Moscow axis.

The Soviet Union came to desire a détente because, like the United States, it had been finding the costs of the cold war, providing guns and economic aid to ungrateful recipients, prohibitive. Moscow wanted a breathing spell in the cold war to be able to attend to its vast needs at home. Its agriculture needs huge investments, which are not easily obtainable. Its industry is enormous, but inefficient. It needs modern management and technical know-how and large



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North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho and Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's chief foreign policy adviser, exchange greetings after initialling a Vietnam ceasefire agreement in Paris. The ceasefire became effective on January 27. The pact provides for release within 60 days of all U.S. prisoners of war and in the same period the 23,000 U.S. troops remaining in South Vietnam are to be withdrawn.

foreign credits. To meet all these needs, the men in Moscow obviously decided it was necessary to seek a world-wide détente.

President Richard Nixon, aided by Dr. Henry Kissinger, also proceeded early in 1969 to re-examine U.S. domestic and foreign priorities. The result was a new blueprint, of which withdrawal from Vietnam was an essential part. But, in deciding on a pull-out, the President was still determined to retain a major voice for the United States in East and Southeast Asia. This goal he then proceeded to follow, with skill and patience. The result was spectacular. For 1971-72 saw the beginning of an essential dialogue between the Americans and the Chinese after a lapse in which the only voice heard in the United States was the shrill and negative voice of the China Lobby. Where in 1969 the Americans feared the end of their role in Asia, in 1972 they saw themselves playing an influential role.

In the late spring of 1972, President Nixon tested the attitudes of the two Communist giants by clamping a blockade on the North Vietnamese ports and subjecting the country to devastating air

U.S. determined to retain key voice in Southeast Asia despite planned Vietnam withdrawal