Over the Hills and Far Away


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On 30 January 1968, National Liberation Front (NLF) guerillas and Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) regulars carried out a massive, organized attack on all major cities and military outposts of the Government of (South) Vietnam (GVN) and U.S. troops. On the tactical level, the Tet Offensive was a massive defeat for the Communist forces. Initial chaos quickly subsided, and the South Vietnamese and U.S. troops regained control. Politically, however, the ability of the NLF and the North Vietnamese forces to attack throughout South Vietnam allowed the Communists to claim overall success. Only two months later, in a major speech on Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that the bombing of North Vietnam would be restricted to the area just north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and that “if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi,” even this limited bombing would come to an end. Although the speech has been considered a major turning point in U.S. policy in Vietnam, the administration believed that its proposal, like many others before, would be rejected by the Hanoi government. Harry McPherson (special counsel and chief speechwriter to the president), suggested in a memorandum that “[the] purpose of this exercise [is] to show the American people that we are willing to do every reasonable thing to bring about talks.” Johnson’s hawkish national security adviser, Walt W. Herring, America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1986), p. 187. See also Bernard Brodie, “The Tet Offensive,” in Noble Frankland and Christopher Dowling, eds., Decisive Battles of the Twentieth Century (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1976).


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Rostow, replied that “if, as we suspect, they do not draw back, we would be in a position to fight the un-fought battle against the major North Vietnamese units, flat out.” The documents available suggest that the Tet Offensive did not immediately change the administration’s view of the situation in Vietnam. Instead, the administration was prepared to continue with its previous policy of engagement, though many in the administration, and even President Johnson himself, were becoming more and more unwilling to continue escalating U.S. involvement. For the North Vietnamese, the Tet Offensive was more effective outside the contested battlefield. The effect of the apparent North Vietnamese success was not lost in Washington. In a cable to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and General William Westmoreland, White House Press Secretary George Christian suggested that “we are facing, in the next few days a critical phase in the American public’s understanding and confidence towards our efforts in Vietnam. . . . We can already see that recent developments are being inadequately reported and interpreted.” Despite White House efforts at damage control, Tet became synonymous with the U.S. public’s growing belief that the United States should not be involved in a prolonged and inconclusive war in Indochina.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk argued that the bombing had had only limited effects and that it should be restricted to areas “integrally related to the battlefield.” By 25 March, Rostow had written to the president that “Sec. Rusk was rolling when Harry McPherson’s suggestion arrived. I had earlier this morning transmitted your desire for a positive proposal.” Even if the White House, disappointed with the failure of many earlier peace proposals, did not believe that its latest effort stood any greater chance of success, it was nonetheless willing to allow Rusk to broach the idea. The background section of Rusk’s 25 March memorandum suggested that “for the next month or so

Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers (LBJP), National Security Files (NSF), National Security Council Histories (NSCH), 31 March Speech, Box 48.
6. Herring, America’s Longest War, p. 191.
9. Memorandum to the President, 25 March 1968 (see note 4 supra).
the weather in the Hanoi-Haiphong area would mean that the proposal would not make a major difference from a military point of view” and that “full bombing would be resumed if there were any major attack.”

Despite skepticism in the White House, Hanoi’s response was positive. This was not the first time the administration had made an overture to the DRV, but it was the first time that the North Vietnamese had given an encouraging response. In a public statement on Johnson’s 31 March speech, Hanoi accepted the invitation to negotiations, stating that although

[i]t is obvious that the US Government has not seriously and adequately met the legitimate demand of the government of the DRV . . . , for the most part [the DRV] declares its readiness to appoint a representative to contact a US representative for the purpose of ascertaining with the American side the unconditional cessation of the US bombing raids and all other acts of war against the DRV so that talks may start.

Official talks began on 13 May, but they reached an impasse almost immediately. An agreement was nowhere in sight, and the North Vietnamese remained content to use the Paris talks in the context of their “fighting while negotiating” strategy. The DRV was also pressured by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to resist any compromise. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai told the North Vietnamese delegation in Beijing on 11 April 1967 that “to consider compromise as a tactic is correct, but to consider it as a policy is erroneous.” A year later, on 13 April 1968, he told DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong that “you have compromised twice” and “[though] we believe in your fighting experience, we are somewhat more experienced than you as far as conducting talks with the United States is concerned.” On 17 April Zhou Enlai suggested that “you [the DRV] should be prepared to fight for the next two to three years, namely 1968, 1969 and 1970.” U.S. diplomats complained that “the North Vietnamese are content to read the phone directory if necessary to keep unproductive talks going.”

Another five years of fighting ensued until US combat troops departed South Vietnam, and two more years passed after that before the last U.S. soldiers left South Vietnam as it was being overrun by North Vietnamese forces.

10. Dean Rusk Background to Attached Draft, 25 March 1968, in LBJL, Declassified, Sanitized Documents, Box 2, Folder “DOD Microfilm Roll SD-TS-15 Dean Rusk Memo.”
The beginning of negotiations in May 1968 represented the end result of almost three years of abortive attempts to begin direct contacts between the two parties. From the 1965 “peace offensive” to the January 1968 Tet Offensive, more than 70 attempts were made to begin negotiations. Although some were more successful than others, all ended with the same result: not enough compromise and no common ground. Both parties believed that a better “deal” could be reached on the battlefield. The results of the Tet Offensive changed the position of both sides. U.S. forces and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) had succeeded in defeating the enemy, but the U.S. public, which hitherto had been supportive of the war, shifted in ever larger numbers against it. Even as the government in Saigon perceived Tet as a victory for its troops (which it clearly was not), officials in Washington began a major reassessment of U.S. policy.14

Whatever may have motivated President Johnson to give his speech on 31 March, it does not explain why the DRV government responded to the speech in a positive fashion. By the fall of 1967, the unofficial discussions between the two sides, still carried out through intermediaries, progressed enough that only one main point of contention remained: the bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the conditions under which it would be ended.15

After the failure of one of the more promising efforts to initiate peace talks, the so-called Marigold venture involving Polish diplomats, the quest for a negotiated settlement of the war seemed to have receded.16 The Sunflower initiative led by U.S. and British diplomats did not accomplish much, and before the Tet Offensive only two other major peace initiatives were undertaken—Pennsylvania and Packers.17 Pennsylvania is well known for

14. At a March 2001 seminar reassessing the Tet Offensive, held at the Cold War International History Project, Harry McPherson said he had believed more “what I saw on TV than the information I got in the White House.” Former South Vietnamese ambassador Bu Diem, however, argued that in Saigon the mood was one of restrained jubilation at the defeat inflicted upon the NLF forces. On the administration’s reassessment of its policies, see Herring, America’s Longest War, pp. 195–197; and Clark Clifford, “A Vietnam Reappraisal,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 47, No. 4 (July 1969), pp. 609–611.

15. Herring, America’s Longest War, p. 169.


the role played by Henry A. Kissinger, who was then a Harvard professor. The Packers initiative, however, has received much less attention.

After President Johnson launched his peace offensive in the summer of 1965, numerous unofficial and semi-official communications between Washington and Hanoi had clarified what each side considered necessary for the beginning of talks. Because Packers began in the fall of 1967 and ended on 24 February 1968, almost a month after the Tet Offensive, it remains unclear whether DRV leaders believed at the time that negotiations were necessary and that a compromise could be reached with the U.S. government. More likely, as with the other ventures and with the negotiations themselves, the North Vietnamese viewed Packers as just another opportunity to continue their “fighting while negotiating” policy and gaining some advantage on the battlefield under the guise of an “appropriate period of time” formula.

What makes the Packers channel interesting, however, is the effect it had on relations between Romania and the United States as a result of the two sides’ interaction during the attempt. Furthermore, Packers was one of the first in a series of secret mediation attempts the Romanian authorities carried out in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of which flirted with success. Nicolae Ceaușescu’s secret diplomacy to China in 1970–1971, his attempts to mediate between Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, and his later attempts at mediation between the Arab states, Israel, and the United States during the Carter administration all attempted to build on the perceived success—and increased influence—the Romanian leader gained in Washington and other Western capitals with his own, autonomous foreign policy.

In the summer of 1967 the Johnson administration faced increasing challenges at home in regard to its handling of the Vietnam War in general and, more specifically, its diplomatic attempts to begin negotiations with the DRV. As the administration’s public support began to wither and the situation on the battlefield remained uncertain, reaching a compromise with the DRV became a crucial part of U.S. strategy. Despite pressure from Saigon to accelerate the pace of intervention and escalate the conflict, the administration com-

18. North Vietnamese leaders indicated that, if the United States brought an “unconditional and final” halt to its bombing campaign, the DRV would begin negotiations “after an appropriate period of time.”

19. The literature on Vietnam War diplomacy largely ignores Romania’s role in the negotiating attempts in 1967–1968 and after. Large quantities of U.S. documents on Packers are available in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland; the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) volumes; and The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers edited by Herring, but these records offer only a partial picture of the situation. Until recently, the lack of documents from the Romanian side precluded in-depth analysis of Packers. Relevant North Vietnamese sources are still unavailable.

20. South Vietnamese leaders worried that the U.S. government might force them to accept a fait ac-
mitted itself to a “concentrated, all-out [peace] offensive,” a course urged by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach. Unlike Marigolds ill-fated demise, which was brought about by the December bombing campaign, Pennsylvania was handled with the utmost secrecy and coordination. If the overtures did not accomplish what McNamara wanted—an opening of discussions between the two parties aimed at reaching a political solution to the Vietnam crisis—this was not because of blundering on the U.S. side. Rather, North Vietnamese leaders dragged out the talks in hope of gaining advantages on the battlefield. During a meeting with the two French citizens involved in the Pennsylvania channel, DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong stressed that “[y]ou see dear friends that the problem is very complicated. You may think that your travels are useless. In fact you have given us much to think about. I will see you again and we will talk again.”

In light of these earlier failures, the opportunity offered by the Romanian government carried sufficient weight to warrant close attention. Romania’s attempts to help bring about negotiations between the United States and the DRV did not begin with Packers. From the moment the Johnson administration began its “peace offensive” in 1965, Soviet-bloc countries sought to gain the prestige of successfully bringing the two sides to the negotiating table. The fact that Soviet leaders believed a negotiated settlement was possible encouraged the East European Communist governments to try. By late 1966, after the Warsaw Pact countries extended diplomatic recognition to the NLF, the ability to pass messages between the belligerent parties had greatly improved. Even so, diplomatic overtures encountered serious obstacles. Chinese opposition to a negotiated settlement was a particular sore point. The Sino-Soviet polemics, which increasingly involved the East European countries as well, added another level of complexity.

**Romania’s Role**

For Romania the odds of success in mediation seemed better than for other East-bloc states. From the early 1960s on, the Romanian government had incompli in the settlement of the Vietnam issue with the DRV. South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu and the South Vietnamese ambassador in Washington, Bui Diem, argued many times, especially after the Marigold fiasco, that they should be informed before any decisions were taken regarding “opportunities” arising out of U.S. discussions with the DRV through secret channels.

22. Memorandum of Conversation (Memorandum of Conversation) between Aubrac, Marcovich, and Pham Van Dung, 1967, in NARA, Record Group (RG) 59, Box 2735, PENNSYLVANIA File.
23. While the NLF was not recognized as a government and did not have embassies as such, by 1967
creasingly moved away from strict subordination to Moscow and had conducted a campaign to reassert itself as a more independent player both at home and abroad. Emboldened by the departure of Soviet troops from Romania’s soil in 1958, the leader of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, began to reduce Romania’s economic dependence on the Soviet Union. After Gheorghiu-Dej’s death in March 1965 and the ascension of Ceaușescu as RCP General Secretary, Romania’s economic “movement toward independence” increasingly was mirrored by initiatives in foreign policy. Though still paying lip service to the “Soviet Union’s leadership of the Communist camp,” Ceaușescu and the Romanian government headed by Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer attempted to carry out a specifically Romanian strategy vis-à-vis the Vietnam War.

Sino-Romanian relations at the time were frosty, especially after Mao Zedong launched his Cultural Revolution in 1966, yet unlike the other Communist countries in Europe—with the exception of Albania—Bucharest was successful in maintaining some level of cooperation and consultation with Beijing, including about Vietnam. Throughout 1965 and 1966, Romanian and Chinese leaders met to discuss the ongoing situation in the international Communist movement, the ideological conflict between Moscow and Beijing, and the situation in Vietnam. Romanian officials made clear that they did not welcome the escalation of the Vietnamese conflict, which they viewed as detrimental to Romania’s own goal of increasing its autonomy in foreign policy and economic development.

On 26 March 1965, during a trip to Romania, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai met with Ceaușescu and Maurer in Bucharest. The discussions ranged from Chinese and Romanian domestic issues to foreign policy and the international Communist movement. A few months earlier, the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had unceremoniously ousted First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, in part because of the deteriorating relationship with China. Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin visited Beijing in

all Eastern European countries had provided NLF representatives with diplomatic status under the cover of cultural or economic missions.


26. Ibid. See also Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, 26 June 1967, The White House, between Prime Minister of Romania Ion Gheorghe Maurer and President Johnson, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 27/14 Viet/PACKERS, Box 2734.
an effort to repair the relationship with the PRC, and he then continued on to Hanoi to reassure the North Vietnamese of full Soviet support. The trip, however, proved less successful than Soviet leaders had envisioned.27

The Vietnamese situation played a major role in the Sino-Romanian discussions on 26 March. Zhou Enlai described in detail the Chinese position on the war and attacked the Soviet Union for not doing enough to support the North Vietnamese. The Soviet offers of help to North Vietnam, Zhou Enlai told the Romanians, were fraught with dangers. “The Soviet Union wanted to send 4,000 soldiers from its regular armed forces [to Vietnam]. . . . These are not for training purposes, but to control the country,” the Chinese premier added.28 Romanian officials were noncommittal. The Vietnamese situation, they said, was “of great importance” and needed to be studied further.29 Prime Minister Maurer added that the Romanians had not known many of the details described by the Chinese delegation, and that although the two countries (and their leaders) viewed the world in similar ways and were likely to agree on most interpretations, the wealth of information provided by the Chinese made it difficult to enunciate a Romanian position.30

Four months later, Chinese Politburo member Deng Xiaoping visited Bucharest as part of the official Chinese delegation participating in the 9th RCP Congress. By this time, the Romanian position had begun to emerge. Although Romanian leaders fully supported the struggle of the Vietnamese Communists and condemned the U.S. intervention in South Vietnam and aggression against the North, they also called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the withdrawal of U.S. troops. “There are certain differences of opinion between us in connection with the form of expression,” Deng Xiaoping told the Romanian participants, “but the fact that you adopted a separate decision is very good.”31

The issue of the Vietnam War was not just a matter of interest for the

29. Ibid., p. 76.
30. Ibid., p. 79.
31. Minutes of Conversation between the Chinese delegation led by Deng Xiaoping and the Romanian leadership led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, 26 July 1965, in ANIC, RCP Chancellery Files, 105/1965, obtained by the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact.
Chinese or the Soviet Union. The Polish United Workers’ Party wrote a letter to the governing Communist parties suggesting a conclave that would coordinate policies on Vietnam. On 19 January 1966, the RCP Politburo discussed how Romania should respond to the Polish suggestion. “We must deal with this letter with a great deal of reserve,” Maurer said. Such a letter, he continued, written “in such a way as to assure that China and Vietnam will refuse to participate, allows the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries to shed their responsibilities to come to China’s aid in case it faces aggression.” Bucharest, however, needed to play a delicate balancing game between the two Communist giants. “Recently . . . we were successful in dispelling some of the apprehensions [the Chinese] had,” Maurer continued. “We [also] sought to improve our relations with the Soviet Union . . . [and] were able to obtain some successes in this regard. . . . This, however, causes some tension in our relations with China.” The upcoming visit by Zhou Enlai, Maurer hoped, would help clarify some of these issues. Ceaușescu did not share the misgivings of his close colleague:

It does seem clear to me that the purpose is to bring China and Vietnam [to the conference] and pressure them to accept negotiations. By coincidence, this happens at the same time as the U.S. peace offensive, as [W. Averell] Harriman’s visit to Warsaw and to Saigon, as [CPSU Politburo member Aleksandr] Shelepin’s visit to the DRV, etc. Maybe there was collusion in these actions; maybe it is just a coincidence.

The response to the Polish letter, Ceaușescu argued, should be brief. Any questions concerning China should be discussed directly with the Chinese. Although Bucharest remained interested in finding out about the situation in Vietnam, it would discuss those issues directly with Hanoi. Yet Ceaușescu worried about the consequences of the Vietnam War on his own ability to maneuver. The expansion of the war, he mused, “contains the seeds of the danger of extending the war . . . , with grave repercussions not just in Asia but also Europe.” For Ceaușescu, the longer the war went on, the higher the likelihood that “extremist circles within the US government” would gain the upper hand and attack China with nuclear weapons. In turn, such an attack would necessitate a massive response from the Soviet Union. “We too must be preoccupied with finding solutions to prevent this war from expanding,” Ceaușescu concluded. The Romanians, he said, were to be more active.

33. Ibid., p. 9.
34. Ibid., p. 11.
35. Ibid., p. 12.
in pursuing a solution to the Vietnam War. Bringing the United States and the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table would “unmask the US” for not wanting to leave Vietnam.\(^{36}\)

### The Start of Mediation

Following the decision to get more directly involved in the Vietnamese issue, Romanian leaders embarked on a whirlwind tour of Asia. A first trip to Vietnam by RCP Politburo members Emil Bodnăraș and Paul Niculescu-Mizil took place in May 1966. Discussing the visit after his return to Bucharest, Bodnăraș stressed that the Vietnamese leaders indicated that they were not interested in reaching a negotiated settlement. “There is no other action that elicits more sensitivity and a more immediate reaction than the smallest attempt to find a mediated [settlement] between [the Vietnamese] and the American aggressors. They are ready to talk about anything, but not that,” Bodnăraș told the Politburo.\(^{37}\) During a stop in Beijing, Bondaras and Mizil met with Zhou Enlai. Although the Chinese were obviously unenthusiastic about the Romanian discussions with the Vietnamese and with the Romanian position, the meeting was cordial. The Romanians even secured Chinese agreement not to publish the toast the Chinese premier made during the official dinner for the delegation, which contained attacks against Soviet revisionism.\(^{38}\) Furthermore, the Chinese confirmed that Zhou Enlai would visit Romania later that year.

Zhou Enlai traveled to Bucharest in June, meeting with Ceaușescu and the Romanian leadership several times between the 16th and 22nd. With the Cultural Revolution continuing to rage in China, Zhou was in no mood to mince words regarding Soviet revisionism. Given Romania’s tenuous position in the bloc, the Romanian officials took great care to prevent the Chinese delegation from attacking the Soviet Union frontally. Anti-Soviet polemics were not the only contentious moments during the meetings. The Romanians emphasized their position on Vietnam to the Chinese delegation. “[S]upporting Vietnam is a concrete matter,” Ceaușescu told Zhou Enlai, suggesting that a meeting of the governing Communist Parties to discuss the Vietnam situation might be a useful option. “We do not aim at creating a unified command . . . ; this conference is about debating, about coming together and facilitating an

36. Ibid., p. 13.
38. Ibid., p. 28.
exchange of opinions; this conference is, by all means, a proof of unanimous solidarity with the struggle of the Vietnamese people.” Ceauşescu acknowledged that the Chinese view of discussions with Soviet leaders—“who try to get along with the Americans”—was different from the Romanian position, but insisted that any multilateral discussion concerning the Vietnamese topic would be positive if the end result could be controlled. Vietnam was going to come up for discussion during the July meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact, Ceauşescu told the Chinese, and having an agreement with the Chinese would ensure that neither country was left isolated in the Communist camp. This was a nuanced position compared to the opposition the Romanians had expressed a few months earlier to the Polish proposal for an international conference on Vietnam.

Zhou Enlai’s response came the next day, during the continuation of official meetings with the Romanian delegation. “We do not feel isolated,” Zhou told Ceauşescu. Even if they were, he said, China does not mind being isolated from the revisionist forces in the socialist camp. The Soviet Union’s desire for a negotiated settlement in Vietnam, Zhou argued, was a “betrayal of the Vietnamese liberation forces.” The Chinese opposed any discussions about Vietnam issue because they would just be a ploy by the Soviet Union:

If we attend a conference convened by the Soviet Union or any other conferences convened by other countries, at which other socialist countries are participating, it means we are adding value to the Soviet revisionists, as they can pretend in front of the Americans that they have control over those events. Hence, their betrayal capacities are enhanced and we can all be betrayed.

Following Zhou Enlai’s visit, a Romanian delegation led by Maurer and including Niculescu-Mizil, who had been assigned the portfolio of relations with socialist countries, traveled to Hanoi for discussions with the North Vietnamese. The Romanian delegation stopped first in Beijing. Relations with the PRC were still strained after Zhou’s somewhat acrimonious visit in June. The Chinese, having been informed that the delegation was traveling via Beijing to Hanoi, had initially refused to meet, stating that, because the Romanian position had not changed, consultations were unnecessary. Once the delegation arrived, the Chinese sent Marshal Chen Yi to meet the Romanians at the airport. Later that day Zhou Enlai hosted a dinner for the

41. Ibid., p. 823.
delegation and agreed that consultations should be held after Maurer returned from Hanoi.

In Hanoi, the Romanian delegation had several meetings with North Vietnamese leaders, including Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh. Although the Romanians stressed that they remain committed to the North Vietnamese positions of resisting American aggression and fighting for reunification and self-determination, they also stressed the position adopted by the Romanian Politburo that “diplomatic and political means are not sufficiently used” to further the goals of the Vietnamese leadership.

In 1967, Romanian leaders took several steps that put them at odds with the other Warsaw Pact governments. In January, Romania recognized the Federal Republic of Germany, despite pressure from the East German and Polish authorities not to do so. To make matters worse, Romania acted just a short while before a long-planned Warsaw Pact meeting designed to coordinate policy on the German question. At the beginning of June, the Israeli army launched a preemptive strike against Egyptian military units that were preparing to attack from the Sinai Peninsula. Six days later, Israel had conquered the peninsula, the Golan Heights, Gaza, and the West Bank, leaving the Arab militaries in shambles. The Warsaw Pact countries severed ties with Israel, but Romania refused to go along with this policy, despite Soviet pressure. A year later the Romanians actually raised their diplomatic representation in Israel (and vice versa) to the level of ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary. Halfway around the world, a then little-known Harvard professor, Henry Kissinger, began a series of efforts to convince the North Vietnamese to come to the negotiating table. On 26 June 1967, as Pennsylvania was getting under way, Maurer met with President Johnson. The topic of conversation invariably turned to the situation in Vietnam, with Maurer suggesting that Romania had a “special interest in settling the Vietnamese question.”

Three days before, after a meeting of the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Maurer and Secretary of State Dean Rusk had met to discuss the crisis in the Middle East. The conversation focused on the Arab world and its relations with Israel, but it also, in the context of the Middle East, touched several times on the issue of negotiation and, more importantly the “prerequisites” to negotiations. The idea of “prerequisites” prompted Rusk to argue that there must be an understanding about “the sequence of events and the shape of the final result” where withdrawal—in this case Israeli forces from Egyptian territory—is concerned. “Prerequisite,” the secretary went on to say, “is good if something follows and not if nothing follows.” At the same time, the two agreed that with

42. Secret, Nodis/PACKERS Chron[ology], n.d., in NARA, RG 59, Box 2734, PACKERS File.
“very secret contacts,” the process “unfortunately takes time.” Because of this, Prime Minister Maurer stressed, the contact should be made by a “person who had the confidence of the parties to explore the possibilities [of negotiations].”

Romania’s interest in the resolution of the Vietnam question became more apparent in light of the Johnson-Maurer conversation of 26 June 1967. By 1967, Romania was lobbying for the position of president of the General Assembly of the UN for Foreign Minister Corneliu Mănescu, as well as a more visible role in the resolution of world conflict. Maurer told Johnson he “would be pleased if the President could understand the special interest of Romania in settling the Vietnamese problem. . . . Tension anywhere in the world creates difficulties for smaller countries and the possibilities of achieving independence become more restrictive.” He went on to say

[all] that Romania wished was to be master in its own house. As it happens, this ideal for Romania cannot be achieved when there is a crisis or tension in the world. Then countries are told to get together, to renounce some of their sovereignty and some of their independence and to obey the command of another state. [T]hose actions endanger what Romania has won, and which they wish to preserve at all costs. It is this consideration which causes Romania to interfere in problems which really are beyond her and to try to settle them.

During Maurer’s trip to Hanoi President Johnson gave a speech in San Antonio, Texas that proposed “no advantage” as the basis for a settlement, sparking a flurry of diplomatic activity that sought to clarify the full meaning behind the two words. Even before the San Antonio speech, U.S. messages for the North Vietnamese suggested that the DRV should “not take advantage” of any cessation of bombing of Communist supply lines. On 31 January 1967, the United States had suggested it would “stop the bombing [campaign] as a prior and ostensibly a unilateral action. [There would follow] an equitable and reciprocal reduction of hostile action.” On 10 February, however, the U.S. government sent a cable to the British clarifying that “stoppage of infiltration, however, means that men and arms cannot move from North Viet-

43. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, between Romanian Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer and U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Hotel Waldorf-Astoria, Secretary’s Dinner, 23 June 1967, in FRUS, 1964–1968, Vol. XVII (Eastern Europe), Doc. 156. The conversation refers to the possibility of starting negotiations between Israel and the Arab world. Yet, in view of subsequent events, it has a great deal of bearing on the Vietnam question. During the discussion Maurer argued that “the Middle East [crisis] is quite different from the Far East [crisis]” but that “the Secretary was right in asking what would follow [the cessation of bombing in North Vietnam].”


45. Department of State Cable 128486, 31 January 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 27-14 US/Viet/Sunflower, Box 2735.
nam to South Vietnam.” By 17 August, Kissinger was informing Marcovich and Aubrac that “taking advantage” meant “increasing the movement of men and supplies in the South.”

In September 1967, after stopping at the UN, Maurer traveled to Hanoi to reach an understanding based on his conversations in New York. He also stopped in Moscow both on his way to Hanoi and afterward (he was in Hanoi 29 September, and two days later he went to Beijing for “seven days of talks”), informing the Soviet and Chinese leaders of the Romanian position.

On 1 November, the U.S. State Department sent a cable to Bucharest with an aide-mémoire for Maurer explaining the concept of “no advantage” put forth by the president in his San Antonio speech:

The President, in making his assumptions that the North Vietnamese would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or the limitation while discussions proceed, was not assuming North Vietnam would cut off entirely its support to its forces in the South while the armed struggle was continuing.

From November 1967 to February 1968 the Romanian government increased its efforts to break the deadlock between the two belligerents and secure an agreement on the start of negotiations. After returning from Hanoi and Beijing, Maurer had asked the U.S. embassy in Bucharest to pass along a message to Harriman (President Johnson’s ambassador-at-large) about Maurer’s discussion with the North Vietnamese. Harriman made a stopover in Bucharest for consultations with the Romanian prime minister on 28 November. Maurer reported that his trip to Hanoi in September had been “about finding a basis for discussions between Washington and Hanoi. I had the limited objective of getting the parties to start talking.” However, he went on to say, “it seems to me there is a strong basis for discussion, taking into account that Hanoi does not want anything else [beyond the right of the South Vietnamese people to decide their own form of government].” Maurer also acknowledged that “both sides have different nuances in their interpretations of [the concept of ‘no advantage’].”

47. Ibid.
48. State 63057 to U.S. embassy in Bucharest, Secret/Nodis, 1 November 1967, emphasis added. The message was delivered to Maurer by U.S. Ambassador Richard Davis as an explanation of the “No Advantage” formula in the San Antonio speech. The Romanian channel was not the only one given this explanation.
49. Undersecretary of State Katzenbach, writing to Ambassador Bunker in Saigon in January 1968, qualified the Romanian channel as “clear and serious.” See State 98130, SecState WashDC to Amembassy Saigon, Top Secret, Immediate, 12 January 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 27/14 Viet/ PACKERS
the basic principles [of self-determination]. It seems to me that the US and Vietnam do not understand the right of the South-Vietnamese people to decide their own destiny in the same way.”

Harriman had some reason to feel more optimistic about Maurer’s trip to Vietnam. During a reception in Bucharest for Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 16 October, the French ambassador to Romania had spoken briefly with Maurer about the latter’s trip to Hanoi. He had asked Maurer whether the North Vietnamese had been “as ‘hard’ this time as on [the] occasion [of] his last visit approximately [a] year ago.” Maurer’s immediate response was “not at all,” adding, without amplification, that “he was confident [that] if Americans stopped the bombing ‘something could be arranged.’”

Ten days later Maurer informed Harriman about the talks with Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong. Maurer was frank in speaking with the U.S. envoy, saying that “[I] believe it [the discussion] would lose much of its value if it was not in complete sincerity. This is why I tell you certain things I would never state publicly.” To a large extent, the discussion in Bucharest was not only an opportunity for Harriman to explain the U.S. position to the Romanians; it also allowed the Romanians to report directly on their discussions with the Chinese and North Vietnamese regarding issues of concern to the U.S. government.

The discussion between Harriman and Maurer was not limited to the North Vietnamese question. Much of it also had to do with the influence and role of the PRC in the resolution of the conflict. Harriman wanted to know whether the Chinese were interested in a peaceful resolution of the conflict or were pressuring the DRV to continue the fight. At the time of Harriman’s visit to Bucharest, the North Vietnamese and, more importantly, the Chinese were still pressing for the “unconditional and permanent” cessation of the bombing of the DRV. Zhou had told Maurer that the United States had “two options. Either it leaves North Vietnam or . . . it must extend the war. If they [the United States] expand the war, then inevitably they will extend it over China. ‘We [the Chinese] are ready for this.’” What was unclear even to Maurer was whether the Chinese wanted the DRV to continue the war in the South so that it would expand to the DRV and ultimately to China.


52. Bucharest 566, to SecState WashDC, Confidential, 17 October 1967, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 27-14 Viet/PACKERS; emphasis added. Maurer also suggested to Ponds that China was “in such an internal mess due to the Cultural Revolution that he had the impression that they would not be opposed to a negotiated settlement.”


The discussions regarding China were not without reason. Harriman was frustrated by the apparent lack of willingness on the North Vietnamese side to “send us a [clear] message through you or through another channel” regarding the beginning of negotiations. “I think the big difference between us and some socialist states,” Harriman went on to say, “is that we regard bombing as part of the defense of South Vietnam while some think it is a matter detachable from the war in the South.” At the same time, the Johnson administration believed the DRV was stalling the start of negotiations because of pressure from China. The polemics between the Soviet Union and China had at their heart not only disagreements over Communist ideology. The Chinese government had, at first secretly and then more and more openly, disapproved of the emerging politics of détente between the Soviet Union and the United States. The PRC also accused the Soviet Union of “selling out North Vietnam” for the benefit of friendly relations with the United States. Harriman told Maurer that the Chinese accusations had made Soviet officials reluctant to push the DRV too hard to begin negotiations. Newly available Romanian and Chinese documents suggest this assessment was essentially correct.

Although the Romanians could not provide U.S. officials with a definite date and time when “discussions” might start, they did give Harriman an overall picture of the state of affairs in North Vietnam. The channel also remained open for Romania to direct further inquiries to North Vietnam regarding conditions for the start of negotiations. Harriman’s trip to Bucharest demonstrated that the Romanians could play a role in delivering messages between the two parties, but Maurer could not easily act as the go-between. His advanced age would have taken a toll, and it would have been exceedingly difficult for him to serve as a mediator unnoticed. At the same time, the importance of the mission and the required secrecy demanded a high-level representative. With Foreign Minister Mănescu otherwise engaged, the job fell to Deputy Foreign Minister George Macovescu. On 7 December, Macovescu invited the North Vietnamese Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Ho Tú Trúc for an audience. Macovescu informed him that the Romanians had held dis-

55. Ibid.

56. Zhou Enlai told Maurer that “[o]n the issue of Vietnam, the Chinese and Soviet positions are absolutely opposite and united action is out of the question. . . . As to the passage of aid-Vietnam materials through China, we will act according to agreements. On this issue there is no possibility of united action.” Zhou Enlai talk with Georghe Maurer, 5 October 1966, Beijing, quoted in Qiang Zhai, “Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965–1968: New Evidence from Chinese Sources,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 18 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 1997), p. 35. In reality, the Soviet Union was providing considerably more assistance to North Vietnam than China was.

57. Mănescu was serving as the president of the UN General Assembly, leaving Macovescu the acting foreign minister.
cussions with Harriman during the latter’s visit to Bucharest and wanted to send him to inform the DRV authorities of the nature and content of the discussions. If the North Vietnamese side were to accept the proposal, Macovescu told Ho Tu Truc, he would be ready to depart for Hanoi immediately.58 The diplomatic mission was to be carried out in complete secrecy, and the North Vietnamese diplomat should deliver the answer from Hanoi to him personally. Macovescu was so intent on protecting the secrecy of the venture that even the minutes of conversation between the two were handwritten—possibly by Macovescu himself—with only one copy.

On 11 December, Ho Tu Truc delivered the DRV’s answer to Macovescu. Hanoi “would be happy to receive the Deputy Foreign Minister,” but requested that the visit be considered unofficial. In a five-minute meeting, Macovescu once again stressed the strictly confidential character of the visit he was making. He told the North Vietnamese diplomat that he would arrive in Hanoi via Beijing on the following Thursday, 14 December. If asked, Macovescu suggested that the Romanians would say that the visit was a regularly scheduled one for the embassy.59 That same day, Macovescu sent two flash telegrams to Moscow and Beijing informing the Romanian embassies there of his travels. The cable to Moscow instructed the Romanian ambassador that “under no circumstances, was he to inform the Soviet Foreign Ministry” about the visit to Hanoi. Only if Soviet diplomats specifically asked about Macovescu’s travel were they to be told that he was making a regular visit to Hanoi.60

In Hanoi, Macovescu met with several North Vietnamese leaders, including Foreign Minister Trinh and Prime Minister Dong. He stayed in Hanoi for four days, from the night of 14 December to the evening of 18 December. “The meetings went well,” Macovescu wrote Ceaușescu on 18 December, before returning to Bucharest.61 On his way back, Macovescu stopped in Beijing to inform the Chinese about the U.S. position and the discussions with the North Vietnamese, arriving in the Chinese capital in the afternoon of 19 December and leaving the afternoon of 23 December. He stopped in Moscow on 24 December before continuing to Bucharest later that day.

58. Memorandum of Conversation, Strict Secret de Importanta Deosebita (Top Secret of Utmost Importance, SSID), 7 December 1967, in Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMAE), Fond in SSID, Nr. H.I.2, ES Nr. 0/00038-31-68.
59. Memorandum of Conversation, SSID, 11 December 1967, in AMAE, Fond in SSID, Nr. H.I.3, ES Nr. 0/00039-31-68.
60. Telegram 1172, MAE to Moscow, Flash, Top Secret, 11 December 1967, 16:30, in AMAE, ES. Nr. 0/00041; and Telegram 1173, MAE to Beijing, Flash, Top Secret, 11 December 1967, 21:00, in AMAE, ES. Nr. 0/00042.
61. Telegram 59438, Hanoi to MAE, Flash, Top Secret, 18 December 1967, 20:45, in AMAE, ES. Nr. 0/00048.
In a top secret, hand-written memo Macovescu penned after returning to Bucharest, he described the results of his trip to Hanoi as positive and concrete. The DRV, he said, would enter into serious discussion if the U.S. government announced an unconditional cessation of its bombing campaign against North Vietnam. DRV officials, Macovescu underlined in his note, would begin the discussion after an appropriate amount of time had passed.\footnote{Memo, SSID, n.d. [probably post–23 December 1967], in AMAE, Fond in SSID, Nr. H.I.10, ES nr. 0/00057.} Foreign Minister Trinh told Macovescu that “as soon as the bombing [of North Vietnam] stops, diplomatic contacts with the United States would be considered regular contacts.” Trinh also passed on a written aide-mémoire that he stressed should be viewed by the Americans as a sign of interest.\footnote{Ibid., p. 1.} The North Vietnamese, Macovescu wrote, probably were familiar with the Romanian message because their response came quickly. The Chinese, he believed, had also been informed by the North Vietnamese about the U.S. position and the Romanian message. “They did not ask any questions,” Macovescu wrote of the Chinese, and had their answer already prepared. “They did not even ask how the [North] Vietnamese reacted to the proposal.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 3.}

Macovescu concluded that North Vietnamese leaders were genuinely interested in moving forward with a political solution. “They have never given such a concrete answer [before],” he concluded. At the same time, Macovescu noted a consistent and, in his opinion, sincere mistrust of the U.S. government’s willingness to live up to its proposals.\footnote{Ibid.} Pham Van Dong, he wrote, remained concerned about the impact of the Vietnam War. “There are some comrades who believed all we know is to ªght,” Dong told Macovescu. “Victory,” he continued, “must also be achieved politically.” “There is, I believe,” Macovescu concluded, “an ongoing competition in Hanoi between the domestic [Vietnamese] group and the Chinese (?) group. Maybe there are some obligations [the Vietnamese have] that we don’t know about.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.}

The secrecy of the trip was well-guarded by both the Romanians and the North Vietnamese, so much so that no one had any idea that Macovescu was gone.\footnote{The Romanians spread the rumor that Macovescu had fallen ill. Later he told Harriman that so few people knew about the trip that upon his arrival at the airport in Hanoi he was not even met by the staff of the Romanian embassy. See Memorandum of Conversation, Harriman-Macovescu, 6 January 1968, in LOC, FLC16, Harriman Papers, Romania 1964–68. On 10 January, the U.S. embassy in Bucharest reported rumors about a supposed trip by Macovescu to Hanoi in late December, citing as the source the Italian chargé d’affaires, who in turn cited Yugoslavia’s counselor in Bucharest. How-}
arranged discussions were held with U.S. officials to try to secure a bombing pause during the trip. One downside to this secrecy was during both Maurer’s September trip and Macovescu’s trip in December, U.S. planes bombed Hanoi, sending the Romanians and the North Vietnamese to the cellars.68

Whatever Macovescu’s mission might have accomplished, the planned Tet Offensive would still have gone ahead.69 There is no evidence that the North Vietnamese saw discussing negotiations and the planned offensive as inconsistent with one another. More likely, the clarifications of positions offered by the Romanian channel were to be used in the aftermath of Tet to begin negotiations from a position of strength. During Macovescu’s stay in Hanoi, the Vietnamese Workers’ Party (VWP) Politburo discussed the situation with the war—and surely also the Romanian feelers in regard to negotiations. The VWP Central Committee had agreed to a resolution setting out the objectives necessary for victory through “General Offensive” and “General Uprising,” one of which was to “break the U.S. will of aggression and force [the United States] to . . . put an end to all acts of war against the North.”70 VWP Secretary General Le Duan wrote to the Central Office South Vietnam in January 1968 that

> there is now an opportunity to launch a general offensive and general uprisings. . . . The nature of the immediate tasks is that we try to change the course of the war, further shaking the will of aggression of the US, forcing the US to change its war strategy and de-escalate its war efforts.71

The Romanian documents do not discuss in detail any plans for military action by the North Vietnamese. Nor do the Romanian records give any indication that the DRV informed the Romanian government of the planned attack. Even if Macovescu had been told during his trip to Hanoi that an attack was imminent, he would not have reported that information to Washington. The North Vietnamese leaders had already made clear that they would continue the armed struggle against “the puppet regime” during the negotiations, and they, as well as the Romanians, would have viewed Tet as part of the continued struggle and in no way related to the process of negotiations.

ever, the embassy suggested the other diplomats did not have much basis for their assumptions because “as far as the embassy is concerned, we had not earlier heard of . . . alleged Macovescu trip to Hanoi (in fact he was present at the Grand National Assembly 26–29 December).” See Bucharest 958, to SecState WashDC, Secret, 10 January 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 27/14 Viet/PACKERS.

68. Memorandum of Conversation, Harriman-Macovescu, 6 January 1968.
71. Ibid.
On 26 December, the Romanian ambassador to the United States, Corneliu Bogdan, met with Harriman in Washington and informed him that Ceaușescu and Maurer would like to send a special envoy to Washington to discuss the Vietnam question. Bogdan said he did not know who the special envoy was but that he would inform Harriman as soon as he himself received the information. On 29 December, at another meeting with Harriman, Bogdan reported that Macovescu would be the special envoy and would come to Washington at the beginning of January.

Macovescu arrived on 4 January 1968 and met with Harriman on the morning of 5 January. He informed the ambassador of his discussions with Foreign Minister Trinh and Prime Minister Dong, specifically about his exposition of the U.S. position to the Vietnamese leaders with respect to the halt of bombing and the infiltration of men and materiel into South Vietnam. The tone of the discussions, according to Macovescu, was much harsher on the North Vietnamese side. During Trinh's first two meetings with the Romanian delegation (15 and 16 December), he had said very little, mainly suggesting, during a bombing raid that forced the two delegations into shelters, that the continued bombing confirmed that U.S. officials could not be trusted in their desire to reach a negotiated settlement. On Sunday, 17 December, Macovescu met with Prime Minister Dong in what he described as “the main discussion.” Dong made a favorable impression on the Romanian delegation. Macovescu remembered him as “calm, reasonable, knowing what he was talking about. A man you can have a dialog with.” Macovescu seemed to imply that the atmosphere of the meeting was friendly—throughout his discussion with Harriman, Macovescu did not once mention any North Vietnamese objections to Romania’s position. He did, however, describe Dong as less conciliatory than before. The North Vietnamese prime minister had made clear that he believed the United States was unwilling to pursue a course of action meant to bring about talks. He viewed Johnson’s San Antonio speech as a ploy meant to gain support on the world scene for “aggression” against the DRV. In support of his arguments, Dong cited several instances in which U.S. officials had made public declarations that at the very least went against the spirit of the San Antonio position: “The basis for set-[83]
tlement of the Vietnamese issue is provided by the four points of 8 April 1965; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently issued its 28 January 1967 statement. This is our position of principles on which no concession is possible.”76 If until that moment the main point of contention in the discussion between the two sides was the U.S. bombing campaign against targets in the North, Dong’s comments made clear that the North Vietnamese believed the military situation favored them.

With that, Dong thanked the Romanian delegation for its efforts and “sincerity” and suggested that he and Deputy Foreign Minister Macovescu begin to discuss some issues regarding bilateral relations. Because the consultations regarding the issue of negotiations seemed to be over, Macovescu made plans to take the first return flight to Romania. However, the following day he learned that, after a Politburo meeting, Foreign Minister Trinh would like to meet with him before his departure.

The meeting with Trinh was even tenser than the ones before. In his discussions with Harriman, Macovescu recalled that Trinh made a series of statements, all read from a prepared paper. The spirit of the statements—which Macovescu had promised Trinh to abide by when discussing them with U.S. representatives—was, in the opinion of the Romanian minister, even harsher than Pham Van Dong’s exposition the previous day. Trinh denounced the United States as continuing an aggressive policy toward North Vietnam and stated that the San Antonio speech and other statements by Johnson and Rusk emphasized left no doubt that the United States would remain in Vietnam and would continue to fight. He further accused the Johnson administration of continually adopting a “double-faced policy” of stepping up the war while making peace overtures to “deceive and appease public opinion.” This policy, Trinh said, “did not achieve expected results but suffered great losses.” At this time, Trinh suggested, “the United States is bound to strive to prevent the situation from getting worse and to avoid serious defeats until the November election.”77 As with Dong the day before, Trinh went on to say that the four points of April 1965 remained the basis for all negotiations and no compromise was possible on that issue. Furthermore, as long as the United States

76. Memorandum of Conversation, Harriman-Macovescu, 6 January 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Pol.
25/12, Viet/PACKERS, emphasis added.
77. Ibid.

bombing campaign—and all other acts of war—and to begin negotiations for the pullout of U.S. forces from South Vietnam. When Westmoreland was called to Washington in November 1967 as part of a public relations campaign to appease public discontent over the war, his appraisal of the situation in Vietnam was actually highly optimistic. He told Congress, “We are making real progress. . . . We have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view.” Herring, America’s Longest War, p. 185.
continued to claim reciprocity, the issue could never be settled. While insisting
that the four points were the only basis for negotiation, Trinh did go on to
say that an unconditional cessation of the bombing campaign—that is, no
statement from the North Vietnamese side concerning reciprocal restraint in
infiltration—was the only method of bringing about, “after an appropriate
period of time, serious discussions.” At this point Macovescu interrupted
Trinh several times to determine whether the position of the DRV had
changed with respect to the cessation of bombing from “final and uncondi-
tional” to exclude the word “final,” as in Trinh’s statement. Upon being asked
directly, Trinh stated that, publicly, the North Vietnamese “will continue to
mention it but, with a view to negotiations, this is our position.” The fact
that the DRV maintained its position regarding the necessity for an “ap-
propriate period of time to pass” before discussions were to start suggests that
striking the word “final” from the message to be delivered through the Roma-
nian channel might have been just a cynical ploy to allow Vietcong forces to
gain an interlude in which to prepare fully for the coming attack. Macovescu
hypothesized that the expression referred to a period in which the North
would “test” U.S. willingness to begin talks—though he acknowledged he did
not know by what means. Throughout the discussion, Macovescu tried to
convince Harriman that the North Vietnamese had, with the Trinh state-
ment, made clear their willingness to begin negotiations. “We, Romanians,
believe they have done it. When the decision was made for me to come here
the Trinh statement had been made. We believe the sign was authorized and
made through the Romanian channels,” Macovescu told Harriman.

78. The issue of “no advantage” was not new. It had been a central part of the discussions between the
North Vietnamese and the U.S. government through the PENNSYLVANIA and Sunflower channels.
Since the “peace offensive” in 1965, the discussions had centered on acceptance by both sides of each
other’s points of contention. However, by late September 1967 the only remaining point of conten-
tion seemed to be the “unconditional, final, and for all times” cessation of the bombing campaign.
25/12 Viet/PACKERS.
80. On 29 December 1967, Trinh made a statement during a reception at the Mongolian embassy in
Hanoi that was broadcast in English by Radio Hanoi on 1 January. Trinh stated that “[t]he stand of
the Vietnamese people is quite clear. That is the four-point stand of the DRV Government and the
political program of the NLF. That is the basis for the settlement of the Vietnam question. The USG
has unceasingly claimed that it wants to talk with Hanoi but has received no response. If the
USG truly wants to talk, it must, as it was made clear in our statement on 28 January 1967, first of all
stop unconditionally the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV. After the US has ended
unconditionally the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV, the DRV will hold talks with
the US on questions concerned.” See PACKERS Chronology (see note 42 supra). Macovescu argued
that Trinh’s statement, which was made public by the DRV a few days before Macovescu’s trip to
Washington, was the sign Harriman had urged from the DRV during his conversations with Maurer
in Bucharest. Macovescu, however, insisted that the timing of the statement and his trip to see
Harriman were coincidental, pointing out that the DRV had not been informed of the timing of the
visit. Memorandum of Conversation, Harriman-Macovescu, 5 January 1968.
Though intrigued by the change in the North Vietnamese position, Harriman still was not convinced that leaders in Hanoi understood what the United States meant by the formula of no advantage and reciprocity. He explained to Macovescu that the formula did not necessitate a ceasefire in the south in exchange for the cessation of bombing; it simply meant that “restraint in military matters” was required for the discussions to be fruitful. Macovescu answered that the DRV was unwilling to even discuss such issues at this time, that “they stiffened, they braced, they said it was a condition and could not be discussed.” He mentioned that, though Hanoi had given him no indication as to its position, he believed that the issue of “reciprocal restraint” could be one of the topics of discussion at the first meeting between the two sides. Macovescu emphasized again that he was not authorized by the Hanoi leadership to make such a statement in its name. At the same time, he continued, he agreed with Harriman that “fighting in the South should be continued under special conditions until there is a final political settlement.”

The next day, Macovescu met with Rusk and Harriman for further discussion about his trip to Hanoi. Once more he presented the Romanian government’s position regarding the danger of the Vietnam conflict spilling over into neighboring states. Rusk, still disillusioned with previous failed peace initiatives and not believing that Hanoi had any intention of starting serious negotiations with Washington, expressed his concern that Hanoi’s overtures would be “part of a tactical program” to destabilize the situation in Vietnam.81 His concern might have been fueled in part by reports that the North Vietnamese were planning for a major offensive in the spring of 1968. Rusk’s hope, as expressed to the Romanian deputy foreign minister, was that North Vietnam and South Vietnam might reach an arrangement “like Korea and Germany, where problems remain but it is recognized that they must be solved by peaceful means.” The unwillingness of the North Vietnamese to recognize some principle of “elementary reciprocity” disturbed Rusk greatly and added to his cynicism about the willingness of the North Vietnamese to begin negotiations.82 The Romanian government, Macovescu answered, un-

81. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Macovescu, Washington, DC, 6 January 1967, in LOC, FLC 16, Harriman Papers, Folder Romania 1964–68. Rusk blamed the failure of MARIGOLD on the Polish government, claiming that it had not told the United States everything and that Hanoi was searching for a pretext not to start talks with the United States when the bombing of Hanoi happened on 13–14 December 1967 and that the Polish initiative did not reflect Hanoi’s views at the time. He went so far as to call the Poles “crooks.” See Hershberg, Who Murdered MARIGOLD?, pp. 99–101.

82. Rusk: “We do not know what Hanoi thinks. . . . The problem on our side is that the principle of reciprocity is rather important to us. An ideological chasm affects this word. . . . Some people say that it’s natural that North Vietnam cannot negotiate while we are bombing it. But if we said we cannot negotiate while they are coming down on us, people would be astonished. They are sending men through the DMZ in considerable numbers. If we send one company North, people would be
derstood the U.S. concern. Nevertheless, the North Vietnamese authorities were voicing the same arguments “from the opposite angle.” Macovescu told Rusk that, though the Romanian and U.S. positions on the Vietnam question differed, his mission was to find a way out of the impasse of the “iron cast logics” of the two sides and to facilitate reaching a compromise. He did, however, want to explain to Rusk the position of the North Vietnamese government as expressed by Foreign Minister Trinh. The North Vietnamese argued that although U.S. officials requested that the North Vietnamese limit their infiltration into South Vietnam, the United States had not limited its own involvement. U.S. officials argued that bombing in North Vietnam was a military, tactical decision, but the North Vietnamese similarly believed that the infiltration of personnel and supplies in the South was also necessary on tactical grounds. DRV officials claimed that “by placing ourselves in the future on the grounds of reciprocity, not much advance will be made.”

Macovescu’s main concern was to convince Rusk that, as he had previously told Harriman, the North Vietnamese were ready for negotiations and that if the United States undertook to stop the bombing campaign unilaterally the North Vietnamese would be hard-pressed not to accept negotiations. From his perspective, the time had come for the U.S. government to take the major step of suspending the bombing campaign and thereby making a public gesture of its willingness to have discussions with Vietnam. Rusk, however, was still apprehensive about the sincerity of the DRV leaders. A year before, when the North Vietnamese had canceled a planned meeting with U.S. diplomats in Warsaw, he had argued that if the DRV had been truly interested in starting negotiations, it would have done so them despite the bombing of Hanoi in the previous days. Now he believed that the DRV was stonewalling the process by imposing conditions on the bombing cessation as well as the secrecy of the discussions. Stopping the bombing campaign, Rusk suggested, “would be the most public act imaginable.” Rusk’s goals were to obtain some “preliminary arrangements” before negotiations began in order to ensure that, once they got under way, the process of peace-making would not be hampered by failure at the negotiating table. The first issue—reciprocity for the cessation of bombing—was in Rusk’s opinion a necessary precondition for the negotiations to begin. Either because of information regarding a planned NLF/DRV offensive in the spring or because of military planning, Rusk was shocked. We must get some elementary notion of reciprocity. I am not suggesting we are unwilling to talk until the war in the South ceases. We never said we will not talk until the other side stops doing what we didn't like. . . . We are not children.”

83. Ibid.
84. Hershberg, *Who Murdered Marigold?*
unwilling to accept a DRV proposal calling for a unilateral half of U.S. military action against DRV infiltration and attacks while allowing the NLF and DRV carte blanche in South Vietnam. “This is not acceptable,” Rusk told Macovescu. “The problem is how to limit the war in the North,” Macovescu retorted. The Romanian position was that, even during negotiations, fighting in South Vietnam would continue. “If the transports are in southern territory, stopping them is a problem for U.S. forces, but the main problem is to stop the bombing in the North,” concluded Macovescu.85

The second issue raised by Rusk was the topics to be negotiated in the context of ensuring that, once talks got under way, they would not be obstructed by misunderstandings in the parties’ positions. Rusk emphasized that although the United States was “willing to listen to their four points, or 14 points or 40 points,” it expected the DRV to “discuss our points. . . . If they will only discuss their points, there is difficulty.” Macovescu continued to express his belief that, in his discussions, Dong and Trinh made a “clear statement” that “they were willing to discuss whatever the other side came in with.” He also said that despite understanding the military arguments made by the U.S. government regarding cessation of the bombing campaign, the DRV cannot have any contacts with [the U.S. government before that]. As soon as [the Americans] cease the bombing and discontinue the acts of aggression we [the DRV] shall be prepared to receive any person, even a representative of the United States, who may wish to make known to us the American point of view or to get informed on our viewpoint. We shall regard those future contacts as normal diplomatic activity. The American representative will be reached by our representatives at the former’s suggestion. But, as long as the Americans threaten us with escalation, under those conditions our representatives cannot receive them and they have instructions to this end.86

Rusk was not impressed by the North Vietnamese argument, considering that it was necessary for the two sides to have an understanding on the formula of “no advantage”—he stressed that this was not a condition but a necessity for the discussions to be fruitful. He believed that the phrase “an appropriate period of time” would merely enable the DRV to “send tens of thousands of troops of men and ammunition” into South Vietnam, placing U.S. ground troops in an indefensible position. Macovescu was unable to give

85. Unfortunately, the discussion is still partly classified. Almost half a page is missing from the record, including the part in which Rusk and Macovescu discuss the details of what the bombing cessation would mean in military terms and its effects on continued DRV infiltration into the South.
86. Macovescu read the statement made by Foreign Minister Trinh during their conversation in Hanoi. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Macovescu, 6 January 1968, in LOC, FLC 16, Harriman Papers, Romania 1964–68.
any assurances about the DRV’s willingness to abide by the “no advantage” formula, but he said that, if the United States refrained from bombing, “strong moral and political pressure will be brought to bear on both sides to get discussions going as quickly as possible.” The discussion ended with an understanding that they should meet again in a few days to go over the notes and clarify any other point that might need clarification.

On 8 January Macovescu again met with Harriman to present Romania’s views regarding his meeting with the DRV leadership. He stressed that political and moral (friendly) pressure to get discussions started would be brought to bear if cessation of the bombing occurred. On 11 January Macovescu met with Rusk and Harriman, who conveyed the U.S. response to the North Vietnamese position. The meeting lasted only 30 minutes, with Rusk handing over to the Romanians a prepared text to be delivered to the DRV. Later that day, Harriman and William Bundy met with Macovescu to deliver the French translation of the 7/4 points—the seven written and four oral points Rusk had given Macovescu earlier that day—and to inform the Romanians that the Johnson administration left it up to them to decide how to transmit the points to the DRV. The written points were the U.S. government’s position, whereas the oral points were explanations of the points that would enable the Romanian delegation to better deliver the message to the Hanoi leadership. The written points showed that Washington was unwilling to compromise much on the issue of the cessation of the bombing campaign. The points offered an extended explanation of the “no advantage formula” and an attempt to clarify Hanoi’s position concerning the exact time envisioned under the “appropriate time” formula. The oral points, however, made clear that the United States had softened its stance on negotiations with Hanoi, partly because of encouraging signals from Hanoi, either publicly—Trinh’s statement—or privately through the Romanian channel. After placing a bombing moratorium on an area five miles around Hanoi, on 16 January Washington extended that area to include an area of five miles around Haiphong as well.

87. The U.S. response has long been declassified and is well known.


89. David Kraslow and Stuart Loory, in The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam (New York: Vintage, 1968), claim that the Romanians were given the same points transmitted to Hanoi through the Pennsylvania channel. The 25 August 1967 document shows that the U.S. government “assumed” that a bombing cessation would be reciprocated by Hanoi’s willingness “not to take advantage” of it. However, similarities in the two proposals most likely stem from the fact that the United States had not changed its position much and not that U.S. officials did not have enough faith in the channel. See Thies, When Governments Collide, p. 200n142.

90. State 98130, SecState WashDC to Amembassy Saigon, 12 January 1968: “[W]e have informed the Romanians that we should refrain from bombing within five miles of the center of Hanoi and Haiphong in connection with his mission” (emphasis added).
The bombing cessation and the “no advantage formula” remained contentious issues without an immediate solution. However, they primarily involved the issue, also broached by Washington, of South Vietnamese representation at the negotiating table. U.S. officials stressed that the United States would not involve itself in any substantive talks with the North Vietnamese regarding the future of South Vietnam without the GVN fully represented. Although at the time of Macovescu’s departure from Washington the United States had not revealed Romania’s mediation to the South Vietnamese, U.S. officials did consider the Romanian channel to be sufficiently serious and to have a sufficient likelihood of success. Katzenbach, writing to Ambassador Bunker in Saigon, believed that after Macovescu returned from Hanoi—where he would be delivering the U.S. position to the DRV leadership—the U.S. government would be in a position to “ask [South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van] Thieu[,] on the basis not only of the probe results but of the plans covering in detail how we would handle the whole situation, both militarily and diplomatically, if it should be agreed to go ahead and stop the bombing.”

Bunker did give Thieu “a general summation of the U.S. probes” but only on 20 January and “without revealing the PACKERS channel.” At the same time, Bunker indicated that Washington viewed the current process as a consultation in the hope of starting negotiations and that the GVN would be present at any negotiations with the DRV. More than that, the Thieu government would in the future be consulted on all important decisions. Thieu, however, was not convinced. On 16 January, Bunker sent a cable to State suggesting that

Thieu’s speech last night (Saigon 15997) is further witness of the genuine fear he and others here have that they will be left out of the decisions on those vital matters. . . . I believe Thieu would agree with Bui Diem’s implication that US-Hanoi contacts to bring about negotiations would be tolerable to the GVN, provided he was kept informed of them and given an opportunity to express his views before a rapidly moving situation becomes a fait accompli.

On 15 January President Johnson sent a letter to Ceaușescu thanking him for the Romanian attempt to start direct contacts between the United States and the DRV. Richard Davis, the U.S. ambassador to Romania, delivered the letter to Macovescu—who at the time was still acting as foreign minister, even though Mănescu had returned from the UN—citing “security rea-

91. Ibid. “[T]his channel, which now emerged as a clear serious channel to Hanoi.”
92. Ibid.
93. PACKERS Chronology (see note 42 supra), ref: Saigon 16501.
sons” for not seeking a meeting with President Ceaușescu directly.\footnote{Bucharest 970, 15 January 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Pol 113/4 Viet/PACKERS Davis also informed Macovescu that some Western diplomats had heard of his visit to Hanoi in December, but that there was no indication that they had heard of his visit to Washington. Bucharest 925, 10 January 1968. Macovescu suggested the information was “understandable since Romanians had necessarily informed Moscow and Beijing. He added that Moscow and Beijing would be informed of his visit to Washington at an appropriate moment but only after Hanoi was informed. In meantime, secret should be kept.”} That same day, Macovescu sent a flash telegram to Hanoi requesting a meeting with DRV leaders to inform them of the U.S. response.\footnote{Telegram 361, Flash Top Secret, MAE to Hanoi, 15 January 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/00091.} Via the Romanian embassy in Washington, Harriman requested that he be kept informed.\footnote{Telegram 92024, Flash, Washington to MAE, 15 January 1968 (received 16 January 08:30), in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/00094.} On 17 January, the Romanian ambassador to North Vietnam met with Foreign Minister Trînh and informed him of Macovescu’s request to visit Hanoi. Trînh’s response was immediate: he “was ready to receive [Macovescu] in Hanoi at the earliest possible moment.”\footnote{Telegram 59019, Flash, Hanoi to MAE, 17 January 1968 (received 10:45), in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/00095.} The next day Macovescu informed Hanoi that he would arrive on 22 January.\footnote{Telegram 23/002024, Flash, MAE to Hanoi, 18 January 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/00096.} He told the Romanian embassy in Washington to inform Harriman that he would be leaving for Hanoi the same day.\footnote{Telegram 23/002022, Flash MAE to Washington, 18 January 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/00097.} Not until 23 January did the Romanian ambassador in Moscow brief Soviet leaders about the Romanian-U.S. discussions.\footnote{The Romanians suggested the ambassador ask to be received on 23 January, a day after Macovescu was to arrive in Hanoi, but Soviet leaders, who had been informed about the discussions only up to the point of Macovescu’s second trip to Hanoi, did not receive him until the next day. See Bucharest 1144/1, Secret, 24 February 1968, in AMAE. Macovescu had already informed Harriman (via the Romanian embassy in Washington) that the Romanian ambassador in Moscow would inform leaders in Moscow about Macovescu’s visit to Hanoi on 23 January. Telegram 23/002023, Flash, MAE to Washington, 18 January 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES., Nr. 0/00098. The information given to the Soviets—available from the Romanian archives—provides a brief summary of the trips Macovescu took to Hanoi and Washington following the visit by Ambassador at Large Averell Harriman to Bucharest in November 1967, and of the main points made by the two sides during the discussion. Information on the Chinese position was also given to the Soviet leadership. Minutes of Conversation between Suslov and Ambassador Teodor Marinescu, SSID, 24 January 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, H.II.2 ES. Nr. 0/000101 of 3.II.68.}

The Romanian delegation arrived in Hanoi the evening of 22 January and left on the 28th. As Macovescu was in transit to Hanoi, Ambassador Bogdan in Washington sent a cable to Macovescu’s deputy offering clarifications from Harriman regarding Johnson’s State of the Union speech. The speech, the cable read, maintained the U.S. position as detailed in the San An-
tonio formula. Whatever the press might think, the administration had not
changed its position with regard to the appropriate time to begin negotiations
after a bombing halt. Harriman stressed that what the U.S. government had
previously told Macovescu remained valid. 102

On 27 January Macovescu reported to Ceaușescu the results of his visit to
Hanoi:

I met with Duy Trinh, Politburo member, Vice-President of the Council of
Ministers, and Foreign Minister. The Vietnamese attitude to the other side’s
proposals is negative. I am taking the first plane to Beijing (Sunday, 28 January)
to inform [the Chinese side] based on your instructions, and will begin my jour-
ney home Wednesday. 103

Macovescu returned to Bucharest on 1 February but did not contact the U.S.
government because, the Romanians claimed, Davis was not in Bucharest at
the time, and they did not want to send the message through Ambassador
Bogdan in Washington in order to avoid having too many people in the chan-
nel. 104 Previously, the Romanians had had no problem using Bogdan to trans-
mit messages requiring utter secrecy to the U.S. government, and it therefore
seems likely that the Romanians were very much surprised by Tet and decided
in its immediate aftermath to wait. Following Macovescu’s December trip to
Hanoi, he had contacted the U.S. embassy in Bucharest, and Bogdan had
contacted Harriman three days after the deputy foreign minister’s return to
Bucharest. Macovescu did not feel he had to come to Washington to talk in
person to Harriman and Rusk. When he finally met with the U.S. ambassa-
dor in late February, he claimed that, upon his return from Hanoi “other
pressing matters” had prevented him from contacting the embassy sooner.
Considering the efforts and strain the Romanians had already placed on their
delegation, Macovescu’s story does not make much sense.

On 4 February, Bogdan himself cabled Macovescu to inform him that
both Harriman and Walt Rostow had recently accepted a dinner invitation
from the Romanian ambassador. 105 A response was needed, Bogdan cau-
tioned, about the visit to Hanoi. Macovescu’s response, sent three days later,
instructed the ambassador to play for time by telling the Americans he had no
additional information but he hoped information would soon be forthcom-

102. Telegram 92.036, Flash, Washington to MAE, 18 January 1968 (received 17:45), in AMAE, in
SSID, ES. Nr. 0/00099.
103. Telegram 59.026, Flash, Hanoi to MAE, 28 January 1968 (received 19:25), in AMAE, in SSID,
ES. Nr. 0/000111.
104. Telegram to MAE, Bucharest 1144/2, Secret, 24 February 1968, in AMAE.
105. Telegram 92.075, Flash, Washington to MAE, 4 February 1968 (received 19:40), in AMAE, in
SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000120.
ing. By 9 February, another visit by Macovescu to Washington became increasingly improbable. In a cable to Bucharest, Bogdan informed Macovescu that rumors of his trips to Hanoi and Washington were beginning to circulate. Harriman’s assistant had called the Romanian ambassador to ask that he not mention anything to Vice President Hubert Humphrey about Macovescu’s missions and to tell the Romanian ambassador that information about Macovescu’s visits had made its way into a report from the State Department’s Romania’s desk. “The most plausible explanation,” Bogdan wrote, “is that the American side, for internal reasons, feels compelled to make these attempts public, and is thus preparing the ground to do so.” However, making such attempts public, Bogdan concluded, did not necessarily mean the United States was rejecting negotiations. A subsequent visit by the deputy foreign minister, Bogdan wrote in the final paragraph, could not be kept secret or explained via the same bureaucratic reasoning as before.

At the 9 February dinner, Bogdan could not tell his American guests anything new regarding Macovescu’s visit to Hanoi. Not until the next day did Macovescu instruct the Romanian ambassador what to transmit to U.S. officials. On 12 February, Bogdan met with Harriman and read the DRV response to the U.S. position:

The position of the Vietnamese people and of the Government of the DRV is very clear. There are the four points of the Government of the DRV and the political program of the NLFSV [National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam]. This is the basis for the solution [règlementation] of the Vietnamese problem. We stated clearly: if in actuality the [U.S. government] desires conversations, as it says it does, it must in the first place unconditionally halt the bombardment and all other acts of war against the DRV. After a convenient period of time, following the unconditional cessation of bombardment and all other American acts of war against the DRV, the DRV will start conversations with the US in the questions of interest to the two parties. The convenient period of time is the time necessary to prove that the US has really and without conditions stopped bombardment and all other acts of war against the DRV. After the unconditional cessation of bombardment and all other acts of war against the DRV, a meeting will take place between the two sides to reach an agreement on the place, the level and the contents of conversation. The right position and the correct attitude of the government of the DRV have been warmly welcomed and

106. Telegram 23/002086, Flash, MAE to Washington, 7 February 1968, and Telegram 92.036, Flash, Washington to MAE, 18 January 1968 (received 17:45), in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000099; Telegram 59.026, Flash, Hanoi to MAE, 28 January 1968 (received 19:25), in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000111; and Telegram to MAE, 24 February 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000121.

107. Ibid., p. 4.
supported by the peoples of the world. The attitude of the DRV is serious. If the conversations are leading, or not, to results, this depends on the US.\textsuperscript{109}

The response came as a disappointment to the Americans. Harriman was surprised that the Romanians had taken a week to pass on the information Macovescu had gained in Hanoi, but he thanked the Romanians for their efforts.\textsuperscript{110} If Packers had looked like promising only two months before, by February the situation had changed dramatically.\textsuperscript{111} The Tet Offensive had altered the political perspective on the war. Harriman told Bogdan on 12 February that Hanoi was taking an “arbitrary line” and that the message “brought nothing new.” Rusk informed Davis that “the message he brought us is clearly unacceptable.”\textsuperscript{112} On 24 February in Bucharest, Davis met with Macovescu, who described his talks in Hanoi and Beijing. Macovescu insisted that he had transmitted the form and spirit of the messages exactly to Hanoi. He told Davis that the Romanian position, as it was explained to Hanoi, was that “the minimum of conditions [has] now [been] created to stride forward on the road to negotiations.”\textsuperscript{113} He also said that after returning to Bucharest he had received no more signals from the DRV regarding talks with the United States but that the Romanian government remained open to deliver any messages to and from the DRV if the United States desired to keep the channel open. The Chinese position—on 29 January Macovescu had informed Deputy Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua about his talks with the U.S. government and the DRV—remained the same: “The decision is up to the North Vietnamese,” Qiao said.\textsuperscript{114} But by then the Romanian channel had failed to live up to its promise, and it fizzled out entirely by the end of February.

Yet, despite its apparent failure, the channel was notably successful from Bucharest’s point of view. The faithful passing of messages between the two

\textsuperscript{109} The passage was read and reviewed by Ambassador Bogdan in the meeting with Harriman. Bogdan also noted that Macovescu had more information and that Ambassador Davis should request a meeting with the deputy foreign minister. The passage read by Bogdan was forwarded to Bucharest on 20 February as part of background information for Davis in preparation for his meeting with Macovescu. See Department of State Cable 117922, Secret, 20 February 1968, in in NARA, RG59, Pol 87/34 Viet/PACKERS.

\textsuperscript{110} Telegram 92.100, Flash, Washington to MAE, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000129, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{112} State 117922, Secret, 20 February 1968.

\textsuperscript{113} Bucharest 1144/1, 24 February 1968.

\textsuperscript{114} Newly declassified information from Chinese archives show this to be untrue. The Chinese were vehemently opposed to the peace process and made their position known to the DRV in a series of direct discussions between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong from 13 to 19 April 1968. See conversations between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong in Odd Arne Westad et al., eds., 77 Conversations, pp. 123–129.
sides increased Romania’s visibility and recognition in Washington. Despite the disappointment, Washington did not blame the Romanians. Rusk told Macovescu during a meeting on 4 March 1968 that U.S. officials “sincerely appreciate what your government, and you personally, have done with regard to this issue [of Vietnam]. From the very beginning we believed that your efforts have been serious, and that you would know how to carry out this mission with integrity.” Almost two months later, at a reception given by President Johnson for the diplomatic corps, Johnson himself thanked Bogdan for Romania’s participation. During the reception later, Harriman asked Bogdan, half-jokingly, whether he should plan to come to Bucharest to start negotiations with the DRV. Walt Rostow made the same suggestion. When pressed by Bogdan, both officials suggested they did not speak for the U.S. government but only for themselves personally.115 Mănescu, still president of the UN General Assembly, received a similar proposal on 24 April from the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Arthur Goldberg. Goldberg, too, stressed that the idea was strictly personal in nature. Mănescu responded that Bucharest would consider the suggestion, but an official request had to be made. Otherwise, Mănescu told Goldberg, the Romanian government would consider that Goldberg’s suggestion had not been accepted by the U.S. government and would take no other action on the issue.116 The next day, on 25 April, Harriman called Bogdan to his residence and informed him that “the USG does not object to having preliminary contacts with the North Vietnamese side in Bucharest.”117

The North Vietnamese, however, were not interested. In a meeting with Macovescu in Bucharest on 26 April, DRV Ambassador Hoang Tu, stressed that Hanoi’s preference for initial contacts would be Warsaw. When asked whether another socialist capital would be acceptable to the North Vietnamese, Hoang Tu responded that Warsaw was the only acceptable place. “There we have the best conditions for us and for the Americans,” Hoang Tu stated. “And, Warsaw is also the place where the conversations between the Chinese and the U.S. ambassadors are taking place.”118 Three days later, however, Macovescu cabled the embassy in Hanoi to instruct the ambassador to request a meeting with Prime Minister Dong or Foreign Minister Trinh and inform

118. Minutes of the Meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister G. Macovescu and DRV Ambassador Hoang Tu, 26 April 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES Nr. 0/000145 of 26.IV.68, pp. 7–8.
them of the repeated, unofficial suggestions coming from Washington for Bucharest to be the place for initial contacts. Before the Romanian government responded to Washington’s request, it wanted to know Hanoi’s position. A day later a telegram from the RCP Central Committee informed Mănescu of the cable sent to Hanoi. The Romanian ambassador in Hanoi met with Pham Van Dong on 1 May and informed him of the proposal. Dong responded that such a suggestion needed to be studied closely. However, “the Americans are making a fight out of the place for negotiations,” Dong averred, “and, if they want to fight on this field, then we must defeat them here as well.” By 3 May the situation was finally settled. Both sides accepted Paris as the place where negotiations would finally begin. However, a peace treaty was not signed until another five years had passed and many thousands more had died on both sides.

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The views expressed in this article are strictly my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. government.

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119. Telegram 23/002278, Flash, MAE to Hanoi, 29 April 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000150.

120. Decision, RCP CC Chancellery, 30 April 1968, Special Files—No Circulation, 30 April 1968, in AMAE, in SSID, ES. Nr. 0/000151.