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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

27 August 1985

The PW/MIA Talks: What Happened to Thach? [redacted]

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Summary

The weight of the evidence available to us suggests the Vietnamese--and Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, in particular--hoped for a successful visit by the US PW/MIA delegation. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that Hanoi tried to manipulate the visit by having Thach conspicuously absent, we believe it is more likely that the Vietnamese proceeded in good faith, assuming that the necessary groundwork for successful talks had been prepared, with or without Thach's personal involvement. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Research was completed on 27 August. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA [redacted]

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Hanoi has increased its emphasis on normalization of relations with the United States over the past several months as part of a broader strategy to break out of the isolation caused by its Cambodia policy.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Thach may have felt that, having established a firm foundation for the talks, his own personal presence during the US delegation's visit would not be vital to its success. We doubt, given the apparent importance Hanoi has assigned to improving prospects for normalization with Washington, that Thach would deliberately absent himself from the talks simply to demonstrate Hanoi's concern that it be treated as an "equal" in dealing with the United States.

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Furthermore, [REDACTED] planning for Thach's Moscow trip was under way as of 13 August, three days before Hanoi agreed to accept the US delegation. This sequence would appear to rule out any late "summons" from Moscow as the reason for his absence from Hanoi during the PW/MIA talks. A 26 August press report indicates Thach was scheduled to spend only one day in Moscow for a possible meeting with Foreign Minister Schevardnadze before proceeding to the nonaligned meeting in Luanda, Angola* that begins 2 September. It appears that Thach's attendance at the NAM meeting, which probably was planned for some time, is the primary reason for his absence from Hanoi during the US delegation's visit. We have no information whether Hanoi considered cancelling the Moscow and Luanda visits in light of the later agreement to host the PW/MIA talks.

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[REDACTED]

Thach's stand-in, Vice Foreign Minister Vo Dong Giang, is the most senior of eight officials of that rank and serves as Acting Foreign Minister during Thach's absences from Hanoi. He is known as a forceful spokesman and has travelled widely in the past several years. Although we have little firm information on his political standing, we believe he is fully empowered to act in Thach's stead. He will probably represent Vietnam at the UN General Assembly as Thach indicated in mid-June that he would not attend this year's session. [REDACTED]

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