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Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the "Maneli Affair"

By Margaret K. Gnoinska

GWHP

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**Poland and Vietnam, 1963:
New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the “Maneli
Affair”**

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Introduction¹

For more than four decades, a private meeting in Saigon in the autumn of 1963 between a Polish diplomat and Ngo Dinh Nhu – the powerful brother of South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem – has remained a nagging mystery of the Vietnam War, a murky episode crucially linked to the Kennedy Administration's perceptions of the Diems in the run-up to the November 1963 coup that toppled the regime. To some American officials, Nhu's secretive dealings with a communist representative offered evidence that he might be angling to cut a deal with Hanoi behind Washington's back, perhaps to neutralize South Vietnam as France was urging, and justification for the United States to take urgent action to install a new regime in Saigon that could be relied upon to press the battle against the communists.² By contrast, some historians have suggested in retrospect that the episode should be viewed as a missed opportunity to resolve the conflict between Saigon and Hanoi and thereby avoid the further disastrous US military escalation.³

Until now, a lack of access to Polish sources has precluded any firmer understanding of what actually took place. But newly-opened files in Warsaw, both in the former communist party and foreign ministry archives, permit a substantial—if not complete—clarification of this lingering puzzle, and contribute fresh information on secret communist diplomatic and political maneuvering related to Vietnam during that critical year.

At the center of the affair was Mieczysław Maneli, the head of the Polish delegation to the International Commission for Control and Supervision (known simply as the International Control Commission, or ICC).⁴ The 1954 Geneva Conference on

¹ The author presented earlier versions of this paper at the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR), Austin, Texas, 24-27 June 2004, and at the George Washington University Cold War Group ("GWCW") conference, "New Central and East European Evidence on the Cold War in Asia," Budapest, Hungary, 31 October-1 November 2003. She would like to thank the following individuals for their invaluable comments and assistance: Wanda Jarzabek, Martin Kofler, Leo Gluchowski, Tim Naftali, Odd Arne Westad, Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, Artemy Kalinovsky, Yvette Chin, Christian Ostermann, James Goldgeier, Hope M. Harrison, and especially Jim Hershberg. She would also like to express her thanks to the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the George Washington University for providing assistance in funding a research trip to Poland in May 2004.

² As one former U.S. embassy official in Saigon recalls, "By the time the coup occurred on November 1, the possibility that Nhu was putting out feelers to Hanoi behind our backs had become an important secondary factor in our decision not to stand in the generals' way." Robert Hopkins Miller, *Vietnam and Beyond: A Diplomat's Cold War Education* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2002), p. 73.

³ See, e.g., Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002 ed.), p. 720.

⁴ MANELI, Mieczysław (1922-1994), born in Miechów, Poland; resistance fighter and Auschwitz survivor in World War II – in 1942, joined the underground movement in Nazi-occupied Warsaw and the rank and file as a member of the People's Army and Polish Workers' Party, captured and interned in May 1943 in Auschwitz where he joined the underground communist party, in January 1945 escaped from Auschwitz after which he continued to serve in a military and political struggle against the Nazis; in 1950, became university assistant at Warsaw University; received a degree of Doctor of Law in 1954 from Warsaw University; Professor, Department of Law, Warsaw University (1954-1968); Polish delegate to the International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICC) in Vietnam (1954-55 as a legal and political advisor, and 1963-64 as delegation chief); worked for the Vietnamese Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw preparing oral and written opinions on legal and political subjects (1964-1968);

Indochina had created the ICC (consisting of Poland, Canada, and India) to monitor the implementation of the accords that concluded the French-Viet Minh war and were intended to lead to a political resolution of the Vietnam conflict.⁵ Even as the accords collapsed—elections to unify the country in 1956 never took place, and an armed conflict arose in the south between a Hanoi-backed communist insurgency and a Washington-supported regime in Saigon—the Commission continued to exist, at least formally. In actuality it could achieve little, perpetually stalemated between Warsaw and Ottawa, with neutral New Delhi performing a delicate balancing act as chair. Yet, the situating of the body's administrative headquarters in Saigon produced a curious anomaly that made possible the "Maneli Affair"—the presence in the South Vietnamese capital of a ranking communist diplomat, Poland's representative, able to shuttle periodically back-and-forth to Hanoi (via Cambodia and Laos), despite the fact that no communist government in the world recognized the Saigon government as legitimate and despite the ongoing violent confrontation between the north and south.

Prior studies on the Vietnamese events of 1963 have tended to mention Poland's role in passing, forced to rely on fragmentary sources that included contemporary press leaks, a memoir published by Maneli in 1971 after he defected to the United States, (supplemented by a newspaper article the Pole published four years later on the eve of South Vietnam's final defeat)⁶, and a handful of declassified U.S. government documents, especially several CIA telegrams published in 1991 in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*.⁷ Taken together these sources have raised more questions than they answer, but have been read by scholars to suggest that Maneli served as a mediator between Nhu and Hanoi, perhaps raising the prospect that some sort of north-south deal or at least a serious dialogue between them had been in the works.⁸

dismissed from Warsaw University in July 1968, Maneli left Poland for the United States, where became a professor of law and political science at Queens College, City University of New York; chairman of the Council for Study of Ethics and Public Policy at Queens College; former member of the board of directors of the American Humanist Association; the author of fifteen books including *Juridical Positivism and Human Rights* (1981), *Freedom and Tolerance* (1987), and *Perelman's New Rhetoric As Philosophy and Methodology for the Next Century* (1994).

⁵ For more on the ICC, see "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam, July 20, 1954." U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 90th Congress, 1st Session, *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam* (3d Revised Edition) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1967), pp. 50-62.

⁶ Mieczysław Maneli. *War of the Vanquished*, trans. Maria de Görgey (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) and Mieczysław Maneli. "Vietnam, '63 and Now," *The New York Times*, 27 January 1975, p. 25.

⁷ See U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1961-1963, Volume IV: Vietnam, August - December 1963*, esp. pp. 89, 125-126, 239-240, and 264.

⁸ Many important works dealing with the 1963 Vietnamese events mention Maneli and his alleged role as a mediator between Saigon and Hanoi that autumn and speculate that Poland may have authorized such a secret channel, which, in turn, would have to be approved by Moscow; most base their account primarily on Maneli's published memoirs. See, e.g., references in Ellen Hammer's *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), pp. 86-88, 102, 165, 219-20, 222-229; Francis X. Winters, *The Year of the Hare: America in Vietnam, January 25, 1963-February 15, 1964* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), pp. 43, 45, 60, 79 and 172; Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 311-314, 341-342, 345-346, 351, and 369; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 6, 12, 17, and 48; Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, Robert K. Brigham et al., *Argument without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (Public Affairs: New York, 1999), pp. 112-113; Schlesinger,

Now, however, newly declassified materials from two archives in Warsaw—the Polish Foreign Ministry archive (*Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych; AMSZ*) and the former Polish communist party archives (the Archive of Modern Records; *Archiwum Akt Nowych – AAN*)⁹—enable scholars to re-examine these events more closely. In particular, the AMSZ dossiers of secret cables (*szyfrogramy*) between Warsaw and Moscow, Beijing, Saigon, Hanoi, and New Delhi, as well as background reports in AAN, yield fresh information on Maneli's actions, Poland's Vietnam policy, the relationship among the Polish, Soviet, and North Vietnamese governments, and the issue of whether there was a missed opportunity to bring peace to Vietnam in 1963.¹⁰

The Polish documents make clear, contrary to previous speculations, that Warsaw did not launch any secret peace initiatives in Vietnam in the months immediately prior to the November 1963 coup. (The documents do reveal, however, that Poland—inspired by John F. Kennedy's ambassador in India, John Kenneth Galbraith—did make a serious, but futile, attempt to promote a settlement in Vietnam earlier that year.) This paper illustrates that Warsaw was not interested in what it referred to as the "Paris-Saigon-Washington" game of the fall of 1963 and thus did not authorize Maneli to meet with Nhu in private. In fact, the Polish leadership instructed Maneli not to become involved in *any* mediating activities, even if pressured by the North Vietnamese. Instead, the Polish delegate was to carry out his tasks solely within the framework of the ICC. This attitude clearly reflects the hands-off policy of Warsaw toward the events in Saigon at the time.

As regards the behavior and attitude of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) leadership, the Polish sources indicate that the North Vietnamese asked Maneli to relay to "those interested in the South" that Hanoi wanted to begin cultural exchanges and trade (coal for rice) with the South before any political settlements. The Polish documents also indicate that the North Vietnamese leadership was intrigued by Maneli's meeting with Nhu and even urged him to meet again with the South Vietnamese if such an opportunity arose. As this paper shows, this should not lead one to believe that Maneli acted as mediator on Hanoi's behalf to promote plans for the neutralization of South Vietnam, or someone who would interpose between the South and the North in order to reconcile differences between them. After all, the role of a mediator, as usually understood, is someone who intervenes between conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement, or compromise upon the request of one or both parties. As Polish sources suggest, neither the South nor even the North trusted Maneli enough to make him their secret go-between on such critical issues as the neutralization of South Vietnam, as suggested by American contemporaneous sources.

Robert Kennedy and His Times, pp. 718-729, cites, in addition to Maneli's published works, his unpublished account of a 1959 meeting with JFK ("Encounters with John F. Kennedy and Discussions on 'Democratic Socialism,' Polish Policy and Vietnam") and a 24 June 1977 interview; Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and the Fall of Diem," part 1, *Australian Outlook*, 28:3 (December 1974), pp. 245-258, and part 2, *Australian Outlook* 29:1 (April 1975), pp. 3-17, cites, among other sources, the private diary of Italian ambassador Giovanni d'Orlandi.

⁹ The author is particularly grateful to Mr. Szczepan Ciborek, the main archivist at AMSZ, for his kindness and patience in providing materials for this paper.

¹⁰ Moreover, given the limited access to the Chinese, Indian, Soviet, and Vietnamese archives, the Polish documents also add useful perspectives on such topics as the attitudes and behavior of the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese leaders, Soviet policy towards Vietnam, India's role within the ICC, and the influence of the Sino-Soviet split.

To be sure, the North Vietnamese were curious about Diem's ideas as to the future of Vietnam, especially given the precarious state of affairs in Saigon in 1963. Certainly, the North Vietnamese were intrigued by the fact that Maneli met with Nhu, and even encouraged him to meet again, if such an opportunity arrived. Maneli refused such a request, as Warsaw strictly forbade him to meet with Nhu again. The Polish evidence suggests that the North Vietnamese did not ask Maneli to relay to the South Vietnamese any specific questions or suggestions of a political nature except for the issue of economic exchange. The evidence further shows that both DRV Premier Pham Van Dong and Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy, despite their incessant praise for Poland's material and moral support for Vietnam, remained suspicious of the Polish representative. In fact, the North Vietnamese openly denied to Maneli any contacts Hanoi may have had with Diem. This does not come as a surprise since in 1963 the DRV was leaning toward China in the Sino-Soviet split. However, until we obtain evidence from the Vietnamese archives regarding meetings between Maneli and the North Vietnamese, there is no evidence to indicate that Hanoi went out of its way to arrange such a meeting and made serious attempts to sway the Saigon regime to its side through the Polish channel.

Conversely, it is not clear whether any concrete political proposals were made during the private meeting with Nhu except for a short discussion regarding Charles de Gaulle's 29 August 1963 call to transform the two Vietnams into a neutral, unified state, free of all foreign influence. Although Nhu stated to Maneli that he and Diem were studying Ho Chi Minh's ceasefire proposal, de Gaulle's proposal was not seriously discussed, thereby leading to the belief that the entire meeting was more informational. Moreover, Maneli does not state in his cables to Warsaw that he offered his services to Nhu and Diem, as suggested by US sources. There is no indication in the Polish documents that Nhu asked Maneli to relay this, or any other information, to the North Vietnamese leadership. Maneli's cables to Warsaw thus suggest that although Nhu may have talked about plans of "paving the way for trade exchange with the North," as well as his anger toward the United States and his hopes for a free and independent Vietnam, he still did not want to cut ties with the Americans. In fact, Maneli depicted Nhu as reserved, cautious, and suspicious during their meeting, thus indicating that Nhu was not ready to embrace Maneli as a trusted contact between Saigon and Hanoi. As Maneli reported, "the non-concreteness of [Nhu's] statements result[ed] from instability and hope that the bridges with the US have not yet been burned."¹¹ Therefore, what the Polish documents show is that Maneli was more of a *messenger* rather than a *mediator*. After all, he mainly relayed information as far as cultural and economic exchanges, something that he openly admits in his memoirs. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that Maneli relayed any new concrete political proposals from Hanoi that would attempt to alter seriously the position of South Vietnam in the fall of 1963, as suggested by the US sources, as well as contemporaneous Western and South Vietnamese press reports.

Although the Polish documents clarify the role Warsaw played in the Maneli-Nhu meeting and shed more light on the behavior of the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese leaders, they raise a plethora of new questions regarding Maneli's role and

¹¹ Ciphergram No. 11424 from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw). 4 September 1963, 6/77, w-108, t-625. This and all other ciphergrams cited herein are from AMSZ, and all translations from Polish are the present author's unless otherwise indicated.

motivations. Why did he decide to meet with Nhu—without specific authorization from his government—in the first place? Did he do so out of simple human curiosity or personal ambition? Did he perhaps succumb to pressures from the North Vietnamese leaders? What prompted him to believe that the governments of Poland and the Soviet Union would condone such a meeting? Could he have been uninformed about his own government's actual position? Did he not realize that the West and Saigon might exploit such a private meeting between a communist delegate and a South Vietnamese leader? Did he perhaps become so entangled in the schemes of French Ambassador Roger Lalouette and other diplomats in Saigon that he forgot whose interests he was to represent? This paper addresses these questions and other issues in hope that its findings will bring additional missing pieces to the "Maneli puzzle," which has been left incomplete for over forty years largely due to the lack of primary sources from "the other side."

The Rapacki-Galbraith Polish "Peace Initiative" on Vietnam: Jan.-Feb. 1963

In order to understand the political atmosphere in Saigon in the fall of 1963, the dynamics between the governments of Warsaw and Moscow, as well as their attitude towards Vietnam, it is necessary to look at the events which took place earlier that year. As Maneli recalls in his memoirs, upon his arrival to Saigon in early 1963 he began to understand that the political atmosphere in the capital was full of contradictions, tensions were rampant, and "everyone was waiting for something to happen."¹² Maneli recollects that as soon as he arrived in Saigon the main topics of conversation between him and Ramchundur Goburdhun, the Indian delegate to the ICC, were on how to establish channels of communication between the North and the South. In a cable to Warsaw in early March, not mentioned in his memoirs, Maneli notes Goburdhun's remarks regarding Vietnam:

It would be desirable for the North and the guerillas to give Diem some respite. Then, as Diem promised Goburdhun, he would get rid of the Americans by himself and he would join the Indian line. Mrs. Nhu also favors this idea. It would be necessary to facilitate direct North-South contacts. This could take place in [New] Delhi, where the two sides have their representatives. If the guerillas intensify the fight, the US is ready to destroy entire areas of the country, which the North should take into account.¹³

Prior to Maneli's arrival in Saigon, the idea of neutralizing Vietnam was broached by the Poles in early 1963 when Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki met with Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru during his visit to India between 20 and 22 January.¹⁴ Rapacki

¹² Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, p. 60.

¹³ Ciphergram No. 3002 from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski-Pohoryles (Warsaw), 7 March 1963, 6/77, w-108, t-625.

¹⁴ See the account in Jerzy Michałowski, *Polskie tajne inicjatywy pokojowe w Wietnamie [Polish Secret Peace Initiatives in Vietnam]*, courtesy of Stefan Michałowski, translation by L. W. Gluchowski, excerpt courtesy of James G. Hershberg; see appendix. (Hereafter, "Michalowski Report.") Michałowski apparently prepared this secret report with the benefit of Foreign Ministry archives in the late 1970s, then brought it with him when he left to live in the West; his son Stefan generously provided it to CWIHP. See Jerzy Michałowski (prepared by Stefan Michałowski), "Polish Secret Peace Initiatives in Vietnam," *CWIHP Bulletin* no. 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 241, 258-259.

proposed a plan to neutralize South Vietnam through the selection of a new government in Saigon that would replace Diem and would be capable of negotiating with the North. Having received a favorable reaction from Nehru, Rapacki (along with his close aide on Asian affairs, foreign ministry director-general Jerzy Michałowski) then spoke with U.S. ambassador Galbraith, who also responded positively and put forth his own plan for the neutralization of Vietnam, allegedly in accordance with President Kennedy's views, based on the Laos model.¹⁵ (Galbraith wrote in his journal that he "had to improvise for I was, of course, without instruction."¹⁶) In his memoirs, Galbraith recalled his encounter with Rapacki:

My concern, even despair, over Vietnam continued, and I continued to look for any handle by which I might move the issue. In January 1963, the Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki visited New Delhi and on January 21 sent for me for a discussion, which we had at the house of [Indian foreign secretary] M.R. Desai. Rapacki told me, as I wrote in my journal, "While we [the United States] probably couldn't lose in South Vietnam, we couldn't win. Meanwhile we are forcing North Vietnam to look more and more to the Chinese for protection. This is bad. Why not get a liberal government in South Vietnam which all could support? In return, Ho Chi Minh would call off the insurrection."¹⁷ I promptly reported the conversation to Washington, where it was ignored by the State Department. Kennedy, however, saw the cable and sent word that I was to pursue the subject immediately. I could not; Rapacki by then had departed.¹⁸

With access to the Polish archives, we can now confirm several elements of this Rapacki-Galbraith neutralization [*neutralizacja*] initiative. In a 22 January cable to Warsaw, Rapacki wrote from New Delhi: "Besides the constant emphasis of adhering to the non-alignment [policy], further talks contained few political elements. The Indians did not raise the Chinese matter... As far as Vietnam, we will send interesting information separately."¹⁹ Unfortunately, the present author was not able to locate the separate cable or report to Warsaw regarding the so-called "interesting information" about Vietnam.²⁰ Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence which indicates that such an initiative was launched. On his return to Warsaw, Rapacki sent Michałowski urgently to Moscow to

¹⁵ In July 1962, the Geneva Conference on Laos had reached an accord to neutralize the country, thereby removing it from the East-West conflict, building on an agreement in principle between JFK and Nikita Khrushchev when they met in Vienna in June 1961.

¹⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969; citations from New American Library/Signet paperback edition, 1970), p. 466

¹⁷ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 466

¹⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 478.

Michałowski quoted this passage from Galbraith's memoirs in his report but noted that it contained "numerous inaccuracies"—for instance, Michałowski wrote that he, not Rapacki, conducted the talk with Galbraith. See appendix. Galbraith's published journal entry, however, specified that he met *both* Rapacki and Michałowski at Desai's house. On Galbraith's views on Vietnam, see, besides his own writings, the recently-published biography, Richard Parker, *John Kenneth Galbraith: His Life, His Politics, His Economics* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), which does not, however, cover the Polish episode described in this paper.

¹⁹ See telegram from Rapacki (New Delhi) to Naszkowski (Warsaw), 22 January 1963, translation in appendix.

²⁰ In addition to Vietnam, Rapacki and Nehru discussed a series of other pertinent international matters, see See telegram from Rapacki (New Delhi) to Naszkowski (Warsaw), 21 January 1963, translation in appendix.

personally inform Soviet leaders about the initiative.²¹ On February 4, the Polish foreign ministry director-general conveyed information about the conversations in New Delhi to Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Gromyko reacted positively but cautiously, stressing the need to consult with the North Vietnamese comrades.²² The next day, back in Warsaw, Michałowski immediately cabled Przemysław Ogrodziński, the Polish Ambassador to India: "As far as the Vietnam matter, we are discussing it. It was received with interest. Deliberations will continue. As for now, we suggest inviting Galbraith to lunch and sounding [him] out, without committing ourselves, in order for him to see that we are looking into this matter."²³

Galbraith claims in his memoirs that he could not do anything about "the Polish proposal" because Rapacki departed New Delhi on January 22. However, did he really need to speak directly to Rapacki? After all, Ogrodziński was in New Delhi and Galbraith could have turned to him with any questions or suggestions, especially since the Poles, and the Soviets, seemed interested in following up on the matter. But whether a meeting between Ogrodziński and Galbraith ever took place is not clear.

Responses from Moscow to the Polish Initiative

Polish as well as Soviet documents indicate that Moscow took a keen interest in the neutralization initiative. In particular, a lengthy Soviet memorandum (undated but clearly from February 1963), found by scholar L.W. Gluchowski in the Polish party archives in Warsaw, reveals the Kremlin's positive attitude toward the neutralization approach.²⁴ The memorandum states:

Information of Comrades Rapacki's arrival in India, and in particular the conversation between Comrade Michalowski and American Ambassador Galbraith, in which, on his own initiative, and, it appears, without Washington's knowledge, the question of Vietnam's neutralization was raised, was given much attention in the CC CPSU [Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. This information, relayed to us by a representative of Polish MFA who arrived in Moscow specifically for that purpose [i.e., Michałowski], is undoubtedly of interest.²⁵

According to this memorandum, the Soviets estimated that Galbraith's appeal to the Polish representatives in the ICC was "clearly calculated to ascertain the attitude of Poland as well as the DRV and other Socialist countries to the idea of the neutralization

²¹ See telegram from Rapacki (Warsaw) to Jaszczuk (Moscow), 31 January 1963, translation in appendix.

²² Michałowski Report, quoting "Urgent Note of 7 February 1963" (not found); see appendix.

²³ Ciphergram No. 1336 Michałowski (Warsaw) to Ogrodziński (New Delhi), 5 February 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-608.

²⁴ See Soviet memorandum on Polish peace initiative on Vietnam, n.d. [early Feb. 1963], AAN, Warsaw, obtained by L.W. Gluchowski, translation from Russian by Artemy Kalinovsky in appendix. Judging from the content, the memorandum was most likely addressed to the PUWP politburo, perhaps directly to Polish leader Władysław Gomułka, and was prepared by the highest decision-making circles of the Soviet leadership, most likely by either Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister, or Yuri Andropov, the Soviet chief liaison between the CPSU and Soviet bloc communist parties. It also presumably reflects views approved by the CPSU Central Committee, which the memorandum indicates closely examined the Polish report of the Galbraith neutralization proposal.

²⁵ Ibid.

of Vietnam.”²⁶ At the same time, the Soviets surmised that Kennedy did not oppose a compromise solution for South Vietnam, as was earlier found for Laos, and that the Americans must have concluded that the continued intervention in Vietnam did not promise victory and that they therefore decided to extricate themselves.²⁷ The memorandum stressed that the neutralization idea was certainly “worth exploiting” and would benefit the Soviet Union while helping “to untangle the dangerous knot of international tensions in Southeast Asia and also to strengthen the international-political position of the DRV.”²⁸ In other words, neutralizing Vietnam would strengthen the DRV’s struggle in support of the national-patriotic forces of South Vietnam, destabilize Western military alliances, especially the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), help further displace the Americans from Asia, ease regional tensions, bolster the Geneva Accords, and accelerate the process of Vietnamese unification through economic, scientific-technological, and cultural exchanges favorable to the DRV.²⁹

Furthermore, according to the Soviets, neutralizing Vietnam would offer an opportunity to create, along with Cambodia and Laos, a neutral zone in Southeast Asia, in which each country would have full sovereignty and would reject participation in any military and political alliances. The memorandum called for consulting the North Vietnamese comrades on the issue, as well as for consultations among interested socialist countries with the goal of developing a single coordinated position, as carried out in the case of Laos. This would enable the Soviets to react to the American overture, i.e. through the Polish representatives to whom the Americans had turned, and to let the US government know that the socialist countries would not object to the conduct of the talks regarding the proposal of Vietnamese neutrality.³⁰ The Soviets therefore urged the Poles to communicate the Soviet position to the North Vietnamese:

Our thoughts regarding the neutralization of Vietnam are laid out in detail in our message to Comrade Ho Chi Minh; we would first like to consult you regarding its contents.

If you do not have any doubts regarding the possibility of using the idea of neutralization of Vietnam in the interests of Socialist countries and you share our thoughts, then we believe that you could, possibly, inform our Vietnam friends yourself, should you find that expedient. This would be completely understandable, considering that Poland is a member of the International Commission of Supervision and Control in Vietnam and that the Americans undertook their overture through Polish representatives.³¹

Numerous cables and reports from Moscow, prepared by Polish Ambassador Bolesław Jaszczuk,³² further corroborate the favorable Soviet response to the neutralization initiative; on 13 February, Jaszczuk cabled Rapacki:

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Soviet memorandum on the Polish peace initiative on Vietnam, n.d. [Feb. 1963], AAN, Warsaw, obtained by L.W. Gluchowski, translated from Russian by Artemy Kalinovsky. (See full translation in appendix.)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Bolesław Jaszczuk was the Polish Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1963.

After the conversation with Michałowski, Gromyko presented its content to the leadership of the CC [Central Committee]. The assessment is as follows: The US would like to get out of the uncomfortable situation in South Vietnam. It was only in Vienna [in June 1961] when Kennedy was telling Khrushchev that their presence and entanglement in the war in Vietnam is the result of Eisenhower's policies. The CC concludes that the possibility of solving the problem in South Vietnam is surfacing – Of course, this solution must be in our favor and not in that of the Americans. That is why a decision was also made to have the Soviet side talk to the DRV with the suggestion proposed by us.³³

In a second cable to Rapacki and Zenon Kliszko,³⁴ which unlike the previous one was circulated to the politburo of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP), Jaszczuk reported a warning from senior CPSU official Yuri Andropov³⁵—who served as chief liaison to fraternal parties—warnings that overcoming Hanoi's militant, Chinese-aligned position in favor of armed struggle would not be easy:

Andropov acknowledged the seriousness of the matter... Nevertheless, according to A[ndropov], some statements of the Vietnamese do not fully correspond with the position of the DRV's leadership. From the talks which Andropov conducted in Hanoi recently, one gets the impression that, among other things, one can see the source of overcoming a series of difficulties in the DRV as far as the victory of the revolution (not postponed for years to come.). That is why we will have to explain to the Vietnamese comrades that there should be no talk about any concession or tying their hands; otherwise, the Chinese will come out ahead. They exert a very large influence on the DRV (both within the party as well as in the army where there are their commissars).³⁶

A ciphered cable from Warsaw's embassy in Hanoi yields further evidence regarding Andropov's January 1963 trip to North Vietnam during which he carried out official and unofficial meetings with the DRV leadership. According an account which Soviet envoy Tovmassian related to his Polish colleague, one of the visit's main goals was to sound out the position of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) as to the ideological disagreement between the USSR and the PRC.³⁷ Were DRV officials to take a middle position within the split, the Soviet delegation would support such a stance by ensuring a joint struggle in the name of the unity of the communist movement, as well as to emphasize the role of the brave and international VWP among the Asian communist parties. Andropov also reportedly assured the North Vietnamese that the USSR supported the DRV's position in Southeast Asia, Vietnamese economic development, and peaceful unification based on the Geneva Accords.³⁸

³³ See telegram from Jaszczuk (Moscow) to Rapacki (Warsaw), 13 February 1963, translation in appendix.

³⁴ Zenon Kliszko was a member of the Political Bureau and a close adviser to Gomulka.

³⁵ In 1957 Yuri V. Andropov was appointed the head of liaison between the CPSU and its fraternal parties. He promoted the idea of regional economic specialization within the bloc and helped to direct the ideological campaign against the Chinese Communists.

³⁶ See telegram from Jaszczuk (Moscow) to Rapacki and Kliszko (Warsaw), 13 February 1963, translation in appendix.

³⁷ Other goals were: to present the official Soviet position towards Cuba, West Berlin, Laos, South Vietnam, peaceful coexistence, the PRC-India conflict, the tasks of the international proletariat and the unity of the communist international movement.

³⁸ Ciphertext No.3223 Choderek (Hanoi) to Morski (Warsaw), 12 March 1963. 6/77, w-108, t-625.

Despite ongoing tensions between Moscow and Hanoi over the Sino-Soviet split, Tovmassian emphasized the “good and honest” talks conducted between Andropov and Ho Chi Minh. The DRV leader was said to have assured Andropov of the VWP’s continued confidence in the CPSU, as well as support for the USSR’s efforts to strengthen the unity of the parties and solidarity of socialist countries, the maintenance of peace, and the victory of communism.³⁹

The abovementioned cables and reports, however, also indicate that the Sino-Soviet split was greatly affecting relations between the USSR and North Vietnam, as the USSR had to work hard to win DRV’s support and loyalty. This is perhaps one main reason why the USSR refrained from itself actually pushing for “a peaceful unification of Vietnam based on the Geneva Accords,” as Andropov purportedly favored, and why the Soviets did not give the Polish more attention after its initial expression of interest. Having difficulties with influencing the North Vietnamese, the Soviets seemed to eschew any intrigue, schemes, and initiatives in Saigon which were primarily orchestrated by the Americans and the French, or by the Indians who, due to their conflict with China, did not want Vietnam to fall under Beijing’s sway.⁴⁰

Therefore, given the changed Soviet policy, Poland’s attitude concerning Vietnam also took on a more cautious tone. In that respect, Rapacki’s somewhat defensive 15 February reply to Jaszczuk is revealing:

We [Poles] hope that it is clear to them [Soviets] that:

- 1) We did not insinuate anything to the [North] Vietnamese, except only to make them aware that the matter [was] important, even though we rejected the first American proposition;⁴¹
- 2) We were careful, all the more since [the North Vietnamese] Ambassador [in Warsaw Tran Chi Hien] immediately accentuated, with his entire honesty, the differences of the views within the Party;⁴²
- 3) We limited ourselves to taking notes, asking his position and listening to his long arguments, which we considered “symptomatic, but not conclusive.”⁴³

Maneli and the January 1963 Initiative

In early March, shortly before departing for Hanoi, Maneli wrote to Romuald Spasowski, the Director of the Polish Foreign Office Bureau for Asia and Africa, that Goburdhun expected the following from the Polish delegate:

It would be advised that the North and the guerillas gave Diem some respite. Then, as Diem promised Goburdhun, he will get rid of the Americans himself and he will join the India line... What can mainly be sensed from the arguments of Goburdhun is the following: Since I am leaving for Hanoi tomorrow, I should be convincing the North to

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 24 April 1963, translation in appendix.

⁴¹ It is not clear what American proposition Rapacki refers to here.

⁴² It is not clear what Rapacki refers to here, but most likely, the allusion is to differences over the Sino-Soviet split and the advisability of pursuing an armed struggle even at the risk of an escalated conflict with the Americans.

⁴³ See telegram from Rapacki (Warsaw) to Jaszczuk (Moscow), 15 February 1963, translation in appendix.

give Diem a chance to endure, because any other regime will be worse. He is fascinated by the promises which Diem and Nhu made [to him] that they would join the political line of Nehru. For example, what we observed today was that [Mrs.] Nhu was at his villa for four hours.⁴⁴

While in Hanoi, Maneli met with DRV Premier Pham Van Dong and Soviet Ambassador Suren Tovmassian. He relayed that the premier emphasized several times that the North Vietnamese policy regarding general Vietnamese matters entirely corresponded with that of Moscow and Warsaw and that they wanted decisively to carry out the Geneva Accords. During the visit, Pham Van Dong emphasized that Hanoi had and would continue to consider the Geneva Accords as beneficial and that it did not want any foreign military bases in Vietnam.⁴⁵ According to Maneli, the statement of Pham Van Dong presented consent to carry out something along the lines of neutralization not only of the South, but also of the North, under the condition that different terminology be used as far as the process of neutralization.

What is curious about this report, however, is that Pham Van Dong also stated that, “the goal of the fighting in the South [was] aimed at establishing a government of a very wide democratic range of the Laotian type and the intensification of the fight in the South lead[ing] to an international conference.”⁴⁶ Maneli reminded Pham Van Dong of the statement of Gorbudhun which emphasized that the Americans would withdraw only if they were to save face. Pham Van Dong acknowledged this fact and stated that in such circumstances “the Poles would surely find some intelligent formula”⁴⁷ to solve the problem. This statement was, however, quite ambiguous, as it did not call on the Poles to directly get in contact with either Diem or his brother Nhu, and therefore it is difficult to discern what Pham Van Dong meant by this and how supportive the North Vietnamese would be of a so-called Polish “intelligent formula.”

On 22 March 1963, after Maneli’s visit to Hanoi, the DRV Ambassador in Warsaw presented the Poles the Vietnamese position regarding Galbraith’s initiative.⁴⁸ Michałowski summed up Hanoi’s views—essentially saying the time was not right, or ripe, for negotiations but authorizing further probing of the American position through Galbraith—soon afterward in a cable to Jaszczuk:

The Vietnamese comrades think that the fight of the national liberation movement will eventually lead to an international solution of the problem in South Vietnam. They see such a solution in the form of an international conference based on those of 1954 and 1962, which would enable the victory of our camp while still saving face for the US. While stipulating that in their opinion the situation in South Vietnam has not yet matured

⁴⁴ Ciphergram No. 3002 from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski-Pohoryles (Warsaw), 7 March 1963, 6/77, w-108, t-625.

⁴⁵ See telegram from Maneli (Hanoi) to Spasowski-Morski (Warsaw), 11 March 1963, translation in appendix.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Galbraith recommended pulling out American troops out of South Vietnam and leaving the problem to the Vietnamese, as he saw U.S. military involvement as a “slippery slope.” He favored “dropping” Diem, as he (and Kennedy) saw that the South Vietnamese leader would not be able to make any positive political changes in Vietnam. See Jones, *Death of a Generation*, pp. 132-134. In addition to published sources, Jones cites a 2001 interview with Galbraith.

for such a conference to be taking place, the Vietnamese comrades agree that the continuation of sounding out the real intentions of the United States is desirable.

The probe could lead to an explanation of whether the United States already truly desires a peaceful settlement of the problem in South Vietnam. The probe would also aim at explaining the American conception regarding a ceasefire for a period of six months, withdrawal of foreign troops, and the neutralization of both parts of the country. They are asking us to undertake the continuation of the probe as to the American side. We intend to authorize Ogrodzinski to broach the topic with Galbraith.⁴⁹

However, it is not clear whether such a meeting ever took place between Galbraith and Ogrodzinski, as no evidence has yet surfaced, either in the Polish or American documents. It is correct to assume, however, that Ogrodzinski himself seemed interested in the issue of Vietnam, as on March 4 he cabled to Michalowski asking him if he should perhaps discuss Vietnam with Indian Foreign Minister Desai during their private dinner.⁵⁰ Although the author of this paper was not able to uncover specific instructions from Warsaw to Ogrodzinski upon his request, his March 15 cable from New Delhi indicates that he broached the Vietnam issue with the Indians and was informed about their position towards the Rapacki-Galbraith peace initiative.⁵¹ It is plausible that Ogrodzinski was never authorized to meet with Galbraith on this matter, since Poland may have received a negative response from the Soviets. Moreover, India still did not have a clear line of approaching the situation in Vietnam. Although Nehru and Finance Minister M. R. Desai supported the idea of neutralization, Ogrodzinski observed that, "Nehru himself would like very much to withdraw India from Vietnam in order to 'leave China and the US one on one.'" ⁵² It is worth noting, however, that in a March 22 report to Warsaw, Maneli mentioned that the DRV liaison officer to the ICC, Ha Van Lau (code-named "Ludwik" in Polish cables) and Soviet officials ("Mikołaj") had both asked him to "widen the contacts to the maximum" given "the period of new decisions" in Hanoi.⁵³ That is perhaps why Maneli requested that the Polish personnel, i.e. translators, remain and not be recalled to Warsaw as they were needed in South Vietnam. It is not entirely clear what the reference to "new decisions" signified, but the fact that Maneli was asked to "expand the contacts" could have meant that: Hanoi was serious about neutralization and therefore wanted to get closer to South Vietnam; or, conversely, that Hanoi was more interested in a subversive policy in the South and that is why it needed Polish channels in South Vietnam. The documentation available thus far indicates that it was most likely the latter.

Thus, despite Rapacki's proposal for Vietnam's neutralization in early 1963, the initial excitement and high hopes of India's government and diplomats in Saigon, and the Soviet interest in the matter, the initiative seems to have fizzled out. The North Vietnamese seemed to have been "talking big," but not following up, as they were not

⁴⁹ See telegram from Michalowski (Warsaw) to Jaszczuk (Moscow), 4 April 1963, translation in appendix.

⁵⁰ See telegram from Ogrodzinski (New Delhi) to Michalowski (Warsaw), 4 March 1963, translation in appendix.

⁵¹ See telegram from Ogrodzinski (New Delhi) to Wierna (Warsaw), 15 March 1963, translation in appendix.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ciphergram No. 3706, Maneli (Saigon) to Puta, Pohoryles and Wajda (Warsaw), 22 March 1963: 6/77, w-102, t-625.

sure about the intentions of the Americans and were also influenced more by the Chinese than the Soviets. In the end, the Americans did not respond, while the Soviets, and therefore the Poles, decided to distance themselves from the problematic situation in Vietnam.

Maneli and Hanoi

Maneli visited Hanoi and met with the North Vietnamese leadership on several occasions during 1963. In his memoirs, he presents excerpts from reports to Warsaw and refers to anecdotes from his interactions with North Vietnamese leaders. In the Polish foreign ministry archives, the present author was able to locate some, but not all, of the reports Maneli refers to, as well as many additional ones. Most of the meetings pertained to Poland's work in the ICC, including numerous political battles it waged with the Indian and Canadian representatives on issues such as chemical weapons and increased U.S. involvement in South Vietnam. Some cables describe general discussions regarding the North Vietnamese future plans, often emphasizing Hanoi's desire for unification and the removal of US troops, as well as some nebulous discussion of neutralizing South Vietnam along Laotian lines. One of Maneli's most important visits came in late May, when he reported conversations with top leaders regarding Poland's role in potential contacts with Saigon:

Everyone considers our task of carrying out political probes regarding all Vietnamese matters to be particularly important and perhaps most urgent. We were reminded of the great usefulness of the probes conducted by [previous Polish ICC delegate] Ambassador Pohoryles, and given the new situation⁵⁴ in particular, we should show all the more activity and quickly provide information. They [North Vietnamese] are expecting that due to the crisis in American politics, more and more people from the diplomatic corps and from the government in the South will be seeking contacts with us. Premier [Pham Van Dong] and the Minister of Foreign Affairs [Xuan Thuy] presented what they wanted us to emphasize during the contacts.⁵⁵

During the same visit, the North Vietnamese also told Maneli that they were interested in opening some kind of economic relations with South Vietnam. Maneli noted in his cables to Warsaw that Xuan Thuy asked him to relay to "those interested in the South that they wanted to begin cultural and economic exchange (coal for rice) before the political settlements."⁵⁶ It is not entirely clear whom Xuan Thuy meant by "those interested," as the names of either Diem or Nhu were not mentioned in the report. It could be tempting to think that closer contacts between the North and the South were in fact established through Maneli. However, it is still not clear whether Maneli was the first person to inform Nhu about the desire of the North for trade exchange, or whether

⁵⁴ By "the new situation," Maneli most likely meant the great disturbances taking place in South Vietnam due to the Buddhist crisis which had erupted in Hue earlier that month.

⁵⁵ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 29 May 1963, translation in appendix.

⁵⁶ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 31 May 1963, translation in appendix. Maneli emphasizes in his memoirs that during this meeting the North Vietnamese indeed seemed to be very ready to start negotiations any time, secretly or publicly. See Maneli (1971), p.121.

Nhu had already been informed about it through some other sources such as the French, the National Liberation Front (NLF), or perhaps even Hanoi itself.

Meetings with Nhu: “Must Have Been a Communist Mediation!”

In his memoirs, Maneli acknowledged having met with Nhu on two occasions, publicly on 25 August and privately on 2 September 1963, having shuttled back and forth between Saigon and Hanoi in order to meet with the North Vietnamese leaders, and to having copied many of his cables to Moscow and Hanoi. He vehemently denied, however, acting as mediator between Hanoi and Saigon. Instead, he emphasized that he acted within the framework of the ICC. Yet in his 1975 *New York Times* article, Maneli openly declared that he had participated in behind-the-scenes diplomatic negotiations and stated, “In the spring of 1963, I was secretly asked by President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, the secret-police Ngo Dinh Nhu, through Roger Lalouette, the French Ambassador to Saigon, to approach the Government in Hanoi in order to explore the possibilities for a peaceful resolution of the struggle.”⁵⁷ Maneli further described the alleged plans developed by the North Vietnamese leaders for neutralization of South Vietnam which would entail the development of postal, economic, and cultural relations between North and South. The economic exchange, Maneli stated, would have involved Hanoi’s production of industrial goods that would be paid for by South Vietnam with rice. In the article, Maneli compared the situations in Vietnam in 1963 and in 1975 by pointing out that “nothing has changed” and emphasizing how the North Vietnamese were caught up in the “Moscow-Beijing game.” Finally, Maneli asserted that he “pursued matters further” by probing the North Vietnamese as to the country’s future if the United States withdrew its troops. According to Maneli, the North would be prepared to give all kinds of substantial guarantees and accept American participation in the supervisory process. He asserted that the North Vietnamese were willing to accept a negotiated agreement whose result would not have been worse for the West than the one in 1973; Vietnam would be divided into two parts with free commercial and cultural intercommunication. He thus concluded that after ten years of war and two years of “peace,” the problems of 1963 were still relevant in 1975.⁵⁸

Curiously, he did not mention his 2 September 1963 meeting with Nhu. Thus, what he essentially tells us is that he met and discussed matters with the North Vietnamese, but *not* whether he relayed these plans to the South Vietnamese. In other words, he tells us a one-sided story whose purpose it is to emphasize that he played an instrumental role in 1963 in the attempts to bring peace in Vietnam by being involved in “behind-the-scenes diplomatic negotiations.” As will be shown below, the newly uncovered evidence from the Polish archives paints a less straightforward story.

Contemporaneous secret American sources—including three now declassified telegrams from the CIA station in Saigon—raised the possibility that Maneli might be involved in secret North-South mediation. On 2 September 1963, the CIA reported a 30 August conversation with an unidentified source (whose name is censored) who was quoted as stating that, “Several times in the past months Maneli has asked him [*name*

⁵⁷ Maneli. “Vietnam, ’63 and Now.”

⁵⁸ These problems included: Vietnam’s division, Hanoi’s isolation and reluctant supported by its allies, Vietcong attacks, and the unpopularity of a Saigon regime in which the South Vietnamese generals seem more dedicated to internal squabbles than fighting the communists

not declassified] to tell Nhu that the Polish Commissioner [is] also available for messages to [Pham Van] Dong. Maneli asked [*less than 1 line not declassified*] also to convey this word to Nhu. Both [*less than 1 line not declassified*] declined [to] serve as intermediary to Nhu.”⁵⁹ Late on the evening of 2 September, Lodge cabled a report of a conversation with Nhu that afternoon in which the Vietnamese reported on his talk with Maneli. According to Nhu, the Pole had drawn his attention to statements by De Gaulle (in favor of neutralization) and Ho Chi Minh (apparently his terms for a cease-fire between the NLF and the “Diemist forces” in Saigon, as stated to communist journalist Wilfred Burchett and published in *The New York Times* on 29 May 1963) and asked Nhu what he might report to Pham Van Dong. Nhu assured Lodge that he had rebuffed the overture: “Nothing,” he claimed to have responded. “As regards De Gaulle, while he has a right to his opinion, those who do not take part in the fight have no right to interfere. Our loyalty to the Americans forbids us to consider either statement. The Americans are the only people on earth who dare to help South Vietnam. Therefore I have no comment.”⁶⁰

Four days later, on 6 September, the CIA reported further on Maneli’s purported involvement in “mediations,” based entirely on a two-hour conversation that day with Nhu:

...Nhu said Italian Ambassador D’Orlandi and Indian High Commissioner Goburdhun had asked him to see Polish ICC Commissioner Maneli to find out ‘what is in his gut.’ Maneli had made several previous efforts to talk with Nhu but had not been received. As a result of D’Orlandi and Goburdhun’s persuasion, Nhu received Maneli about three days ago. Maneli expressed the view that Nhu should take advantage of de Gaulle’s declaration and enter into negotiations with Hanoi. Maneli said that he had been authorized by the DRV’s Prime Minister Pham Van Dong to act as intermediary. He suggested to Nhu that SVN [South Vietnam] could sell rice and beer to North Vietnam in return for coal. [He] volunteered to be at Nhu’s service at any hour of the day or night. Maneli told Nhu he was the only man in SVN who could dare to undertake such negotiations.⁶¹

At least some US officials took such reports seriously. On September 13, in the midst of the rumors, Lodge sent Rusk an “eyes only” telegram alerting him to the need to study “what our response should be if Nhu, in the course of a negotiation with North Vietnam, should ask the US to leave South Vietnam or to make a major reduction in forces”—a request the ambassador (who found it “obvious to me that we must not leave” Vietnam) termed “obviously the only trump card [Nhu’s] got and it is obviously of the highest importance.”⁶² Nhu did his best to stir the pot. In a 40-minute meeting with his generals on 16 September, Nhu had repeated the tale of the Pole’s alleged mediation. A CIA telegram the following day reported, “He told the generals that Maneli had brought him a proposal from DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong for the start of trade between

⁵⁹ Telegram from CIA station in Saigon, 2 September 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 4, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Telegram 403 from US embassy in Saigon (Lodge), 2 September 1963, 10 pm, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 4, p. 85.

⁶¹ Telegram from CIA station in Saigon, 6 September 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 4, pp. 125-126.

⁶² Telegram 505 from US embassy in Saigon (Lodge) to Rusk, 13 September 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 4, p. 203; see also Miller, *Vietnam and Beyond*, p. 73.

North and South Vietnam ... Maneli had stated that he was at Nhu's complete disposal and ready to fly to Hanoi at a moment's notice."⁶³

The Polish archival evidence tells somewhat a different story. As presented in Maneli's cables, as well as in his memoirs, it was indeed several Western diplomats, especially French Ambassador Lalouette, and the Indian Ambassador Goburdhun, and to a lesser extent Italian Ambassador d'Orlandi, who wanted to arrange a meeting with Nhu as soon as Maneli arrived to Saigon. Thus, they corroborate this part of the CIA reporting. However, the Polish evidence so far discovered does *not* support the contention that Maneli made efforts to meet with Nhu.

As Polish documents indicate, the first encounter between the two took place in a public setting during a South Vietnamese foreign ministry reception on 25 August. It was allegedly brief, but pleasant. In his memoirs, Maneli recounted that d'Orlandi and the Vatican representative, Monsignor Salvatore d'Astata, arranged the meeting; his cable to Warsaw credited the French and Italian ambassadors. Nonetheless, Maneli recalls that he was surprised at how warmly Nhu welcomed him and how well he spoke of Poland.⁶⁴ In his cable to Warsaw reporting the conversation—sent at noon on Friday, August 30, that is, five days after the event—Maneli reported that Nhu had not only greeted him with “ostentatious kindness” but had invited him for a talk. “Tovmassian recommends that I go,” he added, evidently referring to a prior conversation in Hanoi with Moscow's ambassador to North Vietnam.⁶⁵

In his memoirs, Maneli noted that he had informed Warsaw regarding his intention to see Diem's controversial brother for a second, one-on-one conversation: “I cabled the news of my appointment with Nhu, and as usual received no answer from Warsaw. I could interpret their silence to mean: we have no objections. Act within the framework of general instructions, in concert with our Vietnamese and Soviet comrades.”⁶⁶ Maneli did not explain, however, the meaning of “in concert with our Vietnamese and Soviet comrades” and therefore we cannot be entirely certain what he understood to be their views.

Moreover, Maneli did not state in his memoirs when he cabled the news to Warsaw—leaving the apparently misleading impression that he did so promptly. Perhaps other documents reveal that he informed Warsaw right after the meeting occurred, rather than waiting five days, but the present author could not locate any. In any case, the contents of the 30 August cable strongly indicate that this was the first piece of information he communicated to Warsaw about his encounter with Nhu. What complicates matters even more is that this cable was not decoded until Monday, 2 September, at 18:15 (6:15 p.m.) Warsaw time, just fifteen minutes before the deciphering of a subsequent Maneli cable dated 2 September informing senior foreign ministry official Romuald Spasowski that the second meeting with Nhu was about to take place in

⁶³ Telegram from CIA station in Saigon, 17 September 1963, in *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 4, pp. 239-240.

⁶⁴ Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, pp. 136-139. In the same account, Maneli also recalls his short encounter with the newly arrived U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Maneli states that Lodge only asked him about the time difference between Warsaw and Vietnam. One may argue that this was a missed opportunity for the United States to get closer to Poland, especially since later that evening Maneli talked to Nhu and therefore Lodge could have gained some information from the Polish delegate who was shuttling between Saigon and Hanoi.

⁶⁵ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 30 August 1963, translation in appendix.

⁶⁶ Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, p. 139.

“a few hours.” Therefore, by the time the 30 August and the 2 September cables were decoded--both at about the same time, early Monday evening, 2 September, in Poland--the second, private meeting with Nhu had already taken place in Saigon.

It is perhaps tempting to think that sending the cable five days after the encounter was something innocent or perhaps even an honest mistake on Maneli's part. In other words, Maneli might have written the cable whenever he was able to get around to it. Although this scenario is quite plausible, nonetheless the telegram's peculiar timing raises several questions. Given that a meeting with Nhu would surely cause interest and further instructions from Warsaw, why did Maneli wait five days to tell Warsaw about the encounter? Was sending the cable on 30 August deliberate on his part given that it was a Friday and there was a chance that the cable would sit in the Decoding Department over the weekend and therefore not reach Spasowski until Monday? If Maneli were indeed waiting for instructions from Warsaw, as he claims in his memoirs, why did he not designate the cable “urgent” or “immediate”? Was the negligence perhaps on the Warsaw side for not decoding the cable earlier? Or was it that it was simply a weekend and since the cable was not marked “immediate” or “urgent” it sat undeciphered until sometime on Monday, 2 September?

All of the above seemingly mundane questions are of great importance because the Polish government was incensed when it found out that Maneli had visited Nhu in private. Warsaw fumed especially because the relations between Diem's government and the United States were becoming increasingly tense and Warsaw, as well as Moscow, did not want to become entangled in this already troubled relationship. In his defense, Maneli blamed Michałowski, whom he disparaged as “an adroit opportunist blindly following the Soviet line of non-involvement in any mediation in Vietnam.”⁶⁷ Maneli stated in his memoirs:

Michałowski had no doubt that the “peace mission” and mediation between Hanoi and Saigon would not be welcomed by either Moscow or Beijing...Michałowski – although – this is paradoxical – knew the intention of Moscow even better than Tovmassian, the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi, who urged me to accept Nhu's invitation and believed that Russia really wanted peace in Vietnam.⁶⁸

He further writes that Michałowski sent a cable a few days after Maneli's second meeting with Nhu already took place. In this cable, he allegedly forbade him to meet with Nhu. Maneli claims that Michałowski already knew about the private meeting and was even informed about the content of the conversation.⁶⁹ According to Maneli, this is what Michałowski wrote: “We advise you against paying a visit to Nhu. He may use it for provocative purposes. Ignore the invitation.”⁷⁰ The author of this paper was not able to locate this cable in the Polish archives. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence to indicate that there were other cables sent to Maneli *prior* to his meetings with Nhu instructing him not to participate in any negotiations or undertake any initiatives on his own. One such cable, dispatched in early June 1963, specifically forbade Maneli to undertake any mediating role (emphases added):

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 148

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 147

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 147

Your task is to act according to Poland's obligations as the member of the Commission, our line of carrying out the Geneva Accords (thus according to [that of] the USSR), as well as our concern for maintaining our prestige. Therefore:

- a) You **must not** (despite the pressure from the Vietnamese) commit yourself to any activity beyond the matters resulting from the participation in the Commission and those defined by the Geneva Accords. This applies to our entire personnel.
- b) Your relations outside of the Commission should be of a social character. Remember that you are not accredited in [South] Vietnam. You represent Poland's position in all conversations. **Do not take up any mediating roles.**
- c) You can convey to the Friends [the North Vietnamese] the opinions of the embassies in Saigon. It would be best to do so orally in Hanoi. They [North Vietnamese] should understand, however, that this is not your obligation, but an expression of our friendly relations.⁷¹

The above cable clearly illustrates Warsaw's position and expectations of Maneli and his work.

Unaware that his purported mediation activities had not been authorized by his own government, in the autumn of 1963 diplomats and especially journalists plunged into speculation regarding Maneli, who after all was a Polish diplomat—a representative of the communist world—able to shuttle back and forth regularly between Saigon and Hanoi thanks to his ICC position. Not surprisingly, the 2 September meeting with Nhu aroused rumors and speculation about its purpose—especially in the American press, which quickly linked it with French efforts to promote a neutralization settlement in Vietnam and De Gaulle's highly-publicized statement just a few days earlier. In a front-page story on September 5, for instance, *The New York Times* underlined Paris' renewed activism and drew specific attention to Saigon's allegedly "warming attitude" toward Maneli, who was revealed (accurately) to have had a "two-hour private interview" with Nhu.⁷²

On 18 September, the influential journalist Joseph Alsop weighed in with a column that stirred a diplomatic tempest.⁷³ Then making a visit to Saigon, the hawkish syndicated columnist for the *New York Herald Tribune* published an article (reprinted in *The Washington Post* and elsewhere), entitled "Very Ugly Stuff," in which he alleged that Maneli offered his services to the Ngo family to establish contact with Hanoi.⁷⁴ Basing his account on a conversation with Nhu at Gia Long Palace, Alsop wrote that "at [French Ambassador Roger] L'Alouette's request and urging (again the words are Nhu's own), the acting Polish member for the International Control Commission, Dr. Mieczysław Maneli, came to see the Councillor [Nhu]. Besides urging upon Nhu all the

⁷¹ Ciphergram No. 6333 Spasowski (Warsaw) to Maneli (Saigon), 4 June 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625 (emphasis is mine).

⁷² Robert Trumbull, "Paris Seen Trying to Regain a Role in South Vietnam," *The New York Times*, 5 September 1963, pp. 1, 4.

⁷³ See Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop: Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996; citation from Penguin ed., 1997), esp. pp. 404-405.

⁷⁴ Joseph Alsop, "Very Ugly Stuff," *The New York Herald Tribune (European Edition)*, 18 September 1963, p.4, and *The Washington Post*, 18 September 1963, p. A17.

arguments already urged by L'Alouette, Maneli carried a personal message from the Prime Minister of North Vietnam, Pham Van Dong." According to Alsop, Nhu stated that Pham Van Dong's message "begged me to open negotiations" based on Ho Chi Minh's cease-fire proposal. Nhu further emphasized that, although "the offer" was "almost attractive," he had to tell the Pole—as he had reassured Lodge—that he could not open negotiations behind the Americans' backs. Nhu was further reported to have told Alsop that he had an interesting conversation with Maneli who allegedly stated that as a communist he considered Nhu the only serious theorist of the guerilla warfare in the non-communist world. Nhu told Alsop that Maneli pledged that "he would wait for a different reply from [him] 24 hours a day" and emphasized that at "any time of the day or night" Nhu could call upon Maneli who would fly "that instant" to Hanoi. Cautiously, Alsop noted that Nhu clearly hoped to gain leverage by describing "the French-sponsored Polish-transmitted" approach from Hanoi. Nevertheless, Alsop concluded that even after such allowance was made "the facts all too clearly point to a French intrigue...to defeat American policy [in South Vietnam]." Although the article blamed Paris, most of the rumors surrounded Maneli and thus Poland's role in the ICC.

Warsaw reacted angrily to the article. A September 21 cable to Maneli, coded "Top Secret" (with an exclamation mark!), instructed him to relay immediately the contents of the conversation with Nhu including any additional elements that could have provoked such an article to appear in the Western press. Maneli was further told to publish a *démenti* (denial) in the press stating that he did not act as intermediary and that Alsop's information was blatantly "fabricated."⁷⁵ Apparently as a result, Maneli took the unusual step of inviting to dinner at the ICC compound (the Champ des Mars) two of the most prominent American reporters in Saigon—David Halberstam of *The New York Times* and Neil Sheehan of United Press International, both known for their critical coverage of the Diems, especially their recent crackdown on the Buddhists.⁷⁶ As Sheehan (later famous for his role in publishing the Pentagon Papers and his prize-winning study of John Paul Vann) recalled recently, "Maneli wanted us to write a *démenti*"—the unusual word stuck out in his memory more than four decades later—"that he had been involved in any intrigue between Nhu and Hanoi."⁷⁷ Uncertain how to treat the information, however, neither reporter published a story repeating Maneli's denial—although the conversation may have contributed to Halberstam's conclusion that Nhu might "at times play with the idea of a neutralist solution, including an agreement with Hanoi," but was "not really serious" and instead primarily "found the idea valuable in keeping Washington off balance."⁷⁸

Maneli's denials eventually found their way into print, however. His *démenti* was published on 23 September in the *Bulletin* of the French embassy in Saigon, which heavily circulated in diplomatic, especially European, circles in the South Vietnamese

⁷⁵ Ciphergram No. 10788 Korolczyk (Warsaw) to Maneli (Saigon) 21 September 1963, 6/77, w-108, t-625.

⁷⁶ See William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

⁷⁷ Neil Sheehan, telephone interviews with James G. Hershberg, 29 August 2004 and 1 March 2005. Sheehan recalled that Maneli, who impressed him as experienced and intelligent, did not seem particularly anxious or agitated during the dinner—even though it now appears that he was urgently trying to satisfy his superiors in Warsaw that he had not overstepped his instructions or created an embarrassing diplomatic scandal.

⁷⁸ David Halberstam, "Neutralism Idea Irks Vietnamese," *The New York Times*, 29 September 1963, p. 15.

capital, and subsequently appeared in *Le Monde* on 24 September. The former stated, "Maneli did not transmit any information from North Vietnam to Ngo Dinh Nhu regarding a proposition for ceasefire."⁷⁹ It made sense for the French to disseminate Maneli's denial, since it fit with Parisian protests that Alsop's claims that France and Poland were intriguing to undermine Washington were "pure imagination."⁸⁰

Warsaw's incensed reaction regarding Maneli's visit with Nhu, despite the circulated *démenti*, did not quickly subside and was still palpable in a September 27 cable to him (emphases added):

1. Both oral instructions, as well as the written ones (2675 from March and 6333 from June)⁸¹ defined your tasks in the Commission and beyond it...The instruction recommended that you also do not commit yourself to any activity beyond the matters resulting from participation in the Commission, ***even in the case that you are asked by the Vietnamese comrades***. This means that as far as political matters are concerned, which go beyond the framework of the Commission, you should act [only] after having consulted with the head office [in Warsaw].
2. We are asking [you] to maintain close ties with Hanoi as far as matters [regarding] the Commission, as well as to consult with the head office about any move of critical importance...
3. As we expected, Nhu discussed your visit in the ongoing Paris-Washington-Saigon game, ***with which you should be familiar, but in which you should not engage***.⁸²

Maneli's handwritten reply to the above cable, found in the Polish archives, corresponds with the explanations in his memoirs (emphasis added):

1. I am trying to carry out the instructions within my capabilities. The Commission and its agendas are not working (for the past 8 months of my stay there were three meetings) which requires a lot of hassle. All my contacts are those of a social character. ***There was no single incident in which I would act as a mediator in anything at the request of the Vietnamese comrades***; I have been informing you about everything without delay.
3. ...I am presenting the facts as far as the issue of Nhu. I immediately conveyed the public invitation by Nhu at the party – yours 393. On 1 September, I received an invitation signed by the chief of the Liaison Mission for 2 September. I understood the lack of your reply as the lack of reservations [on your part], and I knew about the positive position of the Soviet comrades. I therefore thought that I could not decline [the invitation]. I made this decision in very difficult conditions. I received your [cable], which prohibited me to go [to meet with Nhu] on 5 September, that is, after I

⁷⁹ A.F.P. *Le délégué polonais à la C.I.C. démentit les allégations de M. Alsop*, 23 September 1963, quoted in Note from Spasowski to Minister Naszkowski, Warsaw 28 September 1963, Department V, 24/1/63, AMSZ, Warsaw.

⁸⁰ "Effort by French in Saigon Reported," *The New York Times*, 19 September 1963, p. 5.

⁸¹ Unfortunately, the present author was unable to locate the 2675 cable from March, but, as indicated above, the 6333 cable from June is available.

⁸² Ciphergram No. 11026 from Spasowski (Warsaw) to Maneli (Saigon), 27 September 1963, 6/77, w-108, t-625 (emphasis added).

sent the report of the conversation. As to the *démenti*, I sent it before your 10788 (our 466)...⁸³

Maneli's reply hinted at his frustration with the work of the ICC, and indirectly perhaps with his own government, as well as his own helplessness as regards solving the Vietnamese conflict. The fact that this reply corresponds to the account in his memoirs suggests that Maneli was already fed up with the situation in Vietnam while there and not only retrospectively after he had left his post in Saigon, and later Poland for the United States.

In his memoirs, Maneli states that he did not act as a "special emissary" from Hanoi and emphasized that "Nhu understood that very well." Even though this may have been Maneli's understanding Nhu publicly claimed that Maneli was Hanoi's envoy. This announcement, however, seemed to have been more of an effort by Nhu to blackmail the United States which was increasingly exasperated by the Diem's regime's inability or unwillingness to combat the internal communist opposition.

Furthermore, Maneli's naiveté, or perhaps a purposeful misunderstanding, as to the official position of the Soviet government, and thus his own government, are apparent in the above cable and therefore serve as the immediate causes of his decision to see Nhu in private. The fact that we are not able to locate the 5 September cable from Warsaw, to which Maneli refers in his memoirs, further complicates our analysis and leaves certain pieces of the puzzle unanswered. In other words, we are not sure whether such a cable was sent to Maneli before or after the meeting with Nhu, or even if such a cable existed at all. Moreover, the fact that he decided to meet privately with Nhu could also be attributed to his inexperience, as Maneli was not a professional diplomat, but a university professor, who was appointed by the Polish government to represent Poland in the ICC. Therefore, such a meeting may not have seemed as controversial in his eyes as in those of Warsaw, and Moscow, which considered such a meeting a serious irritant in their relations with the West.

Maneli's October 1963 Report

In a lengthy 10 October 1963 report to the foreign ministry, *The Overall Assessment of the Situation in South Vietnam from Mid-August until Mid-October, 1963*, Maneli does not mention his visit with Nhu. The report—which is not mentioned in Maneli's memoirs—treats several main themes: 1) the Buddhist crisis which started in Hue on 8 May 1963 and gained momentum in July and August; 2) a contradictory US policy toward South Vietnam which on the one hand condemned Diem's regime and threatened to curtail economic aid, but on the other, upheld the name of the president and the army in South Vietnam and did not stop aid which would hamper the war effort; 3) the French attempt to exploit the divergences between Diem and the United States; and 4) Hanoi's policy toward South Vietnam.⁸⁴

⁸³ See (handwritten) telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 4 October 1963, translation in appendix (emphasis added).

⁸⁴ *The Overall Assessment of the Situation in South Vietnam from Mid August until Mid October, 1963*. 6/77, w-102, t-625.

The latter two themes are particularly interesting and pertinent to our discussion. Maneli notes that Hanoi mainly aimed its political and propaganda attacks against the United States and Diem, and not at all at Nhu. According to Maneli, this was particularly noticed by Western diplomats and journalists who began to spread rumors that there must have been some, even if indirect, contacts between Nhu-Diem and Ho Chi Minh, and there was speculation that France was involved in the mediation. But Maneli did not mention any gossip pertaining to him directly.

Nevertheless, what is revealing about this report is that the Hanoi leadership not only denied the existence of any North-South contacts to Western media and diplomats, but it also denied them to the Polish delegate, and particularly to Ambassador Tovmassian. In this report, Maneli quotes Xuan Thuy, who allegedly denied the existence of such contacts by stating jokingly to Maneli: "Do you really imagine us conferring with or agreeing with Mr. Nhu?"⁸⁵ Maneli's report, consistent with his memoirs, described the reactions of Nhu and Pham Van Dong regarding the rumors as to the contact between North and South: "Nhu asked, 'Are you also succumbing to these rumors?' as if in jest. It is also interesting to note that the first time I spoke of these rumors, Pham Van Dong reacted in identically the same way as Nhu. He asked, 'Do you believe it, comrade?'"⁸⁶ Maneli mentioned that one lower-ranking North Vietnamese officer admitted that high-level contacts existed between Hanoi and Saigon, but unfortunately he did not elaborate on this intriguing (and so far uncorroborated) statement.

Another revealing aspect of the North Vietnamese policy is evident through the words of Lieut. May Lam, then deputy chief of the DRV's Liaison Mission. Maneli quoted May Lam as stating to him in the fall of 1963: "We [the North Vietnamese] must exploit the divergences between Diem and the Americans to the very end. If there were to be a fight between the army troops loyal to Diem and between the assassins inspired by the United States, then we would back Diem against the Americans."⁸⁷ Yet another interesting aspect, noted by Maneli, is that Hanoi changed its attitude toward the French; that is, they treated the French representative in Vietnam on the par of an ambassador. But what, if anything, lay behind this treatment must await further Vietnamese sources.

Pressures from Hanoi?

Maneli maintained that he complied with Warsaw's instructions while in Saigon. In his cable in mid-May, he stressed that he remained strictly within his ICC role and acted as an observer rather than mediator. He stated, for example, that "in connection with your repeated instructions about not activating the Commission, I think that it is necessary that I strictly abide by it."⁸⁸ At the same time, however, Maneli noted that he could not be entirely neutral, since he was "forced to carry out specific maneuvers due to the wishes of the Vietnamese comrades and the opinion of the Soviet comrades."⁸⁹ The

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, p. 147.

⁸⁷ *The Overall Assessment of the Situation in South Vietnam from Mid August until Mid October, 1963*, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

⁸⁸ CIPHERGRAM No. 6690 from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 20 May 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

“maneuvers,” referred to by Maneli, included, for example, placing such issues as chemical weapons (i.e., U.S. use of defoliants, herbicides, et al.) and American intervention in the South on the agenda of the ICC meetings as a result of “a clear wish of Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and the Soviet Ambassador Tovmassian.”⁹⁰

These pressures from Hanoi may also be one of the reasons why Maneli decided to meet with Nhu in private. Indeed, in August, the North Vietnamese began to urge Maneli to become more active within the ICC on the issue of the American intervention in South Vietnam. The month before, in July, Jerzy Siedlecki, Warsaw’s newly-arrived ambassador to the DRV, had given a speech in Hanoi stating that Poland demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops from South Vietnam and an end to the policy of brutal terror and extermination of the Vietnamese people carried out by the corrupt Diem regime and the American imperialists. Afterward, Spasowski told Maneli, “We realize that such a pronouncement must complicate your work,” but “we understand that the Mission in the South approached the ICC about that. Inform us about the developments; of course, *without initiating anything on your own.*”⁹¹ Such sharper statements from Warsaw may have stemmed in part from increased North Vietnamese pressure, reflected in an appeal from DRV Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy to Rapacki transmitted on July 12 by Siedlecki:

The government of the DRV hopes that Poland, as the member of the ICC in Vietnam, would pay particular attention to the situation in the South, which is worsening day by day due to the aggressive war conducted by the American imperialists, and that it will use its powers and influence in order to stop the US from violating the Geneva Accords regarding Vietnam, from torpedoing the unification of Vietnam and from threatening peace and security in Indochina and South East Asia.⁹²

As the American involvement in South Vietnam expanded, and as it became apparent that the US government was fed up with Diem and Nhu, the North Vietnamese grew increasingly nervous. One obvious example of the change in US policy toward Diem’s regime was a sudden recall of US Ambassador Fredrik Nolting, who was sympathetic to the Saigon regime, and his replacement in July by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who did not share the same positive feelings toward the Ngo brothers. The North Vietnamese thus expected much more from the Poles than in previous years.

Why the 2 September Meeting with Nhu?

As mentioned above, Maneli informed Warsaw only a few hours prior to the meeting with Nhu.⁹³ He then cabled Warsaw on 5 September about how the meeting was arranged.⁹⁴ Maneli’s memoir account of his talk with Nhu generally corresponds with the cable he sent to Warsaw soon after the meeting.⁹⁵ He emphasized that Nhu touched upon very general themes and that the entire meeting was more Nhu’s monologue than a

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ciphergram No. 899, Spasowski (Warsaw) to Maneli (Saigon), 9 August 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625 (emphasis is mine).

⁹² Ciphergram 9289 Siedlecki (Hanoi) to Morski (Warsaw), 12 July 1963. 6/77, w-96, t-1368.

⁹³ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 2 September 1963, translation in appendix.

⁹⁴ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 5 September 1963, translation in appendix.

⁹⁵ See Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, pp.144-147.

conversation.⁹⁶ The fact that Maneli did not use expressions such as, “Nhu asked that I relay...” or “Nhu requested that...,” suggests that the purpose of the meeting, after all initiated by Nhu, was to scare the Americans.

Closer analysis of Maneli’s cable illustrates that Nhu wanted to show the United States that the North was allegedly serious about negotiating with Diem’s regime. If the United States did not aid the South Vietnamese government, Nhu implied, then the Americans would lose an important ally in Southeast Asia. Maneli acknowledged in his memoirs that he could not tell how serious the Ngo brothers were since “they were carrying on such a complicated and many-sided game that one could not be certain the direction in which they were heading.”⁹⁷ In *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., quotes Maneli as telling him that Nhu “was playing on many instruments at the same time.”⁹⁸ This is indeed supported by the fact that Nhu did not follow up on Maneli’s visit, as there is no evidence in the Polish archives that would indicate that Nhu contacted Maneli again after their meeting—leading one to surmise that he was not serious about entrusting Maneli with the role of a mediator.

Instead, Nhu seems to have exploited the meeting to his own advantage in attempts to blackmail the US government. Thus, the CIA report from 6 September, solely based on the conversation with Nhu, is not reliable as it presents only a one-sided view of a man looking for a way out of his difficult situation. It is quite plausible that Maneli was cautious not to reveal more information once he found out what Warsaw’s attitude was and once the frenzy of the Western press which fueled the rumors erupted in Saigon. What is curious, however, is that the alleged cable from Michałowski reached Maneli on 5 September, after Maneli already cabled to Warsaw on 2 September. Therefore, it is also plausible that he told the truth in his report. The fact that we have neither Maneli’s reports from Hanoi describing the meeting with Nhu to the North Vietnamese leadership nor Hanoi’s reply makes it difficult to say what, if anything, Maneli may have suggested or proposed to Nhu.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, given that Maneli received strict and straightforward instructions from the head office in Warsaw, why did he still want to meet with Nhu at this tense and critical time in Saigon? There are perhaps four explanations. First, Maneli went to see Nhu without any intention of becoming involved in mediation, but out of plain curiosity to hear out the seemingly desperate South Vietnamese leader. Perhaps he was hoping to find out whether North-South contacts really existed. Schlesinger writes, “Diem and Nhu, without Kennedy’s knowledge, were engaged in secret negotiations.”¹⁰⁰ He further states, basing his information on Maneli’s memoirs, that by August 1963 Maneli concluded that there was “a supersecret agreement between Diem-Nhu and Hanoi.”¹⁰¹ However, as presented above, there is ample evidence to support the fact that the Poles, and perhaps even the Soviets, were in the dark about North-South contacts. The fact that the North Vietnamese may have spoken of the possibility of an alliance with Diem-Nhu

⁹⁶ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 4 September 1963, translation in appendix.

⁹⁷ Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, p. 141.

⁹⁸ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, p. 719, quoting his 24 June 1977 interview with Maneli.

⁹⁹ See telegram from CIA Station in Saigon to CIA, 6 September 1963, in appendix, and telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 4 September 1963, translation in appendix, to compare the US and Polish sources.

¹⁰⁰ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, p. 717.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 719

against the Americans to Maneli does not necessarily suggest, as argued by Schlesinger, that a “secret agreement” was in place. Moreover, Maneli himself states that neither Nhu nor Pham Van Dong would admit to any contacts they may have had with each other. In fact, Maneli’s information often came from D’Orlandi and Lalouette and not from his North Vietnamese comrades. For example, in his 15 August 1963 cable to Warsaw, Maneli conveyed information from d’Orlandi regarding the rumors about secret contacts between Nhu and the government of Hanoi and the Italian’s confirmation that the elements vital to this alleged connection were predominantly Chinese.¹⁰²

Second, given Maneli’s close relationship with Lalouette it is plausible that with time he was swept along by the French ambassador’s incessant “plan” to neutralize Vietnam. Maneli discusses in his memoirs how he valued and respected Lalouette, his work and his concern for Vietnam.¹⁰³ It is also evident from numerous cables to Warsaw that Maneli met with Lalouette on many more occasions than with any other Western ambassador in Saigon. In fact, his meetings with other delegates in the ICC were not so frequent. It is also quite clear that it was Lalouette who usually initiated such visits, as he hoped that a political solution for Vietnam could perhaps be reached through the Polish delegate, who was perceived to have close ties with communist North Vietnam. In one cable in April, Maneli reported that Lalouette was convinced that the ICC would play an active role in the process of neutralizing Vietnam. According to Lalouette, this was to take place “anytime now” given that Canada was taking a more neutral position and not blindly following the United States. He stated that Nolting was “finished politically,” some of the Diem’s advisers were willing to get rid of the Americans, and thus there was a new atmosphere in Saigon where everyone was looking for new concepts of how to handle the situation.¹⁰⁴

The close relationship with the French ambassador is evident through yet another cable from May in which Maneli passed on information about the reasons why Diem’s regime was willing to reduce US forces in South Vietnam. According to Lalouette, even though the “intended experiment” of cutting US personnel was rather dangerous for both Diem and Nhu, they were willing to “begin this game” with the United States. Lalouette also mentioned that some French representatives in Hanoi were asked to probe Saigon in order to draw the North and South closer together.¹⁰⁵ The frequent huddles meetings with Lalouette raise the question of whether Maneli was drawn into the “French game” of trying to neutralize Vietnam—although the January initiative indicates that Poland was hardly averse to the idea. They also show that Lalouette was a valuable source of information for Maneli. In a 4 September cable, after his visit with Nhu, Maneli reported Lalouette’s view to Warsaw: “The French and the Poles should be working together jointly and discreetly in order to lead to North-South relations according to the Geneva Accords. If Diem and Nhu, I quote, ‘whom France has always criticized, hold onto power, then even weakened and hated, they will have to come into understanding with Hanoi. This will be an introduction for further evolution.’”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ciphergram No. 10625, Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 15 August 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹⁰³ Maneli, *War of the Vanquished*, pp. 114-115, 117-118, 120-122, 125-126, 141-142, and 150-152.

¹⁰⁴ Ciphergram No. 4295 Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 4 April 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹⁰⁵ Ciphergram No. 6655 Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 20 May 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹⁰⁶ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 4 September 1963, translation in appendix.

Third, Maneli felt that even though he did not receive official “go-ahead” from Warsaw, his visit was still justified because it was in accordance with the Soviet position expressed to him through Tovmassian. This, as we have seen, is evident in his 4 October reply to Warsaw’s angry cable from 27 September. Therefore, from Maneli’s perspective, he felt that his decision was fully justified since the Soviets approved. Russian historian Ilya Gaiduk emphasizes that although the USSR’s attitude toward the North-South exchanges in 1963 is not clear, primarily due to the lack of declassified Russian sources, one can infer that Moscow was interested in such an initiative, and therefore might have tacitly approved Maneli’s mediation to facilitate the contacts between Ngo Dinh Nhu and the North Vietnamese.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, quoting the aforementioned 6 September 1963 CIA cable from Saigon to Washington, Gaiduk asserts that Maneli encouraged Diem’s brother Nhu to seek contacts with the North and pretended that Pham Van Dong authorized him to act as mediator.¹⁰⁸ However, the Polish documents clearly show that Maneli was not authorized by the Polish government to carry out any mediation between Saigon and Hanoi. Therefore, there did not seem to be anything for the Soviets to approve of, whether tacitly or not. It is thus very doubtful that the Soviet Union was in any way involved in instructing Maneli to talk to Nhu, as Gaiduk suggests. On the contrary, the Soviet Union, and by extension Poland, opted to stay out of the intrigues of the fall of 1963. However, it remains possible that Tovmassian, perhaps without explicit instructions from Moscow, encouraged Maneli to see Nhu.

Finally, given the increased North Vietnamese pressure on Poland to act more aggressively within the ICC on Hanoi’s behalf, combined with the already desperate state of the South Vietnamese regime, Maneli may have well entertained the belief that seeing Nhu might contribute to the goals of ejecting the Americans, fostering North-South relations, and bringing peace to Vietnam. Such an attitude may have stemmed in part from what some colleagues felt was Maneli’s naiveté and inexperience in diplomatic matters.¹⁰⁹ As Schlesinger notes, “Maneli was a political scientist rather than a career diplomat, a survivor of Auschwitz and Maidanek, an admirer of Kennedy, with whom he had discussed Vietnam in Poland in 1959.”¹¹⁰

The “Maneli Affair,” Nhu, and the Americans

The Americans, who seemed to have believed many of the North-South contact rumors, and who were by that point already fed up with Diem, also sought information from Maneli. In late September, an unidentified officer of the American embassy in Saigon invited Maneli to a private dinner to discuss the situation in Vietnam.¹¹¹ As Maneli cabled on 25 September, the main purpose of the meeting was threefold: 1) to establish some type of a contact between the American embassy and the Polish

¹⁰⁷ Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy Toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1964*. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), p. 202.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202

¹⁰⁹ Author’s interview with a former high-level ranking Polish diplomat who asked not to be identified., Warsaw, 9 June 2004.

¹¹⁰ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, p. 718.

¹¹¹ Maneli refers to the official as a counselor named “Henry” but provides no further identification. It clearly does *not* appear to be Henry Cabot Lodge.

delegation; 2) an overall probe in case a meeting between Lodge and Maneli were to take place; and 3) to receive information about his conversation with Nhu.¹¹² (This time, the Polish government sent a written consent to Maneli to meet with Lodge if such an opportunity arose, but only if it were initiated by Lodge. Maneli, however, was reminded with some asperity that he was representing Poland and therefore in relaying the opinions of the DRV to the American he would have to remember that he was acting on behalf of the Polish foreign ministry and *not* the North Vietnamese. He was told to act with caution and to consult with the head office in Warsaw.¹¹³ However, such a meeting never materialized.) Naturally, the American was most curious about the last point. Maneli writes to Warsaw:

I said [that the 2 September talk] took place on the initiative of Nhu, and the invitation came through the liaison mission. Nhu said what he wanted [and] my questions pertained only to carrying out the Geneva Accords. To the question of how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assessed the conversation, I answered, "There is nothing to assess because Nhu said nothing new or important, and the visits of the representatives of the two countries are normal for the commission, as, for example, the recent visit of the Canadian Ambassador to the Prime Minister [Pham Van Dong] in the North."¹¹⁴

One wonders how much the American really believed Maneli's account (a US record of this dinner conversation has not been discovered). The paradox here is that Maneli was perhaps telling more truth than Nhu. Maneli does not state, however, whether he relayed to the US representative that Nhu was talking about neutralization and withdrawing US troops from South Vietnam. However, as Maneli mentioned, these were general themes of which the United States was most likely aware.¹¹⁵

Significantly, this cable also illuminates Hanoi's response to the Nhu-Maneli meeting. The Pole informed Warsaw that the North Vietnamese had sent their assessment of his conversation with Nhu—"that they were pleased with this fact [that we met] and they are asking to maintain contact."¹¹⁶ Although the North Vietnamese may have hoped for something more concrete, Maneli was not authorized by Warsaw, under any condition, to meet with Nhu again even if the North insisted.

Maneli had a chance to gain more first-hand impressions of North Vietnamese thinking when he went to Hanoi in early October and met with Pham Van Dong, Xuan Thuy, and Tovmassian. The most important aspect of the conversations, which is directly pertinent to our discussion, was that Maneli declined the request of the North Vietnamese to meet with Nhu if such an opportunity were to arise again.¹¹⁷ Upon his return from Hanoi, Maneli continued to be pestered by Western correspondents who wanted to know the "truth" about his meeting with Nhu. To both *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) and the *Christian Science Monitor*, Maneli declared: "I did not bring any propositions to the

¹¹² Telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 25 September 1963, translation in appendix.

¹¹³ See Ciphergram No. 1115, Spasowski (Warsaw) to Maneli (Saigon), 1 October 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹¹⁴ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 25 September 1963, translation in appendix.

¹¹⁵ Maneli also wrote that "Henry" spoke scornfully of Diem, his regime and his ideology.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Unfortunately, we do not have the cable from Hanoi to Maneli to see what the North Vietnamese may have proposed or suggested to relay to Nhu were such a meeting to take place again.

¹¹⁷ See telegram from Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 3 October 1963, translation in appendix.

South Vietnamese government; I was never authorized to do so; I did not convey anything [to Nhu], in contrast with what Alsop states. I am acting in accordance with the Geneva Accords and within the framework of the Commission.”¹¹⁸

The press rumors were heavily exploited by Nhu, who refused to write any type of a *démenti* to clear Maneli’s name. However, Nhu was not able to exploit the rumors for too long, as on 1 November 1963, a military junta backed by Washington ousted—and killed—both Nhu and Diem, bringing their regime to a bloody end.

“Maneli Affair” and the ICC

The rumors about Maneli persisted after the November coup and were exploited by the new South Vietnamese leadership. The strategy was to contribute to the legitimization of the new government. At the same time, they began to hurt the work of the ICC and tarnish the name of the Polish delegation. In a conversation with British Ambassador Etherington-Smith, Maneli emphasized that, “spreading such provocative rumors greatly complicates our activity [and therefore] the Saigon government should give a *démenti*”¹¹⁹ to clear his name. What is interesting about this cable is that the British Ambassador stated to Maneli that mediation between governments was in accordance with the Geneva Accords and would not be detrimental to the Poles.¹²⁰ Maneli reported that he quickly responded, “We did not [mediate] and we are acting only within the framework of the Commission.”¹²¹ The rumors spread by the new government seemed also to protect the French thereby making Poland a scapegoat in this entire hodgepodge, or “Paris-Saigon-Washington game” as Warsaw dubbed it. In early November, Maneli stated that, “according to Goburdhun, Lodge was also of the opinion that the lie was serious and its purpose was to protect the French.”¹²²

Other Western ambassadors, particularly from England and Italy, began to protest the statements of the new Saigon government and were, in fact, instrumental in their attempts to clear the name of the Polish delegation. The British ambassador, in particular, intervened with the South Vietnamese foreign minister to ensure that there were no more accusations directed at the Polish delegation in the press. Curiously, there was no mention of the French ambassador. The issue became all the more serious since the new leadership in Saigon threatened Poland’s position within the ICC. Therefore, the fact that other Western ambassadors were involved in clearing the name of the Polish delegate illustrates not only the solidarity with the Pole, but also a complex relationship among West Europeans, Americans, and the South Vietnamese regime.

Hanoi, the November Coup, and the Future of the ICC

Maneli set out for Hanoi again in early December 1963. He was warmly welcomed. The North Vietnamese expressed their gratitude for his information and

¹¹⁸ Ciphergram No. 12769 Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 4 October 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹¹⁹ Ciphergram No. 14254 Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 11 November 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ciphergram No. 14260 Maneli (Saigon) to Spasowski (Warsaw), 8 November 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

assessment of the situation in South Vietnam during and after the coup d'état. Unlike the chief delegates in the ICC from India and Canada, who were only allocated 20 minutes each to talk with the DRV's premier, Maneli conducted lengthy talks with Pham Van Dong, Xuan Thuy, a representative of the NLF, the chief of the Liaison Mission, and Tovmassian. He began to realize during this visit that there were many contradictions within the North Vietnamese leadership as far as the ICC's role. The opinions of Pham Van Dong and Xuan Thuy were especially contradictory. On the one hand, they emphasized the need to preserve the ICC, to strengthen its authority, and to improve Hanoi's cooperation with the body; on the other hand, they advocated that the Commission's supervisory groups be eliminated. Their justification for this decision was that many who worked in such posts were involved in espionage, especially the Canadians. Although the Vietnamese stressed that this would not have to occur immediately and that they were not going to make a unilateral decision, they began to act impatiently when Maneli mentioned that this was a complicated issue and that he had to wait for instructions from Warsaw. According to Tovmassian, Hanoi wanted to remove those posts which made it difficult to transfer weapons across the 17th parallel.¹²³

Both Pham Van Dong and Xuan Thuy saw the November 1963 coup as "beneficial and desired by the National Liberation Front," Maneli cabled Warsaw.¹²⁴ He wrote, however, that he was surprised by this "post-realistic" assessment since the options previously considered by Hanoi, and discussed with him, called for supporting Diem against the Americans. He discerned that Pham Van Dong had high hopes for a Laos-Cambodia-South Vietnam neutral bloc, with pro-French forces as the main "engines" supporting it.¹²⁵ What also stands out in this conversation is Pham Van Dong's statement that "the North, while complying with the Geneva Accords, will also be neutral, because this was a question of foreign policy and not internal relations."¹²⁶ Maneli noted that this was indeed a new aspect since previously Hanoi would categorically reject any mention of the "neutrality of the North" seeing it was contrary to the essence of a socialist country.

The issue of removing the ICC supervisory groups by the DRV was not new to Maneli, as he already learned about it from the Polish embassy in Hanoi in late November 1963. According to one cable, "coming out of the recommendation of the conference in Honolulu,¹²⁷ which postulated US intensification of the war with Vietcong as well as delaying elections until such a war was successful, Ha Van Lau presented both the past and the future of the ICC in rather dark colors questioning the efficiency and the purpose of the Commission's activity at a time when the Americans were breaking the Geneva Accords, intensifying military assistance, and intervening in the internal affairs of the South."¹²⁸ Judging from this cable, the ICC's prospects seemed precarious, as for the North Vietnamese, the Commission not only created no obstacles for the US military

¹²³ Ciphergram No. 15869 Maneli (Saigon) to Naszkowski (Warsaw), 11 December 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹²⁴ Ciphergram No. 15880 Maneli (Saigon) to Naszkowski (Warsaw), 11 December 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ The Honolulu Conference of US senior cabinet and military officials on November 20–21 was called to review plans in the wake of the November 1, 1963 Saigon coup.

¹²⁸ Telegram from Chodorek (Hanoi) to Morski (Warsaw) 25 November 1963, translation in appendix.

aggression in South Vietnam and their “breaking of the Geneva Accords,” but its activity deviated daily from Geneva’s principal goals.¹²⁹ Ha Van Lau particularly blamed the Indians for their pro-American stance and for carrying out a policy in Southeast Asia dictated by Washington. This is one reason why the DRV decided to limit the activity of the representatives of India and Canada by getting rid of the ICC posts in the South and in the North, excluding the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Ha Van Lau stated, however, that ad hoc groups could be established in Saigon and in Hanoi when such necessity arose and only when the conditions were favorable to the North Vietnamese. In order not to create too many difficulties between Poland and the two other ICC members, the DRV presented their motives as organizational and financial rather than political. Such decision was made soon after the coup, as Ha Van Lau alluded to a 13 November document while relaying this information to Maneli.¹³⁰

As far as the campaign in Saigon regarding alleged contacts between Diem and the North, Pham Van Dong told Maneli, “This is not true; the junta is announcing it in order to justify the disloyalty of Diem.” The fact that the North Vietnamese would not share this information with the Polish delegate indicates that the Vietnamese were still not comfortable with having Maneli as a trusted mediator despite the fact that they may have trusted the Pole more than the Soviets. Indeed, Tovmassian stated to Maneli, “We are isolated; you present the only source of substantial information [for us].”¹³¹

Maneli soon informed Warsaw about the possibility of the ICC supervisory groups being eliminated. The news was immediately dispatched to Moscow. In late November, Marian Naszkowski, Poland’s deputy foreign minister, expressed his concern about the issue and instructed Edmund Pszczółkowski, Polish ambassador to Moscow, to consult with the Soviets. He instructed him to emphasize that such groups, five in the North and in the South, were indeed not as operational and useful as they should have been, particularly when it came to controlling the military aspect of the conflict. Ever since an open American intervention, such groups in the South had even stopped notifying the ICC about the transportation of weapons and free movement of foreign military personnel. In the same cable, Naszkowski also pointed out that the conflict between China and India made India’s position in the ICC unfavorable to the interests of the DRV, which had already started to follow the Chinese line in the Sino-Soviet split. Naszkowski thus concluded that it was not the military aspect of the supervisory groups in both the South and the North—they were already obsolete—but their political aspect which was increasingly annoying the DRV. Nevertheless, Naszkowski emphasized that

¹²⁹ Ibid. In many cases, Hanoi felt, the ICC went beyond the framework of the Geneva Accords given the espionage conducted by the Canadians and the Indians slandering the DRV.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ciphergram No. 15991 Maneli (Saigon) to Naszkowski (Warsaw), 12 December 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625. Tovmassian’s statement about the paucity of Soviet sources in Hanoi is corroborated by Soviet embassy reports noted by the Norwegian scholar Mari Olsen in her dissertation (and forthcoming book) on Soviet-DRV relations. While in Hanoi, Maneli was also able to gather opinions from his friends whom he met in 1954 and who were now either in university or in guerrilla circles, such as: intensifying anti-Soviet moods; the USSR was being accused of betrayal of the liberation struggle; friends of the USSR were being gradually removed from positions in the party; and they were afraid that if North Vietnam were to officially announce its pro-China line, then this would greatly exacerbate the political situation (See Ciphergram No. 15869 Maneli (Saigon) to Naszkowski (Warsaw), 12 December 1963, 6/77, w-102, t-625.) In addition, Maneli met with an NLF representative who informed him about the Front’s swift victories soon after the coup and current strategy to destroy the Saigon regime’s main command, political, and military facilities.

the preservation of the ICC was desirable and necessary. At the same time, he suggested that there should be a discussion with the North Vietnamese about removing perhaps two or three of such groups in order not to alienate them and to show them that Poland was in solidarity with Hanoi. Pszczółkowski was to communicate this to the Soviets and seek their advice on the issue.

Indeed, in the USSR, the director of the foreign ministry's Southeast Asia Department, Chistiakov, saw the elimination of the five supervisory groups as a serious problem. He further saw the position of Hanoi as contradictory since the North Vietnamese criticized the ICC, but at the same time called for compliance with the Geneva Accords. As he told Polish diplomats in Moscow, China strongly opposed the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 and was thus pushing the DRV toward a military solution. He further pointed out that placing the discussion regarding the removal of the five supervisory groups on the ICC's agenda would be dangerous since this could harm the interests of the DRV. Chistiakov thus proposed that instead it would be easier to find some concrete way in which the United States was breaking the Geneva Accords.¹³² What is perhaps most revealing about Chistiakov's conversation with the Poles at the end of 1963 is that he admitted that Poland and the world press were the only sources for the USSR as far as the situation in South Vietnam.

Conclusion

The initial proposal put forth by Rapacki in early 1963, broached to Nehru and then briefly taken up by Galbraith, never materialized as there were no concrete responses from the North Vietnamese, the Americans, or the Soviets. One could speculate that the initiative might have taken off had it not been for the Buddhist crisis which began in May and which was subsequently suppressed by Diem's regime – the events which made the Americans more critical of Diem and Nhu and ultimately induced them to stage a coup against the Saigon regime.

Nonetheless, the rumors which incessantly circulated about Maneli after his private visit with Nhu on 2 September could be explained by the fact that Poland was the only communist country in the ICC, and therefore, in the eyes of the West, would “naturally” have to collaborate with its North Vietnamese brothers. However, as this paper shows, basing its results primarily on the newly accessible contemporaneous evidence from the Polish archives, Poland did not act as mediator between Saigon and Hanoi in 1963.

Washington's reaction to Maneli's visit with Nhu, and to the subsequent rumors surrounding it, suggest that American officials, while aware of the troubles within the socialist camp, such as the Sino-Soviet split, nonetheless continued to adhere to the presumption that all communists were willing to and did collaborate with each other. US officials, as well as the American journalists, further assumed that a Polish delegate, being a communist, must have acted on the Soviet Union's behalf and attempted to sway Diem's government toward North Vietnam. To be sure, the timing of the visit during this highly tense period, when the relationship between Diem's regime and the United States was strained, made the suspicions all the more plausible

¹³² Ciphergram No. 16437 Chodorek (Hanoi) to Morski (Warsaw) 12 December 1963, 6/77, w-96, t-1368. On Soviet-DRV relations at this juncture, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*.

Moreover, as has been shown, Maneli assumed that the headquarters in Warsaw would not object if he saw Nhu in private, especially since he felt that he had the approval and support of the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi. The newly uncovered evidence in the Polish and Russian archives now shows that the Soviet-North Vietnamese relations were distinctly cool throughout 1963, as Hanoi increasingly followed the China line of the Sino-Soviet split.¹³³ Therefore, Maneli was also not expected to become involved in any mediation, as it was apparent that the Chinese were getting heavily involved in DRV's internal affairs.

Was the refusal of the Polish Foreign Ministry to allow another Maneli meeting with Nhu a missed opportunity? Probably not, since soon after the meeting Nhu began to exploit the visit to his advantage. Besides, there is no evidence to suggest that he sought to meet with the Pole again. If Warsaw allowed Maneli to meet with Nhu again, would the Pole have pursued this opportunity to establish a closer communication between Hanoi and Saigon? Perhaps, especially since he personally desired a peaceful resolution to the conflict and he was asked by the North Vietnamese to relay certain messages to the South. However, Maneli seemed to have quickly realized that Nhu was not yet ready to break entirely away from the United States. Therefore, if there was any missed opportunity at all, it was on the American side, as suggested by Arthur Schlesinger who put forth that "an opportunity of some sort was perhaps missed in the autumn of 1963" since a Diem-Ho deal could have been the means of an American exit from Vietnam.¹³⁴ In fact, it seems that Maneli's actions, whether pursued further or not, were of little consequence, as he did not have any backing from the Polish government and since Washington and its new ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, were already set on removing the Diem regime. In any case, had Nhu been serious about pursuing contacts with the North through Maneli, he would have most likely made some more specific propositions for him to transmit. Thus, the Polish evidence indicates that it was the North Vietnamese who were perhaps more serious about establishing contact than the South. However, only access to evidence from the Vietnamese archives may allow us to clarify this issue with certainty.

Other questions, although partially answered, still remain unsolved, especially regarding Maneli's motivations in privately meeting with Nhu and the steps he took soon after their first, public encounter. Why did Maneli, who was usually very scrupulous in reporting to Warsaw, wait five whole days to cable Warsaw (on a Friday) regarding his first encounter with Nhu and a possible meeting in the future? Why was the cable not coded "Urgent" or "Reply Required Immediately"? Perhaps sending a routine, belated cable was simply a blunder of the Polish foreign service which did not type up and code Maneli's message in a timely manner. Perhaps Maneli did not realize that he could be called on by Nhu so soon, that is, only a week after their first encounter. However, given the significance of the encounter and the overall tense situation in Hanoi, Maneli must have known better.

What the documents show is that the rumors involving the Polish delegate were not triggered by any conscious mediation efforts on the part of Poland or the Soviet Union to bring peace to Vietnam. On the contrary, they illustrate that the Soviet Union

¹³³ Many Polish cables sent to Warsaw from diplomats in Beijing, Moscow, and Hanoi to Warsaw indeed reported that the Chinese were becoming more influential in North Vietnam

¹³⁴ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, p. 720

was not interested in any such mediation, and neither was Poland. In fact, after not having received any positive response from Moscow about the peace initiative which it had broached in January 1963, Poland began to instruct Maneli in rather strict and unequivocal language not to take up any mediating roles under any circumstances and to let the “Paris-Saigon-Washington game” play out on its own. In other words, the rumors, which shook Saigon and Washington in the fall of 1963, were triggered by the US government’s misperception of the relations within the socialist camp which did not realize how truly divided this camp really was due to the Sino-Soviet split. And, most importantly, the rumors were apparently stoked by the Maneli’s inexperience and naivete, perhaps compounded by misperceptions both on his part and by the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi regarding their own governments’ policies and tactics toward Vietnam in 1963. Finally, the gossip was spread by Nhu who wanted to show the Americans that if they abandoned him he could still negotiate with the communists and gain recognition from them, if necessary. As has been shown, however, this was most likely a tactical move by the South Vietnamese ruler rather than a sincere desire to establish contact with the North Vietnamese through a Polish channel.

One can therefore conclude that Maneli, who perhaps wished to play a role of a mediator, ended up acting more as someone who simply relayed information, and only occasionally messages, between Hanoi and Saigon, as neither side trusted him enough nor was serious enough about pursuing concrete political proposals which might bring about reconciliation or negotiations between the two sides. Hanoi, except for wishing to explore cultural and economic exchanges, did not seem to be serious about bringing Diem to its side. There is no evidence to indicate that Maneli was to cajole the South in any way to abandon the Americans and join the North. Conversely, the Polish evidence illustrates that Nhu was not yet ready to break away from the Americans and thus he was extremely cautious in having Maneli propose anything serious to the North Vietnamese. In the end, Maneli’s role was not so crucial and the rumors which surrounded him were greatly exaggerated.

Thus, although many questions remain unanswered, it is hoped that this recent Polish archival evidence has contributed to solving, if only partially, a puzzle from forty years ago, thereby filling one of the many gaps in the Cold War history and adding to our further understanding of the Cold War dynamics in Asia.

DOCUMENTS

Document No. 1: Extract from Jerzy Michałowski, *Polskie tajne inicjatywy pokojowe w Wietnamie* [Polish Secret Peace Initiatives in Vietnam]

The first Polish diplomatic attempt contributing to a resumption of peace in Vietnam had its place in January 1963, during the official visit of Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki to New Delhi. During the Minister's talks with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharal Nehru, the Vietnam matter had a prominent place by virtue of India's participation in the International Commission. Rapacki spoke about the possibility of the neutrality of both Vietnam's as well as organizing universal elections and reuniting the country. (*Notes/5th Department/5632/3/63*)¹³⁵ According to Nehru the United States would be interested in settling the conflict in line with a neutral Vietnam.

Present at this talk (besides me) was the head of the [Indian] Ministry of Foreign Affairs [and First Chairman of the ICC] M.J. Desai. On the following day he arranged, unforeseen in the program, a cocktail visit to which, other than the Hindu guests, USA Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith was invited—an outstanding diplomat and American economist, a person trusted by [President] John F. Kennedy and [Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs] Averell Harriman. Minister Rapacki instructed me to hold a talk with Galbraith in another room.

The Ambassador stated that settlement of the Laotian matter served as evidence to Kennedy that it is also possible to settle the Vietnam problem in a peaceful manner. He then put forward his own idea about arranging a six-month truce in Vietnam, which would be the beginning of the deescalation of the conflict. Next, this period could be extended for a year and with the changed atmosphere work out a neutral status for Vietnam and proceed to the withdrawal of foreign troops. He hinted at the same time about the possibility of replacing the [President Ngo Dinh] Diem government [of South Vietnam] with a more liberal administration, which would make it possible to establish talks between the North and the South.

From my side, I stated that a cease-fire is not easy to achieve because the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] is not a party in the conflict since it is about the independent movement to liberate the South. However, Galbraith's idea is worth considering. It would be possible to bring about a withdrawal of foreign troops from the South and create conditions to realize the right of the Vietnamese to self-determination. If authority in Saigon was discharged by someone more liberal than Diem's government, I think that establishing contact with the leadership of the NLF [National Liberation Front of South Vietnam] would be possible. Also brought up during the talk, by Galbraith, was the possibility of participation in the war by Chinese "volunteers," which disturbed Galbraith very much since this could significantly sharpen the conflict and widen its reach.

Galbraith announced at the end of the discussion that "it will have its own results!"

¹³⁵ Ed.--Document not located.

It became apparent from the talk with Nehru on the next day that he was informed about the exchange of views. However, there were no further contacts with the Americans [Michalowski then quotes Galbraith's account in his memoirs—ed.]

After the delegation returned to Warsaw, I was sent to Moscow to consult with [Soviet Foreign] Minister [Andrei] Gromyko. The talk took place on 4 February 1963, with [Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai] Firyubin and Likhachev present on the Soviet side as well as Ambassador [*Boleslaw*] Jaszczuk, [Leonard] Pohoryles and [*Charge d'affaires* Zbigniew] Paszkowski on our side.

I presented, among other things, the matter of the talk with Galbraith. Gromyko considered that Vietnam constitutes a burden for the current USA administration and Kennedy's aim—similar to that in Laos—is to withdraw himself from excessive responsibility in this region of the world. It is necessary to turn over in one's mind how a conceivable agreement on Vietnamese neutrality, the withdrawal of troops, and a cease-fire, may influence the evolution of Vietnamese democratic forces and the perspectives for the further evolution of the situation in Southeast Asia. It is necessary to investigate the attitude of the Vietnamese about this suggestion. Solving the Vietnamese knot will exert an influence on the reduction of international tensions, which suits our interests. Calm in this region surely also suits the USA. Here our interests are convergent. It is necessary to speak with the DRV about the conceivable impact of an agreement on the internal situation in Vietnam. **(Urgent Note of 7 February 1963)**¹³⁶

Since the Vietnamese leadership did not indicate greater interest in the matter, and the Americans did not return to it, this initiative had no further results.

[Source: *Jerzy Michalowski*, *Polskie tajne inicjatywy pokojowe w Wietnamie* [Polish Secret Peace Initiatives in Vietnam], courtesy of *Stefan Michalowski* and *James G. Hershberg*, translation by *L. W. Gluchowski*.]

¹³⁶ Ed.--Document not located.

Document 2: Galbraith's Published Journal Entry Account of the Conversation with Rapacki and Michałowski in New Delhi, 21 January 1963

January 22 – New Delhi

The Polish Foreign Minister, [Adam] Rapacki, has been visiting here. Last night I got word that he wanted to talk to me about Vietnam. I met him, along with the Secretary-General of the Polish Foreign Office [Jerzy Michałowski], at M.J. Desai's house. They told me that while we [the United States] probably couldn't lose in South Vietnam, we couldn't win. Meanwhile we are forcing North Vietnam to look more and more to the Chinese for protection. This is bad. Why not get a liberal government in South Vietnam which all could support? In return, Ho Chi Minh would call off the insurrection. I had to improvise for, of course, I was without instruction. So I countered by asking why not call off the insurrection for six months and with this manifestation of good faith, we could then withdraw. They said that North Vietnam could not get peace in the south so long as Diem was in charge. They said (approximately), "You know enough of Marx yourself to know about popular movements."¹⁴ I responded, "But you should be good enough Communists to know about the international leadership of the Communist movement." They replied that, under present circumstances, given the split between Russia and China, any reference to international leadership was to a myth. I noted that if it were easy to throw out leaders such as Diem, we would have thrown out Castro. But we weren't that powerful.¹⁵

¹⁴ The reference is to my *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952, 1956), which is regarded by some Marxian scholars as showing enlightened Marxist influences.

¹⁵ This conversation was, of course, promptly reported. It was ignored by the State Department but picked up from the cables by President Kennedy. He told [Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern W. Affairs Averell] Harriman to have me pursue the matter as he was much interested. By the time his instruction came, Rapacki had departed.

[Source: John Kenneth Galbraith, Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969; New American Library/Signet paperback ed., 1970), p. 466.]

**Document 3: Soviet Memorandum on the Polish Peace Initiative on Vietnam, n.d.
[early Feb. 1963]**

1. Our Polish friends have informed us that a meeting has taken place in Delhi between the general director of the Polish MFA Comrade [Jerzy] Michalowski, who accompanied Comrade [Adam] Rapacki on the trip to India, and American Ambassador [John Kenneth] Galbraith, on his [Galbraith's] initiative. During the course of the conversation the US ambassador put forth a plan for the neutralization of South and North Vietnam, emphasizing that he is laying out his own point of view, although it is based on the opinion of US President Kennedy, which is well known to him. According to Galbraith's own words, Kennedy and part of the administration do not want Vietnam to turn into a second Korea and stand for the quick withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam leaving Vietnam for the Vietnamese. Galbraith said that it would be possible to bring about the neutralization of Vietnam on the Laos model, but for that to happen it would be necessary to conclude an agreement for a six-month truce between the two sides. During this time the two sides would stop all military activity and military propaganda and would start talks on the withdrawal of foreign troops from South Vietnam and the neutralization of Vietnam.

The US Ambassador to Delhi further claimed that the USA has experienced difficulties with Diem and that in Washington the opinion of him is negative, but the Kennedy administration cannot reject aid to Diem, since this would not be understood in the USA. Furthermore, Galbraith said he does not see forces on which to base a new government in South Vietnam, since Diem has destroyed the oppositional elements in the country. In the conclusion of the conversation Galbraith expressed his hope that his suggestion would be given some consideration.

2. Galbraith's appeal to the representatives of Poland, which is a member of the International Commission on Supervision and Control in Vietnam, is, in our estimation, clearly calculated to ascertain the attitude of Poland as well as of the DRV and other Socialist countries to the idea of the neutralization of Vietnam. This overture is along the line that was first marked in US politics regarding Southeast Asia after the departure Eisenhower from the office of President and manifested during the settlement of the Laos problem. The current US government inherited certain responsibilities in the region of Southeast Asia; this concerns both Laos and South Vietnam, which are now viewed as a serious burden for American foreign policy. This was expressed directly by President Kennedy during his meeting with Comrade N.S. Khrushchev in Vienna in [June] 1961. The many-year-long and wearisome war against the nationalist-patriotic forces of South Vietnam, it seems, has forced the ruling circles of the US to understand that American armed forces will not win laurels in the jungles of South Vietnam. The USA are substantially entangled in this war, which for the most part falls on the shoulders of American armed servicemen, sent to a foreign land far from the USA.

As is well known, the Americans have tried using "guerrilla war" methods against the people's liberation movement, and have even created educational formations for that purpose. But it's one thing when the war is led by guerrillas – avengers of the people, patriots fighting for freedom and independence of their country, and another when

intervention-punitive forces, attempting to strangle a national liberation movement, pose as guerrillas. It is one thing to brag about plans for a guerrilla war, another to be faced with guerrilla war and popular anger in a foreign land.

All of this speaks to the fact that the government of the USA, which now puts forth the idea of a neutralization of Vietnam, is searching for a way out of the military and political dead end into which it was led by an aggressive policy in Vietnam. Galbraith spoke to the Polish representative of concluding a truce between the two countries, although legally speaking there is no war. Most important is that the question of withdrawing foreign forces has been raised, and that is a favorable formula for us, since there are no such forces in the DRV, and foreign forces are only present in South Vietnam. Offering equal conditions in this question, the Americans are really trying to save face. Without there being formally equal conditions, they would have difficulty finding support for their offer in their own country.

3. Of course, it would be possible to ignore the overture of the American ambassador and not to react to it. But for us, and, possibly, for our Vietnamese friends, the question arises whether it might not be best, for the benefit of the DRV and the socialist countries, to take the opportunity created by the US government's desire to somehow untangle itself from the situation in which it has found itself in South Vietnam. In other words, would it not be worthwhile to think over how to turn the idea of neutralization of Vietnam in such a way as to make it strengthen the DRV, to create a more favorable basis for the struggle of national-patriotic forces of South Vietnam and along with that to liquidate the center of tensions in the Southeast Asia region? In our view, this opportunity, particularly while it is only an opportunity, exists and is worth exploiting.

We are proceeding from the fact that the subject of any international talks and agreements regarding the neutralization of Vietnam could come out of the foreign politics of this problem. Naturally, all questions regarding the sphere of domestic affairs which might in some way touch on the social-political structure of the DRV or to some degree hold down the democratic-patriotic forces in South Vietnam cannot come under discussion. One must assume that the Americans themselves are so shortsighted [*не дал'новидны*] that they are hoping for some sort of deal which would allow for a change in the domestic order of the DRV.

We believe that the neutralization of South Vietnam means first the obligation not to take part in any military alliances or alignments and not to allow the arrival of foreign troops or positioning of military bases and footholds [опорных пунктов] on its territory. The obligation would be formally accepted by the DRV and South Vietnam, but in practice this order places the obligation specifically on South Vietnam; the USA, like other countries, if they have troops there, will have to withdraw them from South Vietnam. This would bring to an end the armed intervention of the USA in South Vietnam.

In this conception the neutralization of Vietnam would obligate both Vietnams only formally – the north and the south, but in reality it would only affect South Vietnam, since in the DRV there are not now foreign troops or bases. In accordance with the Geneva accords of 1954 it is not a part of a military alliance. It follows that neutralization would not force any new obligations in this regard on the DRV and nothing would

change in its relations with socialist countries which with all their might dependably guarantee and will continue to guarantee her security.

The situation in South Vietnam is a different affair. There are American troops there, American military advisers, who play a direct role in military operations against South Vietnamese patriots. The territory of South Vietnam has practically turned into a military base for the USA. Finally, South Vietnam, as was once the case with Laos, is included in the SEATO sphere of activity. With the neutralization of South Vietnam all these attributes of aggressive politics on the part of the USA with regard to Vietnam would be overturned. Naturally, all this would create new, more favorable conditions for the South Vietnamese people's will to manifest itself in the choice of a socialist-political order.

4. The USA, of course, might try to reach an agreement which would allow them to strengthen, in South Vietnam, a government and regime favorable to them, and to prevent DRV efforts to help the national-patriotic forces of South Vietnam. It is wise to keep these intentions of the US in mind. Such attempts must be rebuffed.

Our Vietnamese friends are better judges of how the situation in South Vietnam will unfold after the American troops leave, if it would be possible to reach an agreement on that. But one thing is clear: whether the Americans want it or not, the withdrawal of their troops from South Vietnam would significantly weaken the reactionary forces of South Vietnam, the main support of whom has been American bayonets.

In looking at the idea of a neutralization of Vietnam, we are guided [by the idea that] its achievement should by no measure mean a refusal of the sovereign rights of the Vietnamese people to strive for the establishment in South Vietnam of such an order as they consider appropriate for themselves. This means that if there were to be international talks, the socialist countries would not assume any obligations guaranteeing the existence of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, and would not allow the inclusion of international agreements on positions directed against the patriotic forces of South Vietnam.

5. The agreement on the neutralization of Vietnam could strengthen and develop the corresponding positions of the Geneva accords of 1954, which, as our Vietnam colleagues emphasize fairly, are not a bad weapon in the hands of the people of both Vietnams in the fight for reunification on a democratic basis.

It would be possible to use the Geneva accords which were, with the consent of and pressure from the USA, violated by Diem, and to return, in part, to the fight for general elections, as stipulated in these accords, as well as other Geneva positions, favorable to the DRV.

It is not impossible that the Americans might try to lead things to where they would cross out the Geneva accords which foresee unification of Vietnam. This is an important question and we believe that concessions must not be allowed. Keeping in mind that our Vietnamese friends have already created a flexible program for the gradual unification of the country in stages, the challenge for the socialist countries in potential talks would be to decisively press for this program of unification, responding to national expectations of the Vietnamese people and the interests of securing peace in Southeast Asia.

6. In the case of its neutralization and the departure of American troops of South Vietnam, the DRV might free up certain resources for the further expansion of the peaceful aspects of its economy, an additional benefit of a neutral Vietnam. It would likely increase the possibility of establishing contacts and reaching agreements between the DRV and South Vietnam on certain questions of normalization of relations between the two countries which in the past were brought up multiple times by our Vietnamese friends. The doors would open for cooperation between the DRV and South Vietnam in the economic sphere, in part, for the development of trade, as well for scientific-technological and cultural exchange. All this, taken together, would allow for the strengthening of DRV influence on South Vietnam and pour additional energy into the Vietnamese people's movement to unite their motherland, and in general would increase the impact of such influence on South Vietnam, which under known conditions could lead to the downfall of the reactionary regime there, and possibly even the unification of the country on a basis favorable to the DRV, that is, on the basis of socialism.

7. If we evaluate the significance of a possible agreement on the neutralization of Vietnam, favorable to us from the point of view that this would reflect on the overall picture of the international situation, then, it seems, there is no reason to doubt that such a step would lead to the relaxation of international tensions. The neutralization of South Vietnam, accomplished under the flag of neutralization of all Vietnam, would mean the widening of a breakthrough in the position of international governments and first of all that of the USA in Southeast Asia, and would destabilize such Western military alliances as SEATO and in part CENTO, and would allow for a further displacement of the Americans from Asia.

Weighing all the "pros" and "cons" of the idea of a neutralization of Vietnam, we also take into consideration that it is founded on a political program close to the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, which accelerates the termination of American armed intervention, the withdrawal of military personnel by the US and its satellites, the liquidation of American military bases, as well as the termination by all interested sides of all military activity and the reestablishment of peace on the basis of a South Vietnamese settlement by the South Vietnamese people. This program includes positions on the conduct by South Vietnam of a political peace and neutrality, the creation, along with Cambodia and Laos, of a neutral zone, in which each country would have full sovereignty and would reject participation in any military or political alliances. In the program of the national front for the liberation of South Vietnam there is an emphasis also on the necessity of concluding an international agreement which would guarantee the respect of independence, sovereignty of international territorial integrity and the neutrality of South Vietnam.

All this induces us to address the Vietnamese comrades with our thoughts. Of course, this question is closer for our Vietnamese friends, and for that reason they can see more clearly all the pluses and minuses of the realization of a neutralization of Vietnam. Because we have formed the conviction that the pluses in this case significantly outweigh the minuses, we consider it our duty to state our reasoning. If it does not, in principle, coincide with the opinion of the Vietnamese comrades, then it seems it would be necessary to agree on a way to proceed.

First of all we, of course, mean that the relevant consultations will take place between the interested socialist countries with the goal of developing a single coordinated position, as it was on the eve of the Laos meeting. Along with that it would be possible, in a form acceptable to all of us, to react to the American overture (for example, through the Polish representatives to whom they turned,) and to let the US government know that the socialist countries would not object to the conduct of the talks regarding the proposal of Vietnamese neutrality.

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Information of Comrades Rapacki's arrival in India, and in particular the conversation between Comrade Michalowski and American Ambassador Galbraith, in which, on his own initiative, and, it appears, without Washington's knowledge, the question of Vietnam's neutralization was raised, was given much attention in the CC CPSU. This information, relayed to us by a representative of Polish MFA who arrived in Moscow specifically for that purpose, is undoubtedly of interest.

It is apparent that Kennedy is not opposed to finding a compromise solution regarding South Vietnam, as was earlier attempted for Laos. It seems that the Americans have arrived at the conclusion that the continued intervention in Vietnam does not promise victory and have decided to somehow untangle themselves from the difficult situation they find themselves in over there.

It is our view that the idea of neutralizing Vietnam could be used by socialist countries for the purpose of trying to untangle the dangerous knot of international tensions in Southeast Asia and also to strengthen the international-political position of the DRV.

Our thoughts regarding the neutralization of Vietnam are laid out in detail in our message to Comrade Ho Chi Minh; we would first like to consult you regarding its contents.

If you do not have any doubts regarding the possibility of using the idea of neutralization of Vietnam in the interests of Socialist countries and you share our thoughts, then we believe that you could, possibly, inform our Vietnam friends yourself, should you find that expedient. This would be completely understandable, considering that Poland is a member of the International Commission of Supervision and Control in Vietnam and that the Americans undertook their overture through Polish representatives.

[Source: Archive of Modern Records (AAN), Warsaw, obtained by L.W. Gluchowski, translated from Russian by Artemy Kalinovsky.]