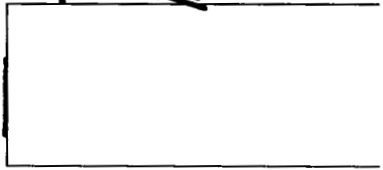
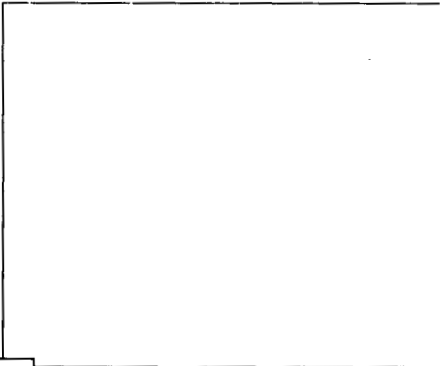


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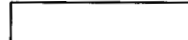
*The Sino-Soviet Dispute on Aid to North Vietnam
(1965-1968)*

Reference Title: ESAU XXXIX



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25 November 1968



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THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE ON AID TO NORTH VIETNAM (1965-1968)

MEMORANDUM TO RECIPIENTS

The analysis and findings of this study were published in summary form as an Intelligence Report "The Sino-Soviet Dispute on Aid to North Vietnam (1965-1968)," ESAU XXXIX, 30 September 1968.

This larger and more detailed version of the study, including citations of the sources used, is published separately and in limited quantities for the benefit of those who wish to pursue the subject in greater depth or who may find the collection of material a useful reference.

Although this study in draft benefited from the comments of other offices, it is entirely a product of the Special Research Staff. The research analyst in charge of the project was Harry Gelman.

John Kerry King
Chief, DD/I Special Research Staff

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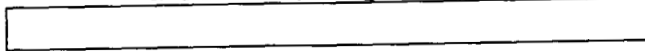
THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE ON AID TO NORTH VIETNAM (1965-1968)

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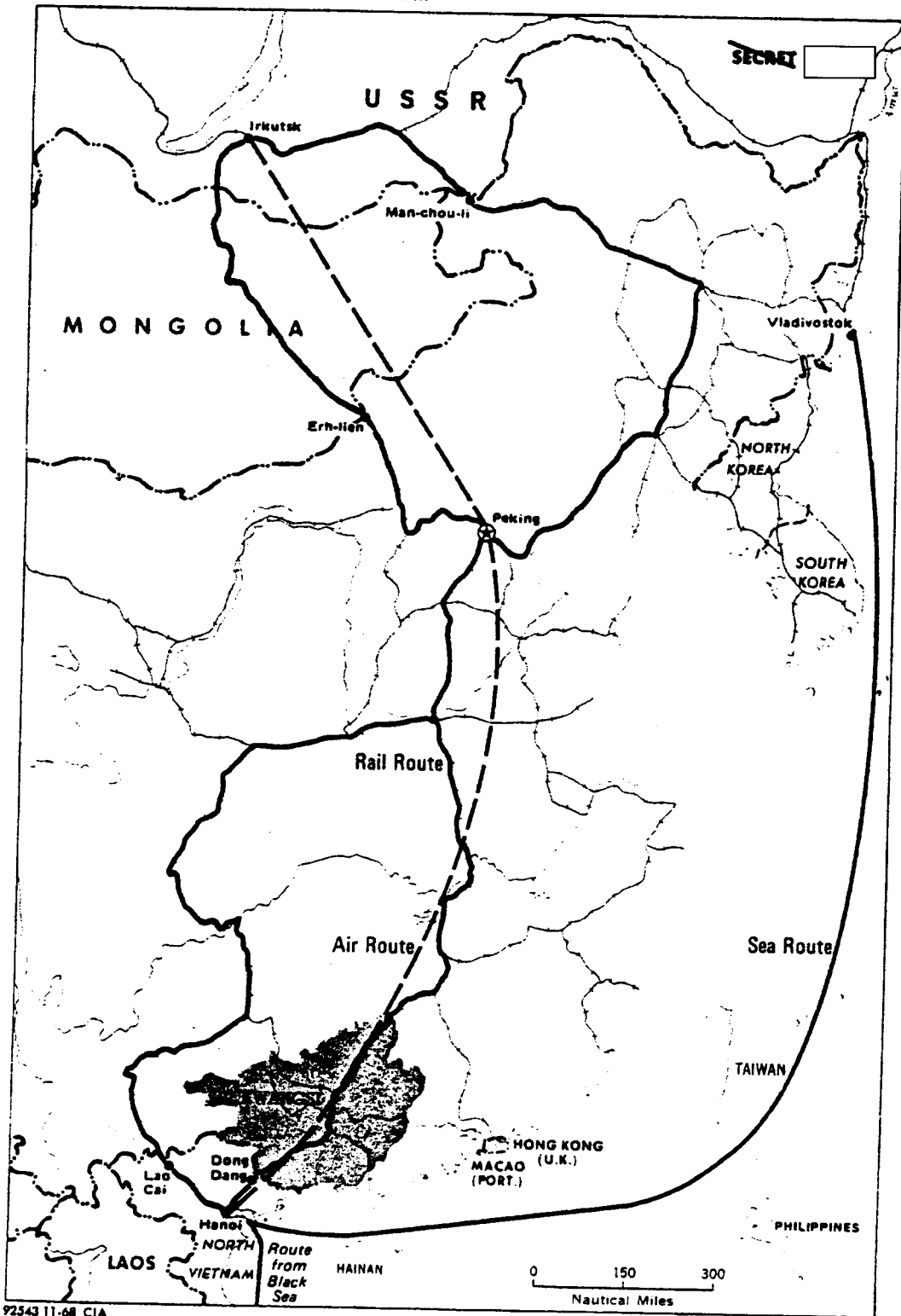


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Soviet Aid Routes to North Vietnam



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THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE ON AID TO NORTH VIETNAM (1965-1968).

Preface

This report is concerned primarily with tracing the difficulties and limitations which the Sino-Soviet dispute has imposed over the last three years on Soviet efforts to supply military assistance to North Vietnam by rail, air, and sea. The report is also concerned with those limitations on the transit of military aid and on the assistance actually supplied to the DRV which have been imposed by Soviet and Chinese reluctance to accept a direct clash with the United States. Although the aid that both countries have in fact supplied North Vietnam is necessarily discussed repeatedly in general terms, this paper is not intended as an authoritative compilation of data on aid actually rendered, and should therefore be read in conjunction with published studies on military aid supplied to the DRV.

The most useful sources employed in this study are a body of [redacted] reports--particularly those describing secret letters and other documents of the Soviet and Chinese Communists [redacted]

[redacted] these reports create a coherent picture not only of running disputes over aid transit but also of the central mechanism on which much of the argument has focused, the secret two-year Sino-Soviet military aid rail transit agreement.

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I. THE ISSUE OF RAIL TRANSIT OF CHINA

The main disagreement on aid to Vietnam has revolved about the shipping of Soviet military goods by rail through China. This Soviet-Chinese running dispute over rail transit has gone through a series of clearly marked phases which will be examined in detail in turn. To summarize, these include:

1) The period from mid-February through late March 1965, when rail shipments of Soviet arms were held up during acrimonious Sino-Soviet negotiations over the terms of shipment and Chinese insistence on inspection of all goods shipped. This period ended on 30 March with the signing of a two-year Sino-Soviet rail transit agreement.

2) The period from April through July 1965, when rail shipments went through but SAM site construction in North Vietnam was strangely protracted. In this period the DRV apparently vacillated between yielding to Chinese pressure and deferring completion and activation of SAM sites until the fall when North Vietnamese cadres could complete training to operate them, or flouting Chinese wishes and accepting enough Soviet personnel to put the SAMs into operation more promptly. Under the influence of mounting U.S. bombing, the DRV finally opted for the latter course, and prevailed upon Peking to permit a limited quota of Soviet SAM personnel to pass. The SAMs were then fired by the Soviets on 24 July.

3) The period from August through December 1965, during which the Chinese held up one specific rail shipment of Soviet weapons, under the double pretext that it had not been authorized under the 30 March agreement and that a new supplementary agreement had not yet been signed. Following extensive Sino-Soviet haggling--and apparent Chinese efforts to persuade the DRV that it did not need some of the additional Soviet weapons--the shipment in question was released for transit by the end of the year. Around the turn of the year, leaked Soviet charges about Chinese obstruction led to repeated private Chinese governmental protests to the USSR and a public Chinese statement of denial.

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4) The period from January through July 1966, during which the DRV struggled to cope with the twin problems of the disruption of aid transit caused by U.S. bombing of DRV rail lines and of continued Sino-Soviet friction over transit. By the turn of the year shipment of some Soviet economic goods had already had to be shifted from rail to sea, and in February the Chinese told the East Europeans that henceforth no nonmilitary shipments by them could be sent by rail. There is evidence to indicate that between mid-May and mid-June Ho Chi Minh visited China secretly to confer with Chinese leaders, and that the rail shipment problem was one of the topics discussed.

5) The period from August through December 1966, during which the North Vietnamese were given a new role in the transshipment of Soviet supplies. In August the USSR initiated new negotiations with the Chinese on the rail transit issue, most probably in an effort to get some modification of Chinese inspection procedures. After this Soviet effort was rejected by the Chinese, the Soviets secured as a substitute an arrangement whereby North Vietnamese personnel accepted responsibility for Soviet military shipments at the Sino-Soviet border. Contrary to some later Soviet statements, this system was put into effect not in 1967 but by October 1966 at the latest, and apparently encountered no difficulty for the rest of the year.

6) The period from January through March 1967, when the most serious Chinese threat to the Soviet rail supply line to the DRV was posed. In late January and early February a Chinese siege of the Soviet Embassy in Peking brought the two countries near a break in state relations which would have made it impossible for the Soviets to conduct necessary business with the Chinese any longer over rail supply. At the same time, there was some evidence to indicate that the Chinese in January again imposed obstacles of some kind to the flow of Soviet military goods, despite the new DRV role in rail transit. There is also some reason to believe that these Chinese actions were connected with the issue of DRV negotiations with the United States, and the Chinese pressures were in fact relaxed in the second week of February at precisely the moment when the North Vietnamese decided to reject President Johnson's latest offer. North Vietnamese-Chinese negotiations held in Peking

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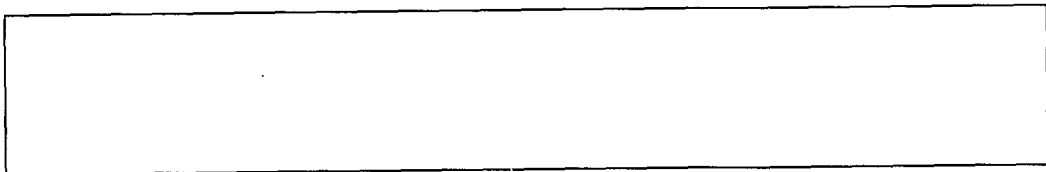
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immediately thereafter evidently reaffirmed the DRV role in "safeguarding" Soviet military shipments, and the Soviets the following month in separate talks with the Chinese were able to conclude a renewal of the March 1965 two-year Sino-Soviet rail transport agreement (although in terms providing for much less tonnage to be shipped than the Soviets desired).

7) The period from April 1967 to date, during which the main problems have been disruptions caused by Chinese cultural revolution disorders in south China (particularly in the summer of 1967 and from May to July 1968). The CPSU has formally asserted that "trainloads" of SAM missiles were held up by the Chinese for a month in September 1967. The Chinese at the time apparently told the Soviets that this was necessitated by rail bottlenecks in North Vietnam, but a more likely explanation of the temporary delay was Peking's concern over the possibility of Red Guard interference with these shipments in south China. There was a similar delay again in June 1968. Thus far there has been no convincing evidence since April 1967 of deliberate Chinese obstruction of rail shipments, but the possibility of a resumption of the politically-motivated Chinese obstruction of previous years remains an important weapon held in reserve by Peking.

A. Mid-February - Late March 1965: The Initial Impasse

The Soviets seem not to have anticipated the extent of the difficulties they were to have with the Chinese over rail transshipment of their military aid to Vietnam. It was true that they had encountered Chinese petty bureaucratic harrassment in this matter before* but they had, after all, successfully sent arms to North Vietnam over



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Chinese railways in the past (although not recently). It is likely that they felt, as one Soviet diplomat put it in early February, that it would be difficult for the Chinese to refuse a North Vietnamese request to permit Soviet aid to pass. [redacted] While this proved to be true as a general proposition, it underestimated the difficulties the Chinese could create through measures other than outright refusal.

Immediately following Premier Kosygin's 6-10 February visit to Hanoi in which he offered the DRV a package of military aid, particularly for air defense, the North Vietnamese took a necessary practical step to prepare for the coming influx over the rail lines from China. On 13 February, North Vietnam requested the International Control Commission to remove the five permanent inspection teams that had been present in the DRV for a decade, including two that were located at the railheads on the Sino-North Vietnamese border (Lao Kay and Dong Dang). This demand was evidently made to protect the security of the sensitive military equipment that had been promised by Kosygin and would shortly be arriving.

At about the same time, Kosygin was in Peking having an acrimonious conversation with Mao [redacted] and conducting other talks with the Chinese about the Soviet aid promised the DRV. According to statements by both the Soviets and Chinese contained in an exchange of secret party letters the following fall, [redacted] the Chinese promised to cooperate in transshipping the Soviet military goods.

The next event of which we have evidence occurred some ten days later, on 25 February, when the Soviets apparently made their first effort to pass through China

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a specific shipment of the military goods Kosygin had promised Hanoi. On that day, according to a later Chinese editorial, "the Soviet side requested the Chinese side to help transport a shipment of military supplies to Vietnam." What the Soviets actually asked for on the 25th, according to a subsequent CPSU account, was an "air corridor" which would enable a mass flight of Soviet transports to ferry "equipment and technicians" to Vietnam. [redacted]

[redacted] The motivation for this request, and [redacted] the episode, are discussed in the section of this paper devoted to the issue of air transit of China. Three days later, on 28 February, this joint request by the Soviet government and the CPSU Central Committee was formally rejected by the Chinese.

The next day, on 1 March, according to [redacted] [redacted] a Soviet military mission left for Hanoi, presumably to discuss the Chinese rejection. The Chinese have since claimed (in a 14 July 1965 secret party letter to the CPSU [redacted]) that the North Vietnamese had not even asked that the shipment in question be sent by air; and this may be correct. During the first few days of March--judging from the secret statements of both the Soviet and Chinese parties--the two fraternal opponents evidently agreed in principle that this and subsequent shipments would be made by rail. The entire month of March was to be spent, however, in haggling over the ground rules for such shipments. Meanwhile, no Soviet arms moved.

In the third week of March the diplomatic community in Moscow received several reports--apparently originating with the Soviets--that the Chinese at some unspecified time in the recent past had halted in China or even "seized" an entire trainload of Soviet military equipment bound for North

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Vietnam. The Chinese were said to have cited some "technical reason" for this action. It seems on balance that there was a germ of truth in these reports, however distorted in the telling. It is conceivable that the reports reflected, in garbled fashion, some incident that actually took place in early or mid-March, involving a Soviet rail shipment dispatched after Chinese rejection of the air corridor which was stopped and returned by the Chinese.* If so, this might have happened on the secondary Sino-Soviet rail line, which passes through Mongolia with a change-of-gauge transshipment point at Tsining,** 200 miles inside China. An initial

*A Soviet public lecturer told a gathering of propagandists in Moscow in October 1966 that after Kosygin returned from Hanoi "we began shipments immediately without obtaining the necessary clearances in China," and that "this led to temporary complications."

**This would explain how a Soviet rail shipment later to become a subject of dissension could have entered China in the first place. On the main Sino-Soviet rail line through Manchuria the change-of-gauge point of transshipment--and the place where at the border at Manchouli. Six months later this became true for the line through Mongolia as well: in September 1965, with the completion of the conversion of track between Tsining and Erhlien to Chinese standard gauge, the point of transshipment was shifted to Erhlien at the Mongolian border. NCNA reported on 10 September that a Sino-Soviet-Mongolian rail conference had just discussed "questions on international transfer and delivery of through-traffic freight" relating to the change and had revised "articles in relevant agreements and protocols." This change was explainable on rational economic grounds alone; but it is possible that one of the contributing reasons for hastening the conversion of track and the shift to Erhlien was a Chinese desire to prevent Soviet military shipments from moving a considerable distance into China prior to inspection. See, in this connection, the next footnote.

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Soviet shipment could have been halted at Tsining and ultimately returned to the Soviet Union because of an unexpected impasse over Chinese "technical" requirements at the point of transshipment. Such an impasse--to conclude this line of speculation--could have concerned the question of Chinese inspection of the military shipment.

The Issue of Chinese Inspection

The question of Chinese inspection of Soviet military rail shipments was one of the main issues that agitated and prolonged the Sino-Soviet rail negotiations in March 1965 and that continued to cause trouble thereafter. The Soviets from the first chafed at Chinese insistence on a "sovereign right" to inspect all goods shipped.* While the USSR had to yield on this point in order to obtain Chinese rail transportation, the Soviets were never fully reconciled to this concession. The CPSU complained in a January 1966 note to the Italian Communist party that the Chinese were "inspecting every crate, dismantling every weapon, etc." [redacted] An East German official stated in February 1968 that the Chinese insisted on "inventorying" all shipments sent to North Vietnam by rail from the Soviet Union, and that this process

*Chinese insistence on such inspection--abundantly documented in [redacted]--was soon formally recorded as a matter of law. On 30 April, a month after the impasse over the passage of Soviet rail shipments had been resolved, the CPR State Council approved a set of very stringent regulations governing frontier inspection of persons and materials entering or leaving Chinese territory. These regulations insisted inter alia on the duty of conductors of trains entering the country to "accept inspection," raising the question of whether someone had once failed to do so. Another provision which may well have been adopted with a specific incident in mind demanded that "responsible persons" on trains or other vehicles inform the Chinese frontier officials immediately if the train were carrying persons entering China illegally or goods endangering the security of our country."

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took two days (although he added that it had previously taken longer). [redacted] The Soviets and their friends on numerous occasions in the past three years have complained privately and publicly about the delays North Vietnam has suffered in receiving their aid because of these "customs procedures," but it is likely that the Soviets were annoyed by Chinese inspection for reasons other than a pious concern for the DRV.

In the first place, the Chinese acquired, both through their inspection procedures and through the detailed descriptions of specific shipments they demanded of the Soviets well in advance, an exact knowledge of every Soviet weapon sent to North Vietnam.** The Soviets apparently had no such detailed knowledge of Chinese military shipments to the DRV; a Soviet Central Committee official complained of the unfairness of this in a conversation with a Japanese Socialist delegation in the summer of 1967. [redacted] Moreover, the Chinese used the information thus acquired as the basis for propaganda charges that the Soviets were supplying old, obsolete, or defective equipment "far from commensurate with the power of the Soviet Union," and also as the basis for repeated private lobbying with the North Vietnamese to reduce their dependence on Soviet materiel generally and to refuse specific Soviet shipments. Chiao Kuan-hua, a Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, told a Japanese trade delegation in May 1966 that "due to the bitter experiences" the Chinese had with outmoded, often unusable equipment received from the Soviets during the Korean war, the Chinese did not trust them to ship "effective" materiel to North Vietnam. Consequently, according to Chiao, the Chinese were "assisting" the DRV by

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**This assumes, of course, that the Soviets have not sent weapons to North Vietnam by sea: a question discussed elsewhere in this paper.

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inspecting the Soviet materiel being sent to the DRV and giving "appraisals" of the quality of the materiel to the North Vietnamese. [redacted] We shall presently discuss what was apparently a concrete case of such Chinese lobbying with the DRV over a specific Soviet military shipment in the fall of 1965.

In the second place, there is reason to suspect that the Soviets were at least to some degree influenced in their decisions as to which weapons to furnish the DRV by the knowledge that every weapon system shipped to Vietnam through China would pass under close Chinese examination. That the Soviets have in fact denied the North Vietnamese some weapons they wished to have is certain, as will be seen in the detailed discussion of this question later in this paper. It is more difficult to say to what degree the Soviets were inhibited by their desire to limit Chinese knowledge of certain advanced weapons, as distinguished from their desire to prevent possible dangerous DRV use of those weapons. The latter was probably the major factor in the Soviet refusal of at least one weapon system. It is likely, however, that in the case of some weapons, worries about furnishing assistance to Chinese weapons programs at least entered into Soviet calculations. The Chinese Ambassador to Burma claimed in conversation [redacted] in December 1966 that the Soviets had stated in private negotiations with the Chinese that the quality of arms shipped to the DRV might be improved if the Chinese would cease inspecting shipments.** It is just conceivable that the Soviets may have made such a statement privately; but available evidence makes more unlikely the Ambassador's further claim that the Chinese actually agreed to desist from inspection for a time in 1966 in an abortive effort to secure for Vietnam improved Soviet military aid.

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Thirdly, there seems to have been at least a modicum of genuine Soviet conviction behind a few of the exaggerated propaganda charges the Soviets and their friends have made (particularly in 1966 and 1967) about Chinese evil tricks with Soviet weapons being shipped to Vietnam. Some of these charges seem implausible: for example, the charge that the Chinese while inspecting Soviet weapons sometimes changed the labels or factory markings to deceive the North Vietnamese into thinking the weapons were Chinese offerings. It is difficult to believe that the Chinese would attempt this or that they would feel that the North Vietnamese could in fact be thus deceived, if only because the DRV has apparently possessed detailed advance descriptions of each Soviet shipment expected.*

It is similarly unlikely that the Chinese regime has ever "stolen" entire Soviet missiles or other advanced equipment as Soviet propaganda has sometimes intimated. For one thing, we would certainly expect to have seen vehement Soviet complaints about any such specific incidents included in the secret CPSU documents passed to other parties which complained in detail of much less serious alleged Chinese transgressions. No such complaints have been found. While some military goods destined for Vietnam evidently were

*The most nearly credible of the reports under this heading derived from [redacted] who told American diplomats in December 1966 that Czech Foreign Ministry press chief Dufek had stated in his presence that Czechoslovakia had protested both in Peking and Hanoi against alleged Chinese relabelling of Czech aid shipments transiting the CPR to make it appear that they were of Chinese origin. Dufek was said to have declared that the Czech embassy in Hanoi had firm evidence of this practice. This allegation contains somewhat more circumstantial detail than any that has appeared in the open propaganda. It has not been confirmed by any other source, however, and must still be considered doubtful.

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stolen by rampaging Red Guards in the summer of 1967 and again in the summer of 1968, apparently were small arms. Whether such looted weapons were of Soviet or Chinese origin has never been definitely established. Moreover, the evidence to be examined later strongly suggests that the Red Guard thefts were not authorized by the regime.

On the other hand, there is some evidence that the Soviets may genuinely believe that the Chinese, in the course of inspection of Soviet goods, sometimes disassembled Soviet equipment and reassembled incorrectly or without vital parts. [redacted] has stated that he was told by both Czechoslovak Minister of Defense Lomsky and the senior Warsaw Pact representative in Czechoslovakia, Soviet Col. Gen. Kushchev, that on one of the few occasions when the Soviets in the DRV had succeeded in inspecting an incoming train from China they had found parts of some equipment, particularly missiles, missing and presumed to have been removed by the Chinese. Both [redacted] [redacted] were in a position to know the facts. It is of course possible that weapons were reassembled incorrectly because of the ignorance and maladroitness of the Chinese inspectors, rather than because of Chinese malevolence. The Soviets, following their customary habits of thought, seem to have assumed deliberate Chinese sabotage. The USSR is also likely to have taken such an incident as confirmation that the Chinese were indeed studying minutely all Soviet advanced weapons passed through China with a view to enhancing their weapons technology, and this in turn is likely to have reinforced Soviet doubts about sending still more sophisticated weapons to Vietnam by rail.

In sum the question of Chinese inspection is one of the issues that greatly complicated the initial Sino-Soviet negotiations on the subject of military rail transit in March 1965 and which continued to disturb the Soviets in the years after they were forced to yield on this point. The Soviets have been unhappy about Chinese inspection because it had been useful to the repeated efforts to per-

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suade the DRV to restrict its reliance on Soviet military aid; because it has made it impossible for the USSR to ship to Vietnam some advanced weapons which Moscow might just possibly have been willing otherwise to give the DRV; and because the Soviets apparently do believe that the Chinese have occasionally lost or removed parts of Soviet weapons in the course of inspecting them.

The 30 March Two-Year Agreement

In the last ten days of March the first Sino-Soviet negotiations over rail transit were concluded, and the initial obstacle to the flow of Soviet military goods to Vietnam was removed. On 21 March a Soviet Ministry of Defense transport arrived in Hanoi, and after several days' stay proceeded to Peking, where it remained for three days before returning to the USSR. It is likely that this plane carried officials engaged in the final coordination of the draft of the document under discussion--the secret two-year Sino-Soviet rail transport agreement for Soviet aid to Vietnam. [redacted]

[redacted] the Soviet ambassador had said that a protocol on aid transport had been signed that day, and that "launching ramps for rockets" would now be installed in the DRV without delay. In fact, work on the construction of the first SAM site in North Vietnam apparently did begin at about this time, and was to be seen in U.S. photography for the first time on 5 April. However, it is probable that no SAM-associated equipment had yet reached the DRV, and, as will be seen, there were special reasons why the SAM-site construction was delayed. Nevertheless, by early April Soviet military goods for Vietnam--including MIGs and perhaps some SAM equipment--had begun to move through China. Shortly before 8 April the Soviet government told [redacted] that Soviet equipment was now on its way, and the DRV charge in Moscow told [redacted] the same thing on the 8th [redacted]

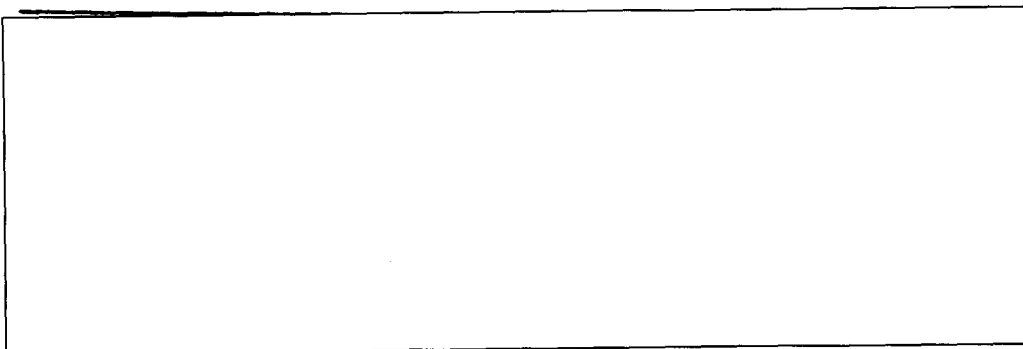
The unpublished Sino-Soviet agreement signed in late March which released the flow of Soviet equipment was to become a subject of considerable later controversy. From statements made by both sides in subsequent secret

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and public polemics we have learned a number of facts about the agreement. [redacted]

1) The agreement was dated and apparently became effective on 30 March. It covered, according to authoritative statements by both the Soviets and the Chinese, "the period 1965-1967," and was to run, according to the Chinese, for "more than two years." Therefore, it was to expire sometime after 30 March 1967, but as will be seen, it was renewed in March of that year. The agreement was bilateral; the Chinese have emphatically stated that they have concluded separate bilateral rail agreements with North Vietnam to cover the delivery of Soviet military supplies.** It has been a matter of principle for Mao's regime to sign no tripartite Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese agreements of any kind. This has been consistent with the vehement Chinese rejection of "unity of action" with the Soviet Union and with the repeated Chinese refusals of Soviet calls for tripartite meetings or tripartite statements. All the tortured subsequent negotiations have been bilateral--Soviet-Vietnamese, Soviet-Chinese, and Chinese-Vietnamese, in that sequence.



**This was attested by Suslov in a talk with an Italian party delegation in April 1965. [redacted]
The strictly bilateral nature of the 30 March agreement was also emphasized in the CCP letter to the CPSU of 5 November 1965 and indicated in the Chinese public statement of 23 December 1965.

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2) The agreement covers military supplies only, a point of some importance in subsequent polemics because the Chinese agreed to transport free of charge only military goods, as defined by themselves. Everything else was categorized as "economic supplies," and was not covered by this or any other Sino-Soviet rail transport agreement.* The Chinese have stated that shipment of such economic goods was to be a matter of ad hoc arrangements between Chinese and Soviet railroad authorities, and was to be paid for as usual in rubles. It seems likely that both sides have indulged in semantic obfuscation in their later polemics on this matter, the Soviets charging that the Chinese were demanding payment for military supplies, the Chinese denying it. The Chinese seem to have defined "military goods" narrowly to exclude many military-support articles, and there is evidence that the Soviets have used the term broadly to include such items.**

3) Furthermore, the Chinese evidently agreed on 30 March 1965 to transport only those categories of weapons that were listed in the agreement. The agreement specified that a certain number of freight cars would be

*The Chinese 23 December 1965 statement implied that there is no formal Sino-Soviet agreement planning shipment of goods by rail except for the rail transit agreement on arms for Vietnam. This was explicitly affirmed [redacted] by Soviet railroad officials in April 1966. [redacted]

**Thus the November 1967 secret Soviet document on aid to Vietnam disseminated to other parties in Moscow spoke of 1,750 carloads of military aid turned over to China for the DRV by East European countries (excluding the USSR) in 1965-66. Other information suggests that this total would have to include military support items such as transport vehicles, construction equipment, repair shops, and electronic equipment.

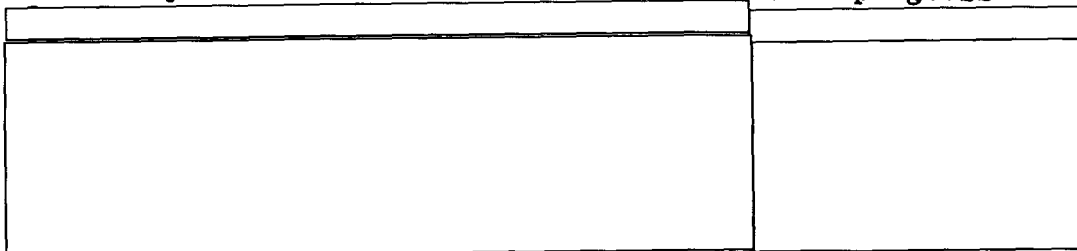
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made available by China in each month, quarter, and year to carry a certain maximum tonnage of Soviet military goods in each time period, but only provided that the goods fell into the categories listed in the agreement. The Chinese did not agree in advance, in other words, to transport any weapons the Soviets might choose to send. Since the Soviets were also required by the agreement to file with the Chinese an "outline transport plan" for each specific shipment at least 30 days before the shipment was to arrive in China, the Chinese were given some lead time to deal with the matter in accordance with their political interests. If, for example, as a result of further Soviet-Vietnamese talks the Soviets were to agree to supply additional types of weapons not clearly specified in the 30 March agreement, the Chinese had a legal excuse to refuse to accept shipments of such weapons until a supplement had been negotiated to the agreement. Furthermore, they would not sign such a supplement until they had themselves confirmed that North Vietnam wanted the weapons (they would not take the word of the Soviets for this), and the process of securing such confirmation from the DRV apparently furnished a good opportunity for the Chinese to lobby privately with the North Vietnamese to refuse.

B. April - July 1965: The Issue of Soviet SAM Personnel

In April there was an abundance of evidence that rail shipment of Soviet arms to Vietnam was in progress.



[redacted] late in April there were reports that the rail-line above Canton, between Hengyang and Chuchow, which is part of the route to Vietnam, had been closed to foreigners. On 6 May the first hard evidence appeared that Soviet weapons had begun to arrive, with the discovery in photography of Soviet MIG-15s and 17s and their crates at Phuc Yen airfield.

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[redacted]

Amidst all this purposeful haste there was one curious anomaly. Construction at the initial SAM site discovered in early April and probably begun in late March proceeded at a strangely leisurely pace. On 5 May the site was still not quite completed; on 9 May a second site had been begun, but no SAM-associated equipment was yet visible. Seven weeks later, at the end of June, there were still only four SAM sites under construction, three of which--including the one begun in March--were apparently nearing completion. One site was occupied with equipment that was probably missile-associated; but there was no evidence that communications or radar had been installed. Such slow progress was in vivid contrast to the Soviet performance in Cuba, where MRBM sites were erected and equipment emplaced in a week. On other occasions (including their own later performance in Vietnam) the Soviets have shown that they can erect and equip SAM sites in a week or less. Clearly, the SAM construction was deliberately protracted because the DRV was waiting for something. It seems clear, too, that the absence of SAM equipment was not the fundamental cause of the delay; the Chinese railroads were surely capable of delivering SAM equipment sufficient for the seven sites initially employed in July in much less than four months.

The evidence strongly suggests that the placing of SAMs in operation was delayed from late March until late July because the future North Vietnamese SAM personnel--who had begun training in the USSR--were not ready, and because the DRV was initially induced by Chinese pressure to refuse to allow the Soviet Union to operate the SAM sites.

There is good evidence to show that the issue of the passage of Soviet SAM personnel through China to Vietnam had been one of the matters agitating the Sino-Soviet negotiations in March. In late March, Soviet leaders stated privately in Moscow that the Chinese had initially agreed to allow Soviet nationals to go through China to Vietnam but had changed their minds several times in this regard. [redacted] In early April, shortly after the signing of the 30 March transit agreement, [redacted] stated that as of [redacted]

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the end of March, the Chinese had not agreed to permit Soviet advisors and technicians to transit China en-route to Vietnam. [redacted] At about the same time, the [redacted] in Moscow was told by a Soviet source that one of the reasons for the delay in the shipment of Soviet weapons to the DRV had been Chinese refusal to allow Soviet specialists or escorts to travel with the weapons. A few days later, [redacted] was told by Soviet leaders in Moscow that while the flow of equipment to Vietnam had finally been unblocked, the Chinese were placing a limit on the transit of Soviet personnel. [redacted]
[redacted]

All of these Soviet reports spoke of some direct Chinese action to prevent the passage of Soviet personnel whom the USSR apparently wanted to travel with the weapons being supplied to the DRV. Two reports deriving from the Soviets, however, indicate that if the Chinese did obstruct the passage of these personnel, they did so indirectly, by placing pressure on the North Vietnamese to decline them.

In May, [redacted] re-
marked that whereas he had first been told by Soviet Ambassador Puzanov that the Soviets would be supplying "experts" for missile sites, he had subsequently been informed by Puzanov that North Vietnam had informed the USSR that the DRV would send its own personnel for training in the USSR rather than accept Soviet experts. [redacted]

[redacted]. And on 5 May an Italian party delegation was told by Pravda correspondent Zhukov in Hanoi that the North Vietnamese had refused to permit the Soviets to man the rockets being installed in order to avoid alienating the Chinese. Zhukov also stated that it was not expected that North Vietnamese specialists would be sufficiently trained to put the SAMs into operation themselves until the winter of 1965.
[redacted]

In short, we get from Soviet sources in March, April, and May a picture of initial haggling with the

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Chinese in March over the Soviet desire to send SAM personnel with the equipment to Vietnam; of Chinese opposition and vacillation, with resultant confusion over what would be permitted; and of a North Vietnamese decision apparently made under Chinese pressure to wait for a SAM capability until DRV personnel were available. From Chinese sources we get a similar picture, with a few added details.

On 14 July 1965 the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party sent a secret letter to the CPSU which stated, among many other things, that the Soviets had wanted "to send a regular army of four thousand men in transit through China for deployment in Vietnam without obtaining prior agreement."* This was clearly an allusion to an original Soviet proposal in March regarding SAM and other aid personnel, and to the original Chinese objection. The Chinese letter's reference to a "regular army" was hyperbole, intended to express Chinese indignation over the size of the group the Soviets wanted to move through China without adequately clearing the matter with Peking. It seems improbable that the USSR would have advanced such a proposal without at least tentative approval from the DRV. But on 8 April--after the Chinese had objected--Vice Premier Lu Ting-yi told [redacted] that the USSR had offered to send to the DRV "rockets for eight battalions and four thousand personnel," but that the DRV had "refused the sending of personnel."** Later in April, a senior Chinese diplomat

[redacted]

**Four thousand men would be enough to operate some twenty SAM battalions, not eight battalions. The number of times that the Chinese have repeated the figure of 4,000, however, strongly suggests that it did have some special significance in terms of an original Soviet offer. It is possible that the Soviets were referring to the manpower needed to run an eventual twenty-battalion SAM force, or it is possible that the 4,000-man figure was to (footnote continued on page 19)

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told [redacted] that Moscow had offered to send "many thousands" of Soviet technicians to Hanoi, and commented that "of course this could not be accepted. This would be a sort of invasion. The North Vietnamese government had the sagacity to refuse the offer."

[redacted] In mid-May, another Chinese party official, in conversation with a pro-Chinese [redacted] [redacted] referred again to a Soviet abortive offer to send the DRV a "four thousand man rocket unit." [redacted]

To sum up thus far: in early March, presumably in accordance with the understandings Kosygin had reached with the Vietnamese in Hanoi in February, the Soviets proposed to send to the DRV by rail through China eight battalions of SAMs and four thousand Soviet advisors and technicians. The Chinese objected; the Soviets argued with the Chinese; the Chinese spoke to the North Vietnamese; and the North Vietnamese declined the personnel.

It is conceivable that the North Vietnamese preferred, despite the U.S. bombing, to defer acquisition of a SAM capability until their own personnel were trained, rather than admit Soviet crews. However, the weight of evidence indicates otherwise. In addition to Zhukov's direct assertion that the Chinese had been applying pressure on Hanoi on this question, and the repeated strong hints from the Chinese that they had objected to Soviet plans to install and operate SAMs in the DRV, there is also a report that in April the North Vietnamese confirmed and complained to the North Koreans that the Chinese had been applying such pressure.

According to [redacted]

(footnote continued from page 18)
include Soviet military advisers of all kinds, including the initial eight-battalion SAM force to be sent. The actual total of all Soviet advisers and technicians eventually sent to Vietnam was in fact well under 4,000.

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[redacted]

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[redacted]

Kim Il-sung told [redacted] that in a previous talk he had had with Pham Van Dong, Phan had complained that the Chinese had persistently demanded that North Vietnam cut off receipt of Soviet aid, and added that the Chinese had sometimes become threatening in trying to enforce this demand. [redacted] The last known meeting between Kim and Pham before this was on 16 and 17 April 1965, when the two men had private talks in Djakarta. It is credible that Pham made some such complaint about the SAM personnel issue, although the bitterness of his remarks may have been exaggerated when retold.

It was a limit, not a total ban, however, that was imposed on the presence of Soviet SAM personnel in Vietnam at this time (as the Soviets indicated to [redacted]). Among the limited numbers of Soviet military aid experts who did pass through China to the DRV in April, some almost certainly were involved in the construction of SAM sites. There is evidence that at least a few Soviet personnel in the USSR were being alerted, apparently for this purpose, in early April. In a somewhat garbled account of a subsequent conversation with CPSU secretary Ponomarev, a Bolivian party official quoted him as saying that the Soviets had offered the DRV 500 Soviet technicians "to erect" missile sites, the Chinese had opposed this, and that it had finally been agreed to restrict the number to 120 technicians. [redacted] If the function of these people was limited to site construction, there was no necessary contradiction between Ponomarev's figures and the 4,000 man figure for Soviet personnel offered that was repeatedly cited by the Chinese.

[redacted]

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[redacted]

In late May and early June the situation appears to have changed, perhaps because of the mounting pace of U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam which appear to have alarmed the DRV. On 9 June Soviet Ambassador Lapin told [redacted] that the Chinese had just given their agreement to Soviet transport of certain war materiel, unspecified, to the DRV. [redacted]

About a week later [redacted] reported that he had learned from various Chinese officials, including Lu Ting-yi, that the USSR had now sent to North Vietnam equipment including "rockets for eight battalions" and four thousand Soviet military personnel and technical experts. [redacted] The figure was exaggerated, but Lu's statement was significant because ten weeks earlier he stated that the DRV had rejected these Soviet personnel. By June North Vietnam appears to have insisted to Peking that in view of the U.S. bombing threat it was impossible to wait the necessary months until DRV SAM personnel became available, and that some Soviet experts would have to be admitted immediately to create a SAM capability soon.

North Vietnam would have been aided in such a discussion with the Chinese by the fact that it was simultaneously inviting the Chinese to establish a counterbalancing presence in the DRV: it was at this time, June 1965, that the first Chinese railway engineer and anti-aircraft troops entered North Vietnam to help maintain lines of communication in the face of U.S. bombing. It would have been characteristic of the North Vietnamese attitude in the Sino-Soviet struggle to balance a contemplated major increase in Soviet and Chinese aid in this way.

In June the shipment of high-priority military goods through China was accelerated, and there were continuing indications of strain in the DRV's rail transport capacity. [redacted]
[redacted]

[redacted] North Vietnamese editorials in late June and early July became more and more strident in terming the U.S. air attacks a "challenge" to the entire bloc. On 24 July seven SAM sites became operational, including two built from scratch in the last week, and the first U.S. aircraft were shot down by a SAM fired by Soviet personnel.

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Soviet missile personnel continued in control of the expanding SAM network throughout the summer of 1965, although Vietnamese assumed more and more prominence as trainees were hurriedly--and perhaps prematurely--brought home from the Soviet Union to phase into the missile operation. The DRV took over full control of the SAMs from the Soviet Union in the fall of 1965 with a haste apparently reflecting political considerations. SAM performance suffered for a considerable time thereafter from DRV inexperience in addition to other difficulties. Except for two brief periods, in the summer of 1966 and 1967 when the Soviets for special reasons were temporarily again given control of some SAMs, the Soviet function henceforth was one of technical support and advice. The issue of the Soviet missilemen apparently did not arise again in Sino-Soviet polemics.

C. August-December 1965: Another Blocked Rail Shipment

In April 1965 a North Vietnamese delegation led by first secretary Le Duan and Defense Minister Giap visited the Soviet Union, and in talks there apparently laid the groundwork for a subsequent visit in July by Vice Premier Le Thanh Nghi that arranged for both an acceleration of, and an increase in, Soviet military aid. A joint communique released at the conclusion of Le Thanh Nghi's July visit spoke of agreements concluded to strengthen DRV defense potential "taking into consideration the needs that have arisen," and said that "supplementary assistance" would now be furnished in addition to the aid rendered in accordance with agreements previously concluded.

This was easier said than done, however; the 30 March Sino-Soviet rail transit agreement, with its fixed categories and quotas, first had to be dealt with. As a sympathetic Yugoslav official reported in early August, the Soviets were chafing at the Chinese demand--reflected in the agreement--for "highly detailed information on rail shipments of aid materials unreasonably far in

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advance of proposed shipping dates.' [redacted] In August and September the Soviets therefore evidently sought to take advantage of Le Thanh Nghi's request for an acceleration of aid as justification for an effort to override the provisions of the agreement. According to subsequent credible Chinese complaints in a letter to the CPSU, [redacted] the Soviets began frequently to fail to submit their advance shipment plans the full thirty days ahead of time, and sometimes "even sent freight unexpectedly to the Chinese frontier station without plan or prior notice." Despite a Chinese vice minister's protest on 2 September, the Soviets did this more and more, and the Chinese claim that "in September 72 percent of the Russian freight through China arrived without any prior plan." The Chinese renewed their protests on 18 September and again on 23 October, the last time directly threatening to delay transport.***

[redacted]
[redacted]

***These Sino-Soviet conversations and the others discussed in this section were held in Peking. Involved on the Chinese side was Li Chiang, deputy head of the Chinese Commission for Economic Relations with Foreign Countries, and one of the Commission's deputy department heads, unnamed. Involved on the Soviet side was Major General S.D. Romanov (the Soviet military attache in Peking); an unnamed deputy of his; Colonel A.A. Shaytan (attached to the Soviet Embassy as the "acting representative in China of the Soviet State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations who was responsible for the shipments in transit"); and another Peking representative of that Committee (or rather, its Main Engineering Directorate) named Kalinin. These details are cited to show the decisive importance of the Soviet Embassy in Peking in securing the continued flow of Soviet aid by rail through China--a fact which assumed special significance in January 1967 when the Chinese seemed to be trying to force the USSR to close the embassy.

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[redacted]

All these shipments, however, apparently involved goods in categories covered by the 30 March agreement, which the Chinese evidently were somewhat reluctant to take responsibility for halting. When the Soviets in the fall offered a shipment of weapons which the Chinese could represent as falling outside the scope of the March agreement, they did not hesitate to hold up the shipment for several months.

According to the Soviets, on 26 August the Soviet representatives in Peking gave the Chinese Committee for Foreign Economic Relations a list of the military supplies which the USSR, in accordance with the July discussions with Le Thanh Nghi, now proposed to send to North Vietnam throughout 1965-1967 over and above the supplies originally specified in the 30 March agreement. The Soviets evidently received no answer for a month. In the meantime, the USSR apparently gave the Chinese routine notice of one specific coming shipment to consisting of "ten military technical workshops and forty anti-aircraft guns." On 7 October, a representative of the Soviet Embassy asked the Chinese to hasten the signing of a supplement to the 30 March agreement to cover the new long-term list of supplies. The Chinese replied that they would not sign until the North Vietnamese had told them a) what "technical possibilities" there were for delivery; b) the dates for receipt; and c) whether the equipment listed was essential to Vietnam. The Soviets at this time told the Chinese that the shipment of workshops and AAA guns--which apparently had already encountered trouble--was provided for in the original March agreement and should not have to wait for the supplementary agreement. Again according to the Soviets, the Chinese rejected this view and while continuing to hold up the supplementary agreement, also held up the specific shipment on the ground that it was not yet authorized. All these complaints were voiced in a secret letter which the Soviet party sent to the Chinese party on 23 October.

The Chinese replied in a letter of 5 November, claiming that the supplementary agreement (and therefore, all the supplies covered by it) were being held up because the Chinese had not yet received a final answer to their

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inquiries in Hanoi. The Chinese also claimed that they had however offered to release for transit the specific shipment the Soviets were concerned about without waiting for the signing of a supplementary agreement, if only the Soviets would agree to a separate exchange of letters for this shipment--which the USSR had not yet done.

Both sides were being disingenuous, but the Chinese more so. While it is possible that the shipment could have been released through a specific exchange of letters as the Chinese demanded, if Soviets agreed to this they would open up the obvious danger that this additional bureaucratic hurdle would be imposed on other shipments which the Soviets believed already covered by the 30 March agreement.

So far as the Chinese dealings with the Vietnamese to clear the supplementary agreement are concerned, it is just conceivable that North Vietnam did need several more months to prepare its long-term timetable for receipt of the Soviet weapons, although Hanoi had had since Li Thanh Nghi's return in July to do so. But it is highly unlikely that this was the whole story. As the Chinese have several times indicated in public statements as well as in their November 5 letter, they were willing to transport only those Soviet weapons that the DRV "confirmed" or "wanted," and there is good reason to believe that they have many times sought to influence North Vietnam as to which weapons to accept.* Although there is no direct evidence to confirm the hypothesis, it seems likely that the Chinese were doing this in the fall of 1965, and that in their contacts with the North Vietnamese they were

*See, in this connection, the statement attributed to Vice Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua in May 1966 (page 8), and the statement attributed to Pham Van Dong in April 1965 (page 20).

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in effect seeking to whittle down the list the Soviets had presented to Peking as agreed upon with Le Thanh Nghi.

We do not know when the supplementary agreement was finally signed by the Chinese and shipments pursuant to it begun. Nor do we know when the shipment of "ten military technical workshops and forty anti-aircraft guns" was released for transit to Vietnam. We can assume that it was prior to January 1966, when the CPSU stated in a widely-circulated letter to other parties that "on one occasion the Chinese for a long time refused to transport military aid, including anti-aircraft weapons, on the ground that the documentation was not in order and also that they did not know that the Vietnamese comrades needed that equipment."* [redacted] It is possible that similar supplementary Sino-Soviet rail transit agreements had again to be negotiated through the same tortuous procedure after each of Le Thanh Nghi's subsequent annual visits to Moscow, in addition to the renegotiation of the main agreement itself in March 1967. There is no available evidence, however, to indicate that new delays for Soviet weapons were caused by such negotiations.

D. January-July 1966: DRV Rail Destruction and Ho's Visit to China

Meanwhile, U.S. bombing of the north had steadily increased in the fall of 1965. As is discussed elsewhere,

*One Czechoslovak official, on learning of this charge in a Czech document in February 1966, claimed to have queried a Chinese official (presumably from the Embassy in Prague) about it. The Chinese reportedly admitted readily that one Soviet shipment of arms had been turned back in late 1965, and claimed that this had been done because the arms were obsolescent. [redacted]

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it was at that time that the threat to North Vietnamese airfields led the Chinese to put into effect a plan apparently worked out in the spring, to offer DRV fighters a haven at Chinese fields. By the time of a temporary U.S. bombing halt in late December, the DRV need for more rapid delivery of high-priority goods had become sufficiently pressing to induce the Chinese to make what for them was a major concession, albeit a temporary one: they relaxed their restrictions on Soviet air transit of China and from December through February allowed the Soviets to make many more flights than ever before (or ever again.) [redacted]

[redacted] the DRV was apparently unable to meet the Chinese January 1966 rail delivery schedule and was arranging a meeting with the Chinese [redacted]

[redacted] And by December, there had been some diversion of economic freight from the rail to the sea route.

The Curb on East European Traffic

The changes apparently necessitated by these North Vietnamese difficulties led to a Chinese move which created a considerable stir at the time. On at least one and possibly two occasions in mid-February the Chinese Foreign Ministry called in the ambassadors of most of the East European countries in the absence of the Soviets and informed them that henceforth only military goods would be accepted from those countries for rail transshipment through China to Vietnam. Economic goods--the bulk of East European contributions in any case--would have to go by sea. The Chinese reportedly read a list of items which would have to go by sea, apparently to avoid ambiguity. The Chinese are said to have cited damage to the DRV rail lines as the reason for these restrictions. [redacted] The Soviets and their friends immediately began embroidering upon this; a few reports claimed that

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the Chinese at a second meeting had also banned East European military shipments by rail, but this appears incorrect.

Reflections of these Chinese limitations on bloc rail traffic continued to appear in reporting from time to time thereafter. In March 1966 the Yugoslav representative at a World Peace Council meeting complained to the Chinese delegate that he had asked for facilities for transportation of a Yugoslav gift to Vietnam but had been given no cooperation. A year later in March 1967 a Czechoslovak official remarked that the single largest item of Czech support for Vietnam--medium-size trucks--had formerly been delivered via the USSR and China by railroad, but because of Sino-Soviet frictions were now being delivered by sea. At about the same time the Japanese Communist Akahata representative in Pyongyang is said to have reported to his party that the Chinese had refused to allow North Korea to send aid (unspecified) to Vietnam via Chinese railroads.

While the Chinese convocation of the East European diplomats in mid-February to announce to them jointly the restrictions on their rail shipments may indeed prompted in part by the problems of the DRV rail system, its timing was probably not entirely fortuitous. Only about a week before this, on 7 February, the CCP had sent to the Polish party a vitriolic secret letter [redacted] rejecting the bloc conference on "unity of action" regarding Vietnam which the Poles at Soviet behest had been vainly trying to convene at the 23rd CPSU Congress in March. The letter claimed that the Soviets had given the world a distorted view of Chinese transportation of Soviet goods, and noted that the Poles, Bulgarians, Hungarians, East Germans, Mongolians, and Czechs--in other words, all the subsequent

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invitees to the Chinese Foreign Ministry meeting--had been impressed by the Soviets into their anti-China campaign.

Charges and Counter-Charges

The exchange took place against a background of increasingly bitter public and private mutual recriminations over the issue of Chinese obstruction of Soviet aid. Since early December the Soviets had greatly expanded their campaign on this issue through Soviet and East European diplomatic and intelligence channels. One story particularly infuriated the Chinese. Through intermediaries the KGB planted in the New York Times** and then played back in the Soviet press a story charging that the Chinese had demanded payment in dollars (rather than rubles) for Soviet rail shipments of "military and medical supplies" to Vietnam. While we have no conclusive evidence either way about such a Chinese demand for hard currency, in view of the vehement and explicit Chinese denials and the fact that the Soviets have not seen fit to repeat this specific charge in their most authoritative secret documents, it seems improbable. The Chinese denounced these "lies" in People's Daily on 23 December, and the Chinese Foreign Ministry handed protests to Ambassador Lapin on 4, 9, and 11 January which Lapin refused to accept each time. These diplomatic transactions were revealed to the world in another angry NCNA statement of 15 January.

Meanwhile, on 7 January 1966 the CCP sent the CPSU a secret party letter in which the Chinese ridiculed the value of the Sino-Soviet treaty, recalled that they had

*N. Y. Times, 4 December 1965.

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previously denied sabotaging Soviet aid to Vietnam in letters to the CPSU on 16 July and 5 November 1965, and threatened to publish this correspondence if the Soviets continued to "concoct such rumors about China." [redacted]

[redacted]. However, although the Chinese did privately disseminate these letters to other parties, they did not publish them despite the fact that the Soviets did not desist. As already noted, in January and February the CPSU distributed an anti-Chinese letter widely to other parties which alluded in general terms to Chinese obstruction and referred to the shipment held up in the fall of 1965. The Soviet and East European whispering campaign throughout the world continued.

After Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky on 21 April had made a public allusion to Chinese "hampering" of the transport of supplies to Vietnam, the Chinese Foreign Ministry on 3 May issued what now appears to have been a dishonest reply. The Chinese revealed that the Soviets had previously asked the Chinese (presumably in the 30 March 1965 agreement or its later supplement) to " earmark" for the first quarter of 1966 a total of 1,730 freight cars for Vietnam aid, but that the Soviets in that period actually delivered only 556 freight car loads. This intimation that it was the Soviets who were not meeting their commitments was hardly consistent with the earlier Chinese complaint in their 5 November secret letter that the Soviets were inundating the Chinese railroads with a torrent of unplanned shipments the Chinese could not handle. The apparent Soviet temporary cutback in deliveries in the first quarter of 1966 was apparently attributable to the temporary difficulties of the Vietnamese railroads--difficulties which the Chinese were obviously well aware of since Hanoi had informed Peking in December that it was unable to meet the Chinese January rail delivery schedule, and since the Chinese had cited this problem as justification for their February edict to the East Europeans. In short, both the Soviets and Chinese by now were making full use of sophistry and distortions in their polemics on the rail transit issue.

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This highly inflamed state of Sino-Soviet relations may well have been responsible for a curious incident [redacted] in the spring of 1966. [redacted]

[redacted]
This was an almost unique case of direct evidence of Chinese refusal of a North Vietnamese (as distinguished from a Soviet) request for rail transportation. It is particularly remarkable that the Chinese would reject several authoritative DRV pleas for a food shipment.

. Although the North Vietnamese consumed small amounts of wheat and cheese it seems likely that these foods were for European aid personnel in North Vietnam, most of whom were Russians. If so, the Chinese conduct would be much more understandable: Peking would be reluctant to make life more comfortable for "revisionists" seeking to supplant Chinese influence in North Vietnam.

The Ho Visit

Ho Chi Minh probably made an unannounced visit to China for two or three weeks in late May 1966 to discuss the question of foreign military aid to the DRV. This would be the first time he left the country since 1961.

The evidence of Ho's visit is found in reporting by [redacted] diplomats in Hanoi and [redacted] in Peking. The Canadian ICC representative in Hanoi reported that the visit had been confirmed by "sure sources," and quoted the Soviet Ambassador there to the effect that Ho had indeed gone and that there were "good reasons" for the visit. [redacted] spoke of the visit as a certainty, and the

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[redacted] concurred. Some DRV Foreign Ministry officials, as well as the Cuban Ambassador in Hanoi, refused to deny that Ho had gone to China when asked about it, and at least one high North Vietnamese official is said to have explicitly confirmed it. Chen Yi is also said to have "indirectly confirmed" the visit [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

The dates of Ho's visit are not certain, but it is likely that he departed on 16 May on a special VIP flight [redacted]

[redacted] Ho was seen in Hanoi as late as 15 May and was not seen thereafter on occasions when he would normally have appeared. The Chinese Ambassador reportedly returned to Peking on 19 May. Ho apparently came back from China some time between early June and 13 June, a day when a ban on normal flight activity often associated with VIP movements was temporarily imposed on the Peking airport. Le Duan and General Giap may have accompanied Ho; both were also out of sight in late May.

Only exceptionally grave matters could have taken the aged DRV President out of the country in the midst of the war. One of these matters was almost certainly his awareness of the upheavals that had begun within the Chinese leadership and his concern over the possible effect of leadership changes on Chinese support for the North Vietnamese war effort. Sixteen May, the day when Ho apparently left Hanoi, was the same day on which a secret Chinese Central Committee work conference concluded by issuing to the Chinese party a historic "16 May Report" denouncing Peng Chen's line on the cultural revolution. The Peking party committee and its publications were by this time under public attack; Chief of Staff Lo Jui-ch'ing had been quietly arrested months before; and Liu Shao-chi on a visit to Burma in the spring reportedly confided his forebodings about his future to Ne Win. It is likely that the Lao Dong party by mid-May had gotten wind of much of this and had become alarmed about its consequences.

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It is also likely that questions relating to the transportation of military supplies to Vietnam were involved in Ho's visit. The Canadian ICC representative in Hanoi drew this conclusion at the time from hints dropped by the Soviet Ambassador. A North Vietnamese embassy official in Peking is reported to have later told a [redacted] visitor there that during Chou En-lai's visit to Rumania in June 1966--that is, immediately after Ho's visit to China--Chou rejected a Rumanian request for unlimited Chinese support for transportation across China of Warsaw Pact aid. According to the North Vietnamese diplomat, Hanoi was deeply concerned over this because of fear that the United States might blockade the port of Haiphong and that Soviet and other East European aid might be appreciably reduced in consequence. [redacted] The belief that such concern was a major part of Ho's discussions with the Chinese strengthened by an unusual People's Daily article published on 10 July, a month or so after Ho's return home. Referring explicitly to the war in Vietnam, People's Daily referred to the lesson of the Chinese civil war when the Red Army had persisted in battle although "it was impossible for them to get any international material support," and drew the helpful conclusion for Hanoi that "the people . . . must be prepared to carry on the struggle by themselves should all material aid from outside be cut off." Not long after the article was published, an important foreign Communist saw Ho and other DRV leaders in Hanoi and was told by his hosts that the Sino-Soviet conflict was unfortunate because it created difficulties in getting material aid to the DRV. [redacted]

E. August-December 1966: A New DRV Role in Rail Transit

A new turning point was reached in the late summer and fall of 1966, possibly as a belated after-effect of Ho's visit to China. Although good information on the question is scarce the evidence suggests that it was in the August-December 1966 period, rather than in the spring

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[redacted]

of 1967 as the Soviets later claimed, that North Vietnam first assumed a role in the "safeguarding" of Soviet military supplies entering China en route to the DRV.

In mid-February 1967, shortly after the Chinese siege of the Soviet embassy in Peking had ended, Soviet Ambassador to the United States Dobrynin told [redacted] [redacted] that in August 1966 the Soviet Union had made a "final" effort to work out a Sino-Soviet accord on the transshipment of Soviet goods. [redacted] Dobrynin did not mention the accord that already existed --the 30 March 1965 agreement--and he did not make clear what it was that the Soviets wanted in August 1966. In view of what was to follow it is conceivable, however, that the Soviets made a new approach to the Chinese at this time over the issue of Chinese inspection, perhaps in relation to the apparently genuine Soviet belief that Chinese inspectors had sometimes done mischief to Soviet weapons. It is also conceivable that the Soviets requested permission to have some Soviet personnel regularly accompany their weapons shipment through China.**

In any case, according to Dobrynin, this "final"

[redacted]

**The Chinese had publicly stated (in the NCNA statement of 15 January 1966) that they had transported Soviet "technical personnel" by rail to Vietnam; but they did not say how often this was done, and they did not claim that these rail passengers accompanied weapons shipments. In view of all the available evidence it seems improbable that Soviets customarily accompanied the shipments. The subsequent willingness of the USSR to have the Vietnamese assume responsibility for the shipments testifies to this, and also suggests once more that the Soviets did have some genuine suspicions of possible Chinese misconduct with the shipments.

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Soviet effort in August was rejected by the Chinese, and it was in consequence of this rejection, at a subsequent unspecified time, that arrangement was made with the DRV whereby the North Vietnamese "accepted" Soviet shipments at the Sino-Soviet rail crossing points (i.e., at Manchouli in Manchuria and Erhlien in Inner Mongolia). It was not clear from Dobrynin's statement whether this meant merely that North Vietnamese personnel observed the process of Chinese inspection at the border and perhaps attested to the arrival of specific quantities of Soviet equipment in good condition, or whether it also meant that some North Vietnamese then actually accompanied each shipment through China to see that it came to no harm. (It was not until September 1968 that a diplomatic official clarified this point, asserting that the USSR had suggested that a Vietnamese escort accompany Soviet goods from the Sino-Soviet border to the DRV, but that the Chinese had refused. In consequence, the Soviet official stated, the USSR had at some unspecified time begun handing over to the Vietnamese a copy of the manifest of each shipment being transferred to Chinese control at the Sino-Soviet border. Presumably, North Vietnamese stationed at Manchouli and Erhlien checked the incoming goods being received by the Chinese against this manifest.)

In August 1966 [redacted] had indicated that Sino-Soviet transit negotiations were taking place. A Rumanian Agerpress correspondent [redacted] told a U.S. diplomat on 18 August that secret negotiations had recently begun in Peking between the Soviets and the Chinese on this matter, adding (optimistically) that these negotiations were almost completed and final agreement was soon expected; and that the agreement contemplated would permit the Soviets to transship military aid to North Vietnam without Chinese interference. This statement about negotiations, which would ordinarily have appeared doubtful from such a source, was given greater credibility by Dobrynin's subsequent statement. [redacted]

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Another [redacted] later furnished information that complemented both statements, and narrowed down Dobrynin's vague time period for the establishment of the new system. According to [redacted]

[redacted] the understanding on DRV assumption of responsibility was reached not in 1967 but in the last half of 1966, and certainly before the end of the year. [redacted] declared that the Chinese had been reluctant to permit the passage of Soviet "officials" (presumably, with the trains), the Soviets had been uneasy, and so the DRV had "taken the initiative."
[redacted]

Finally, we have confirmation from Hoang Muoi, the Minister Counselor and charge d'affaires of the North Vietnamese embassy in Pyongyang, who stated privately, in October 1966, that there had been "some irregularities" in the matter of Chinese transport of Soviet weapons, but that these had been taken care of and transportation of the materials was now being "safeguarded by the Vietnamese themselves." [redacted] This indicated that the new system was put into effect between August and October 1966.

The new system appears to have worked satisfactorily for the rest of 1966, although some Soviet sources throughout the fall and winter continued to speak privately and vaguely of Chinese delays and Chinese thefts of Soviet weapons. Brezhnev himself participated rather crudely in this effort, undoubtedly as part of the massive CPSU propaganda offensive against Mao initiated in the fall.

F. January-March 1967: The Crisis

In the latter part of January 1967, the Chinese initiated the most serious threat they had ever made to the continued existence of Sino-Soviet diplomatic relations

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--and to the Soviet overland supply route to Hanoi. Following a series of incidents in late January in Moscow and in countries around the world which were apparently deliberately planned, provoked, and coordinated by the Chinese, the CCP laid seige to the Soviet embassy in Peking from 26 January to 11 February. All entrances of the embassy were surrounded by howling mobs; Chinese embassy employees were withdrawn; the heat was cut off; Soviet (and East European) diplomats who ventured into the city were attacked; the Soviets were officially informed by the Foreign Ministry that their safety could no longer be guaranteed; and People's Daily editorials referred directly to the possibility of a cessation in relations. It appeared at the time as if the Chinese were seeking to force the Soviets to break diplomatic relations. The USSR however decided to hang on to its diplomatic presence in Peking as long as it could, and took steps to that end. Obviously--as the Soviet protest notes to the Chinese observed--the officials of the Soviet embassy charged with dealing with the transit of Soviet supplies to Vietnam could hardly perform their functions under these circumstances. In addition, Soviet passenger trains on the Peking-Moscow run were extensively harrassed and in some cases delayed by the Red Guards, and the overflying of China by Soviet military transports were halted.

There is evidence that the Chinese also reimposed delays on the passage of some Soviet military goods through China, despite new responsibilities assumed by the North Vietnamese for receiving rail shipments. On 18 January, Tran Ngoc Kha, the DRV press attache in Paris, told a western journalist that the "Chinese situation" constituted a "great handicap," particularly in matters concerning military aid, because transportation from the USSR overland through China was the shortest.

[] A week later the DRV ambassador to Cairo told a diplomat flatly that the Chinese were delaying Soviet aid deliveries to North Vietnam. The DRV ambassador to Czechoslovakia subsequently also admitted to some delays in Chinese shipments. And as late as 28 February, Luu Quy Tan, second secretary of the DRV embassy in Dar Es Salaam, declared that the Sino-Soviet dispute was harming North Vietnam militarily since Soviet aid was presently "unable" to reach Vietnam through China. []

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* This unparalleled onslaught of statements by DRV officials was supported by a significant omission in a DRV public statement. After the Chinese, on 21 January, published an angry denial of Soviet charges that the Chinese had hijacked Soviet missiles--citing past Vietnamese avowals that the Chinese had not delayed transit of Soviet materials--the North Vietnamese five days later also issued a statement denying the charge about Chinese hijacking, but conspicuously omitting the customary ritualistic statement that the Chinese were not delaying anything (a statement which Hanoi had repeated as recently as 10 December 1966).

There are grounds for conjecture that the Chinese threat to the Soviet presence in Peking and the delay of some Soviet shipments were intended to inhibit the DRV from moving toward negotiations with the United States, by raising the specter of a permanent cut-off of Soviet aid. We know [redacted] that Le Duan, in January 1967, had been sent on a secret visit to China to notify Mao of a recent North Vietnamese politburo decision to accept negotiations when conditions were judged propitious. [redacted] We know that the Chinese were unhappy at this, and reportedly said so. Moreover, in early December an official of the Chinese embassy in Baghdad stated that his government had warned Ho Chi Minh about the readiness of the Soviets to bargain with the Americans for peace in Vietnam and had told Ho that China was ready to make up the difference if Soviet aid were cut off in consequence.** In mid-December, CCP international liaison department chief Wu Hsiu-chuan, in conversation with a foreign Communist visitor, alluded to the possibility that Ho might, in fact, negotiate a settlement. Wu said that the CCP would explain such a development as an abandonment of the correct path by Hanoi under Soviet pressure, and that the Chinese would oppose this as deviationist. These private remarks were followed

[redacted]

**The Chinese could not, in fact, replace the Soviets as suppliers of some of the more sophisticated Soviet equipment, a fact which all concerned well knew.

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in early January by a public statement by the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister which removed some of the previous ambiguity in the DRV position and indicated more strongly than before that talks could come after bombing halt. The Chinese actions against the Soviet embassy and apparently against Soviet shipments followed within the next three weeks.

The circumstances surrounding the end of the siege of the Soviet embassy also give some support to the thesis that the siege was connected with the issue of negotiations. On 10 February, according to the North Vietnamese, a letter from President Johnson to Ho was received in Hanoi. The U.S. position was still unacceptable to Ho; it still required reciprocal concessions in exchange for a bombing halt. The following day--11 February--the Chinese apparently decided to end harassment of the embassy. One may conjecture that the decision followed North Vietnamese notification of the Chinese that the latest U.S. offer would be rejected. [redacted]

[redacted] a high-level DRV delegation, possibly led by Huong Van Hoan, which remained in Peking for some ten days of negotiations with the Chinese.

The delegation apparently arranged for the unblocking of Soviet shipments and for the reaffirmation of DRV assumption of responsibility for the shipments at the Sino-Soviet border. In late February, a high-ranking Soviet bloc official confirmed that the DRV delegation in Peking had been attempting to straighten out the matter of Soviet military shipments, stating that "many" such shipments had been stopped in China. The official claimed that "for several weeks a transport of over 300 railroad cars has been held up in China." [redacted] That the situation then changed was indicated on 28 February, a week or so after the return of the DRV delegation, when North Vietnam did what it had been unwilling to do in January and issued another "authorized" VNA denial

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that China had been obstructing rail transit.*

The February DRV-Chinese talks in Peking also made possible the Sino-Soviet negotiations in March that resulted in the renewal of the 30 March 1965 Sino-Soviet rail transit agreement. These negotiations took place in an atmosphere of continued intense hostility: the Chinese on 11 March published a protest note to the USSR from their Ministry of Railways about alleged mistreatment of a Chinese train crew in the USSR on 6 March. The note asked rhetorically whether the Soviets "still have any regard for the through-railway transport agreements, and whether or not the Soviet Government intends to carry out its international obligations."

Despite this heavy public hint about the possible fate of the secret negotiations then going on, a new rail transit agreement was signed in March, according to a statement made in the secret CPSU document shown to other parties in Moscow the following November. [] The CPSU document did not state what the lifetime of the new agreement was to be, but did indicate that it covered at least one year; it is probable that like its predecessor, it was to run for two years.

The new agreement, like the one for 1965-67, covered "military freight" only, and it may be assumed that the

*It seems possible that some of these periodic VNA denials whose timing has had no apparent explanation have similarly been issued following secret Sino-Vietnamese conversations. A VNA statement of 19 June 1966 thus followed Ho's visit to China.

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financial arrangements remained unchanged despite the DRV role in assuming responsibility for the shipments at the Sino-Soviet border. That is, all the military articles covered by this agreement were transported free by the Chinese, while all other goods, whatever their nature, were arbitrarily classified as "economic" freight whose transportation was arranged on an ad hoc basis and paid for by the Soviets, apparently in rubles. It is not clear whether the DRV role in accepting the shipments applied also to any of the economic freight not covered by the agreement.

The CPSU document stated that the Chinese in the new agreement "consented to let only 9,000 to 10,000 tons of freight a month or 100,000 or 120,000 tons a year across Chinese territory." The CPSU claimed that "the actual requirements of the DRV in military freight, with due account of the additional deliveries earmarked for this year, add up to more than 30,000 tons a month." (All these figures were evidently in addition to the tonnage for economic freight, which was not discussed). The Soviets concluded that this showed that "the most essential forms of Soviet military aid reach Vietnam in the volume which the Chinese leaders consider permissible and useful to themselves." It is possible, however, that the Chinese insistence on more limited figures for the planned military aid tonnage reflected at least in part the objective difficulties anticipated for the North Vietnamese and Chinese railroad systems.

With the conclusion of this agreement, the Soviets--and to a lesser extent the DRV--began to disseminate many misleading reports calculated to convey to the United States the message that the difficulties over transshipment were over. Some reports suggested that a "tripartite" Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese agreement had now been signed, although others contradicted this, we think correctly. It was in this context that the Soviets in March and April began to tell everyone who would listen about the DRV role in assuming responsibility for Chinese transshipment of Soviet supplies. Many reports suggested or asserted that the DRV assumed a new role as a result of an agreement in March, although this was flatly contradicted by what Dobrynin had said in mid-February, as well by the date on which he had said it.

No need to list:

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To recapitulate: the evidence indicates that the DRV role was first assumed between August and October 1966, that it worked satisfactorily for the rest of 1966, that it did not prevent the Chinese from delaying shipments again when they decided to do so in January and February 1967, and that when the Chinese decided to relent, the DRV role was reaffirmed following separate Sino-Vietnamese talks in February and Sino-Soviet talks in March.

G. April 1967 to Date: Effects of the Cultural Revolution

The September 1967 Delayed Missile Shipment

There is no convincing evidence that the Chinese have again delayed Soviet weapons shipments to Vietnam by rail for political reasons. They do not appear to have done so even after the DRV moved toward and then entered negotiations with the United States in 1968, although they do seem to have made their feelings known to the DRV in other unpleasant ways. As will be seen elsewhere in this paper, [redacted]

[redacted] the CPSU document distributed in November 1967 indicate that the Chinese did refuse permission for a planned overflight of Soviet transports and jet fighters to Vietnam in May 1967.

The November 1967 CPSU document also stated that the Chinese in September 1967 "delayed for nearly a month the transportation of trainloads with rockets for the DRV, despite the requests of the DRV leaders to expedite the deliveries of these weapons." The CPSU admitted, however, that the Chinese leaders had explained this action--apparently in dealings with Soviet personnel in Peking--by "referring to the supposed difficulties of the Vietnamese side in receiving and transporting armaments arriving from the USSR." While this Chinese explanation of the temporary delay in terms of a momentary Vietnamese rail bottleneck may conceivably have been justified, a more likely explanation is the disruption caused by the Red Guards.

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The Red Guards: July-August 1967

The major problem for Soviet rail shipments since April 1967 appears to have been the difficulties created for the Chinese railroads by Red Guard factional fighting, particularly in the summer of 1967 and again in May-July 1968.

There is good evidence that Red Guard factions, seeking weapons to use against their factional opponents, seized weapons bound for Vietnam in July and August 1967. It is much less certain that these were Soviet weapons. The best information on the event came from a Chou En-lai speech of 20 September, reported in some detail in the Red Guard press. In castigating Red Guards for having seized arms from PLA arsenals in many parts of China in July and August, Chou revealed that "trains with military aid for Vietnam" had been "ambushed." "Still more important," he said, "was the looting of military stores destined for Vietnam." He explained that "after we had issued orders most of this was returned although there was a little which was lost." It may appear strange that the special trains bound for Vietnam, reportedly well guarded by PLA troops, could be successfully "ambushed" by Red Guard students. The explanation, as Chou made clear, was in the permissive attitude of the PLA in accordance with instructions from Peking in this frenetic period: "Even when people seize their arms," Chou said, "because the Central Committee has issued instructions that they should not open fire, they can do nothing but go back weeping." [redacted] The instructions were changed in the fall to permit the PLA to protect its weapons. One [redacted] central directive in early September prohibited disruption of "any means of transport" over which weapons and army supplies are moved. The directive implicitly confirms that disruption had occurred.

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Red Guard refugees in Hong Kong [redacted] and posters in Peking have furnished some details on the incidents of which Chou spoke. According to one Red Guard refugee, an incident which "made Chou furious" happened in August when a faction in Nanning raided an arms train bound for North Vietnam, welded the wheels of the train together and made off with three to four carloads of weapons ranging from small arms to artillery, mortars, "and even anti-aircraft missiles." Another Red Guard refugee reported being told by a Red Guard who had participated that also in August, a Nanning faction had gone to the village of Chinchi--supposedly a storage depot for Vietnam military aid--and had stolen a large number of "rockets" and other ammunition, which Chou subsequently forced them to return. [redacted]

It seems quite probable that the raids described, or something similar, actually occurred in the Nanning area. When a Nanning Special District Revolutionary Committee was set up seven months later, in late March 1968, a local broadcast warned of the need for vigilance against "class enemies" who would continue with sabotage activities in Nanning, where class struggle was "extremely acute and complex." That the weapons stolen included Soviet missiles, however, is unconfirmed, and could easily be an exaggeration. In any case, this August incident could well have been responsible--rather than rail troubles in the DRV--for the decision of Chinese authorities to hold up for a month the Soviet September rocket shipments about which the CPSU later complained. Peking may well have been motivated by a desire to wait until order had been sufficiently restored so that no embarrassing incidents could possibly occur with these sensitive shipments.

The Red Guards: May-July 1968

Disruption of arms shipments did not recur on a similar scale until the spring of 1968, when the cultural revolution in China once more entered a leftist phase, regime newspapers once more began to praise "chaos," and Red Guard factional struggle was again given the green

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light by the Maoist leadership in Peking. And once again, it was Chou En-lai's task to try to mitigate the damage caused by these excesses both to the Chinese economy in general and to the transport of aid to Vietnam in particular.

On 12 May, Chou delivered a speech to a nationwide conference of transport workers in Peking, subsequently published in the Red Guard press, in which he lamented traffic tieups caused by factional strife at three major rail junctions on the main railroad line from the USSR to Vietnam--in the north, at Mukden in Manchuria; in central China, at Chengchow in Honan; and in the south at Liuchow in Kwangsi. The worst of the three was Liuchow where, according to Chou, "traffic is at a standstill" and "material cannot be transported...to Vietnam."

[redacted]
[redacted] have confirmed that disorder in parts of Kwangsi province, which adjoins Vietnam, had greatly intensified in the month preceding Chou's speech, and that the factional violence had reached major cities on the rail line by early May. [redacted] reported that on 5 May "armed struggle" had broken out in Nanning and Liuchou. The tieup at Liuchou of which Chou spoke a week later presumably began at this time or shortly thereafter.

Subsequently, the situation on the rail line through Kwangsi got worse instead of better. According to [redacted] [redacted] the line through Liuchou had been "cut" (apparently for purposes of passenger travel) for more than a month. Conditions reportedly improved temporarily in late May, possibly as a result of Chou's exhortations, but after a few days the line shut down again for passengers. On 1 June, according to a later Red Guard newspaper account, one Liuchou faction damaged most of the equipment of Liuchou station and tore up rails on a local bridge, thus "completely disrupting traffic along the Hunan-Kwangsi railway" and making "the transportation of supplies in aid of Vietnam...impossible." Another later Red Guard tale told how a Peking-Nanning passenger express train in early June was halted enroute

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at Lopu, Kwangsi, ordered to return by the Peking authorities, and raided and searched by Red Guards at Kweilin on the return trip.* Other poster accounts reported by the Hong Kong Consulate General said that both passenger and freight trains in Kwangsi were halted by fighting after 5 June. In the second week of June, evidence of disruption multiplied. On 13 June Peking instructed key rail centers in East and Central China that because of "extreme confusion of passenger and freight traffic" in Kwangsi they should not accept rail freight for routing into or through the province. [redacted]

[redacted] confirmed that railway service was disrupted at two Kwangsi towns on the main rail line to Vietnam. By this time, the difficulties caused by cultural revolution disorders were being compounded by flooding at points along the rail line further north.

During the same period, the second week of June, the first hard evidence appeared that communications with Vietnam were indeed being affected. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Echoes of this decision regarding passenger service to the DRV were soon heard in Peking: on 13 June a [redacted] correspondent there reported [redacted] that rail tickets were no longer being issued for the Peking-Nanning-Hanoi run, and [redacted] on the 16th noted that two DRV officials en route through China by rail to Hanoi had been forced to turn back to Peking. [redacted]

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*For both accounts, see Survey of China Mainland Press, No. 4227, 29 July 1968.

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In addition to passenger traffic, rail shipment of low-priority freight was also halted. [redacted]

[redacted]

As had happened in previous periods when rail bottlenecks in Vietnam or China imposed restrictions on the volume of traffic, low-priority goods were shifted to sea transportation but high-priority economic or military support item evidently continued to be sent by rail from the Soviet border. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] It does not seem reasonable that the USSR would keep funneling shipments into China if none were reappearing in the DRV; the inference seems to be that some shipments were actually arriving in North Vietnam, however much delayed, and there-

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fore that rail traffic was not completely halted for a prolonged period. Rather, throughout May, June and early July there seem to have been breaks and disruption in different places for short periods of time. The next effort would be to slow shipments down enormously, with frequent temporary halts at different points in China.

Furthermore, while some economic shipments may have continued to get through to the DRV, the evidence suggests that weapons shipments, the highest-priority traffic of all, were in a particularly precarious position because weapons were the particular target of Red Guard factions harrassing the rail lines. On 13 June, the CCP Central Committee, State Council, Central Military Commission, and Central Cultural Revolution Group issued a join directive which delared:

Recently, in their armed struggles, certain mass organizations in the Liuchow district of Kwangsi, acting against the general order of the central authorities, looted our country's support-Vietnam supplies and arms and equipment of the People's Liberation Army. They also carried out armed attack against trains and damaged railways, completely disrupting railway traffic in the Liuchow district. This has badly affected the sending of support-Vietnam supplies and the transport of exports for foreign trade.

The directive's reference to "armed attack against trains" seemed to confirm an assertion made on posters seen in Peking as early as 4 May that Red Guards in Nanning had captured a "military train." While the directive speaks only of the looting of Chinese "support-Vietnam supplies" and of Chinese army equipment, it seems very likely indeed that in this atmosphere Soviet shipments of military equipment bound for Vietnam were at least delayed enroute and possibly looted. In a period of Maoist toleration of Red Guard fighting and when the PLA were restricted in the use of guns against the young revolutionaries, it was most difficult for the PLA to protect the Soviet shipments. Furthermore, it is logical that in such circumstances weapons shipments would be held up at the Sino-Soviet border, as had happened in the late summer and fall of 1967.

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This is in fact what the Soviets have reported to have happened. At some time in June, Mikhail Kapitsa, chief of the Southeast Asian Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, stated that the Chinese had told the Soviets that "for technical reason" they could not accept any additional transports of arms and ammunition for the DRV. Consequently, five Soviet trains, including some loaded with rockets, were said to be halted at the border on the Soviet side. Furthermore, according to Kapitsa, over 500 railroad cars carrying arms had not reached North Vietnam and were marooned somewhere in China.* Kapitsa said that the Soviet government had submitted a "strong protest" to the Chinese government. [redacted]
[redacted]

The issue of what was to be done about these delays appears to have come to a head in late June and early July. On 15 June, according to one Kwangsi railway workers faction, local workers who had received the Central Committee's 13 June order took a stalled "military train" which had been "dispatched to aid Vietnam", hooked on a locomotive, and drove the train through "barriers" erected by a rival faction to enable it to pass through Liuchou. The next day, however, the rivals allegedly attempted to dismantle the Liuchou station's equipment again. On 19 June Chou En-lai intervened once more (for the second time in two months), [redacted]
[redacted] demanding that "the looted support-Vietnam supplies be returned in toto" and that

*Kapitsa also stated that twelve members of the "escort" for the Soviet trains were detained in China, and that the USSR had no information about their fate. This was the first and only allusion in any reporting to date to Soviet personnel being allowed to escort military shipments through China. All previous reporting on the subject had denied that the Chinese were allowing the Soviets to do this; the most recent such statement had been made by an NLF official in Hanoi [redacted] in November 1967 [redacted] Three months after Kapitsa made his statement, in September 1968, his remark (footnote continued on page 50)

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"railway traffic and train services in Liuchow be re-
stored in three days." As a result of his efforts, [redacted]

[redacted] fifty North Vietnamese had left for home by
rail. This resumption of rail passenger traffic was
shortlived, however. [redacted]

[redacted] 248 technical train-
ees would not leave as had been scheduled the next day
because of "transport problems in China." [redacted]

[redacted]

In early July, the North Vietnamese began to com-
plain to foreigners. The Swedish Ambassador in Peking
later reported that he had been told by the DRV Amba-
sador there that the rail line to Vietnam had been
"broken near Nanning for about three weeks," and that
the flow of military supplies had been "disrupted." [redacted]
It seems possible that the DRV was attempting to place
pressure on the Chinese by airing the matter to an out-
sider. The North Vietnamese may also have complained
directly to the Chinese in early July, because soon there-
after the Chinese apparently took more drastic action to
expedite military shipments.

On 3 July the CCP Central Committee, State Council,
Military Commission and Cultural Revolution Group issued
another directive, personally endorsed by Mao, bemoaning
the fact that rail traffic in Kwangsi "has not been re-
stored up to the present" and reiterating in more threat-
ening terms the demand that stolen "supplies destined for

(footnote continued from page 49)

about escorts was contradicted again, by an important
Soviet diplomat in the Far East who stated privately that
the Chinese had refused to allow either Soviet or North
Vietnamese escorts for Soviet goods. [redacted]

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Vietnam" and stolen PLA weapons be returned.

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[redacted]

[redacted] On the same day [redacted]
[redacted] politburo member Li Hsien-nien
was telling a Vietnamese delegation publicly in Peking
that China "will extend more effective support" to the
DRV, after the delegation (according to subsequent Peking
diplomatic reports) had privately pressed the Chinese
for guarantees with regard to rail transportation.

It thus seemed possible that Mao, repeating his
action of the fall of 1967, had finally given the PLA
sufficient authority to crack down on factional fight-
ing in Kwangsi to make it possible to put into effect
Chou's exhortations of May and June and clear the rail

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line to Vietnam for good.* By mid-July, the Soviet Ambassador to Hanoi was grudgingly admitting that rail transit had resumed, but claimed that 240 out of 700 carloads of materiel were still missing.** [redacted]

[redacted] At the beginning of August [redacted] announced the resumption of passenger train service.

The Chinese Demonstrations

The chaotic rail transit picture was further complicated during May and June by the coincidence that it was just at this time--when another leftward shift in Chinese domestic policy had unleashed factional struggles all over China--that the North Vietnamese entered into talks with the United States in Paris that were anathema

*On 28 July, Mao is reported to have issued a personal directive that no one was permitted to attack the PLA, that those who did so would be suppressed, and that anyone who refused to be suppressed would be annihilated. This directive seemed indicative of a general policy swing back toward the right in the direction of order, and therefore appeared to presage a relaxation of Red Guard factional pressure on the rail line to Vietnam.

**Soviet reporting continues to complicate the picture because of the unfortunate Soviet tendency to embroider. Late in July another Soviet official told foreign Communists that two months earlier a Soviet trainload of arms (including air defense rockets) had failed to reach its destination; when the Soviets supposedly asked Chou what had happened to the train, Chou is said to have replied that he did not know, and that the train could have been "seized by bandits." This is simply not credible; even if such a train had been attacked, its PLA guards would surely have reported what had happened. [redacted]

[redacted]

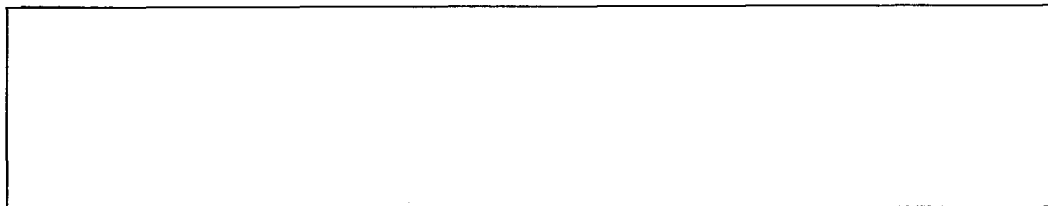
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to Mao. The weight of the evidence, however, does not substantiate the view that the rail delays in south China were deliberately created by the Chinese regime in retaliation for the opening of the Paris talks. The factional struggles in Kwangsi that were the immediate cause of most of the rail troubles in 1968 were clearly part of a larger pattern of factional strife which arose simultaneously in many parts of China in the spring. The Chinese regime evidently made efforts through Chou En-lai, in May and June, to try to curb the disorders on the rail line without sacrificing the current overall leftist line, and when this did not suffice apparently ordered the PLA in early July to crack down hard on railroad troublemakers despite the fact that the PLA in some other places was still being forbidden to crack down on Red Guard factionalists. [] The North Vietnamese war effort was temporarily a victim, but not a target, of one of Mao's domestic aberrations.

Nevertheless, the Chinese took strong measures-- which happened to coincide in time with the rail disruptions--to show the DRV their feelings about the Paris talks. Early in June demonstrations were simultaneously held outside the DRV consulates in Nanning, Kunming and Canton protesting the negotiations. [] The fact that the



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demonstrations occurred has been confirmed by the North Vietnamese charge in Peking, but other lurid details found in some reporting--such as allegations that the Canton consulate was burned down and that the DRV consul general in Nanning was personally humiliated by Red Guards--have not been confirmed and are likely to have been the products of Soviet embroidery. Another such rumor, to the effect that the consulates would all be closed, was specifically denied by the DRV charge.

In retrospect, it would appear that the demonstrations were laid on by the Chinese government for the three southern consulates rather than for the Peking embassy in order to minimize the publicity they would receive in the outside world and to set limits to the public display of hostility toward the DRV. Yet the fact that the three southern consulates--in the general area of the rail disruption--were the targets made it easier for the Soviets to suggest, both privately and through their open propaganda, that there was a connection between the demonstrations and the rail tieups. On 26 June a Moscow Literary Gazette article related that in Nanning "the insolent youths" had demanded that the Vietnamese consul condemn the Paris talks, and soon thereafter Soviet broadcasts began to claim that "Mao Tse-tung has suspended railroad communications with Vietnam."

The strong Chinese efforts to clear the rail line in Kwangsi in early July may have resulted not only from North Vietnamese complaints, but also from Chinese realization of how vulnerable they had become to Soviet propaganda attack on this issue. But the underlying Sino-Vietnamese tensions over the Paris talks have not disappeared. In early July a scuffle occurred in Hanoi between Chinese embassy officials and Vietnamese police when the police prevented passers-by from reading a Chinese propaganda display attacking the Paris negotiations. In the very speech on 10 July in which Li Hsien-nien bragged of past China aid to Vietnam and promised increased aid, he also took the occasion to make hostile allusions to the Paris talks which the Vietnamese were forced to omit when reporting his speech. The Chinese charge in Paris, Yi Su-chih, is [] reported to have stated on 15 May that while China was still furnishing aid to North Vietnam, it might be forced to "reconsider" this aid should

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the Paris negotiations bring results unsatisfactory to China. [redacted] Undoubtedly the threat has been relayed to the DRV.

An Inventory of Current Obstructive Practices

For the present, however, the Chinese still appear to be guided by a policy line which the Soviets have claimed was formally adopted last November: to abstain from deliberate obstruction of Soviet and East European weapons shipments because such action has proven counter-productive to Chinese influence in Hanoi. The absence of such deliberate, politically-motivated blocking of military rail traffic, however, still leaves in effect today a long list of other, lesser hindrances caused by various aspects of Chinese policy. These include:

1) The periodic disruption and delaying of rail traffic as the indirect result of cyclical swings to the left in the policy direction of the Chinese cultural revolution. In both 1967 and 1968 Mao could have acted sooner than he did to enable the PLA to enforce the removal of Red Guard factional obstruction of the rail line, but each time he was apparently reluctant to subordinate a militant phase of his domestic policy to DRV interests.

2) The highly bureaucratic and chauvinist Chinese insistence on the letter of all regulations on international rail traffic. This was most graphically illustrated by an incident [redacted] when the Chinese refused to allow a shipment of East German vehicles to enter China from Mongolia because the invoice listed the rail destination of the consignment as "Ping Hsiang, DRV." (Ping Hsiang is the Chinese rail-head at the DRV frontier). The DRV asked East Germany

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to ask Mongolia to change the rail destination of the invoice to "Dong Dang, DRV" (the North Vietnamese rail-head) in order to get the Chinese to release the shipment. It appears to be Chinese policy to cause deliberate delay on any such minor pretext.

3) The periodic harrassing of Soviet ships in Chinese ports at the initiative of local Maoist fanatics. This has happened at Port Arthur in December 1966, at Dairen in August 1967, and at Canton in April 1968. In two cases a personal protest from Kosygin to Chou En-lai was required to secure release of the ship.* In the last case the ship involved had brought POL to Canton for rail transshipment to the DRV.

4) The present apparent total ban on Soviet military air transport flights to and from North Vietnam. (See page 66.)

5) The unreliable state of Chinese civil air passenger service between Peking and Hanoi. The North Vietnamese are said to have complained to the Chinese about delays in these flights [redacted]

*The Chinese have issued a new Administrative Code for foreign ships using their harbors, with stringent provisions (forbidding all photographs or sketching, for example) evidently intended to compliment those of the tough Frontier Inspection Regulations issued in 1965. Among other things, the new Code sets forth in detail the powers of harbor authorities to detain foreign ships. [redacted]

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Soviet rail traffic to Vietnam continues to be subject to harrassment as it crosses China. The rail traffic itself remains highly vulnerable to any future Chinese decision to apply pressure against North Vietnam, as in early 1967, on the subject of negotiations. Given the background, it is certainly possible that Peking might cut Soviet rail shipments to the DRV if a major decision unwelcome to Mao were to be reached in the Paris talks.

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II. The Issue of Air Transit of China

The Sino-Soviet struggle over rail transit to Vietnam during the last three years has been paralleled by a secondary dispute over Soviet efforts to use military air transports across China. The Chinese have been adamant; despite Soviet polemical protests they have kept the Soviet airlift small-scale, intermittent, and marginal in importance.

The Soviets at one time hoped for an "air corridor" through which they could stage repeated mass flights of transports to the DRV, as they had done in other parts of the world. The Chinese have flatly rejected the corridor idea, and on two occasions (in March 1965 and May 1967) they have taken last-minute action to block mass flights which the Soviets had set in motion. On another occasion, during the siege of the Soviet embassy in February 1967, the Chinese made it impossible for one Soviet transport to return home from Vietnam via China. On no occasion have the Chinese permitted more than two transports at a time to cross China. Each flight actually flown has required separate permission from Peking. The number of flights permitted has varied from about one a month in 1965, to more than three a month in 1966, to virtually nothing since the summer of 1967. As of 1 August 1968, an apparent Chinese ban on all Soviet overflights was still in effect.

A. The Deliveries in November 1964

The Soviets did not become aware of the difficulties in store for them until Kosygin had returned home from Hanoi and Peking in February 1965. Before that, in late November 1964, they had obtained Chinese consent for four IL-18 flights in rapid succession from Irkutsk to Haiphong via Peking, each carrying freight which may have included high priority military goods. [redacted]
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It is conceivable that the materiel furnished in late November included some of the anti-aircraft weapons and radar which the CPSU later privately stated had been given to the DRV before Kosygin's trip.**

B. February-March 1965: The Thirty Blocked AN-12s

On 25 February, ten days after Kosygin's return to Moscow, the Soviet government formally requested from the CPR an "air corridor" across China to North Vietnam--an avenue for mass flights of Soviet transports to the DRV. [redacted] Having made the request, the USSR prepared to put it into effect, before receiving the Chinese answer. 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 their base in European Russia to Irkutsk,

[redacted] 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. The Soviets may have been misled by the Laos precedent and believed that

[redacted]

**Aerial photography subsequently established the deployment since 24 December of at least six Soviet ZSU-57-2 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns in the DRV--the first time this weapon had been seen in either North Vietnam or Communist China. However, this particular weapon is too heavy (31 tons) to have been brought in by the IL-18s, and may have been delivered by rail. It is also conceivable that it was delivered on a Soviet cargo ship which arrived at Haiphong on 22 December.

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there would be no Chinese complications. However, the AN-12s never left the Soviet Union, and during March, they returned to European Russia in small groups, possibly leaving their cargoes in Irkutsk for subsequent rail shipment.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry, in response to the Soviet request for air transit rights, had sent a note to the Soviet government (dated 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." When discussing the overflight question in a letter to the CPSU months later, the Chinese party admitted that it had refused to permit such an ostentatious mass flight to the DRV and claimed that this would have violated the principle of utter secrecy alleged to have been demanded by the Soviets.

[redacted]

Elaborating on this point, 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. A Chinese Foreign Ministry official told the Ceylonese Ambassador in May 1965 that Soviet transportation of supplies across China would give the United States an excuse to bomb China. And a January 1966 secret CPSU note to the Italian CP quoted the Chinese as having written at some unspecified time that the Soviets "are ostentatiously sending their arms across Chinese territory to attract American planes over China. Moscow . . . is seeking to give (the American imperialists) an excuse for an attack in force against the Chinese People's Republic." [redacted] The Soviet Government, for its part, is believed to have told other East European states in the spring of 1965 that the Chinese would not permit mass overflights because they were afraid of consequent U.S. attacks upon the South China airfields; the Soviet assertion may reflect a genuine

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Soviet estimate.*

A second, complementary explanation of Chinese motives was later also circulated by the Soviets among their Communist followers, and apparently confirmed by the Chinese. In the spring of 1965, the secretary-general of the Panamanian CP repeated privately a Soviet claim that the Chinese Communists feared the taking of aerial photographs by the Soviets. A leader of the Swiss Communists claimed that the Chinese, when refusing Soviet overflights, had themselves alleged that the Soviets might "profit in making observations of a strategic nature" [redacted]

Late in 1966, a visiting Japanese leftist trade union delegation was told in Peking by Han Hsi-ya, deputy head of the international department of the Chinese trade union federation, that "in early 1965, China turned down a Soviet request for permission to fly 40 planes through China because it was suspected that the main objective was to make secret observations of military conditions in China from the air". [redacted]

[redacted] This Chinese preoccupation with Soviet inquisitiveness may well have been responsible for their introduction of a requirement [redacted] that those few Soviet planes that were allowed to overfly China take on board a Chinese navigator and Chinese radio operator before leaving Peking for Hanoi.**

* [redacted]
[redacted] It is true, however, that the Chinese government did permit the overflight of China by eight IL-28 light bombers delivered by the USSR to the DRV in late May 1965. There were no other exceptions to the general Chinese rule that foreign aircraft be permitted to cross Chinese territory only at widely-separated intervals, alone or at most in pairs.

**The broad spectrum of information in which the Soviet Union was interested and for which aerial photography might well have been employed was demonstrated in a Soviet TOP SECRET document issued in January 1966 containing a description of Soviet requirements for the collection of military information on the CPR. [redacted]

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A third explanation for Chinese intransigence may be implied by Chinese conduct over rail transit; the right of mass overflight would have meant, in practice, granting a large exception to China's assertion of a "sovereign right" to inspect Soviet military cargoes passing to Vietnam through China. The sort of protracted, meticulous disassembly and inspection of goods which the Chinese so rigidly insisted on for Soviet rail shipments was impractical for air shipments, still more so for a major Soviet airlift to Vietnam. Protracted delays in Peking for Chinese inspection procedures on large numbers of planes would cripple an airlift. On the other hand, for the Chinese to allow the airlift without rigorous inspection would in effect mean abandonment of the sovereign right of inspection. It was simpler to ban mass flights altogether.*

After the Chinese veto of the early March mass overflight and of the air corridor concept, Soviet flights to Vietnam via China took place throughout the rest of 1965 at a rate of little more than one a month. Beginning in late December, however--at about the time of a temporary halt in U.S. bombing, and of increasing rail bottlenecks in the DRV--there was a sharp increase in Soviet military flights to the DRV which lasted for some time in 1966. In September 1966, there was another noticeable flurry of Soviet flights, and the average for the year was more than three times that of 1965, although still far below the

*There is insufficient evidence as to what the actual Chinese practice regarding inspection was with the widely-spaced military flights to Vietnam they did permit in 1965-1967. Except in 1966, a majority of those flights were passenger rather than cargo flights, which simplified the Chinese problem. Judging only from what evidence there is on the length of the stops in Peking, the Chinese as a rule do not seem to have attempted to enforce their 1965 Frontier Regulations on aircraft in the way they enforced them on trains, apparently contenting themselves with requiring detailed manifests of the cargo carried by each plane.

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level of major Soviet airlifts.* Chinese permission for this temporary increase in the rate of Soviet overflights may possibly have been furnished as the result of North Vietnamese intercession. [redacted]
[redacted]

C. The February 1967 Halting of Flights

With the siege of the Soviet embassy in Peking in late January-early February 1967, a new stage began. On 31 January, two Soviet IL-18 transports were harassed by the Chinese at Peking airport while refueling for the flight to Hanoi. One was later allowed to return from Hanoi to the USSR via Peking; but in early February Peking refused to clear several flight plans for the second aircraft, and it finally returned to the Soviet Union on 9-10 February via Laos, Burma, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. This was the first instance of a return flight that did not overfly China. In the week that followed, the USSR apparently attempted to secure overflight privileges for several round-trip flights via this southern route from the countries concerned, but is believed only to have secured permission from Laos (which also reportedly stipulated that no arms be carried over Laotian territory). The Soviets were apparently trying to find another route against the contingency that the Chinese route would be closed permanently, but it must have seemed unlikely to them that all the countries concerned would sanction

*There were some forty Soviet military flights to Vietnam in 1966--by far, the peak of the Soviet air transport effort in support of the Vietnamese war. In the three-week period from 6 to 27 June 1967 there were some 300 Soviet military transport flights to Egypt.

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overflights of Soviet military technicians and military spare parts to Vietnam.*

For some weeks Soviet flights through Chinese were suspended. Soviet personnel and technicians continued to move through China to the DRV using Chinese civil air facilities on the Peking-Hanoi link, but frequently encountered long delays or were refused reservations by the Chinese. On 26 March sporadic Soviet flights through China were resumed.

D. The Abortive Flight of May 1967 and Its Sequel

In mid-May 1967, there was a virtual repetition of the events of March 1965. [redacted]

[redacted] The secret CPSU document shown to other parties in Moscow in November

*In 1964 Burma had refused a Soviet request for permission to stage overflights to Indonesia. In early March 1965, officials of the CPSU reportedly told other Communist leaders in Moscow that "India, Burma, and Thailand" had refused the Soviets permission for air passage over their countries [redacted]; but there is no confirmation that the Soviets had made such a request in February 1965, when they were still expecting to overfly China. [redacted]

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1967 explained what had happened:

Last May the leaders of the CPR did not allow the Soviet Union to send to the DRV transport planes and jet fighters whose urgent delivery was requested by the DRV government.

Presumably, the somewhat ambiguous phraseology used here meant that the Soviets planned to send crated MIG fighter planes (most likely, MIG-21s) to North Vietnam aboard the Soviet transports, as a short cut replacing the usual means of shipment by rail.*

. The North Vietnamese must have been furious at the Chinese last-minute cancellation of the flight of the six AN-12s, a flight which the DRV had certainly expected.**

*In July 1966, ten months before, five AN-12s such as the ones the Soviets sought to use in May 1967 had arrived in Bamako, Mali, and delivered crated MIG fighters [redacted]

[redacted] This was the first time Soviet transports were believed to have been used to deliver MIG aircraft, and it is credible that the USSR had sought to do this again for Vietnam.

**The Soviet claim that the scrubbed transport flights had been scheduled to carry MIGs is given support by the fact that soon thereafter, between 19 and 23 May, two Soviet IL-18 transports did fly to Hanoi, apparently carrying newly trained North Vietnamese pilots. [redacted]

[redacted] It would seem likely that the DRV had requested a quota of new planes to match the new input of pilots. A dozen MIG-17s flown into the DRV from Nanning by the North Vietnamese on 27 and 28 May may have been furnished by the Chinese, and may have been meant as compensation for the blocked Soviet MIG delivery.

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Mao may have countermanded approval of the AN-12 flights given to the Soviets and North Vietnamese by lower-ranking Chinese officials. [redacted]
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[redacted] It would have been fully in character for Mao to have taken such an action. It may be significant in this context that the May 1967 issue of the North Vietnamese party journal Hoc Tap, which appeared at the end of month, contained an unprecedented thinly-veiled personal attack on Mao Tse-tung and his cult. Mao's action may well have been the final straw that goaded the North Vietnamese to pay their respects publicly to Mao.*

The hypothesis that the abortive mass flight of May 1967 had something to do with the May Hoc Tap attack on Mao is given some support by the sequel. After cancellation of the May flight there were a few more individual Soviet flights to Hanoi, the last of which took place on 12 June, shortly after the Hoc Tap article had appeared. From that day to the present, there have been no known Soviet transport flights to and from Vietnam except for the single flight of an AN-10 in mid-December believed to be associated with the rotation of Soviet personnel. The almost total Chinese ban on Soviet overflights appears to have been imposed in mid-June 1967 in the wake of the probable DRV protest over cancellation of the May overflight and of the Hoc Tap veiled criticism of Mao. Mao appears to have had the last word.

*This incident was however not the only factor causing the North Vietnamese to become infuriated at Mao. Of equal or greater importance was the Chinese effort to export Mao's cult to North Vietnam, using Chinese residents in the DRV, as part of the world-wide campaign to spread the cult in the spring of 1967.

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III. The Issue of Shipment by Sea

A. The Chinese Charges

The question of whether the Soviets should ship their military hardware to North Vietnam by sea and why they were reluctant to do so seems to have arisen in private Sino-Soviet dealings from the time of the first controversies over rail and air transit in the spring of 1965. A Chinese Foreign Ministry official told the [redacted] [redacted] in May 1965 that the CPR had suggested that the USSR send all its military assistance by sea and that the Soviets had refused, giving the pretext that sea transport was too slow. As the private recriminations over rail transit delays grew, the Chinese private comments about sea shipment grew more tart. The Chinese party's secret 5 November letter to the CPSU answering Soviet charges about the blocking of a rail shipment told the Soviets (and the other Communist parties that received copies of the letter) that if the Soviets thought China was obstructing the transport of supplies,

one might ask why do the Soviets not use the numerous ocean-going vessels to ship their military supplies to Vietnam?

The Chinese went on to say that the Soviets tried to justify their conduct by referring to a "U.S. blockade" against Vietnam and by claiming that transport through Chinese territory was the only practical channel. The CPR asked:

But is this true? Everyone knows that vessels of various countries are able to enter and clear the ports of Vietnam. Vessels from capitalist countries can enter and so can those from socialist countries. Chinese vessels are not entirely absent either. The Soviets simply dare not use their own ships for transporting military supplies in aid of the Vietnamese people. They are simply afraid of U.S. imperialism.

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When Soviet-sponsored charges about Chinese rail obstruction began to multiply in the Western press late in 1965, the Chinese responded by surfacing their charges about the Soviet cowardly refusal to use the sea route. This began with a Chen Yi interview of 30 December 1965, and continued in many Chinese and Albanian editorials thereafter.

The repeated uncontradicted Chinese private and public statements that the USSR had refused to ship arms by sea, while not definitive proof that this has been the case, must nevertheless be considered important evidence pointing in this direction. There is at least one authoritative private North Vietnamese statement available which seems to point in the same direction. According to notes taken by a captured DRV army officer at a 1966 study session on a March 1966 report made by Le Duan, the North Vietnamese party first secretary was quoted as saying that "because of the American naval blockade we must get assistance over land through China." [redacted] This statement would appear to be an illusion to Soviet military hardware, the only category of assistance which the DRV apparently "must" get by land through China because of the American "blockade", that is, because of the U.S. Seventh Fleet presence in the Gulf of Tonkin.

B. The Private Soviet Statements

Authoritative private Soviet statements from the very first have further reinforced this impression.

[redacted]
[redacted] was told by CPSU leaders in Moscow in early March 1965 that military "shipments by sea were tactically dangerous because of the United States." [redacted] The leader of another Western Communist party was told by Soviet leaders the same month--at a time when rail transit was still held up by the impasse with the Chinese--that the only way that the Soviet Union could then be of real assistance to the DRV would be "by sea" but that "going through the American blockade might create problems." [redacted] This point was explained with [redacted]

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some embarrassment to non-Communists. [redacted]
[redacted] was harranged in March by his Soviet and Bulgarian colleagues on the subject of Chinese rail obstruction; the Bulgarian said that Soviet delivery of the halted weapons by sea was impossible because the Seventh Fleet was "blockading" the North Vietnamese coast. Soviet officials in other parts of the world made similar statements to foreigners in March and April 1965. The Soviets have many times indicated that they have not forgotten the dangerous dilemma they were placed in during the Cuban crisis by the U.S. blockade, and that they do not intend to get into such a situation again.

The USSR has repeatedly suggested that it believes that the Chinese wish to provoke a conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Gulf of Tonkin. A senior officer of the Soviet embassy in Peking, discussing Chinese obstructionist tactics on aid transit with a neutral diplomat in December 1965, said that China wanted the Soviet Union and the U.S. to kill each other off so that China could emerge on top. He added that the Chinese had taken this attitude during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. A widely-distributed private CPSU letter to other parties in February 1966 similarly stated that

there is every reason to contend that one of the goals of the policy of the Chinese leadership in the Vietnamese question is the precipitation of a military conflict between the USSR and the U.S. They desire a collision between the USSR and the U.S. in order to be able to, as they themselves say, "observe the battle of the tigers while seated on the hill."*

In April 1966, the Soviet leaders are reported to have circulated a document at the 23rd CPSU Congress which

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accused the Chinese of trying to force the Soviet Union to ship its military aid by sea and risk the possibility of a clash with the Seventh Fleet, and thereby to force a showdown between the Soviet Union and the United States.

In August 1967, an official of the CPSU Central Committee told a visiting Japanese socialist delegation in Moscow that the Chinese had sought to "restage the Caribbean crisis in the Gulf of Tonkin, aiming thereby to bring about a USSR-United States clash which the Mao clique expected to sit out and watch from the sidelines."

And in November 1967, an important official of the Soviet Foreign Ministry told a neutral diplomat in Moscow that in supplying weapons to Vietnam, "the Soviets are not by-passing China, because this is what China wants them to do to provoke a clash with the Americans." [redacted]
[redacted]

It seems unlikely that after saying all this, the Soviet leadership would actually ship military weapons by sea and run the risks it had so long been denouncing.*

C. The Chinese Refusal of Transshipment

What the Soviets apparently have wanted on the matter of sea transport is a way to have the cake and eat it, too: a way to carry weapons by sea to the Far East

*There is one possible exception: it is conceivable that six Soviet ZSU-57-2 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns seen in the DRV by aerial photography since 24 December 1964 were delivered by a Soviet cargo ship which arrived in Haiphong on 22 December. The United States was not then bombing the DRV, and it is possible that the Soviet Union at that stage did not yet see a major risk in delivering arms by sea. It is also at least equally possible, however, that the guns were brought into North Vietnam by rail.

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yet have someone else assume the burden of actual delivery to the DRV. Such a solution would be available if the Chinese were willing to accept Soviet Vietnam-bound weapons at Chinese ports--such as Canton--for transshipment to the DRV either by rail or by Chinese ship, in the same way that the Chinese at various times during the war have accepted Soviet economic cargoes such as POL for transshipment. There is some evidence to indicate that the Soviets have tried and failed to get the Chinese to do this.

1. In April 1965, a Soviet embassy official in Paris stated that the Soviet Union had asked the Chinese to transship military cargoes for Vietnam from Canton, and that the Chinese had refused, citing as justification for their refusal inadequate rail facilities between Canton and the DRV.* By implication, the Chinese were also unwilling to transship Soviet weapons by sea.**

2. On 5 November 1965, the secret Chinese party letter to the CPSU already cited asked why the Soviets had not yet sent the Vietnamese the "naval vessels" (unspecified) they had promised them. The letter went on:

*On 30 March 1967, an Izvestiya article surfaced for the first and only time the charge that the Chinese had refused the USSR "free access to one of South China's harbors, from which these (Soviet) weapons would be transported to Hanoi."

**It is possible, however, that Chinese ships have carried Chinese small arms to Vietnam, possibly from Canton or from Hainan ports. While confirmation is lacking, such shipments of light weapons, carried with other cargo, would be quite difficult to discover. In this connection, it should be noted that Foreign Minister Chen Yi, in a published interview of 30 December 1965, was quoted by NCNA as declaring: "Why can't Soviet military material for Vietnam be shipped by sea as is that of other countries?" (Emphasis supplied.)

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They (the Soviets) could have sent these direct to the ports of Vietnam but instead they want to transfer them to the Vietnamese comrades by Chinese ports.

As will be seen from the discussion in another portion of this paper,* the vessels in question, whose type can be identified, never did reach the DRV, apparently because the Chinese were unwilling to grant the Soviet request and the Soviets were unwilling to deliver the vessels themselves. The USSR request would have appeared reasonable to the Soviets—and perhaps to the Vietnamese as well--because the North Vietnamese navy on more than one occasion was able to receive new units quietly and without incident from the Chinese themselves, coming from Chinese ports. Chinese ports have also been used for the repair of damaged North Vietnamese naval units. The Chinese, however, were apparently unwilling to provide a protective cover for the revisionists.

3. Finally, in November 1966 both Cuban and Czech diplomats in Hanoi told [redacted] that the pro-Soviet bloc countries had recently asked the Chinese to open a port on the Gulf of Tonkin where bloc goods could be unloaded for transshipment to Vietnam by rail. (The Czech version spoke of an alleged offer to build a new port for this purpose.) [redacted] The Chinese were said to have refused and to have insisted again that the Soviets send their shipments direct to Haiphong. Although these reports were interlaced with Soviet propaganda exaggerations about the extent of Chinese rail obstruction, it seems likely that there was a germ of truth in the account of an unsuccessful bloc effort to secure use of a Chinese port for transshipment of weapons; Such a request may well have been forwarded by the Cuban and other bloc emissaries who travelled to Peking and Hanoi in the wake of the conference of Soviet, East European, and Cuban leaders in Moscow in October 1966. If such a

*See pages 85-90.

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formal request was in fact made, it is likely to have been done without any real Soviet hope of Chinese acquiescence, and with the primary purpose of trying to impress the North Vietnamese.

To sum up thus far: there is a body of evidence from political sources which supplements the technical evidence indicating that Soviet ships probably have not carried arms to North Vietnam. The indications are strongest regarding sophisticated, large, or bulky weapons, and less so regarding small, simple weapons. Soviet ships may have made unobserved clandestine deliveries of rifles or ammunition to Haiphong as the Chinese are likely to have done. But the political reason for Soviet restraint--the wish to avoid a direct clash with the United States in the Gulf of Tonkin--is of such overwhelming importance to the USSR as to make it questionable that the Soviet Union would introduce exceptions to a general ban on arms shipments merely to convey to Haiphong lower-priority weapons which can be easily sent by rail.

D. The Soviet Attitude Toward a Potential Blockade

Nevertheless, even assuming the absence of Soviet arms shipments to Haiphong, the USSR has obviously had great anxiety over the sea supply route to North Vietnam. This has been the main channel for Soviet economic assistance to the DRV, carrying the bulk of the tonnage sent and including such items of direct support to the war effort as food, POL, trucks, helicopters, cranes, barges, and landing craft. Without this channel, Soviet and East European supplies would have to be funnelled entirely through the Chinese railroads and highways--which could not carry such a volume--and the Soviet Union and North Vietnam would become entirely dependent on Chinese willingness and ability to enable sufficient Soviet aid to reach North Vietnam to allow the war to be continued. This would be a grave situation for the DRV, and a political disaster for the Soviet Union.

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The Soviets over the past three years have therefore been concerned (a) over U.S. bombing of DRV ports, bombing incidents involving Soviet ships in those ports, and the consequences for relations with the United States; and (b) over the possibility that the United States might take steps to try to close DRV ports--such as mining harbors or imposing an actual blockade--and what if anything the USSR should then do about it.

The Soviet Union has sought, through repeated protests to the United States, to convey the impression that the USSR regards access to DRV ports as an important Soviet interest, an interest which the USSR would run serious risks to defend. As early as 1 April 1965 a TASS statement denounced U.S. overflights of Soviet shipping in the Vietnam area. In July and August 1966 the Soviet Foreign Ministry protested alleged harrassment of Soviet ships entering Haiphong by watching U.S. ships and planes. In June 1967 and January 1968 the USSR strongly protested (and on one occasion re-protested) alleged strafing or bombing of Soviet ships in DRV ports by U.S. planes.* An officer of the Soviet embassy in Washington told a U.S. official on 6 June 1967 that the Soviets were inclined to view the strafing incident at Campha on 2 June as a probe to test Soviet reaction, and that if the USSR accepted the incident without strong protest it might be followed by other steps to block shipping to Haiphong.**

*The position of Soviet ships in North Vietnamese ports was further complicated by the belligerent attitude taken by Chinese ships in port, which on more than one occasion are reported to have fired at attacking U.S. planes, much to the annoyance of the officers of other ships present, who feared the Chinese were jeopardizing the immunity of shipping from attack. When the Chinese vessel Nan Hai 155 reportedly did this during a raid on Haiphong on 11 July 1966, the officers of all Soviet, British, and Polish ships in Haiphong are said to have strongly condemned the Chinese action to the Vietnamese authorities, since they feared U.S. retaliation against their vessels. A party of North Vietnamese is reported to have boarded the Nan Hai 155 later to warn the Chinese. Similar incidents were reported later in 1966.

**Rand Corporation, Thomas Wolfe, Memorandum of Conversation With Gely Skritsky, 7 June 1967.

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It is quite possible that this was indeed the Soviet view; what is much less clear is whether the Soviet leaders had made up their minds what to do if such other steps were in fact taken by the United States.

[redacted] has stated that in the spring of 1967 Czechoslovak Defense Minister Lomsky reported to the collegium of the Ministry that the Soviets had issued an order to the Soviet Navy to provide escorts for Soviet merchant vessels in the event that Haiphong was blockaded or a Soviet vessel bombed in Haiphong harbor. This order also allegedly called for efforts to break any blockade, including steps to sweep minefields. Lomsky, who had just returned from Moscow, said that the Soviets had told him that they would resist any U.S. moves to prevent Soviet ships from going to Haiphong. The Soviet order was supposedly issued at a time when U.S. statements pointed to a possible blockade of Haiphong. Articles in the U.S. press in April 1967 had referred to discussions about the possibility of such a blockade.

In seeking to evaluate this report, there is some collateral evidence that should be taken into consideration. An official of a Soviet bloc government [redacted] whose reporting appeared to be reliable had stated in October 1967 that the Soviets were "extremely concerned" about possible confrontations with the United States over access to Haiphong, and remarked that he had heard a Soviet official boast at some unspecified time in the past that the Soviet government had issued an order to Soviet ships to shoot their way through any blockade of Haiphong but to avoid extending hostilities in any other sphere.

The Soviets had made a few statements to American diplomats in the spring of 1967 calculated to convey an

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impression of determination to keep the sea route to Haiphong open. On 22 March, a Soviet diplomat in Washington told a State Department official that the USSR could provide what was necessary for Hanoi despite any disturbances in China and reminded him "that there was a seaway to Hanoi and that the Soviets possessed a navy." On 26 May, the first secretary of the Soviet embassy in London, in conversation with an American embassy official there, spontaneously raised the subject of Haiphong, painting a dark picture of inevitable U.S.-Soviet naval confrontation should the U.S. resort to blockade and mining. And on 16 August the first secretary of the Soviet embassy in Washington told another State Department official that the Soviets were more concerned about Haiphong than about anything else, since it would pose a confrontation directly between us and them.

Nevertheless, the Soviets had on occasion made comments of this sort to American officials before, without any concrete decision having been taken to break a blockade of Haiphong--since the [] report itself implies that no decision was taken before the spring of 1967. It does not seem credible that the Soviet leadership would have taken a firm decision at this moment, carrying a potential for the unleashing of nuclear war with the United States, without making the strongest possible effort to avert the clash that decision threatened by conveying a direct message to the United States at the highest level warning that the USSR considered free passage to Haiphong a Soviet interest which the USSR intended to defend by force. We do not know whether or not the Soviet Union sent such a message; if it did not, the implication would appear to be that the Soviet leadership wished to wait upon events and had not fixed upon the rigid course of action suggested by the [] report.

It would in any case appear to be unlikely that the Soviet politburo would foreclose its own freedom of

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action by prescribing for the Soviet navy a set course of action long in advance of the hypothetical U.S. action feared by the USSR. It would seem much more likely that the Soviet leadership, as on so many other occasions, would wish to make ad hoc decisions based on the details of circumstances as they unfold.* It is possible, however, that the Soviet navy in the spring of 1967 was instructed to prepare contingency plans for a possible Soviet attempt to break a hypothetical U.S. blockade of Haiphong--leaving implementation open as a matter for politburo decision--and that it was this which Lomsky related to the Czech collegium and [] later reported in slightly garbled form. While it is conceivable (although we think on balance less than probable) that the Soviet leadership might come to the decision [] reports, it has probably not made that decision yet.

*It should be noted, in this connection, that the [] report speaks of the automatic provision of escorts for Soviet merchant ships if they were bombed in Haiphong harbor. After the 2 June 1967 strafing incident, the Soviet Foreign Ministry note threatened "to take appropriate measures to insure the safety of Soviet ships" if the incident were repeated. After two more incidents had actually occurred, on 5 January 1968, the Soviet protest note then said that now "the corresponding Soviet departments will be compelled to take measures for insuring the safety of Soviet vessels bound for DRV ports." Yet to date no Soviet naval escorts have in fact been provided. It seems evident that this is a matter which the Soviet politburo keeps close tabs on and which it thus far has declined to act on except to authorize protests. To this extent the [] report is erroneous.

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IV. The Issue of the South China Air Bases

A. The Soviet Challenge

The North Vietnamese use of some of the air bases in South China for sanctuary and training purposes since late 1965 seems to derive at least partly from an unsuccessful Soviet request earlier in that year for the right to use those bases to assist the DRV. The evidence suggests that the abortive Soviet effort to secure the bases made it politically difficult for the Chinese to deny them to the North Vietnamese. It is possible, however, that the Chinese would have granted the DRV the use of these bases in any case, because of the strong Chinese desire to keep the North Vietnamese fighting.

Although there is no firm proof of when the Soviet request was made, contextual evidence strongly suggests that it happened in the same general period when the Soviets were vainly seeking both an air corridor through China and the right to transit China with eight SAM battalions and 4,000 men--that is, at the very end of February and the first half of March 1965.

The best evidence of what the Soviets proposed to do with the bases was provided by Soviet party secretary Suslov, who on 27 April 1965 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." [redacted]
The most authoritative statement on the matter from the Chinese side was contained in a CCP letter of 14 July 1965 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 airfields in southwest China, and you wanted to garrison a Soviet army unit of 500 men there." [redacted]
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There are a number of other reports, mostly from Chinese sources, that reiterates this or add a few details. Typical is the assertion of Chang Hsiang-shan, a member of the Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity, that "recently the Soviet Union, under the pretext of giving aid to North Vietnam, tried to obtain Chinese approval to establish a MIG-21 airfield in Yunnan province so that she could air transport supplies to Hanoi."*

In May 1965, the Chinese delegates to an Afro-Asian conference in Ghana told the Egyptian delegation there [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." [redacted] In June, Chinese Communist spokesman Liao Cheng-chih told one Japanese spokesman privately that "it is true that we have rejected a Soviet request for permission to use one or two of our airfields and to station 500 Soviet Air Force personnel in our country." [redacted] Liao repeated this on 15 July in a joint interview given to a group of Japanese newsmen; according to some versions of what he said, the Soviets had wanted to build such a base in Yunnan. (A year later, Han Hsi-ya, an official of the Chinese trade union federation, was also quoted by a visiting Japanese delegation as having referred to a Soviet request "for permission to build two airfields in Yunnan Province under the pretext of giving aid to North Vietnam.") [redacted] In the summer of 1965, the Chinese also told one foreign Communist leader that the Soviets had asked permission to use a

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**This was a probable garble; the figure of 500 Soviet personnel is apparently authoritative.

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Chinese air base "for staging military aid to North Vietnam." And in March 1966, New Zealand CP secretary Wilcox told his party that the Soviets had wanted "their own air bases staffed by their own technicians throughout China* and the Chinese have refused to allow the establishment of foreign bases in their country."

It seems reasonably clear from the foregoing that the Soviets in March 1965 asked for permission to station 500 Soviet air force personnel in control of one or two (probably two) airfields in Yunnan adjoining North Vietnam. They may have offered to "build" these airfields, or most likely, to expand the facilities of existing airfields at their own expense. On the basis of the statements cited above, and taking into account what the Chinese later actually did, we may surmise that the Soviets wanted to use these fields:

1) To assemble in an atmosphere of relative security MIG fighters furnished to the DRV by the USSR and shipped in crated form across China either via a Soviet airlift to these Yunnan fields or via Chinese rail facilities.

2) To enable Soviet pilots to give North Vietnamese pilots advanced training over Chinese territory flying the MIGs assembled by the Soviets at these airfields, before the DRV brought the planes into North Vietnam.

It is possible (although not provable) that the USSR had it in mind also to use these fields to maintain a permanent pool of combat aircraft on which the DRV could periodically draw to transfer units back and forth to North Vietnam, as well as to furnish a sanctuary to which North Vietnamese pilots could retire when DRV

*This is also a probable exaggeration; the great majority of reports speak of a request for only one or two bases in South China, and specifically in Yunnan.

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fields were attacked. The Chinese eventually used their South China bases in this way. It seems most unlikely, however, that the Soviets ever envisaged the use of the South China fields by Soviet pilots flying combat missions over North Vietnam.*

In any case, Chinese refusal of these proposals would have been easily predictable. First, the Chinese could not be expected to accept the stationing of Soviet forces in control of facilities on their soil under any circumstances. The 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 Soviets 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.) Furthermore, the Chinese would be most unlikely to run risks of a clash with the United States at the behest of the Soviet Union and for Soviet political profit while the USSR ran virtually no risk at all. Thus it seems possible that on this issue the Soviets had put forward a proposal expecting a refusal and hoping to damage Sino-Vietnamese relations in consequence.

*One probable KGB source in 1967 claimed that the Soviets were "still pressing" the Chinese for the right to have Soviet pilots fly combat missions from South China fields, and another claimed that the Chinese might allow this. There were no previous reports that the Soviets had ever raised this matter with Peking, and there is no reason to believe either that the Soviets have wished to do this or that the Chinese would ever allow them to do so.

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B. The Chinese Response

The Chinese, however, had their answer to this challenge ready. In mid-May 1965 [redacted] [redacted] told his party central committee--on the basis of statements evidently made to him by Chinese representatives--that China "is prepared to allow the Vietnamese to use the Chinese bases [just across the border] but will not accept Russian personnel." [redacted] It is thus credible that the Chinese in the spring of 1965, within a couple of months after their refusal of the Soviet proposal, offered to Hanoi to make certain South China airfields available to North Vietnamese pilots and planes and to furnish Chinese pilots to assist in training.

The first steps to implement this pledge were taken in the fall and winter of 1965, as the intensity of U.S. bombing grew and the bombing moved further north. In late September 1965 four North Vietnamese IL-14 transports flew to Peitun airfield in Yunnan, evidently to land an advance party at the field subsequently used by the North Vietnamese IL-28 bombers. A month later, 15 North Vietnamese MIGs flew what was apparently a familiarization flight to Mengtsu and Nanning, in Kwangsi province. In the second week of December a number of DRV transports flew to the Chinese base at Yunnani, subsequently used by North Vietnamese MIGs, and from 19 December on North Vietnamese fighters, bombers, and transports streamed across the border to occupy their semi-permanent refuge at Yunnani and Peitun. By March 1966 it was estimated that there were some 55 DRV MIGs located in China, and some 40 or so in North Vietnam. By the fall of 1966 some two-thirds of North Vietnamese fighters were being kept in China. Replacements for aircraft destroyed were periodically supplied to DRV airfields either from the North Vietnamese MIG pool in China or from among fresh planes crated in overland from the USSR. The Chinese may also have supplied some new MIG-17s from Nanning on a couple of occasions in 1966 and 1967.

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In the early summer of 1967, in the wake of the initial U.S. airstrikes against MIG bases in North Vietnam in April, a decision was evidently made to cut back sharply the number of MIGs kept in North Vietnam exposed to U.S. attack. Some 30 MIGs were then flown to China, and for the time being only two MIG bases at Phuc Yen and Gia Lam were in use in the DRV. When further U.S. strikes were made at Phuc Yen airfield on 24 October, a dozen North Vietnamese fighters fled to China to avoid the re-strikes that were in fact made the next day. A number of MIGs were destroyed on the ground, and it was at this time that the MIG force kept in North Vietnam was reduced to the handful of less than a dozen which it remained until after the U.S. bombing of the DRV was cut back the following spring.

It was shortly after the late October raids on the DRV airfields, on 6 November 1967, that North Vietnamese fighters operating out of Hanoi's Gia Lam airfield for the first time used a Chinese airfield (Ning Ming in Kwangsi) as a recovery base after flying tactical missions over North Vietnam. There were indications at the time that the pilots involved were following a plan which had been worked out recently in principle with the Chinese but whose details were still being improvised. On 18 November, a new variant was introduced when two MIGs which had been engaged in combat were subsequently sent into Chinese airspace to circle until U.S. planes had left, and then returned to the DRV to land at a North Vietnamese field. By the end of 1967, the North Vietnamese planes still operating in the DRV were thus using their Chinese sanctuary in three different ways: by fleeing to Chinese bases in advance of U.S. airstrikes; by landing at Chinese bases (and generally returning home hours later) after flying combat missions from DRV bases; and by using Chinese airspace as a temporary refuge from such a combat mission originating in the DRV.

It seems clear that the Chinese have been training North Vietnamese pilots at the South China bases. [redacted]
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[redacted] Later in the year collateral reports alleged that such training was taking place. [redacted]

[redacted] The bombers--located in China since the spring of 1966--were then briefly brought back to Vietnam in February 1968 before being chased back to China for the time being by U.S. airstrikes. Beginning in February, there were also efforts made to put into use the North Vietnamese China-based transport force; a number of transports were temporarily brought into the DRV and then used for apparent parachute drops in northern South Vietnam, before shuttling back via DRV bases to their China refuge.

Apparently the Chinese view their assistance to the North Vietnamese air force as within the range of controllable and tolerable risk. On the other hand, since 8 May 1966--when Chinese planes first ventured across the North Vietnamese border to engage U.S. planes--Peking has evidently concluded that combat sorties into North Vietnam by either Chinese or Vietnamese pilots operating from Chinese fields were too great a risk. However, the Chinese have aggressively patrolled and defended their own airspace and have greatly strengthened their air defense capability in South China, particularly since the summer of 1967. They also permitted the DRV to stage from Chinese bases a parachute drop (probably supplies) into northern South Vietnam. It is likely that the cessation since the spring of 1968 of U.S. bombing of most of the DRV and of U.S. patrolling near the Sino-DRV border has somewhat relieved Chinese anxieties about such North Vietnamese operations.

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V. THE WEAPONS WITHHELD

The Soviet Union clearly has not given the DRV some of the weapons it asked for and wanted. In addition to the detailed evidence discussed below, we have general statements to this effect by [redacted]
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[redacted] and more important, an admission by the Soviet Communist Party itself. In the secret document on Soviet military aid to Vietnam that was circulated among visiting foreign Communists in Moscow in November 1967, the CPSU stated that "the USSR has speedily satisfied practically all the requests of the DRV for delivery of military equipment." (Emphasis added.) A few paragraphs later, the CPSU remarked without elaboration that "through the fault of the Chinese side, it has not been possible to deliver some types of weapons to the DRV." What follows should be read with these two statements kept in mind.

A. The Missile Boats

It seems fairly clear, on the basis of evidence from several different types of sources, some quite authoritative, that the USSR has reneged on delivery to the DRV of at least one weapon system that North Vietnam wanted and apparently at one time thought it was going to receive. This is the KOMAR or OSA-class guided-missile-firing patrol boat.

To begin with, the mere failure of such boats to appear in the hands of the DRV throughout more than three years of South Vietnamese and United States naval and naval air operations against North Vietnam is a striking

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circumstance. The Soviet Union over the past decade has distributed KOMARs and OSAs to about a dozen countries, bloc and nonbloc, scattered over the face of the globe, including some whom the DRV surely regards as far less deserving than itself: not only such recipients as the "revolutionary" Egyptians, Algerians and Cubans but also the Yugoslav revisionists who are bitterly detested by Hanoi and the Indonesian military who have proceeded to slaughter their local Communists. Soviet deliveries of KOMARs and OSAs to various ports regularly go on today, but never to those of the DRV. This omission was brought most pointedly to the attention of many observers around the world when an Egyptian KOMAR-class boat sank an Israeli destroyer in October 1967.

We shall first consider the evidence supporting the contention that the USSR reneged on a promise to supply such boats, and then examine some possible Soviet motives.

1. The most important single source on this subject is a North Vietnamese PT boat division commander captured in July 1966 who had discussed the subject of Soviet military aid to North Vietnam in his final conversation with the commander-in-chief of the DRV Navy in late March 1966. This source declared that "some time after August 1964"--that is at some point after the first Gulf of Tonkin incident--the USSR had agreed to provide North Vietnam with KOMAR "missile boats," but that the boats had not in fact been provided because of subsequent Soviet reluctance. The source stated that the Soviets had presented the excuse that "current Sino-Soviet relations prevent delivery," and added his own view that the Soviets had refused because they believed that the DRV would attack American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. □ (This hypothesis will be discussed presently.)

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2. Important confirmatory evidence is contained in the secret party letter sent by the Chinese Communist party to the CPSU on 5 November 1965, nine months before the North Vietnamese senior PT boat officer was captured. In this letter--sent in reply to a Soviet letter complaining about Chinese delay of a certain rail shipment of Soviet military goods intended for North Vietnam--the Chinese brought up the question of why the Soviets had not, according to the CCP, sent their military supplies to Vietnam by sea. The Chinese party then added:

Why is it that [you] have not yet sent the naval vessels [you] promised to the Vietnamese comrades? [You] could have sent these direct to the ports of Vietnam but instead [you] want to transfer them to the Vietnamese comrades by Chinese ports.

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There is every reason to suppose that the "naval vessels" alleged by the Chinese in November 1965 to have been promised but withheld from the DRV were identical with the KOMARs referred to by the DRV officer in July 1966.

3. There is in addition important evidence on the Soviet side to suggest that the USSR had, indeed, made an initial commitment of this sort to the DRV.

According to the transcript of the acrimonious Mao-Kosygin February 1965 conversation in Peking subsequently shown secretly to foreign Communists by the Soviets, Kosygin told Mao that "we are sending weapons and rockets for the defense of Hanoi, autos, tanks, fast patrol boats, etc., and technicians to teach." (Emphasis added.) It seems likely that Kosygin was referring to the KOMARs, and that in arguing with Mao he was extemporaneously

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recalling some details of the military aid package of pledges he had just carried from Moscow to Hanoi.

Despite the subsequent statements by the Chinese (in November 1965) and by the North Vietnamese naval officer (in July 1966) that the Soviets had withheld the promised naval units, important secret Soviet documents continued to list warships among the aid being given by the USSR to the DRV. For example, in February 1966, a year after Kosygin's statement to Mao, the previously-cited long secret letter attacking the Chinese sent by the Central Committee of the CPSU to other Communist parties stated inter alia that

The Soviet Union is delivering large quantities of weapons to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, including rocket facilities, anti-aircraft artillery, aircraft, tanks, coastal artillery, warships, etc.* (Emphasis added.)

Twenty-one months later, in November 1967, the CPSU was still making this claim. At that time visiting foreign Communist delegations were shown in Moscow a confidential briefing document which explicitly listed "warships" as one of fifteen categories of military aid that the USSR allegedly had given or was giving to the DRV.

In fact, there is no evidence that the USSR as of April 1968 had given any combat vessels of any type to North Vietnam since twelve P-4 class motor torpedo boats (which do not carry missiles) were transferred in November 1961. If the Soviet claims regarding deliveries "of warships" to the DRV were stretched to include this ancient delivery, the claims might be less than outright lies,

*This quotation is taken from the text of the CPSU letter received by the East German party. In a similar although less complete version of the CPSU "note" given the Italian CP in late January 1966, "ships" were said to have been given the DRV along with other military aid in 1965.

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although obviously grossly and intentionally misleading. In recent years, the USSR is known only to have given the DRV barges, landing craft, and dredges; and the captured DRV naval officer has in fact claimed that the Soviets have refused to supply North Vietnam with any additional offensive naval weapons, including additional non-missile PT boats, more torpedoes, or even spare parts for the boats furnished in 1961. Additional non-missile patrol craft have been received by the DRV since 1965, but from Communist China. It is clearly the desire of the CPSU to obscure this situation from general view.

To sum up the evidence thus far: First, at some time between the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident and Kosygin's talk with Mao on 11 February 1965 the Soviets reversed their previous policy and offered the DRV KOMAR missile boats. There is every reason to suppose that this specific change was part of the general reversal of Khrushchev's policy of withholding military aid from North Vietnam that occurred soon after Khrushchev's fall in mid-October 1964 and was apparently communicated to Pham Van Dong during his visit to Moscow in November. The decision of the new Soviet leadership to change Khrushchev's priorities and cultivate Hanoi in this way was based on the expectation of an imminent Communist victory in and United States withdrawal from Vietnam, and the package of specific military aid proposals which was put together in Moscow late in 1964 and taken by Kosygin with him to Hanoi in early February 1965 was surely conditioned by this appraisal.

The unexpected beginning of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in February 1965 at the very moment when Kosygin was presenting his military aid package apparently modified the Soviet view of which items were safe to include in the package. At some point between 11 February, when Kosygin spoke to Mao, and 5 November, when the Chinese

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sent their secret letter to the CPSU, the Soviet leaders evidently changed their minds about sending KOMARs to the DRV.*

The Soviet Motivation

Why did the Soviets change their minds?

1. One possibility is the thesis suggested by the captured DRV naval officer: that the USSR was restrained by a belief that the DRV would use the KOMARs "to attack American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin" and by a fear of the consequences. This thesis has some points to support it. There is good evidence that the USSR has previously had misgivings about the consequences to the USSR or irresponsible use of Soviet-donated KOMARs by a recipient nation. In the fall of 1963 the Soviet Consul General in Surabaya, P.I. Sholmov, gave a private address to Indonesian naval commanders in which he warned over and over again that the guided missile patrol boats Indonesia had received from the USSR "must not be used to provoke a war in Asia in the dispute with Malaysia, which could set the entire world ablaze in a nuclear fire."** Sholmov reiterated several times that "in the Malaysia dispute the Indonesian fleet must be looked on as a defensive force and

*In early June 1965 a North Vietnamese representative abroad privately complained to members of the Central Committee of an important pro-Soviet Communist party about the failure thus far of "the friendly socialist countries" to "give us the means that they promised us to fight against the air attacks." [redacted] There was no amplification of what he meant. While it is most likely that he was alluding to the temporary delay in Soviet establishment of a SAM system in North Vietnam because of Chinese recalcitrance about transit, it is also conceivable that he was alluding to the KOMARs and to a DRV desire to use them against U.S. aircraft carriers.

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not an offensive force," and that "the rocket control boats are not in Indonesia to provoke a war, or for purposes of braggadocio, or to incite a warlike spirit." He concluded frankly announcing that "Indonesia will not stand alone if it does not begin a war in Asia." (Emphasis added.) Clearly, the Soviet regime under Khrushchev at this time was concerned both to head off any irresponsible action against the British fleet by Sukarno with the KOMARs and to dissociate itself from any obligation to defend Sukarno if he did act irresponsibly.

It might therefore be argued that the Soviet leadership in the spring of 1965, confronted with the unexpected reality of U.S. aircraft carriers stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin conducting daily operations against North Vietnam, became concerned at the likelihood that the DRV would use KOMARs to attack and possibly sink major U.S. ships, with uncalculable possibilities of U.S. counteraction embarrassing or dangerous for the USSR. That North Vietnam was indeed likely to try to use the KOMARs this way was demonstrated not only by the DRV torpedo boat attack in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964, but also by the occasions since then in which the DRV has planned or attempted to use its torpedo boats against the U.S. fleet.*

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[redacted] Nothing was done, however, until 1 July 1966, when three North Vietnamese PT boats attempted to engage two U.S. destroyers some 50 miles southeast of Haiphong. U.S. planes sank all three DRV craft, and 19 DRV prisoners were picked up by the destroyers. A number of other DRV naval craft were damaged or sunk in subsequent U.S. airstrikes at their anchorages in July, August, and October 1966.

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In September 1964, the counselor of the Soviet embassy in Cambodia had privately termed the DRV torpedo boat attacks of that year provocations made under Chinese influence.* That the post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership continues to regard all DRV naval activity against U.S. warships with a suspicious eye is suggested by the DRV naval officer's claim that the USSR has withheld even additional torpedoes and torpedo boat spare parts from North Vietnam.

2. On the other hand, the secret Chinese letter to the CPSU of November 1965 explicitly states that the Soviets had offered to transfer to the DRV the "naval vessels" promised, provided that the transfer occur in Chinese ports rather than North Vietnamese ports. The Chinese letter implied that Peking had refused permission for this, and the captured DRV naval officer in July 1966 said that the Soviets had claimed that "current Sino-Soviet relations prevent delivery."

This line of evidence suggests that the Soviets were deterred from sending the KOMARs to North Vietnam because of their general unwillingness to run a serious risk of conflict with the United States in the Gulf of Tonkin.** Unlike other weapons the USSR has supplied to North Vietnam, the KOMARs because of their size could only with extraordinary and unreasonable difficulty be shipped by rail or air across China; they would therefore have to travel from Soviet ports to Haiphong as deck cargo

*The Soviets at this time apparently made this charge to others. On 11 November 1965 a Chinese editorial stated that when the United States in 1964 "engineered" the Gulf of Tonkin incident, "Khrushchev went so far as to concoct the slander that the incident was provoked by China." The secret Chinese party letter to the CPSU on 5 November said the same thing.

**For a detailed examination of this question of the Soviet attitude toward shipping weapons to Haiphong by sea, see pages 67-73.

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under the eyes of U.S. ships. The Soviets instead evidently offered, at some time between February and November 1965, to transfer the KOMARs to DRV control in Chinese ports, whence they could make their way to North Vietnam as have the Chinese patrol boats transferred to the DRV by the Chinese. The Chinese evidently refused: first for political reasons, to point up to the North Vietnamese Soviet cowardice in refusing to make the KOMAR deliveries to Haiphong; and secondly, possibly, for reasons of caution of their own. There has in fact been no confirmed case of the Chinese having accepted any Soviet weapons or ammunition shipments in Chinese ports for transshipment (unlike economic or military-support shipments such as POL) and Peking may well have been doubly reluctant to accept Soviet ships bearing the highly visible KOMARs.*

3. It is possible, finally, that the two explanations of Soviet motives are compatible. It is conceivable that the USSR became reluctant to see the KOMARs it had promised the DRV actually placed in North Vietnamese hands, yet was unwilling to accept the onus for outright refusal. In addition, the USSR was completely unwilling to bring KOMARs to Haiphong on the decks of Soviet ships. If the Soviet Union was aware that the Chinese had laid down a blanket rule forbidding Soviet weapons transshipment via Chinese ports, an offer to send the KOMARs in this way might have been used to force the Chinese to share the responsibility for the DRV's failure to receive KOMARs. That the USSR had in fact used this ploy is suggested by the DRV naval officer's statement that the Soviets had told North Vietnam that "current Sino-Soviet relations prevent delivery." The Soviets had previously made other suggestions to North Vietnam and China--notably the proposal to have Soviet personnel man an airbase in south China

*See in this connection, the statements from both Soviet and Chinese sources regarding Chinese apprehension over possible U.S. reaction to the proposed massive Soviet airlift of military supplies to the DRV in the spring of 1965. (Pages 59-62.)

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near the DRV frontier--which were almost certainly known in advance to the Soviet leaders to be unacceptable to Mao.

B. The Coastal Defense Missiles

A separate but related issue is the question of Soviet willingness to supply North Vietnam with short-range land-based coastal defense guided missiles, such as the 22 n.m. SS-N-2 (Styx)--the weapon carried on the KOMARs and OSAs--or the 35-40 n.m. Samlet. Supplying such weapons to the DRV would be considerably less dangerous for the Soviet Union than supplying KOMARs or OSAs, on a number of counts. In contrast to the missile boats, Styxs or Samlets could be transported without great difficulty to the DRV over China by rail, thus avoiding the painful question of who would carry them into Haiphong by sea past the waiting U.S. fleet. (The USSR, however, would then have to be willing to allow these missiles to be examined minutely in transit by the Chinese--a separate question.) And secondly, short-range coastal defense missiles are much more clearly defensive in nature than the KOMARs, and while useful against hostile ships operating close to the North Vietnamese coast are not as a rule usable against U.S. aircraft carriers which would generally be well out of range. Thus the use to which the North Vietnamese could put these weapons, unlike the KOMARs, would be limited and predictable for the Soviets, and the probable U.S. response would also be more limited and more easily calculable in advance.

Longer-range weapons, such as the 300 n.m. cruise missile Shaddock, would on the other hand present a real threat to American carriers and other major ships, and their possession by the DRV for that reason would conjure up for the USSR some of the same worrisome problems that would be created by the DRV's possession of KOMARs. In addition, the Soviets would presumably be even more reluctant to expose this longer-range missile to Chinese scrutiny en route to the DRV than they would be about the Styx or Samlet. On either count, it may be concluded with some

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confidence that if the Soviets are found to have declined to furnish the DRV with the Styx or Samlet, they are all the more unlikely to furnish the Shaddock or longer-range guided or ballistic missiles.

The evidence regarding the coastal missiles is ambiguous and conflicting, and may be summarized as follows: there is no convincing "hard" evidence that any of these weapons has ever arrived in the DRV, and the [] reports received at different times suggesting that the Soviets had sent or were going to send them to North Vietnam are as a group less authoritative and less convincing than a group of other reports which flatly deny this, and in fact indicate that the USSR has refused North Vietnamese requests for the missiles.

Speculation that the Soviet Union would or could or might send coastal defense missiles to North Vietnam gained particular currency at three different periods in recent years: (1) at the time of Shelepin's visit to Hanoi in January 1966, when the Soviets were attempting to create general fears that they might send surface-to-surface missiles of some type to the DRV; (2) at the time of Pham Van Dong's secret visit to Moscow and Peking in April and May 1967; and (3) in the winter of 1967-1968 following the October 1967 sinking of an Israeli destroyer by Egyptian Styx missiles fired from a KOMAR outside Alexandria harbor. In each case, the rumors were fed by private statements made at the time by Soviet or East European representatives abroad (particularly at United Nations headquarters, and particularly by known KGB officers). It seems clear that the Soviet motivation throughout was to create popular apprehension by raising the specter of greater Soviet involvement and thus to create pressure on the U.S. government to deter it from continuation or expansion of air attacks against North Vietnam.

On the other hand, there have all along been a few private Soviet statements calculated to have the opposite effect--to furnish reassurance and to earn the USSR credit with certain audiences for its restraint in having refused to furnish surface-to-surface guided or ballistic missiles

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to North Vietnam. Some of these statements referred vaguely to surface-to-surface missiles in general, and some referred specifically to short-range coastal defense missiles.

Thus, in late January 1966--shortly after the Shelepin mission had left Hanoi--an important [redacted] official there was told by what was evidently a responsible pro-Soviet source that the Soviets had promised the North Vietnamese more modern weapons including SAMs, but that the DRV would get "no medium-or-long-range missiles," and also that "the Americans in the delta and on the seas will not be targets." [redacted]

Shortly thereafter the Soviets evidently repeated this message in New Delhi with more particulars. In early February, the U.S. Ambassador there was told by the Indian Foreign Minister that the Soviets had informed his government that the USSR had been pressed hard by the DRV to supply surface-to-surface missiles for use against U.S. naval vessels in Vietnamese waters. The Soviets said they had refused this request and described their refusal to the Indians as evidence of their desire to keep the fighting within bounds. [redacted]

These communications to the Indians were obviously intended, first, to enhance the Soviet reputation among Indian officialdom, and secondly, to send a discreet message of reassurance to the U.S. government through very private channels. These special Soviet motives for passing this information, however, do not rule out the possibility that the information was essentially accurate. We shall return later to the question of an alleged DRV request for and Soviet refusal of coastal defense missiles.

In 1967 the Soviets on a few occasions repeated, both directly to U.S. representatives and indirectly through third parties, this message that they had refrained

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from sending surface-to-surface missiles. In early October a Soviet diplomat in Bonn told a U.S. diplomat that despite the alleged Soviet "moral obligation" to support Hanoi, the Soviets had not send military equipment such as surface-to-surface missiles that might escalate the war dangerously. The following month Mikhail Kapitsa, chief of the Southeast Asia Division of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, told representatives of one Asian country in Moscow that although the Soviets were allegedly supplying 80 percent of the fighting equipment for Vietnam, they were not sending sophisticated equipment other than SAMs.
[redacted]

These statements, finally, have received support from an authoritative source whose assertions do not reflect the will of the Soviet government. A Soviet bloc official [redacted] declared [redacted], on the basis of both personal observation and statements made to him by Soviet and other bloc colleagues, that there had been no introduction into North Vietnam of either "more sophisticated surface-to-air missiles" than the SA-2 missiles or "other new or special weapons." [redacted]

Despite all this, there have been a number of tenuous reports since the fall of 1967 about the advent or imminent arrival of coastal defense missiles in the DRV. Around September 1967 one observer reported having seen coastal defense missiles resembling the Samlet installed in the Haiphong area since August 1966. It was improbable, however, that their presence had gone both totally unreported and totally unobserved in photography in all that time, and it seemed more likely that the objects observed were SA-2 missiles at nearby SAM sites. Then, in late December 1967, two heavily camouflaged missile sites were discovered in photography near Thanh Hoa (not Haiphong) and were thought to contain Styx (not Samlet) coastal defense missiles. These sites were hit by air strikes early in January 1968 and extensively damaged; by that time, however, the equipment had probably been removed and it was impossible to confirm whether the suspect objects had been real or dummies, and if real, in fact Styxes.

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Meanwhile, at about Christmas time 1967--that is, about the time the Thanh Hao sites were discovered--the [redacted] told another diplomat that he had "reliable information" that the Soviets had imported into North Vietnam surface-to-surface missiles with a range of some twenty to thirty miles which could be used to deter American ships and aircraft carriers off the shores of North Vietnam. [redacted] added that his source had told him that these missiles had been furnished as the result of pressure exerted on the Soviet Union by the DRV for release to North Vietnam of the weapon the Egyptians had used to sink the Israeli warship Eliat in October 1967. [redacted]
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Finally, on the other side of the world some two months later, in late February 1968, the Italian Communist party leader Giancarlo Pajetta told a party colleague that it was now the intention of the North Vietnamese to give the Soviets a "monopoly" in coastal defense in the expectation of an American sea-borne landing in North Vietnam, and to that end the Soviets would install Styx missiles on the coast. [redacted]

Pajetta's statement is suggestive regarding the ultimate source of the [redacted] information. For it seems most unlikely that the Italian Communist leadership would have been given genuine advance information to disseminate about Soviet plans for such a delicate and dangerous enterprise as the transportation to the DRV and installation there of Styx missiles under the eyes of the United States. On the other hand, if the Soviets had no immediate plans to do this, it is quite likely that the KGB would have sought to place into circulation rumors that Styxes might soon be furnished. Such reports at this time would be calculated to increase pressure on the United States government to accept North

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Vietnamese terms for entry into negotiations.* It thus seems possible that [redacted] also received his information from Soviet sources there--either via the local [redacted] representative or through another intermediary--and that the information furnished was deliberately misleading.

The Japanese Communist Accusation

This hypothesis seems all the more likely because we have received [redacted] information which appears more soundly based and while exactly contradicts the story reported by [redacted] and by Pajetta.

In early March 1968, [redacted] was back at JCP headquarters on a temporary visit to Tokyo, and told JCP Central Committee members there that as of late January the armament most wanted by the North Vietnamese was a surface-to-surface cruise missile suitable for use against U.S. warships which approach the North Vietnamese coast. [redacted] stated that the North Vietnamese had requested these missiles from the Soviet Union many times but had not yet been given them.

[redacted] added that the lack of Soviet response had left the North Vietnamese dissatisfied with Soviet support despite other military aid which the Soviets

*As we have already noted, KGB officers in various parts of the world had previously placed such false rumors into circulation regarding Soviet longer-range surface-to-surface missiles, with similar motives.

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continued to supply. North Vietnamese dissatisfaction on this issue, he said, was heightened when it was learned that while the USSR had supplied small cruise missiles to Egypt,* it still had not responded to the DRV request. According to [], the North Vietnamese intended to continue asking for these missiles from the USSR, believing that they were necessary to prevent U.S. warships from cruising off its coastline.

In a subsequent report, [] both [] and another JCP headquarters liaison official who had himself visited Hanoi in January continued to refer in matter-of-fact terms to a Soviet failure to comply with a North Vietnamese request for coastal defense cruise missiles. The JCP liaison officials were quoted as declaring that the DRV badly wanted these missiles in large part because of concern that the United States might be preparing to launch an amphibious invasion of North Vietnam, either in the area just south of Hanoi/Haiphong or just north of the DMZ. According to the Japanese Communists, the North Vietnamese thus wanted the missiles (1) to prevent or oppose such an anticipated invasion; and (2) in any case, to keep U.S. aircraft carriers and other ships from approaching too close to the North Vietnamese coast. And apparently citing later information than that provided in Hoshino's first conversation, the liaison officials said the North Vietnamese were "still dissatisfied" with the Soviet "refusal" to supply the surface-to-surface missiles. They added that the Soviet refusal had been based on a Soviet view that a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam was neither imminent nor probable.

*This was presumably a reference either to the SS-N-2 as carried on both the KOMARs and the OSAs given to Egypt by the Soviet Union, or to land-based coastal defense missiles. Egyptian personnel were trained on an unidentified coastal defense missile system in the USSR in 1966 and 1967, and missile crates were delivered to the UAR in December 1967 which probably contained the Samlet coastal defense missile.

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These JCP assertions regarding a Soviet refusal of specific DRV requests are fairly impressive. The JCP officials concerned were in a position to know, if the Lao Dong party was willing to communicate such facts to the JCP, and there were good reasons why the North Vietnamese should do so: the relations between the two parties were quite cordial, the two had a common independent and militant outlook on most matters, and the North Vietnamese may well have hoped that the JCP (and very likely the North Koreans as well) would remonstrate with the CPSU and bring a modicum of additional political pressure to bear on the issue.

In fact, the Japanese Communists appear to have done exactly that. [redacted] the JCP, quoting statements made by a party official [redacted] reports that the Japanese party brought up this matter during the formal talks it held with a CPSU delegation in Tokyo from 31 January through 5 February. [redacted] This delegation was led by senior politburo and secretariat member Suslov, and was the most important group the Soviet party had ever sent to Japan. Suslov's mission was to try to wheedle and cajole the JCP into taking further steps to improve relations with the CPSU, and specifically to attend the March 1968 Budapest preparatory meeting for a Soviet-run world Communist conference. (In this regard, he failed.)

According to this JCP report, the Japanese Communists during these lively and protracted talks with Suslov discussed the matter of Soviet aid to the DRV and asked Suslov point-blank "why the USSR had not furnished North Vietnam with surface-to-surface missiles when such had been provided the United Arab Republic." The JCP was said in this report to believe that the USSR was refraining from supplying such missiles to North

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Vietnam because of a cowardly fear of possible confrontation with the United States as the result of DRV use of the missiles against the U.S. Seventh Fleet. The source of this report suggested that [redacted]

[redacted] who had returned to Japan some ten days before Suslov's arrival, had come back specifically to relay North Vietnamese views to the JCP leaders concerning the scheduled JCP/CPSU conference.

While it is conceivable that the North Vietnamese leadership by early 1968 had convinced itself that a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam was now a real possibility, it is not necessary to assume the sincerity of such a DRV belief to explain the JCP statements about DRV arguments with the USSR on this subject. It is entirely possible that the North Vietnamese put forward in discussions with the USSR an alleged new threat of U.S. invasion of which they were not really convinced as a new argument for Soviet release of missiles which the Soviets had previously declined to send. The primary reason for North Vietnamese desire for such missiles all along had apparently been a wish to supplement conventional coastal artillery (which the USSR had supplied) in defense against U.S.-South Vietnamese naval operations along the coast. The expected addition of the U.S. battleship New Jersey to such operations in the fall of 1968 would have furnished an additional reason for DRV revival of the issue around the turn of the year. There seems little reason to doubt the genuineness of the North Vietnamese desire for these short-range weapons; they would be quite useful and in DRV eyes hardly more provocative of the United States than the coastal defense artillery already secured.

Moreover, [redacted] statement that the North Vietnamese had requested coastal defense missiles of the USSR "many times" but had never received them tends to support previous evidence to this effect. It will be recalled that the Indian Foreign Minister in February 1966 reported a Soviet claim that the USSR had been pressed hard during the Shelepin visit to Hanoi the previous month to supply surface-to-surface missiles for use against U.S. naval vessels in Vietnamese waters, and that the Soviet Union had refused.

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Finally, there is one last factor to consider. It is of course possible that the delivery and installation of coastal defense missiles has been delayed pending the completion of DRV crew training in the Soviet Union. But if this were the explanation as of May 1968, such training could not have been begun before September 1966*--at the very least, some 19 months after U.S. bombing of the DRV began in February 1965--and some other explanation would have to account for the long, initial delay. More important, there have been no reports received [redacted] about such training, in contrast to the considerable number of such covert reports (from Soviet, Vietnamese, and other sources)--and indeed, eventually open Soviet boasting--about the training of DRV personnel in the USSR in other weapons systems. Although it is conceivable that Moscow and Hanoi have succeeded in imposing an almost unprecedented degree of secrecy regarding training which is actually in progress, this seems on balance somewhat unlikely over such a protracted period.

In short, the evidence suggesting that the USSR has refused DRV requests for coastal defense missiles is considerably more persuasive than the evidence suggesting that the USSR had agreed to supply such missiles or had already begun to do so. The most important exhibit for the latter thesis--the photography of December 1967 thought to show Styx missiles at Thanh Hoa--must be regarded as inconclusive; and the failure of such missiles to be rediscovered anywhere in the months since then must cast doubt both on the validity of the original identification and the accuracy of reports such as those of [redacted] and Pajetta claiming or implying that the missiles had already arrived in North Vietnam.

*Nationals of other countries who have undergone Soviet training in coastal defense missile systems have spent some 20-21 months in the Soviet Union. It is most unlikely that the DRV would wish the training period to be longer for its nationals; if anything, one would expect North Vietnam to want the training course greatly accelerated in its case, as happened with the training of North Vietnamese SAM specialists in the USSR in 1965.

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It seems unreasonable that the DRV would have prevailed upon a reluctant Soviet Union to ship these weapons all the way across China, exposing them to Chinese scrutiny, only to place them in hidden storage indefinitely instead of attempting to install and use them. It seems even more unreasonable to make the multiple assumptions that the DRV has done this, and that the necessary training of DRV crews has gone on simultaneously in the Soviet Union totally unreported, and that the categorical Japanese Communist statements about Soviet refusals to supply the weapons are all unfounded.

Motives

If the Japanese Communists are right, and the USSR has refused to supply even short-range coastal defense missiles despite a direct North Vietnamese request, the question of Soviet motives again arises.

It might be argued that the Soviets have been unwilling to allow the Chinese to obtain the access to this missile which they would enjoy if the missile were sent to Vietnam through China, because the Soviet Union may have been unwilling to take even a marginal risk of assisting Chinese missile technology for eventual use against the USSR.* It is true that the Soviets have always been

*On two occasions in 1967 and 1968 Premier Kosygin [redacted] chided the British for supplying the Chinese with strategic goods. On one of these occasions Kosygin emphasized that the USSR tightly "controls" exports to China.

There is also an unconfirmed report from an [redacted] trade representative in Peking who was told in February 1966 (apparently by pro-Soviet sources there) that Shelepin during his visit to Hanoi the preceding month had extracted a promise from Ho Chi Minh that the DRV would not permit the Chinese to operate or be in any way associated with Soviet-provided equipment. (Am Consul Hong Kong Telegram No. 1525, 17 February 1965.)

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extraordinarily sensitive about Chinese inspection of their military rail shipments to North Vietnam, and there are grounds for thinking that one of the temporary obstacles to the rail shipment of SA-2 ground to air missiles to the DRV in the spring of 1965 was the Soviet objection to the initial Chinese assertion of their right to inspect these shipments.*

Nevertheless, this explanation seems less than probable, if only because the USSR is reported to have furnished models of the Samlet and the Styx to the Chinese years ago, before the Sino-Soviet break. The Soviet Union is also presumably aware that the Chinese in recent years have demonstrated their ability to produce these coastal defense missiles for their own use.

On balance, therefore, the explanation favored by the Japanese Communists seems most probable. The Soviets have apparently been so concerned over possible U.S. reactions that they have been unwilling to give the DRV even this limited-risk, short range defensive weapon.

C. Other Possibilities

The KOMAR missile boat and the coastal defense missile are the only two weapon systems which have not to date appeared in the DRV and for which there is good evidence that the North Vietnamese have asked. There are a number of other weapons which the DRV has not received and which North Vietnam apparently could well use but regarding which there is no satisfactory evidence to confirm that a DRV request was ever made.

*See the discussion of this question of Chinese inspection of Soviet rail shipments, pages 7-12.

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1. The most plausible such case concerns Soviet planes. [redacted] has stated that there was evidence available to the Czechoslovak Defense Ministry showing a Soviet unwillingness to send "certain aircraft" to the DRV because the North Vietnamese allegedly had refused to admit the technicians required to train the Vietnamese properly in handling the machines. [redacted] There is no information as to which aircraft was involved, although one might speculate on the SU-7 fighter-bomber. (The Communist journalist Wilfred Burchett, who has good contacts with both the Soviets and the North Vietnamese, in June 1968 alluded in conversation to an alleged Soviet refusal to send to the DRV not only certain types of missiles but also "fighter bombers".) [redacted]

The explanation adduced [redacted] for the alleged Soviet unwillingness in this case does not seem reasonable, if only because North Vietnamese pilots have been trained to fly other planes in the Soviet Union and the DRV has been willing to admit enough Soviet personnel to check out those planes and their pilots in North Vietnam after their USSR training has been completed.

[redacted] information about the denial of "certain aircraft" may nevertheless be correct. If so, it is possible that such advanced models were involved that the Soviets were reluctant to provide the Chinese an opportunity to inspect them either enroute to Vietnam or, subsequently, at the south China airfields where the North Vietnamese periodically deploy their planes for safekeeping.

2. Another possibility is the whole category of surface-to-surface guided missiles of various ranges (other than the Samlet or Styx). As previously noted, the Soviets in an effort to deter the United States at different times have privately tried to convey the impression that they were seriously considering a North Vietnamese

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request for such missiles. The inclusion of Colonel General Tolubko, first deputy commander of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces, in the Shelepin delegation that went to Hanoi in January 1966 may well have been meant to convey the suggestion to the United States that offensive missiles might be sent to North Vietnam. In June and December 1966 and April 1967 a KGB officer attached to the UN Secretariat dropped increasingly strong hints that the USSR would furnish such weapons "if" the DRV requested them. In May 1967 the Soviet Union appears to have passed similar hints to U Thant in a successful effort to frighten him. The Second Secretary of the Chinese Communist embassy in The Hague stated in mid-January 1966 that the DRV had asked the Shelepin mission to base strategic rockets in North Vietnam [redacted] and [redacted] member of the International Control Commission was quoted the next month in a second-hand report to the effect that North Vietnam had asked the USSR for "missiles to carry out attacks against Danang and other places" and had been turned down.

It seems unlikely that either the Chinese or the Indian diplomat had reliable information. Although there has been some speculation that some unexplained firings of obsolete SS-3 MRBMs in the Soviet Union in 1967 might have been connected with the training of North Vietnamese crews, no shred of evidence to this effect has ever turned up. Soviet offensive guided missiles have not to date appeared in North Vietnam, and in retrospect it appears at least questionable that the DRV has ever asked for them, knowing the likelihood of their quick destruction by the United States and the strong possibility of retaliation if they were used against South Vietnamese cities. It seems even more unlikely that the USSR would ever send them to North Vietnam, both because of the risks involved in DRV use of them and because of Soviet unwillingness to allow the Chinese to inspect such missiles in transit through China.

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These considerations do not apply to the short-range unguided tactical rockets which the USSR is known to have supplied for Viet Cong use in the south, nor to unguided missile systems such as the 18-to-37 mile FROG which was alleged in some 1967 reports to have been furnished for North Vietnamese use in the DMZ. The appearance even of the FROG has never been substantiated, however, and now appears to be unlikely; it may have been rejected by the DRV because of its relative inaccuracy.*

3. Another conspicuous omission has been the failure of Soviet anti-aircraft missile systems other than the SA-2 to appear in North Vietnam. Of particular interest is the SA-3, which has a low-altitude capability superior to that of the version of the SA-2 sent to North Vietnam, and which has been installed in increasing numbers in Eastern Europe in the last year. Although this weapon would appear to be useful to the DRV, there is no evidence to show that North Vietnam has ever asked for it, and it is possible that the DRV feels that massed conventional anti-aircraft guns offer an adequate answer to the low-altitude threat. If North Vietnam on the other hand has asked for the SA-3, there is no obvious reason why the USSR should have refused it, except possibly because of reluctance to show it in transit to the Chinese who do not have it.

4. Finally, there is the fact that the USSR has not supplied Soviet pilots to fly combat missions in North Vietnam as it did during the Korean war. This fact has exposed the Soviet Union to periodic attack not only by

*The captured North Vietnamese PT boat division commander referred to previously has in fact stated that in 1963 the USSR offered a surface-to-surface missile battalion to North Vietnam but that the offer was turned down on advice from the Chinese that the missiles in question were not accurate since they were not guided. It is quite possible that these were FROGs.

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various pro-Chinese groups around the world, but also by Castro and his militant followers and by leftists intellectuals of a variety of hues. It was in response to criticism from such militant sources--capped by a demand from Bertrand Russell to Kosygin that the USSR send "volunteers" to Vietnam immediately--that a Warsaw Pact statement in July 1966 made a pro forma offer to send volunteers when the DRV wanted them, and Marshal Malinovskiy in an order of the day of 17 August 1966 made an allusion to such a role for Soviet airmen. And according to an account of a secret Pham Van Dong mission sent to Moscow in January 1967 to explain the latest DRV position on negotiations, the Soviets at that time reiterated privately an offer to send pilots if they were requested by North Vietnam.

It is probable, however, that the Soviets made this offer because they knew that it was not likely to be accepted. There have been a number of reports to the effect that the North Vietnamese have been unwilling to accept such Soviet pilot "volunteers" because they felt that this would create a political necessity to accept greater numbers of Chinese "volunteers"--which they were reluctant to do. It is credible that the DRV has been anxious over the possibility that its own control over the war effort and over policy on peace negotiations would be eroded by a greater foreign presence. In any case, because of U.S. attacks on Vietnamese airfields, only a limited number of DRV fighters have been able to operate in North Vietnam at one time, the rest taking periodic sanctuary at south China bases. North Vietnamese needs for additional pilots have therefore probably been limited, and have been sufficiently supplied by the North Koreans. As an additional factor on top of this, it is likely that the Chinese would not allow Soviet-piloted MIGs flying combat missions to take sanctuary at Chinese fields as Vietnamese-piloted MIGs have done.

While some Soviet sources have therefore from time to time sought privately to imply that there was a real possibility that Soviet pilots would be sent into combat in Vietnam--and in mid-September 1967 apparently persuaded U Thant of this--other Soviet sources have more credibly

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asserted that the USSR had no intention of ever sending such "volunteers" because it "did not want to start a new Korean war." [redacted] has stated that because Moscow wanted to avoid extension of the conflict in Vietnam, the question of "volunteers" was not to be taken seriously, public statements to the contrary notwithstanding.* [redacted]

D. Chinese Withholdings

At the same time, it should be recognized that the Chinese have also withheld from the North Vietnamese some items of sophisticated hardware which are just within the Chinese capability to furnish. The Chinese are known to have built between eight and fourteen OSA and KOMAR guided missile boats, which since 1966 have been equipped with the SS-N-2 Styx missile produced in China. Some [redacted] evidence suggests that the Chinese have also begun to deploy guided missiles in coastal defense installations. To date the Chinese have furnished neither missile boats nor coastal defense missiles to the North

*In this respect--reflecting Soviet reluctance to become involved in a direct clash with the U.S.--Soviet policy has not greatly shifted since Khrushchev's time. At the June 1963 plenum of the CPSU Central Committee Khrushchev is reported to have stated, referring to the Laotian civil war:

Souvanna Phouma asked us to give him some planes. We gave him some old ones so as not to unveil our new technology. We asked the Chinese to provide pilots for these planes. The Chinese replied, 'Give them your own pilots.' But we reasoned that Chinese look more like Laotians than Russians do, so we did not give any pilots. See how it works, comrades, the Chinese will not act themselves but they exhort us to war. [redacted]

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Vietnamese. While there is no direct evidence that the North Vietnamese have ever asked Peking for these items, the good evidence that the North Vietnamese have asked the Soviets for them and have been disappointed suggests that the DRV would accept them also from the Chinese. The Chinese could, of course, easily claim in their own justification that they have far fewer of both items available than do the Soviets and still need all they can produce for their own defense.

There are two other notable Chinese acts of omission. First, while they have allowed the North Vietnamese to use south China air bases for sanctuary and training, they have not to date allowed the DRV to initiate combat missions directly from those bases. Secondly, the Chinese, like the Soviets, have not furnished combat fighter pilots to help in DRV air defense, operating from either DRV or Chinese fields.

These omissions have so far probably been the result of both Chinese and North Vietnamese reluctance. As in the case of the Soviets, the number of Chinese pilots who could profitably operate only from North Vietnamese fields would add little to the present North Vietnamese air defense capability, since already the majority of DRV planes and pilots are not used concurrently in North Vietnam but are kept in a pool in China from which selected units are rotated to the DRV. On the other hand, it is probably the estimate of both the Chinese and the North Vietnamese that if either DRV or Chinese units flew combat missions directly from Chinese bases a serious risk would be created of a U.S. strike at those bases and an expansion of the war into a Sino-U.S. conflict. This the Chinese are anxious to avoid;*

*In mid-December 1965--at just about the time that DRV planes were beginning to make use of South China air bases for sanctuary and training--Chou En-lai told [redacted] that the Chinese would avoid any action that might lead the Americans to bomb China, as the country had no defense. [redacted] It is credible that this was the Chinese view, and there is no reason to believe that it will soon change.

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~~TOP SECRET~~ [redacted]
[redacted]

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[redacted]

and the North Vietnamese probably also regard such an expansion of the war into a great-power conflict as most undesirable except in the event of a direct threat to the existence of their own regime. So long as U.S. bombing of the northern part of the DRV remains suspended, the incentive to consider such risks is still further reduced.

E. Caveats for the Future

Finally, some qualifications should be noted about future Chinese and Soviet policy regarding the items so far withheld.

So far as the Chinese are concerned, there seems a real possibility that they may eventually give the North Vietnamese some KOMAR missile boats or land-based Styx missiles. This possibility will remain a live one unless and until the DRV causes a fundamental change in Chinese policy on aid to Vietnam by agreeing to peace terms unacceptable to Mao. Otherwise, the provision of these weapons would be consistent with the evidence earlier this year that the Chinese have begun to supply the DRV with additional weapons such as the latest Chinese hydrofoil torpedo boats, furnished to supplement the other PT boats furnished the DRV by China in the last three years. The possibility of Chinese provision of KOMARs or coastal missiles might improve as time went on and the Chinese inventory of these items increased. Two members of the Chinese diplomatic mission in London may well have been alluding to the KOMAR and the coastal defense missiles when they told a British journalist on 5 June 1968 that China was now in a position to offer the DRV "quite a lot of sophisticated equipment, especially rockets which China is now making and which North Vietnam has not been able to get from Russia." [redacted] It is unlikely that the CPR is yet in a position to give the DRV surface-to-surface guided missiles with a range longer than that of the Styx or Samlet, and it is also on balance unlikely that the CPR would do so if the weapons were available to give.

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~~TOP SECRET~~ [redacted]
[redacted]

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[redacted]

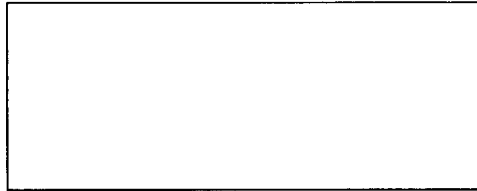
On the Soviet side, the decision not to furnish North Vietnam with coastal defense missiles was probably a marginal one which might conceivably be reversed in time. It seems much more unlikely, however, that the negative Soviet attitude on sending longer-range surface-to-surface guided missiles to North Vietnam can be reversed. The agonizing Soviet decision about what to do in response to a possible blockade of Haiphong has almost certainly been put off with relief until such time as the issue becomes a live one again. A much more pressing Soviet problem and temptation, however, will arise if Vietnam negotiations should lead to a ceasefire and the subsequent withdrawal of most U.S. naval units from the Gulf of Tonkin. It is possible that some Soviet leaders would then argue that the opportunity should be seized to shift the transportation of some Soviet military hardware to Vietnam to the sea route, to establish under conditions of minimum risk a precedent which the United States might thereafter be induced to accept as it now accepts Soviet sea transportation of weapons to Cuba.*

*In mid-July 1968 the second-ranking diplomat of the North Vietnamese embassy in Peking told a European diplomat that the Soviet aid contracted for recently for 1969 --including heavy armament and communications equipment-- would allegedly be shipped to the DRV entirely by sea, both from Vladivostok and around Africa. There is no evidence to confirm this statement, which seems improbable.

[redacted]

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