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20 December 1965

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Memorandum

THE 1965 SINO-SOVIET-VIETNAMESE CONTROVERSY OVER SOVIET MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

[redacted]

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

~~TOP SECRET~~

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RSS No. 0012/65

20 December 1965

INTELLIGENCE STUDY

THE 1965 SINO-SOVIET-VIETNAMESE CONTROVERSY OVER SOVIET MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

(Reference Title: ESAU XXIX)

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

THE 1965 SINO-SOVIET-VIETNAMESE CONTROVERSY OVER SOVIET MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper attempts to reconstruct the course of the bitter and protracted negotiations throughout 1965 among Communist China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam, over Soviet military aid shipments to the DRV. Evidence indicates that a running dispute has gone on in private dealings between the Soviet Union and China over this question and that this dispute long delayed the arrival of certain badly-needed Soviet equipment and technicians in North Vietnam. Each side has repeatedly brought pressure upon the North Vietnamese regime to give it support over the points at issue. While the Soviets made some concessions in the face of Chinese adamancy, the course of events--i.e., the urgent need created by the bombing of North Vietnam--has tended to favor the Soviet position and has caused important Chinese retreats. There was no single general settlement; instead, each grudging Chinese concession merely brought on a new dispute over another point. Each side has meanwhile disseminated detailed and sometimes distorted confidential versions of the negotiations to its supporters in the international Communist movement, and leaked vaguer accounts, usually intentionally misleading or greatly outdated, to the non-Communist world. The dispute was still in progress in the fall of 1965, and may well continue in 1966.

The matters at issue included:

(a) Whether the CPR should participate in a tripartite summit conference with the DRV and the USSR to coordinate measures for military assistance to North Vietnam, and whether the three nations should issue a joint statement on such assistance. The Soviets claim that they persuaded the North Vietnamese to propose such a conference in February, and that they themselves renewed the proposal to the Chinese with explicit DRV approval at the time of Le Duan's visit to Moscow and Peking in

April. In each case, the Chinese vehemently refused, even at the cost of annoying the North Vietnamese. The Chinese rejected the suggestion because it was transparently calculated, like most of the foreign conduct of the post-Khrushchev CPSU leadership, to undermine the Chinese world-wide attack on the Soviets throughout the Communist movement. It is possible that the proposal was put forward a third time by the Soviets in the early fall. The Chinese surfaced the fact of this proposal in a November editorial and committed themselves publicly against it. The Soviets have since continued to demonstrate that they believe the issue to be a major asset for themselves and a liability for the Chinese in dealings with the North Vietnamese.

(b) Whether the CPR should grant the USSR an "air corridor" to North Vietnam; that is, whether the Chinese should give the Soviets blanket authorization for large numbers of Soviet transports to overfly China back and forth over a given route for an indefinite period carrying SAM-related and other equipment and personnel to the DRV. First urgently raised by the USSR in late February, this request was also steadfastly refused by the Chinese. The CPR did permit the Soviets to overfly eight light jet bombers to the DRV in late May, and has allowed occasional transport flights for liaison and other purposes, particularly since mid-summer. Nevertheless, the refusal of the air corridor effectively precluded the Soviet Union from rapidly supplying North Vietnam with elements of a SAM system by air in the spring of 1965. The primary Chinese purpose in refusing, like the reason for several other Chinese actions taken in the spring, was to obstruct and delay the growth of a Soviet military presence in the DRV because of fear of consequent growth of Soviet political influence in Hanoi. The Soviets have suggested two other reasons for the Chinese refusal of the air corridor, and one or both of these may possibly have played a subsidiary role in Chinese thinking. One suggestion is that the Chinese were apprehensive over possible United States reaction to such large movements of Soviet aircraft over China; the other is that the Chinese were unwilling to give the Soviets greater opportunity for photo reconnaissance over China. The Chinese refusal

to permit significant air transport to North Vietnam has been a subject of heated controversy in inter-party correspondence and briefings, with the Chinese very much on the defensive.

(c) Whether the CPR should grant the USSR the use of one or more air bases in South China, near the Vietnamese border, to be manned by Soviet personnel. The request for these bases was disclosed privately by CPSU secretary Suslov in late April and later both privately and publicly by the Chinese party. The bases were apparently intended primarily to permit the Soviets to assemble MIGs shipped by rail from the USSR, in an atmosphere of comparative security, before flying them into North Vietnam. A second intended function of the bases which may be inferred with less assurance from Soviet and Chinese statements may have been to permit Soviet pilots to give advanced training to DRV pilots, flying the Soviet MIGs thus assembled in Chinese airspace rather than in the restricted portion of the DRV which has actually been used for this purpose. The proposal for Soviet bases was violently rejected by the Chinese, like the request for an air corridor, as an attempt to exercise intolerable control over Chinese territory. Both these Soviet proposals presumably recalled to the Chinese the Soviet demands in 1958 for facilities on Chinese territory, which were similarly rejected at the time.

(d) Whether the Soviets should ship their military equipment and personnel directly to North Vietnam by sea, through the port of Haiphong. The Chinese apparently posed this suggestion at an early stage, in reply to the Soviet request for an air corridor, and repeated it later as a taunt to the Soviet Union; for on this issue the USSR is at a political disadvantage. The Soviets have been most reluctant to ship sensitive military goods to Haiphong because of their 1962 Carribean blockade experience and their desire to avoid having again to choose between confrontation with the United States and humiliating retreat. There is every indication that the Soviets did avoid shipping such materiel to Haiphong throughout 1965, and the Chinese have pointed to this in inter-party correspondence as evidence that the Soviet

Union is afraid of the United States. The Soviets have asked, in their turn, to have some of their military aid accepted at a Chinese port for transshipment by rail to the DRV; and this the Chinese, in their turn, have apparently refused.

(e) Whether and on what terms the CPR should permit rail shipment of Soviet equipment and personnel--including MIGs and SAM equipment--to Vietnam. With air shipment on a significant scale ruled out by the Chinese, and sea shipment of sensitive military items ruled out by the Soviets, rail transit became the focus of dispute. While both sides claim to have suggested and agreed to rail shipment of the Soviet goods at the outset--in late February--it is clear that each initially posed conditions unacceptable to the other. For the Soviets, permission to have Soviet personnel accompany their most sensitive military shipments--such as the SAM equipment--was a prerequisite to the shipment of the equipment itself, both because the USSR wished to retain observation of the equipment in transit through China and because the prompt use of the equipment and the expansion of Soviet influence in North Vietnam required expansion of the Soviet presence there. The Chinese, on the other hand, from the start attempted to impose severe limitations on the passage of Soviet personnel, and wanted the Soviets to dump their goods at the Sino-Soviet border to be forwarded to the DRV by China as joint Sino-Soviet aid. The Chinese also insisted on their right to inspect all items shipped by the Soviets through China. In assertion of these demands, the Chinese appear to have halted a Soviet rail shipment to Vietnam in early March.

At the end of March, the Soviets and Chinese made some partial concessions to each other. The Soviets yielded on the question of the Chinese right of inspection, and also agreed to ship crated MIG aircraft to Vietnam by rail despite the Chinese refusal of the Soviet request for South China bases. The Chinese for their part agreed at this time to allow the MIGs and a variety of other Soviet materiel to pass; and the Chinese may possibly have made some concession to the Soviet desire to have some Soviet personnel accompany these shipments.

The question of Soviet SAMs, however, was another matter. While the Chinese in late March apparently agreed to the eventual shipment of SAM equipment to Vietnam, they prevailed upon the North Vietnamese regime at this point to stipulate to the USSR that the Soviets would not be allowed to control or operate the SAM installations. The DRV therefore accepted in late March the prospect of a lengthy wait--until sufficient Vietnamese personnel became available after training in the Soviet Union--before SAMs could actually become operational in North Vietnam. It was for this reason that the construction of SAM sites in the DRV--begun at this time (late March) with Soviet help--proceeded at an extraordinarily leisurely pace throughout the spring and early summer. The Soviet Government throughout April attempted to convey to the United States through a multitude of sources the misleading impression that Soviet SAMs were about to become operational in North Vietnam. This was presumably done at DRV request, in an effort to deter the United States from expanding the scope of airstrikes against the DRV. The CPSU, however, secretly told a very few of its confidants the opposite--that the DRV had agreed under Chinese pressure to wait for a SAM system until Vietnamese personnel could man it; and this was simultaneously confirmed by authoritative Chinese sources.

This arrangement eventually broke down, however, because of mounting North Vietnamese anxiety at the increasing scope of U.S. air attacks. Late in the spring--perhaps at the end of May or the beginning of June--the DRV apparently reversed its position, and prevailed upon the Chinese to allow the passage of a certain number of Soviet SAM personnel and a specific quantity of SAM equipment; and the first SAM sites were thereupon rushed to completion in mid-July. At this point, the Chinese for the first time issued statements publicly questioning the existence of the missile sites and demanding that the Soviets permit the SAMs to be used. These statements were apparently intended to embarrass Soviet-DRV relations should the Soviet Union attempt to hold back on the use of the SAMs in Vietnam as it had done in Cuba. After the Soviets did in fact fire the SAMs for the first time on 24 July, and a U.S. strike against the SAMs was attempted

on 27 July, a Chinese spokesman on the 28th belittled the importance of the Soviet missiles and demanded to know why the U.S. had refrained from attacking them before. This has been the Chinese refrain, publicly and privately, ever since. Having lost an important battle in its effort to restrict the Soviet presence in North Vietnam, the Chinese party has been concerned to limit the political advantages the CPSU could derive from this victory.

Meanwhile, the dispute over Chinese obstruction of Soviet military assistance did not end with the firing of the SAMs in July. Not only was the question of the tripartite conference to coordinate aid surfaced in the fall of 1965 as an object of public polemics between the Chinese and the Soviet camp; in addition, there is evidence that the Chinese have once again blocked the transit of some Soviet military equipment. On 26 August, the Chinese are known to have refused the passage of a shipment of Soviet anti-aircraft "weapons," and there are some grounds for believing that these "weapons" represented an additional increment of SAM equipment above the quantity the Chinese had originally agreed to allow to pass. As of 5 November--when the CCP wrote an angry reply to a CPSU letter of 21 October complaining of the blocked shipment--the shipment had still not been released. There is evidence to suggest that the North Vietnamese regime throughout September and October was again the object of opposing pressures from the Soviets and Chinese over this matter, and that this was one of the subjects discussed during Pham Van Dong's October visit to Moscow and Peking. The Chinese in November claimed that they were willing to "discuss" a new agreement with the Soviets to cover such additional shipments, and it is quite conceivable that such an agreement has now been or will soon be concluded. In any case, however, it seems entirely possible that the 1965 pattern of partial Chinese obstruction, grudging agreement, and renewed partial obstruction will be repeated in 1966, despite the difficulty and annoyance this may cause the North Vietnamese.

Three conclusions emerge from the record of this dispute in 1965. The first is that in dealing with the question of Soviet aid, both the Soviet Union and Communist

China have been above all concerned with maximizing their own influence in Hanoi and reducing that of the fraternal antagonist, and only secondarily concerned with the needs of the North Vietnamese for defense against U.S. air attacks. Despite their loud insistence that the North Vietnamese persevere under these attacks, the Chinese have had no compunction about obstructing and delaying North Vietnamese receipt of major portions of an air defense system. The Soviets, for their part, showed during their initial arguments with the Chinese in February and March that they were reluctant to send equipment by rail to Vietnam except under conditions which would bring them the maximum political gain over Peking. The Soviets have also repeatedly used grandiose gestures--such as the demands for a tripartite conference and the request for South China bases--which they knew in advance were unacceptable to Peking and would consequently produce no tangible result for Hanoi, but which were nevertheless calculated to improve the Soviet position in Hanoi vis-a-vis the Chinese.

The second conclusion is that both the Soviet Union and Communist China have been circumscribed, in dealing with the question of Soviet aid to North Vietnam, by a desire to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States. This is most noticeable in the case of the USSR: in particular, the Soviet avoidance throughout 1965 of sea delivery to Haiphong of sensitive military shipments, and the private statements by important Soviet officials in the fall of 1965 disavowing the Soviet SAM personnel in Vietnam. It was also, however, probably a factor in the conduct of the Chinese. The CPR has shown itself to be acutely aware of U.S. warnings about a lack of sanctuaries, and this may have played a contributory role in the Chinese refusal of South China airbases to the Soviet Union. Concern about U.S. reaction may also have been a factor (albeit a minor one) in the Chinese refusal of the "air corridor" and in the apparent Chinese refusal of the use of Chinese ports to receive sensitive military equipment for rail transshipment to Vietnam.

The third conclusion stems from the violence of the Chinese rejection of Moscow's South China airbase proposal, and from the fact that the Chinese have chosen to go on record, publicly and privately, to the effect that any such proposal is an affront to their sovereignty. Taken in conjunction with the similar Chinese reaction to other Soviet proposals of this type in 1958, this makes it appear most unlikely that the Chinese regime under Mao would ever countenance the stationing of Soviet forces in China for the defense of North Vietnam, or indeed for the defense of China itself unless the survival of the Chinese regime were seriously threatened.

THE 1965 SINO-SOVIET-VIETNAMESE CONTROVERSY OVER SOVIET MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

I. Kosygin's Visit: Soviet Military and Political Proposals

When Soviet Premier Kosygin arrived in Hanoi in early February, the new Soviet leadership, in consequence of its decision to compete more actively with Peking for the good will of the North Vietnamese party, had already radically altered Khrushchev's policy regarding military assistance shipments to the DRV. A Chinese inter-party liaison official, Li Shao-pai, told pro-Chinese foreign Communists in May 1965 that the USSR in 1963 had promised to deliver to the DRV, among other things, one regiment of "rocket units"--presumably SAMs--and "one air group" of MIG-17s. The CCP official claimed that Khrushchev later reneged on this promise. While there is no confirmation of this Chinese story, it must be considered as possible, in view of the precedent set by Khrushchev in cutting off the military assistance program to North Korea because of North Korean political support of the Chinese. In the case of North Vietnam, there is one additional item of evidence. A well-informed Soviet official is reported to have stated that at the time of the first Gulf of Tonkin incident in early August 1964, the DRV made a direct and unsuccessful request for military assistance (unspecified) from the Soviet Union. The material requested is likely to have included anti-aircraft weapons, and three months after Khrushchev's ouster these began to be forthcoming. In January aerial photography established the presence of Soviet self-propelled anti-aircraft guns in North Vietnam for the first time; these weapons may have been delivered by a Soviet cargo ship which arrived in Haiphong on 22 December. The CPSU later confirmed privately that prior to Kosygin's visit the Soviet Union had already given anti-aircraft guns and radar to the DRV.

A. The "Joint Statement"

Kosygin came to Hanoi prepared to offer the DRV, additionally, among other things, MIG fighter planes and SA-2 missiles for air defense. In return, the Soviets expected and the North Vietnamese were prepared to offer certain minimal political concessions. One of these, according to later CPSU briefings and letters to Soviet adherents, was a North Vietnamese commitment to refrain from criticism of the Soviet party or of the Moscow meeting of parties planned for 1 March, regardless of Chinese behavior. A second immediate concession to Soviet desires--which also coincided with DRV interests--was North Vietnamese agreement to join in urging upon the Chinese a plan for a joint statement by North Vietnam, Communist China, and the Soviet Union (plus, perhaps, other bloc countries) to serve as a warning to the United States. According to the Soviets, the North Vietnamese welcomed this idea when it was put forward by Kosygin in Hanoi, and on 22 February themselves prepared and forwarded a draft statement to Moscow and Peking. The Soviets of course accepted the statement, while the Chinese predictably rejected it, since acceptance would tend to undermine their entire world-wide effort to depict the Soviet Union as a perfidious lackey of imperialism.

This was the first in a succession of Soviet ploys calculated to help the Soviet position in Hanoi by demonstrating supposed Soviet solicitude for North Vietnamese interests and alleged Chinese selfish indifference. Since the proposal for a three-power statement had a gratifying effect in February--by exposing Chinese recalcitrance--the Soviets were to revive it in April in connection with Le Duan's visit to Moscow.

B. The "Summit Conference"

In addition, one Latin American Communist leader has stated that he was told by the CPSU in Moscow that the Soviets in late February had requested of the Chinese

a "summit conference" on the passage of Soviet arms to North Vietnam. The request was reportedly refused by Peking. This could well have been the first Soviet attempt "to bring about a summit conference of the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and China," to which the Chinese publicly referred in a People's Daily-Red Flag article on 11 November. As will be seen, this proposal for a three-power summit meeting was also revived by the CPSU for the Le Duan visit in April.*

C. The "Air Corridor"

Meanwhile, on 25 February, ten days after Kosygin's return, the Soviet government requested from the Chinese government what Soviet and Chinese statements and documents have repeatedly described as an "air corridor" across China to North Vietnam. This corridor was to be used, according to the USSR, for the transit of large Soviet transport aircraft carrying equipment and technicians for surface-to-air missiles. Between 26 February--the day after the Soviet request was made--and 2 March, about thirty AN-12 transports are known to have flown from European Russia to Irkutsk

*There is another variation on the Latin American's report. According to an account of a CPSU letter to the French CP, the Soviets at some time in February proposed a conference of all the socialist states for about mid-March "to discuss the Vietnam problem so that they could arrive at a common position." When the Chinese reportedly refused, the notion was dropped. Nine months later, a 3 December editorial in the Polish party organ Trybuna Ludu alluded to a meeting of the heads of all bloc states to deal with Vietnam as a possible alternative to a tripartite Sino-Soviet-DRV meeting.

These planes belonged to the same component that had carried war materiel for Laos (from Irkutsk) in flights over China to Hanoi in 1960-62, and the Soviets may have been misled by this precedent into believing that the Chinese would acquiesce again. This time, the AN-12s never left the Soviet Union; during March, all apparently returned to European Russia, evidently in small groups, possibly after leaving their cargoes in Irkutsk for subsequent rail shipment.

These planes returned because the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in response to the Soviet request for air transit rights, had sent a note to the Soviet Government (on 28 February, according to several Soviet accounts) "strongly refusing," and claiming that the Soviets were "endeavoring to establish control over Chinese and Vietnamese territory." According to the Soviets, the Chinese note also asserted that the United States would detect a mass flight of Soviet transports, and that this might provoke "unnecessary conflicts." Although Chinese use of this excuse for refusing Soviet overflights implies admission of fear of the United States, and is thus hardly consistent with the public posture Chinese propaganda has sought to convey, the Chinese have nevertheless sometimes used this pretext in explaining their position subsequently to third parties. A senior editor of a Chinese Communist newspaper in Hong Kong later said that the CPR refused because such large air movements, upon becoming known to the United States, would create the risk of interception by Seventh Fleet aircraft; and a Chinese Foreign Ministry official told [redacted] in May that Soviet transportation of supplies across China would give the United States an excuse to bomb China.

The Soviet Government is believed to have told other bloc states that the Chinese would not permit such overflights because they were afraid of consequent U.S. attacks upon the South China airfields, and this Soviet assertion may possibly reflect a genuine Soviet estimate. In addition, the Soviets later were circulating among their followers in the Communist world still another explanation. The secretary-general of the Panamanian CP has repeated a Soviet claim that the Chinese Communists feared the taking of aerial photographs by the Soviets. A leader of the Swiss Communists went beyond this claiming that the Chinese, when refusing Soviet overflights, themselves alleged that the Soviets might "profit in making observations of a strategic nature." There is no confirmation that the Chinese ever said anything of the kind, but the Soviets may believe that this was a factor in Chinese thinking.

When discussing the overflight question in a letter to the CPSU months later, the Chinese party admitted that it had refused "to arrange a showy, long-distance flight to Vietnam across China," but asserted that "this would have violated the principle of absolute secrecy demanded by the Russians," and also made the disingenuous claim that the Vietnamese "had not asked for shipment by air." In fact, regardless of whether the DRV had formally requested such shipment, North Vietnam would surely have welcomed it.

The central point is that the Chinese refusal of an "air corridor" ruled out not only the "showy" (and therefore, allegedly dangerous) flight of the thirty AN-12's planned for early March, but also subsequent use of Soviet transports on a significant scale to supply the

DRV.* Throughout the entire period from March through July while the question of the Soviet MIGs and SAMs was being haggled over by the Soviet Union, China, and the DRV, there were only four or five Soviet individual transport flights to North Vietnam of any kind (that is, including liaison journeys). The Chinese flatly refused to give the Soviets the blank check implied by an "air corridor"--i.e., advance blanket authorization for the coming and going of many Soviet aircraft over a given route for an indefinite period. Occasional rare exceptions to the rule against Soviet overflights were treated precisely as exceptions, apparently requiring individual negotiation in each case and advance Chinese permission, which was evidently doled out parsimoniously. The practical effect was to prevent the Soviet Union from supplying the DRV with the components of a SAM system by air.

Finally, it should be noted that even when the Chinese in late May relented sufficiently to allow the overflight of eight Soviet IL-28 light bombers for delivery to Vietnam, there was no relaxation at the time regarding transport flights, which could hardly have been considered more provocative to the United States than the flight of the bombers. In short, it would appear that

*It should be noted that the various Chinese accounts of this initial Soviet attempt to send a mass flight "for show" across China all deny that this flight was intended to carry items of extraordinary military importance, and allude only to such items of cargo as machine guns and conventional anti-aircraft artillery. The Soviets, on the other hand, told at least one party delegation at the 1 March Moscow conference (the Australian CP) that it was "missiles" whose transit across China by air had been refused by the Chinese. In any case, regardless of the actual cargo scheduled to be carried by the 30 AN-12s in late February, it seems probable that the Soviets would have attempted to ferry SAM components and personnel to the DRV by air if the Chinese had permitted it, and that the Chinese refused permission for the "air corridor" largely because of a desire to obstruct such shipments.

while the Chinese regime may indeed have had some apprehension about U.S. reaction to Soviet transport flights, and while the Chinese may conceivably have been concerned about Soviet aerial photography, by far the most important factor in Chinese conduct was Peking's determination to obstruct, delay, and strictly control Soviet sensitive military shipments to North Vietnam, because of a desire to resist an increase in Soviet influence in Hanoi.

There is some reason to suspect that at the time of this original argument over the air transport, in late February, the Chinese may have countered with the obvious question of why the Soviets were unwilling to send all their equipment and personnel by sea. A Chinese Foreign Ministry official told [redacted] in May that the CPR had requested the USSR to send all its military assistance by sea from Vladivostok, and that the Soviets had refused, supposedly on the grounds that sea transport was too slow. The Chinese official did not specify when this exchange took place. Throughout the spring, the Soviets kept explaining defensively to their followers in the Communist movement that sea shipment of SAM equipment would be "tactically dangerous," and on one occasion even claimed that the Seventh Fleet was already blockading North Vietnam. Since the bombing of North Vietnam began, the possibility of such a blockade appears to have become prominent in Soviet thinking. There seems little doubt that the Soviet leadership, profoundly impressed by its experience with the blockade in the Caribbean Sea in October 1962, has been most reluctant again to place itself in the position of having either to turn ships around--to the derision of Peking--or to accept a confrontation with the United States.*

*One evidence of Soviet sensitivity on this subject is a report [redacted] that the Soviets had protested to the Chinese, claiming that they had intentionally planted newspaper statements to the effect that the USSR was supplying aid to Hanoi by sea in order to create difficulties for the Soviet Union with the United States. Some of the East Europeans have shown even greater apprehension. This year (footnote continued on page 8)

The Soviets are in a weak position vis-a-vis the Chinese on this point, and the Chinese have exploited it against them. At least one of the subsequent CCP letters to the CPSU which the Chinese have disseminated to other parties this year explicitly challenged the Soviets to send their military supplies to Vietnam by sea, ridiculed the Soviet contention that a U.S. blockade existed, and stated that the Soviets were afraid of the United States. The Chinese also have contended that the USSR wished, instead, to send some cargoes to Chinese ports for subsequent rail transshipment to Vietnam, and have implied that this request was rejected. A Soviet diplomatic official has confirmed that the Soviet Union in fact asked the Chinese to transship military cargoes for Vietnam from Canton, and that the Chinese refused, citing as justification for their refusal inadequate rail facilities between Canton and the DRV.*

(footnote continued from page 7)
at least two Polish and two Czechoslovak merchant ships under charter to the Chinese and used to bring cargo to North Vietnam have been sold to the Chinese. In the case of at least one of these ships--the Czech freighter Dukla--it is known that the sale occurred after a Czech-Chinese conflict over the question of bringing the ship to Haiphong. It has been credibly reported that Czech ships on voyages to the DRV are under standing orders to turn back if confronted by U.S. naval forces, and that the Chinese Communist captain of the Dukla had told the Czechs that he intended to proceed to Haiphong even if challenged by U.S. vessels.

*There is evidence, however, to suggest that the Chinese may have agreed to accept in their ports some economic cargoes, as distinguished from sensitive military ones, for transshipment to North Vietnam. One such case in December 1965 involved a shipment of Czech locomotives which the Soviets were apparently planning to bring from a Rumanian to a Chinese port for subsequent rail delivery to the DRV. This may be a special case, however, since Haiphong port facilities were inadequate to receive the locomotives involved.

D. The South China Bases

In addition to the two Soviet political gambits advanced in late February (the proposals for a joint statement and a joint meeting), and in addition to the Soviet military proposal for an air corridor, there was a fourth Soviet proposal at about this time: a demand that the Chinese yield to the USSR control over one or more air bases in South China. Although the fact that this demand was made has been well established from authoritative sources on both sides, the date it was advanced is much less certain. The sequence of events, however, suggests that the Soviets raised the matter rather early--perhaps in late February or early March--since one of the main purposes of the proposed bases will be seen to be closely tied in with the question of rail transport of Soviet MIGs across China, which was under active discussion throughout March.

The best evidence of what the Soviets proposed to do with the bases was provided by Soviet party secretary Suslov, who on 27 April told a visiting Italian party delegation in Moscow that the Chinese had refused to permit the Soviets "to use the Chinese airbase near the North Vietnamese frontier to assemble Soviet-shipped planes or to train specialist cadres." The most authoritative statement on this point from the Chinese side was contained in a CCP letter of 14 July to the Soviet party, in which the CPSU was told: "On the pretext of defending the territorial air space of Vietnam, you wanted to occupy and use one or two air fields in Southwest China, and you wanted to garrison a Soviet Army unit of 500 men there."

There are four other statements available that bear on this matter. In mid-May, the Chinese delegates to the Fourth Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Ghana told the Egyptian delegation there (according to [redacted]) that the Soviets had "wanted to establish an airbase with 1,600

Soviet personnel in China,"* and that this demand had been rejected as "military occupation." Also in mid-May, Dutch CP Chairman De Groot told his Central Committee, apparently on the basis of slightly garbled information given him by both the Soviets and the Chinese, that the Soviets had promised the DRV jet fighters; that there were "no" hard landing strips for such fighters in North Vietnam; but that such strips were available across the border in China; that China was prepared to allow the Vietnamese to use these Chinese bases but would not accept Soviet personnel; and that the Chinese believed that once they admitted Soviets to their bases, they would never get rid of them. On 15 July, Chinese Communist spokesman Liao Cheng-chih told a group of Japanese newsmen in Peking that the Soviet Union had asked his government for an airbase or bases and had been refused; according to some versions of what he said, the Soviets had wanted to build such a base in Yunnan. At some time during the summer of 1965, the Chinese also privately told at least one foreign Communist leader that the Soviets had requested permission from China to use a Chinese air base "for staging military aid to North Vietnam," once more adding that they had been refused.

It is reasonably clear from the foregoing that one purpose of the proposed Soviet airbases in South China was to receive crated MIG fighters shipped by rail from the Soviet Union for the DRV and to assemble them in an atmosphere of relative security from attack not available at the one or two usable airfields in North Vietnam. The Soviet-donated MIGs thus assembled would presumably be flown into North Vietnam subsequently, as MIGs furnished the DRV by the Chinese were in fact flown in during the spring.

Less certain is the meaning of Suslov's statement that a second function of these bases would be to enable the Soviets "to train specialist cadres." From the Soviet

*However, the figure of 500 men provided in the CCP 14 July letter may be more authoritative.

point of view, it would be as feasible--and greatly preferable politically--for the Soviets to train almost any Vietnamese specialists either in the Soviet Union or North Vietnam rather than in China. A possible exception, however, might apply in the case of the North Vietnamese pilots trained to fly MIGs in the USSR who this spring have been undergoing advanced training in North Vietnam with Soviet assistance, using there the MIG aircraft newly arrived from the Soviet Union and China. It is conceivable that the Soviets wished to use South China airbases to enable Soviet pilots to give advanced training over Chinese territory to North Vietnamese pilots flying the MIGs assembled by the Soviets at these airbases, before bringing them into the DRV. (This might be the source of De Groot's confused allusions to arguments over DRV use of Chinese "hard" landing strips manned by Soviet personnel. Also, this reading of Suslov's remark seems at least consistent with the Chinese party's statement that the Soviets had asked for the airfields "on the pretext of defending the territorial air space of Vietnam.")* Such a proposal might have appeared particularly attractive to the North Vietnamese in the late spring of 1965, when they were temporarily forced to constrict greatly the area of North Vietnam used for such pilot training because of the expansion of U.S. air operations over the DRV.

Chinese refusal of these proposals, like their reaction to the Soviet proposals for a joint declaration and a three-power meeting, would have been easily predictable. First, the Chinese would not be expected to accept the stationing of Soviet forces in control of facilities on their soil under any circumstances. The

*An alternative and still more speculative hypothesis might be that the Soviets had asked that North Vietnamese fighter pilots also be permitted to operate in defense of the DRV out of a south China base controlled by Soviet ground personnel. Such a request would have been extraordinarily presumptious, even for the CPSU.

Chinese would regard this, as they told the Egyptians, as "military occupation;" and the suggestion would inevitably remind them of what happened in 1958, when the CPSU made what Peking has publicly described as "unreasonable demands designed to bring China under Soviet military control." (These Soviet "demands" have been variously reported as proposals to set up Soviet or joint Sino-Soviet submarine, radar, air and missile bases in China, and in one version, to deploy and control nuclear warheads in China. One report quoted Mao as vowing at the time that the CPR would never permit foreign troops on Chinese soil.) And secondly, the Chinese, who have shown themselves to be acutely aware of U.S. warnings that they would have no "privileged sanctuary" if they allowed bases in China to be used for the air defense of North Vietnam,* would be most unlikely to run a risk of this kind at the behest of the Soviet Union and for Soviet political profit while the USSR ran no risk whatever. Thus it seems likely that on this issue as on others, the Soviets had put forward a proposal expecting a refusal and hoping to damage Sino-Vietnamese relations in consequence.

*To cite one example: when the first SAM launching in the DRV finally occurred in late July, and the first U.S. attempt to destroy a Soviet-manned SAM installation was made three days later, a Chinese spokesman immediately issued a private statement to the Japanese press remarking that it was "strange" that the U.S. had not attacked these installations before, since "the U.S. has been emphasizing that there is no 'sanctuary' from the U.S. air strikes." In context, this was clearly an insinuation that the Soviets had perfidiously obtained from the United States an exemption from a threat, which, by implication, was still valid against the CPR. (See also page 32.)

II. The Dispute Over Rail Transit

With the rejection of the four Soviet February proposals, the main subject of debate became rail transit across China--the question of who and what would be allowed to pass by train through China, and under what conditions. It was characteristic of the negotiations over this question that Soviet sources kept reporting, at different dates over a period of several months, that a definitive agreement had just been signed with the Chinese. Such an agreement was reported to have been reached in early March, according to documents shown a foreign Communist leader in Moscow; on 28 March, according to a statement by the Soviet ambassador in Peking [redacted] on 7 April, according to a Soviet Embassy official in New Delhi; in mid-May, according to another Soviet official abroad; and on 9 June, according to the Soviet ambassador in Peking (again) [redacted] One of the reasons for this multiplicity of dates was probably the protracted nature of the negotiations, which, as the CPSU complained to its friends in early March, were "lengthy, tiresome, and unnecessarily complicated," and focussed on different aspects of the question at different times. Another reason may have been a tendency of the Chinese to keep changing their minds, as a CPSU official remarked [redacted] in late March; that is, to delay action by shifting their position.

A. Chinese Obstruction of Soviet Personnel

The Soviets and Chinese have each claimed privately on several occasions that they suggested rail transportation of the Soviet goods to Vietnam in late February after the Chinese had rejected overflights; and each side maintained that the other at first refused. It would appear that in fact each from the outset posed conditions unacceptable to the other. The Soviets told an Australian Communist in early March that the Chinese had expressed willingness to transport missiles by rail, yet were causing

"difficulties:" and the CPSU similarly told other foreign Communists at that time that the Chinese were holding up Soviet aid despite having agreed to rail transport. A Costa Rican Communist was informed by the Soviets, also in early March, that the difficulty was that the Chinese refused to grant the Soviets the right to accompany the goods through China to Vietnam, but instead insisted that the Soviets transfer it all to Chinese hands at the Sino-Soviet border (as in fact was customary for rail freight shipments into China) for the Chinese to deliver to North Vietnam. On 25 March, three weeks later, this situation evidently had not changed, since [redacted] in Peking was then told by Soviet and Bulgarian diplomats there that the Chinese "wanted to take possession at the border" and deliver the materiel themselves. A few days before this, the Soviets had reportedly told [redacted] in Moscow that the Chinese had indicated that they would permit the passage of Soviet materiel only as joint Sino-Soviet aid to North Vietnam.

It is clear that the Soviets refused this, and that they insisted that Soviet SAM personnel be permitted to accompany the SAM equipment to Vietnam. The purpose of this was evidently twofold: first, to retain possession, or at least observation, of the equipment during its transit of China; and secondly, as the Polish ambassador to Austria remarked in early April, to use the Soviet SAM personnel in North Vietnam to "expand the Soviet presence," to "exert greater influence on North Vietnamese policies," and to "counteract Chinese influence." Several [redacted] reports testify that the Soviets from the very beginning tied the question of SAM shipment to that of the simultaneous transportation of SAM personnel, and that it was this which created the impasse. Whereas a CPSU letter told the French CP late in March that the Chinese were "interfering and preventing deliveries of armaments and other materials either by air or by rail," the Polish Ambassador to Austria a week later emphasized that what the Chinese were specifically rejecting was the "transit of Soviet advisers and technicians to Vietnam." [redacted] in Peking was told by the Soviets and Bulgarians on 25 March that the Chinese, by demanding that the materiel be handed over to them for

delivery, were obstructing delivery of materiel to the DRV "which Soviet technicians were supposed to accompany through China." According to a report, a Soviet official at about this time made private statements implying the same point: that the Chinese had at first refused to allow the Soviets to send materiel for anti-aircraft defense through China to North Vietnam, and that the Chinese then agreed to let Soviet "nationals" go through by rail, but changed their minds several times in this regard. This Soviet official thus intimated that for the Soviets, permission for transit of the personnel was a prerequisite to the transit of the equipment.*

B. The Train "Seizure" Incident

The Soviet official's remark also suggests a possible explanation for the rumors which the Soviet Government began to disseminate in Moscow in the third week of March concerning an incident involving a Soviet rail shipment of military equipment to Vietnam. According to one version the Chinese had "seized" an entire trainload of Soviet military equipment in transit through China; according to other reports, the train had merely been halted; according to still others, all Soviet train traffic across China to Vietnam had been halted. Distorted versions of the event were still being

*Soviet desire to use the SAM personnel to watch the equipment in transit, as well as to use it after arrival, would explain the curious Soviet reluctance to use alternate means of sending the personnel to North Vietnam, e.g., in small groups by ship, or in small groups by commercial airline bypassing China, both methods involving comparitively little risk. It may be relevant to the Soviet position on this matter that the Soviets have given the Chinese themselves no SAM aid since 1960, and that in consequence the Chinese to this day have only 16 SAM installations in all of China, only about half of which are equipped.

used by the Soviets for their own purposes a month later; thus on 15 April a Soviet delegate told a plenary meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Ghana that the Chinese had seized Soviet arms which were being sent by the USSR to the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, and three days later the Chinese delegate termed this a lie. It is conceivable, however, that in early March the Soviets thought they had an agreement with the Chinese on rail transportation which included the transit of Soviet personnel (as one Soviet official said), and that a train carrying both personnel and equipment was brought as far as the Sino-Soviet border--or even allowed to enter China--and then halted by the Chinese.* Alternatively, or additionally, it is quite possible that the incident involved disagreement over a Chinese attempt to inspect the equipment or passengers. The Chinese subsequently made numerous private and public statements insisting on their right of inspection of Soviet rail transit traffic, and in late April adopted and thereafter published for the first time a set of stringent Frontier Inspection Regulations, an act which was surely not coincidental.

To sum up: as of late March a stalemate existed. The Chinese would not allow the missile equipment to pass with Soviet personnel, and the Soviets would not send it without them. The Chinese would not allow anything or anyone to pass by air, and the Soviets were reluctant to

*In a Chinese letter to the Soviet party on 14 July 1965, the CCP hinted that something of this sort had happened. The Chinese letter claimed that the Soviets "wanted to send through China but without first obtaining Chinese consent an army formation of 4,000 men to be stationed in Vietnam." (Emphasis added) Other Chinese sources have repeatedly and consistently referred to the Soviet desire to send 4,000 air defense personnel to Vietnam; and so the CCP letter may well have been alluding to an actual Soviet attempt to bring a train carrying such personnel (and, presumably, SAM equipment) into the CPR.

ship sensitive materiel by sea. Even Soviet MIGs were apparently not yet arriving in Vietnam by rail, since MIG crates were not [redacted] until 6 May; presumably they also were being delayed by the question of Chinese inspection of Soviet shipments, by the question of the transit of Soviet personnel with the MIGs, or by the question of the Soviet airbases in South China.

The CPSU vigorously exploited this situation against the Chinese in the international Communist movement. Party representatives attending the 1-5 March Moscow conference were briefed on the matter, and some were shown documentation of the Sino-Soviet correspondence; and a series of CPSU messages and letters were sent abroad, some through the mechanism of the Problems of Peace and Socialism staff in Prague. In addition, the general message that the Chinese were obstructing Soviet aid to North Vietnam was disseminated to the non-Communist world through discreet leaks by the Soviets to the diplomatic communities in Moscow and Peking and through private statements by Soviet RIS officers and diplomats elsewhere in the world. Finally, Brezhnev and Kosygin each made an indirect public allusion to Chinese obstruction, Brezhnev declaring on 23 March that "it is not because of us that there has been, or will be, delay" in getting help to North Vietnam, and Kosygin asserting on 7 April that the Soviets were using "the available possibilities" for rendering assistance.

C. The Soviet April Proposals

At the same time, the Soviets were maneuvering actively behind the scenes to use the Sino-Soviet difficulties over transit rights to embarrass Chinese-Vietnamese relations. According to accounts subsequently sent abroad by both the Soviets and Chinese, on 3 April--a week before North Vietnamese party first secretary Le Duan was to arrive in Moscow at the head of a DRV delegation--the Soviets sent letters to Peking and Hanoi renewing their February proposal for a joint Soviet-Chinese-North Vietnamese public declaration to warn the United

States, and at the same time formally proposing a meeting of representatives of the three parties at the highest level and at an agreed-upon place. The purpose of the proposed three-party meeting, according to a subsequent private statement by Suslov, was to "coordinate the problem of military assistance to North Vietnam"--the problem already dramatized for the DRV by the Sino-Soviet conflict over SAM shipment.

On 11 April--the day after Le Duan's arrival in Moscow--the Chinese replied to the Soviet proposals, rejecting them once more. The Chinese are alleged to have insisted that they and the Soviets should reach separate, not joint agreements with the DRV, and added that they had already done so. The Chinese (not for the last time) derided Soviet aid to the DRV as insignificant, and the Soviets claim to have replied that same day to Peking to rebuke the Chinese for this remark. The Soviets have also claimed that their plan for a Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese meeting was discussed with Le Duan while he was in Moscow, that both during and subsequent to the Le Duan visit the North Vietnamese declared their support for the scheme, and that the central committee of the North Vietnamese party at some point so informed the Chinese leadership. Moreover, the Soviets further report that after obtaining DRV approval for the three-party meeting, the Soviet central committee again wrote to the Chinese party and government to ask the Chinese to reconsider; this letter was dispatched on 17 April, the day before Le Duan left the Soviet Union for a stay in Peking. This 17 April CPSU letter charged the Chinese with responsibility for the delay of delivery of Soviet weapons to Vietnam, and showed in other ways that it was written for Vietnamese eyes. It is reasonable to assume that a version of the message was shown to Le Duan before he left Moscow.

Thus, the Soviets had done their best to set the stage for an acrimonious exchange between the Le Duan delegation and the Chinese leadership, and the highly unusual absence of a joint communique when the Le Duan visit was concluded on 23 April suggests that his talks with Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping were not in fact the "cordial conversations" NCNA announced. Disagreements

are likely to have arisen under several headings, and the subject of the CPSU letter may well have been one of them. The North Vietnamese had every reason to favor strongly (as the Soviets said they did) both the Soviet proposals--the tripartite public statement and the tripartite conference on military aid--and the Chinese were determined to refuse. On 27 April, after Le Duan had returned to Hanoi, Suslov told an Italian party delegation that the Soviet proposal "supported by Le Duan" for a high level meeting between the Chinese, Soviets and North Vietnamese to coordinate military assistance to the DRV had been rejected by the Chinese on the grounds that existing Soviet-DRV bilateral accords adequately covered the problem. Within the next two weeks, Le Duan made private statements to the same Italian delegation in Hanoi suggesting that the North Vietnamese had for the time being given up on the Soviet proposals: Le Duan admitted that "the present lack of unity in the socialist camp causes uneasiness," but claimed that the Soviets and Chinese, although divided on certain fundamentals, were each in accord with North Vietnamese objectives and were each helping, "even if separately." Meanwhile, the Chinese party allowed the CPSU letter of 17 April to remain unanswered for three months, and finally responded on 14 July with a lengthy message which was vitriolic even by CCP standards and which the Chinese subsequently disseminated to other parties to aid in their general anti-Soviet campaign.

D. Limited Mutual Concessions on Transit

There is reason to believe that one reason the Chinese in April felt they could continue to reject North Vietnamese wishes for a conference to coordinate policy on aid shipments was that Peking by that time had already made limited concessions regarding such shipments. In brief, the sum of all the evidence suggests that at the very end of March or early in April--shortly before Le

Duan went to Moscow--the Chinese agreed to a compromise.* First, several reports agree that the Chinese obtained Soviet acquiescence in the Chinese demand that they be allowed to inspect all goods shipped. Secondly, the Chinese apparently agreed to allow crated Soviet MIGs to pass through China by rail to Vietnam, with the Soviet consenting to ship them despite the Chinese refusal of a South China airbase. Thirdly, the Chinese seem to have agreed, at least in principle, to the eventual rail transit of Soviet SAM equipment to North Vietnam (presumably escorted by some Soviet personnel), provided that the North Vietnamese agreed that the Soviets would not be allowed to control or operate the SAM installations. This arrangement regarding the SAMs implied reluctant DRV acceptance (at this time) of a lengthy wait--until Vietnamese personnel became available after training in the Soviet Union--before SAMs could actually be used, and possibly a similar wait before all the equipment would even be sent by the Soviets to Vietnam.

One may speculate that the North Vietnamese were initially influenced to yield to Chinese pressure on this issue because they were themselves anxious to retain full control over the SAMs and the power to order the SAMs to be used, and because the Soviets may have been unwilling to place their own SAM personnel under the orders of the DRV. The Chinese are likely to have argued to the North Vietnamese--as they are known to have argued to others--that without such DRV command of the SAM personnel North Vietnam would be placed in the same position as was Cuba in 1962, when Castro wished to use the SAMs and the Soviet Union was able to prevent it. As will be seen, it is the

*To anticipate, this dating is supported by two groups of evidence: first, the mass of reports cited in later paragraphs; and secondly, the fact that construction of the first SAM site began at this time in Vietnam, while Soviet MIG crates, requiring some three weeks for rail transit through China, were first seen in the DRV five weeks later.

thesis of this paper that the North Vietnamese later changed their minds, asked for Soviet SAM personnel, and induced the Chinese to allow them to pass. It will also be seen that it was only after this that the Chinese surfaced publicly demands that the Soviets allow the SAMs to be fired.

Throughout April there were a multitude of misleading reports on this subject, almost all from Soviet sources. On 3 April [redacted] as declaring that the Chinese, "at the insistence of Ho Chi Minh," had finally agreed to allow armaments for the DRV to pass through China, as claiming that a protocol on this subject was signed on 28 March by the three countries,* and as predicting that "launching ramps for rockets" would be installed in Vietnam without delay. During the first week of April [redacted] was reportedly told by the Soviets in Moscow that the difficulties which had been holding up Soviet aid to North Vietnam had been resolved, and that equipment was now on its way. On 8 April an official of the Soviet Embassy in New Delhi volunteered to a U.S. diplomat the statement that agreement had just been reached--on 7 April--between Moscow and Peking for the transit of military assistance (unspecified) to the DRV.

*As already noted, Suslov on 27 April told the Italian Communist party that the Chinese had refused a tripartite meeting to coordinate military assistance on the explicit grounds that existing Soviet-DRV bilateral agreements were adequate. Le Duan thereafter told the Italian Communists that the Soviets and Chinese were each helping, "even if separately." This evidence, together with the trend of many Chinese statements and party documents, makes it unlikely that the Chinese had signed any tripartite formal agreement with the Soviets and North Vietnamese in late March. It is possible, however, that a separate Sino-Vietnamese understanding was reached at about that time. On 28 March [redacted] reported [redacted] that "negotiations" had been going on between the DRV and the CPR.

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without delay," as Soviet Ambassador Lapin had predicted in early April. Instead, construction of the first SAM site near Hanoi--apparently begun at the end of March, and discovered in photography on 5 April--proceeded at a very leisurely pace. A month later, in early May, the launch revetments at this first site were nearing completion, and a second site was begun; but no SAM hardware had been installed. After another two months had gone by, late in June, there were still only four sites under construction, three of which were nearing completion (including the one begun in late March) and one of which was half-complete. Only one site at this point had yet been even partially supplied with missile-associated equipment.

This sequence of events does indicate the presence in North Vietnam, from late March on, of at least a few Soviet personnel concerned with SAM site construction,

The missile-related equipment seen at one site in late June was first seen there in mid-May. Nevertheless, the failure of other equipment and more personnel to appear, and the extremely slow pace of site construction, together strongly suggest that the Soviets were marking time, waiting. It appears most improbable that genuine logistical difficulties in the Chinese rail system could have delayed the arrival of sufficient equipment and personnel from late March to 24 July, when the missiles were first launched. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that at least part of this delay had a political cause. There is information from authoritative sources on both the Soviet and Chinese sides to support this supposition.

A few Soviet statements to Communists in April and May contradicted the message being presented to the United States and indicated a reason for the stretchout of SAM site construction. On 27 April, Suslov made the general statement to the Italian party delegation in Moscow that the shipment of Soviet war materiel to North Vietnam was contingent upon the number of specialists in Vietnam, and added that "for the time being," the Vietnamese believed it "inopportune" for the Soviets to

send a larger number of specialists. On 5 May, Pravda correspondent Zhukov told the same delegation in Hanoi that the North Vietnamese had refused to permit the Soviets to man the SAM sites, because of the attitude taken by the Chinese; consequently, said Zhukov, the sites could not be used until the winter of 1965, by which time it was expected that the North Vietnamese specialists would be sufficiently trained to operate them.* Later in May, a Yugoslav Foreign Office official stated that the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade had originally informed the Yugoslavs that the Soviets would be supplying "experts" for missile sites in North Vietnam since the DRV lacked trained personnel, but that the ambassador had subsequently said that the North Vietnamese had informed Moscow that the DRV would rely on personnel to be trained in the USSR rather than accept the Soviet "experts." These three reports should be read in conjunction with the additional statement made by the Soviet leaders [redacted] in early April to the effect that the Chinese, while now permitting the transit of equipment,

*It should be noted that Suslov's and Zhukov's remarks, taken together, implied that the Soviet Union would not even ship many of the missiles to North Vietnam until Vietnamese specialists had completed many additional months of training in the USSR. But on 6 May, the very next day after Zhukov had spoken to the Italian Communists, a second secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi told a very different tale [redacted] The Soviet diplomat claimed: (a) that the SAMs had already arrived in the DRV, accompanied by "a number" of Soviet technicians; (b) that the North Vietnamese could already handle SAMs because of previous training in their use by the Chinese; (c) that the North Vietnamese would be capable of making full use of the SAMs themselves in a very short time; and (d) that the Soviet technicians who had accompanied the SAMs would therefore not be remaining long in the DRV. There is reason to believe that all of these statements were either false or greatly misleading.

were placing a "limit" on the transit of Soviet personnel. While the Chinese may indeed have continued such restrictions independently, the more significant limitation was the one which the Chinese apparently persuaded the North Vietnamese to impose.

In addition, several Chinese private and public statements in April and May similarly suggest a North Vietnamese decision in late March to yield to Chinese demands that they wait for SAMs until DRV personnel were available. On 8 April, [redacted] reported [redacted] that Chinese Vice Premier Lu Ting-i had told [redacted] that the USSR had offered to send to the DRV "rockets for eight battalions and 4,000 personnel." Lu declared that "the DRV refused the sending of personnel." (Emphasis added.) Later in April, a senior Chinese diplomat told a colleague that Moscow had offered to send "many thousands" of Soviet technicians to Hanoi, adding that "of course" this could not be accepted; this would be a sort of invasion," and claiming that the North Vietnamese "had the sagacity to refuse the offer." On 18 April, the Tunisian periodical Jeune Afrique belatedly published statements alleged to have been made by Chou En-lai to Ben Bella during a visit to Algiers at the end of March. According to this account, Chou declared that the Soviets were trying to create in Vietnam a "new Cuba," ending in "Russian-American negotiations which would determine the fate of Southeast Asia without the peoples directly interested being consulted," just as Cuban interests "were sacrificed by the Khrushchev-Kennedy agreement concerning the withdrawal of Russian rockets." For this reason, Chou said, "the sending of technicians, that is to say Soviet troops," to man Soviet rockets is "something which the people of Southeast Asia cannot allow or tolerate."

The Albanians appear to have taken the appearance of the 18 April Jeune Afrique piece as a signal, for two days later the Albanian party organ Zeri i Popullit made the first explicit public charge in Chinese-bloc propaganda to the effect that the Soviets were using the bombing of the DRV as an excuse to try to place "so-called Soviet volunteers" in "key places in Vietnam" with the

aim of "crushing the struggle of the heroic Vietnamese people" and creating conditions for negotiations. On 4 May a Chinese Red Flag article made the same point, a bit less explicitly. On 14 May, a Chinese Communist official told a pro-Chinese foreign Communist that the arms the Soviets were sending to Vietnam were meant to "control" the Vietnamese, not to aid them, and that any Russian troops manning the rockets would be used for this purpose, "as in Cuba." On the following day, Dutch CP chairman De Groot told a meeting of his central committee that "China believes that if the Vietnamese try to use the new Russian arms, the Soviet Union will withdraw them." In short, the Chinese at this time were doing their utmost to justify their own pressure on the DRV to refuse Soviet SAM personnel, to try to keep the North Vietnamese from changing their minds on this point, and to belittle the Soviet SAMs in general.

F. Chinese Surrender on Soviet SAM Specialists

The Chinese, however, were fighting a losing battle in this matter, chiefly because of the gradually increasing scope of U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam; it was the alarm generated in Hanoi by these attacks which seems to have caused the original decision--to wait for the availability of Vietnamese SAM cadres--eventually to be scrapped.* At some point late in the spring the DRV

* The DRV representative is said to have declared that the situation in Vietnam was not as good as has been reported, and added: "If the friendly socialist countries do not give us the means that they promised us to fight against the air attacks, our country will know that her battle is just but in vain."

apparently put sufficient pressure on the Chinese to induce Peking at last to yield, and to agree to the transit of significant quantities of Soviet SAM equipment and number of Soviet personnel.

Information as to the timing of this change is much more fragmentary and inconclusive than information on earlier events. There is some evidence, however, to support the conjecture that it occurred in late May or around the beginning of June. On 9 June, Soviet Ambassador Lapin told [redacted] in Peking that the CPR had "just given her agreement to let the USSR transport war materiel destined for North Vietnam across China." While Lapin did not state what materiel was involved or when it would be sent, there is every reason to suppose he was referring to the SAMs, the major item under dispute.* About a week after this, in mid-June, [redacted] reported that he had learned from various Chinese officials that the Soviets had sent to North Vietnam, among other things, SAM equipment including "rockets for eight battalions," and that

*It is of interest that it was not long before this, beginning on 20 May, that the Chinese monentarily relaxed their inhibitions about Soviet overflights sufficiently to permit the passage of eight Soviet IL-28 light bombers from Irkutsk to North Vietnam. This small concession may have presaged the larger concession regarding the SAM personnel shortly afterward. It is also conceivable that the Chinese in early June found it more difficult to refuse a DRV request for the transit of Soviet SAM technicians because the North Vietnamese may have simultaneously requested the entry of Chinese combat engineers into the northern DRV, despite the well-documented North Vietnamese reluctance to see Chinese troops on DRV soil. It was apparently in June that PLA engineer troops did first enter North Vietnam, presumably to assist in the maintenance of the transportation system under U.S. attack.

4,000 Soviet military personnel and technical experts had already entered the DRV.* He quoted Vice Premier Lu Ting-i as commenting, in this connection, that the Soviet Union was engaged in adventurism in North Vietnam and was risking another Cuba-type capitulation.

This was the first time important Chinese officials had explicitly stated that Soviet SAM equipment and personnel had come to North Vietnam. Moreover, Lu Ting-i's remarks on this occasion were in striking contrast to the [redacted] he had made on 8 April [redacted] when he had said that the Soviets had wanted to send to Vietnam "rockets for eight battalions" and 4,000 personnel, but that the Vietnamese had declined the personnel. Lu's comments in mid-June about the Soviet sins of adventurism presumably referred to the risk the Soviets were now running of allowing a direct clash between their SAM personnel and U.S. forces, and were transparently intended as a rationalization to the Indonesian ambassador of what was obviously a defeat for Chinese policy.

While Lu's mid-June statement appears to be good evidence that the Chinese by then had lost the battle over the Soviet SAM specialists, Lu may not have been accurate

*The Chinese consistently referred to this specific number of Soviet SAM personnel and this specific quantity of SAM equipment as the matter under consideration, both before and after the CPR had agreed to allow them to pass. This suggests that even the agreement the Chinese may have reached with the Soviets in early June did not give a blank check to the USSR for the transit of unlimited numbers of SAMs and personnel, but instead authorized transit up to a specific limit (although not necessarily the limit the Chinese had been naming). This hypothesis was given support in the late summer and fall of 1965, when the Chinese halted a Soviet shipment of anti-aircraft "weapons" on the grounds that it was not covered by the previous agreement, and then used the absence of a new agreement as justification for continuing to hold up the shipment. (See pages 40-42.)

in claiming that all the Soviet SAM equipment and personnel which the Chinese had agreed to allow to pass had already arrived in the DRV. While the date when Chinese consent for transit was given remains uncertain, it seems possible, in view of Lapin's 9 June statement that not enough time had elapsed by mid-June to complete the passage of the missiles and all other equipment through China. Certainly there was good evidence at the very end of June that the flow of high-priority military and civilian goods from China was straining the DRV's rail transport capacity: requested that an order of shovels be sent by sea because the limited capacity of the DRV rail line from China had resulted in a backlog of goods at the border. While it can be neither proved or disproved that the arrival of SAM-related equipment was helping to cause that difficulty, this seems quite possible. Moreover, if SAM equipment and personnel were still arriving in North Vietnam at the end of June and through early July, this in turn would help to explain why the pace of SAM site construction remained slow throughout the month of June: the Soviets presumably preferred to wait until sufficient equipment was available, whereupon existing sites could be completed and some new ones prepared simultaneously and very rapidly, new and old sites becoming operational together. Something like this appears, in fact, to have happened in the last two weeks of July.*

On this reconstruction, the bulk of Soviet SAM equipment and personnel, following a Chinese agreement to let specific numbers pass at the beginning of June, arrived by stages in North Vietnam in the latter half of

*It is conceivable, however, that the Soviets were unduly rushed, and would have preferred, as a safety factor, to build far more alternative, unoccupied SAM sites (as they later did) before making any operational, but were harried into committing themselves on 24 July by DRV anxiety and Chinese taunts.

June and the first half of July, and thus coincided roughly with the increase in U.S. air strikes against DRV territory north of Hanoi. North Vietnamese propaganda displayed greatly increased concern about this U.S. movement northward, and seemed particularly exercised at the alleged violations of Hanoi's "suburban airspace" and the attacks on one of the rail lines to China. In July, a succession of DRV pronouncements--in a Giap Hoc Tap article, in a 3 July Foreign Ministry statement, in a 4 July statement by DRV mass organizations, and in an 18 July Nhan Dan article--alluded to the escalation of the air strikes as a challenge to the bloc, and hinted at the need for further bloc action.

The Chinese in mid-July suddenly issued a flurry of private and public statements calculated to exploit this Vietnamese anxiety and to create pressures upon the USSR to commit the newly-arrived Soviet SAM equipment and personnel to action at once against the United States.* On 14 July, the CCP finally answered the CPSU letter of 17 April dispatched after Le Duan's visit to Moscow; among other things, the Chinese defended themselves at length (although rather lamely) against the charge that they had obstructed Soviet aid to Vietnam, and then went on to sneer again at "the quantity and quality of your aid" as having been "far out of proportion to the power of your country," and, in fact, "old, out-moded, impractical and inferior." Presumably, a copy of this CCP letter was sent to Hanoi. On 15 July, the very next day, an authoritative regime spokesman, Liao Cheng-chih, called a press conference for Japanese newsmen in Peking, and proceeded to wonder aloud about reports that the Soviet Union was building air defense missile bases around Hanoi, asking "why does the Soviet Union not use them and fire its missiles," if there really were such bases, and if they were

*It was entirely in character for the Chinese to do this despite the fact that Vice Premier Lu Ting-i had criticized the Soviet "adventurism" in bringing the missiles to Vietnam in the first place.

not "merely for display purposes." This was widely reported in the Japanese press, and could hardly have been missed by Hanoi. Next, on 16 July, NCNA quoted the DRV Ambassador in Indonesia as responding to a query about Soviet help by saying that it is "difficult to say whether Soviet assistance will be enough" to meet the "heavy requirements" resulting from U.S. military escalation. Finally, on 17 July, NCNA published an account of the Helsinki World Peace Congress which quoted a woman NFLSV delegate as having attacked the Soviets in thinly-veiled fashion, and alleged that she had demanded for the Vietnamese "the right to obtain and use the weapons supplied as aid by the friendly countries." (Emphasis added.) The Chinese had previously made specific allegations privately that the Soviets would not permit the SAMs in Vietnam to be fired, just as they had not permitted Castro to fire the SAMs in Cuba; now the Chinese surfaced these insinuations publicly, presumably because the missiles were at last present to be used.*

Implicit in the Chinese statements was the assumption that the SAMs in North Vietnam were in fact under Soviet control, and it is clear [redacted] that at the time of the first SAM firings and for some time afterward the SAM sites were occupied primarily by Soviet personnel. Although by the fall the North Vietnamese were playing an increasingly important role, the Soviets have continued to retain an essential advisory and support function. It is not clear what relationship was established between the highest Soviet military representatives in the DRV and the North Vietnamese military,

*The fact that the Chinese had not raised this issue publicly before lends circumstantial support to the hypothesis of the late arrival of most of the Soviet missiles and personnel. It would have been out of character for the Chinese to have refrained from comment if the wherewithal had been present in the DRV all the time that SAM site construction was being dragged out in previous months.

but it seems unlikely that the Soviets actually placed themselves under the orders of the DRV government. Even if the Soviets temporarily retained ultimate control over the SAMs, however, it is likely that the USSR had given some private assurance to the North Vietnamese regime, before the bulk of the equipment and personnel entered the DRV, that the Soviet Union would not frustrate North Vietnamese desires to have the SAMs put to use.

On 24 July, the first SAM shootdown by the Soviets of a U.S. aircraft occurred; and on 27 July the first U.S. attempt to destroy SAM installations was made. On 28 July, the Chinese made their first comments: a Japanese newspaper quoted "a reliable source close the Chinese Government" as emphasizing that "the so-called missile bases...are likely not as large as is generally stated, nor have they yet been completed." Commenting on the U.S. strike at the SAM bases, the Chinese source remarked: "The U.S. has been emphasizing that there is no 'sanctuary' from the U.S. air strikes, so it seems rather strange that the U.S. has not made them bombing targets before now." On the same day, CCP central committee member Liu Ning-yi (who may well have been the Chinese source in question), in a public address before a Tokyo meeting, sneered at those who were "making some gestures of support for Vietnam, playing a few anti-U.S. imperialism tunes and devising some little stunts, while at the same time they actively collaborate with U.S. imperialists for 'peace talks,' exchange information and secretly enter into collusion with the U.S. imperialists." (Emphasis added.) The "little stunts" alluded to were presumably the events of 24 and 27 July.

III. Epilogue: The Conflict Over Aid Since July

This has been the Chinese Communist refrain ever since. After having previously stridently demanded to know why the SAMs were not being used, the Chinese have subsequently belittled their significance along with that of all Soviet military aid to North Vietnam, despite the growing and impressive evidence that this aid--and the SAMs in particular--have indeed been important.* Despite their own very considerable military assistance to North Vietnam, including the stationing of Chinese engineer troops in the northern DRV since June, the Chinese have been very much on the defensive with regard to Soviet-Vietnamese relations since losing the spring battle of the SAMs.

A. Soviet Private Disavowals of SAM Personnel

The Soviets, meanwhile, while continuing throughout the summer and fall to expand their presence in the DRV and to multiply the number of alternative, unoccupied SAM sites, took steps to limit the risk of confrontation with the United States deriving from the activities of Soviet personnel in Vietnam. Soviet propaganda, while making occasional generalized claims to the effect that the USSR had furnished weapons and military equipment to North Vietnam, has carefully avoided direct public acknowledgement that any Soviet military personnel are in the DRV or even that the Soviet Union has sent surface-to-air missiles to North Vietnam. Privately, some authoritative Soviet spokesmen have acknowledged the sending of the

*For example, one of the first important effects of the entry of the SAMs into operational use was to permit the area of North Vietnam used for the advanced training of MIG fighter pilots by the Soviets to be gradually expanded, beginning in early August, after having been greatly constricted since early April because of U.S. air activity.

missiles (which they could hardly deny, in view of their own past statements), but have denied flatly the presence of Soviet SAM personnel. Indeed, they have gratuitously suggested to U.S. representatives that it has been the Chinese who have been helping the North Vietnamese fire the SAMs at U.S. aircraft. This ludicrous Soviet gambit can hardly have been seriously expected to mislead the United States as to the fact, but rather to make clear official Soviet dissociation from the fate of Soviet SAM personnel engaged in combat against the U.S. in North Vietnam.

Thus on 28 July, the day after the first U.S. attempt to destroy a SAM site, Soviet chief disarmament negotiator Tsarapkin was said to have declared in a briefing that it was the overall U.S. policy of bombing the DRV that was serious and that "the specific objects which are being bombed is of secondary importance." This statement was reported by a Soviet official in Geneva who was probably aware his remarks would reach the U.S. Government. Simultaneously, two Soviet intelligence officers in different parts of the world stated that the SAM sites were now the responsibility of the North Vietnamese Government, not the USSR, and emphasized that the Soviet Union did not intend to become more directly involved. On 18 August, Col. General Romanov, the acting Commander-in-Chief of the Moscow Military District, told [redacted] that the Soviets had supplied SAMs to Hanoi but no personnel, and that the DRV SAM sites were manned by North Vietnamese or possibly by the Chinese. On 9 September, in a long conversation [redacted] this line was further embellished by Army General A. A. Yepishev, the Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet armed forces. Yepishev maintained that Soviet SAMs had been sent to North Vietnam with no Soviet personnel; then modified this to assert that SAM instructors had been sent by the USSR but that these had been withdrawn; and then added that it was possible that Communist China was sending both SAMs and SAM personnel to North Vietnam. In fact, as has been noted, the first SAM launchings were conducted by Soviet personnel, and while the North Vietnamese have gradually been assuming increasing responsibility for the

SAMs, the Soviets still play an important role and will probably continue to do so for some time. There is no evidence that the Chinese have sent SAM equipment or personnel to the DRV, and indeed, this could hardly be more improbable, in view of the fact that the Chinese have apparently been unable to produce SAMs themselves and have only a few occupied SAM sites in all of China.

B. The MIG Anomaly

This unheroic Soviet attempt to blame the Chinese for their own activities is consistent with the Soviet reluctance to ship sensitive military equipment to Haiphong by sea, and similarly reflects determination to avoid becoming trapped in a confrontation with the United States because of Vietnam. Another circumstance which the Chinese may well have attempted to ascribe to Soviet caution is the initial failure of the Soviet Union to ship MIG-19s or 21s to the DRV, the Soviets limiting themselves instead in the spring and summer of 1965 to MIG-15s and 17s. Only in mid-December did the first indications appear that Soviet MIG-19s or (more probably) MIG-21s may have been sent to the DRV. The Chinese, of course, also failed to give such fighters to the North Vietnamese throughout 1965, and this is particularly relevant with regard to the MIG-19s, which the Chinese began to acquire in fairly substantial numbers in 1964; but the Chinese could retort and probably have retorted that the Soviets have far more high-performance aircraft to give, and that the Soviets have in fact been quite willing to furnish MIG-21s not only to the East European bloc states, revisionist Yugoslavia, and Cuba, but also to a number of non-socialist states around the world, including "reactionary" India.

There is some reason to suppose that the Chinese during 1965 may have privately brought this circumstance to North Vietnamese attention, since it was an obvious argument to use in the general Chinese attempt to prove Soviet perfidy. In mid-May, Li Shao-pai, a CCP inter-party liaison official, told a pro-Chinese European

Communist that the controversy with the USSR over aid to Vietnam revolved around a Soviet promise to send the DRV both "a 4,000-man rocket unit" and "MIG-21s."* And as already noted, the CCP letter to the CPSU of 14 July referred to the Soviet shipment of "old" and "out-moded" military equipment to the DRV. This remark would appear to have at least as much relevance to the MIG-15s as to any of the other equipment sent by the USSR to North Vietnam, and could have been intended as a veiled allusion to specific charges already raised in private.**

Soviet sensitivity on this point would appear to have been demonstrated by statements regarding the MIG-21s made privately by Soviet sources in the fall of 1965. In late September, a Japanese reporter was told by the Indonesian ambassador in Hanoi that the Soviet ambassador there had stated that the USSR had offered in May 1965 to supply the DRV with MIG-21s and to train the pilots. This training would supposedly take one year; but the report did not specify whether the offer was accepted. On 2 October, [redacted] representative in Hanoi reported statements [redacted]

*As noted earlier, Li is also reported to have stated in this conversation that in 1963 the USSR had promised to deliver to Vietnam, among other things, one regiment of rocket units and one "air group" of MIG-17s, and that Khrushchev later reneged on this promise. Regardless of the truth of this Chinese tale, it is interesting that Li made a distinction between the MIG-17s allegedly promised in 1963 and the MIG-21s said to have been promised in 1965.

**It should be noted, however, that the North Vietnamese themselves have found some of the Soviet equipment other than the MIGs to be old and unsatisfactory. In a mid-November intercept, a Vietnamese speaker at a SAM site was heard to complain that old communications equipment was making conversations between the site and the regimental SAM controller difficult to hear.

--presumably reflecting claims by the Soviets--to the effect that the USSR had offered the DRV "supersonic" aircraft, and that not only the USSR but also Rumania, East Germany and Czechoslovakia had offered pilots to fly these aircraft, but that the North Vietnamese had declined both offers with thanks as not presently needed. (Although Soviet MIG-15 and 17 pilots have helped to train DRV pilots in North Vietnam, they are not believed to have participated in combat, and it seems on balance unlikely that the USSR would allow them to do so. It also seems fairly unlikely that the Soviets would offer combat pilots for more advanced aircraft, and most improbable that the three East European states named would do so.) Finally, the Soviets seem likely to have been ultimately responsible (in view of the source) for planting a story with the West German press in mid-November making the dubious claim that the DRV had refused a Soviet offer of combat pilots, but also insisting, more credibly, that the USSR had not yet sent North Vietnam MIG-21s because the North Vietnamese had only a limited number of jet pilots, all trained with older MIG models.*

It thus seems possible that the Soviets have begun training DRV personnel this year to fly MIG-19s or MIG-21s in the Soviet Union, and that these aircraft have been scheduled to appear in North Vietnam as this training is completed. It is also conceivable that the Soviets have agreed to retrain--in a considerably shorter period--some of earlier Vietnamese MIG trainees, and thus get more advanced fighter aircraft to North Vietnam much sooner. If the initial mid-December indications of the arrival of some MIG-19s or 21s in North Vietnam are confirmed, this would suggest that the retraining option has

*In 1964, Laotians returning from training in the Soviet Union gave divergent accounts regarding the fighter aircraft the North Vietnamese were being trained to fly at that time. A few reports implied that these included MIG-19s or 21s, while others--the majority--indicated only MIG-15s or 17s.

been chosen for some of the DRV MIG pilots. At any rate, the hypothesis that the Soviets have at any time this year deliberately withheld high-performance fighter aircraft from the DRV against North Vietnamese wishes presents great difficulties. It might be argued that the Soviet Union had been unwilling to undertake whatever risk of escalating the conflict with the United States is involved in supplying the DRV with aircraft capable of seriously challenging U.S. airstrikes over North Vietnam, and in thus inviting attacks on the two airfields heretofore left untouched. This does not seem reasonable, however, in view of the political costs involved for Soviet relations with the DRV, in view of the demonstrated Soviet willingness to furnish the DRV with a SAM system and to accept U.S. attacks on Soviet personnel in the process, and in view of the Soviet willingness to furnish the North Vietnamese with eight IL-28 light bombers, a potential offensive weapon which in fact had been a subsidiary cause of controversy with the United States following the Cuban crisis. On balance, the hypothesis that the delivery of MIG-19s or 21s was delayed pending the completion of training for North Vietnamese in the USSR appears much more likely.

C. Surfacing of the Tripartite Conference Proposal

Meanwhile, the question of a Sino-Soviet-North Vietnamese summit conference was at last surfaced publicly by both sides in November 1965, possibly as the result of a renewal of Soviet private efforts to promote such a meeting. On 21 September, a North Vietnamese party delegation headed by Politburo member Le Duc Tho concluded a visit to France by signing a joint communique with the French Communist party in which the desire was expressed for the "strengthening of combat solidarity in the international labor movement and the communist movement," because "this solidarity is much more needed now than at any other time." A week after this demonstration of DRV agreement with the CPSU "unity of action" line, and some ten days before DRV Premier Pham Van Dong's October visit to Moscow, Brezhnev reiterated to a CPSU central committee

plenum that "we are consistently speaking out for a unification of the efforts of all fraternal socialist countries in the rendering of support to the Vietnamese people." On 11 November, after Pham had returned from Moscow and Peking, the Chinese published a long People's Daily-Red Flag editorial article whose central purpose was to warn the DRV against further acquiescence in Soviet calls for "unity of action." This article, among many other things, ordered "Marxist-Leninists" to become aware of Soviet perfidy in "trying by every means to bring about a summit conference of the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and China." In making public the fact of this proposal and denouncing it, the Chinese sought to make it difficult for the North Vietnamese again privately to champion it at Soviet urging.

The Soviets, however, appear to have seized upon this as an opportunity. On 20 November, the East German party organ Neues Deutschland published an editorial article--evidently written at Soviet prompting--which referred to the urgent necessity of talks between "the CPSU, the Vietnam Workers Party, and the CCP, on joint measures against the U.S. aggressors, on the coordination of aid for Vietnam." A week later, a Pravda editorial of 28 November followed this up by alluding to the "particularly hard blows" which the Chinese "splitting line" was dealing to the Vietnamese party, and by denouncing "those who refuse to cooperate and turn down proposals for joint actions" regarding Vietnam. Although Pravda did not explicitly refer to the plan for a tripartite summit conference, the Polish party did pursue the matter explicitly in a strongly-worded anti-Chinese editorial on 3 December, and also suggested the desirability of a summit meeting of all the bloc states regarding Vietnam.*

*If the Soviets could actually convene even a rump meeting of the bloc for this purpose, with DRV participation, this would be a momentous victory for the CPSU over the Chinese party, whatever the Chinese did. If the Chinese and Albanians agreed to attend such a meeting, (footnote continued on page 40)

By the end of the first week of December, several other Soviet supporters within the bloc had gone on record with editorials reiterating the Soviet unity-of-action line. Meanwhile, unconfirmed rumors alleged that Ho Chi Minh had gone to Peking in late November to argue with Mao on this matter. Regardless of the truth of these rumors, it is evident that the CPSU continues to feel, with reason, that it has the CCP at a great disadvantage on this issue.

D. Chinese Obstruction of August Soviet Shipment

Finally, there is good evidence to indicate that Chinese obstruction of at least one Soviet military aid shipment occurred again in the late summer and early fall of 1965, and it is possible that this blocked shipment included additional surface-to-air missiles. Two [redacted] military attaches in Moscow have separately reported the shipment of some 32 SAMs eastward along the Trans-Siberian railroad in late August or early September, and one specified that this shipment was being sent to Vietnam. On 21 October, the Soviets sent a letter to the Chinese in which they charged that the Chinese on 26 August

(footnote continued from page 39)
they would be reversing a stand taken publicly and privately on a point of central importance, and would appear to be yielding to the CPSU on the question of Soviet authority. If, as is virtually certain, the Chinese and Albanians refused to attend (and even if, as is likely, the North Koreans and Rumanians also refused), DRV participation at a meeting with the remaining bloc states would publicly dramatize disharmony between the North Vietnamese and the Chinese. For this very reason, it is most improbable that the DRV would in fact wish to attend. It is not impossible, however, that the Soviets may hope to utilize the 23rd CPSU Congress in March 1966 for an attempt to convene privately such a gathering of assembled bloc representatives.

had "refused to accept for transport" a shipment of military goods; according to a Chinese answering letter of 5 November, what were refused were ten "mobile weapon repair shops" and forty anti-aircraft "weapons." The Chinese have sometimes employed such ambiguous phrases in the past when alluding to Soviet SAMs, and it is quite conceivable that the shipment seen by the attaches was the shipment halted by the CPR. Moreover, it is questionable that the Chinese would have created such difficulties over a shipment of conventional anti-aircraft guns.

The language of the Chinese 5 November letter suggests that the Soviet shipment blocked on 26 August was still being held up when the letter was sent, and further suggests that what the Chinese were objecting to was a new increment of SAMs the Soviets were attempting to ship to Vietnam, above a fixed amount the Chinese had previously agreed to allow to pass. The Chinese, while in effect admitting that they had indeed refused to allow the shipment to pass, sought to justify their position by claiming: (a) that they were unable--throughout September and at least until early October--to get confirmation from the North Vietnamese that the DRV wanted the shipment, and (b) that if the DRV did want it, the CPR would "discuss" allowing it to pass, but that the Chinese in any case would require a new separate Sino-Soviet transport agreement to cover such extra shipments, and that the Soviets in late October had allegedly delayed signing such a new agreement. These and other statements in the Chinese letter indicate that the Chinese had previously agreed only to permit the transit of certain quantities of Soviet military equipment, including SAMs, that the Soviets recently had been sending through shipments "not in accord with earlier agreed-upon plans," and the Chinese were now seizing upon this fact to slow down the buildup of the Soviet presence in North Vietnam.*

*In late September--during the period when the Chinese say they were talking to the North Vietnamese about the 26 August shipment-- reported that "senior Chinese officials" had

(Footnote continued on page 42)

That the blocked 26 August shipment had a special significance in the eyes of the Chinese--i.e., that it may have been a shipment of SAMs--was further indicated when the Chinese themselves admitted in their letter that many other Soviet shipments also not covered by the Sino-Soviet transport agreement had nevertheless subsequently, in September, been allowed to transit the CPR. And finally, that the question of the number of SAMs to be admitted to the DRV remains central to the argument is further suggested both by the fact that only 12-15 of the 52 SAM sites detected in the DRV by early December were believed to be equipped with missiles, and by the fact that several intercepted conversations at North Vietnamese SAM sites in the late fall of 1965 implied a low missile inventory in North Vietnam.

All this further suggests that the matter of the admission of additional Soviet missiles to the DRV was again a matter of controversy in Hanoi in the fall of 1965, with the Soviets and Chinese again applying opposing

(footnote continued from page 41)

reacted to a recent U.S. airstrike against a SAM site by disseminating "widely" in Peking a story about Soviet-U.S. collaboration. According to this Chinese tale, the United States and the USSR had reached an agreement whereby the U.S. would allow the delivery of Soviet missiles to North Vietnam on condition that the Soviets would inform the U.S. of their exact deployment after arrival. While the spreading of this story may have been merely another generalized and clumsy Chinese attempt to portray the Soviets as perfidious, it is also possible that this was part of the atmospherics accompanying a real Chinese effort at the time to dissuade the DRV from accepting more SAM equipment.

pressures upon the North Vietnamese.* In early October, shortly before Pham Van Dong's visit to Moscow and Peking, and at a time when, on Chinese testimony, the matter of the 26 August shipment was still being discussed by the Chinese and North Vietnamese, Pham gave an exclusive oral interview to a Japanese Mainichi correspondent. Pham was quoted as having stated that the DRV uses air defense weapons ranging "from missiles to rifles," that the DRV would "further strengthen" its "anti-air power," and that North Vietnam would "rely on brother socialist nations" to do so. This interview was not reported by the North Vietnamese press or radio, which indeed have never mentioned the Soviet SAMs. It seems probable, however, that Pham did make the statements attributed to him, and that the DRV did--as he indicated--want additional Soviet missiles, contrary to the implication conveyed by the Chinese letter.

It is therefore likely that this was one of the matters discussed during the unpublicized October visit of Pham's delegation to Moscow and Peking. It is noteworthy, in this connection, that the CPSU letter to the Chinese complaining about the fate of the 26 August shipment was sent on 21 October, when Pham's trip may have been still in progress. It will be recalled that the Soviets had sent their 17 April letter to Peking immediately before Le Duan arrived there from Moscow. The Soviets on that occasion clearly intended to provoke acrimony between Le Duan and the Chinese; and a similar gambit may have been employed in October.

*On 2 September--a week after the 26 August shipment was blocked--Chou En-lai stated at a reception at the DRV Embassy in Peking that "U.S. imperialism and its followers of all hues" [i.e., the Soviets] were "trying to find loopholes between China and Vietnam, carrying out provocations to cause a split between us." While there are several other possible subjects of dissention between the DRV and the CPR to which Chou could have been alluding, it is conceivable that he was referring to a Soviet "provocation" in connection with the 26 August shipment.

Meanwhile, throughout the fall the Soviets have continued to exploit the general issue of Chinese obstruction, but they have nowhere--except in the secret 21 October letter--charged the Chinese with again preventing specific weapons from reaching the DRV. Late in October, a Soviet public lecturer stated that "for a while," the Chinese had not permitted passage of Soviet aid to North Vietnam, and added that "even now," it took some three weeks for a Soviet shipment to reach the DRV; there was no intimation that any shipments had again been blocked. Also in October, a Soviet party official privately told foreign Communists that the Chinese had harassed the USSR in its assistance to the DRV because of fear that Soviet influence in Vietnam would grow, bragged about the amount of assistance the Soviets had furnished the DRV despite Chinese opposition, and charged that train shipments of medicines and food from East European countries had been denied passage by the Chinese. The Soviet official did not specify, however, when this had happened. The Soviets have continued to make vague and unspecific charges fairly widely, in contacts with Communists and non-Communists alike. In late September, for example, Kosygin is reported to have told the Burmese leader Ne Win, in Moscow, that the Chinese were doing very little to help the DRV, and had even obstructed the flow of Soviet assistance to North Veitnam, the date of obstruction being unspecified. In late October, the Moroccan Foreign Ministry was passing on a similar report of DRV indignation at Chinese obstruction of Soviet help; the ultimate source was unidentified but seems likely to have been the USSR. On 20 November, the Neues Deutschland editorial article already cited referred with relish to Western reports of Chinese blockage of Soviet military help to the DRV, and did not contradict them, thus leaving the impression that such obstruction was still going on without explicitly saying so. Early in December, the Soviets seem to have leaked to the Western press--through Asian sources at the United Nations--the charge that Peking was demanding and receiving transit-fee payments in dollars (useful for foreign exchange) from the USSR for Soviet military aid shipped through China to the DRV.

Thus, although the Soviets have frequently sought to convey an indefinite impression of continued Chinese obstruction, the USSR has nevertheless shown a curious reluctance to touch directly on the matter of renewed Chinese blockage of the transit of anti-aircraft "weapons" anywhere but in a secret inter-party letter. It is conceivable that this Soviet reticence derives from a DRV request that the fact be withheld from Western governments, lest it give encouragement to the United States.* It is also possible that the North Vietnamese felt, in the fall of 1965, that explicit and widespread Soviet use of this issue for anti-Chinese purposes would further complicate delicate DRV negotiations with the Chinese. However, unless another Sino-Soviet agreement on transit to Vietnam has been or is soon reached--which is quite possible--it is questionable whether the USSR will be willing indefinitely to resist the temptation to exploit the issue more widely against the Chinese.

In any case, even if Soviet SAM personnel can eventually be dispensed with entirely by the DRV, it is obvious that more SAM equipment must continually be sent from the Soviet Union to replace expended and deteriorated equipment, let alone to continue to enlarge the SAM network. Faced with the prospect of a long war with the United States, the DRV now has a permanent, long-term dependence on the flow of Soviet equipment for the expansion--and, indeed, preservation--of major portions of the North Vietnamese air defense capability. The Chinese were reluctant to see the DRV become dependent in this way upon the Soviet Union, have sought clumsily to prevent it, and are probably still not reconciled to it. It is therefore possible that the 1965 pattern of partial Chinese obstruction,

*Soviet compliance with such a request would be consistent with the Soviet performance in April, when the Chinese had induced the DRV to hold up the initial installation of SAMs, and when the USSR nevertheless sought to convey to the United States, probably at DRV request, the false impression that Soviet SAMs would very soon be put into action. (See pages 21-22.)

grudging agreement, and renewed partial obstruction may be repeated in 1966, despite the difficulty and annoyance this causes the North Vietnamese.