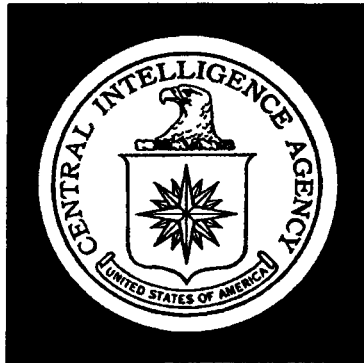


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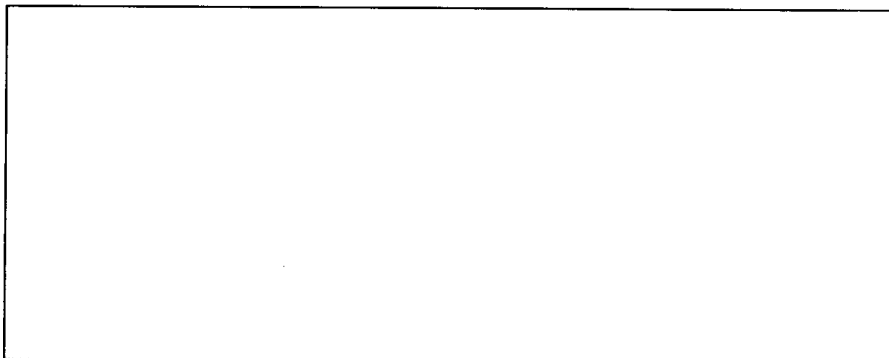


DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Report

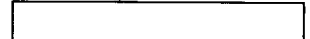
*The Sino-Soviet Dispute on Aid
to North Vietnam (1965-1968)*

Reference Title: ESAU XXXIX



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125
30 September 1968



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

MEMORANDUM TO RECIPIENTS

On 20 December 1965, SRS published an Intelligence Study that traced the bitter private negotiations among the Soviets, the Chinese, and the North Vietnamese throughout 1965 over the question of Soviet military assistance to North Vietnam, particularly the struggle over Soviet aid to the DRV air defense system.¹

The present staff study reviews and brings up to date the story of the protracted and acrimonious haggling among the three principals. It reveals that the major issues and motivations of each have remained essentially unchanged, and that suspicion, dispute, and Chinese obstructionism increased rather than abated as the war moved on. The Paris negotiations between North Vietnam and the U.S. have injected a further sour and disruptive note into Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese relations. However, neither delays in shipments nor denials of weapons appear to have impaired DRV military capabilities to such an extent as to affect the course of the war.

Although this study in draft benefited from the comments of other offices, it is entirely a product of the Special Research Staff.

A larger and more detailed version of this study, including citations of the sources used, will be published separately for the benefit of those who wish to pursue the subject in greater depth. Harry Gelman was the research analyst in charge of the project.

John Kerry King
Chief, DD/I Special Research Staff

1. "The 1965 Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese Controversy Over Soviet Military Aid to North Vietnam." (ESAU XXIX)

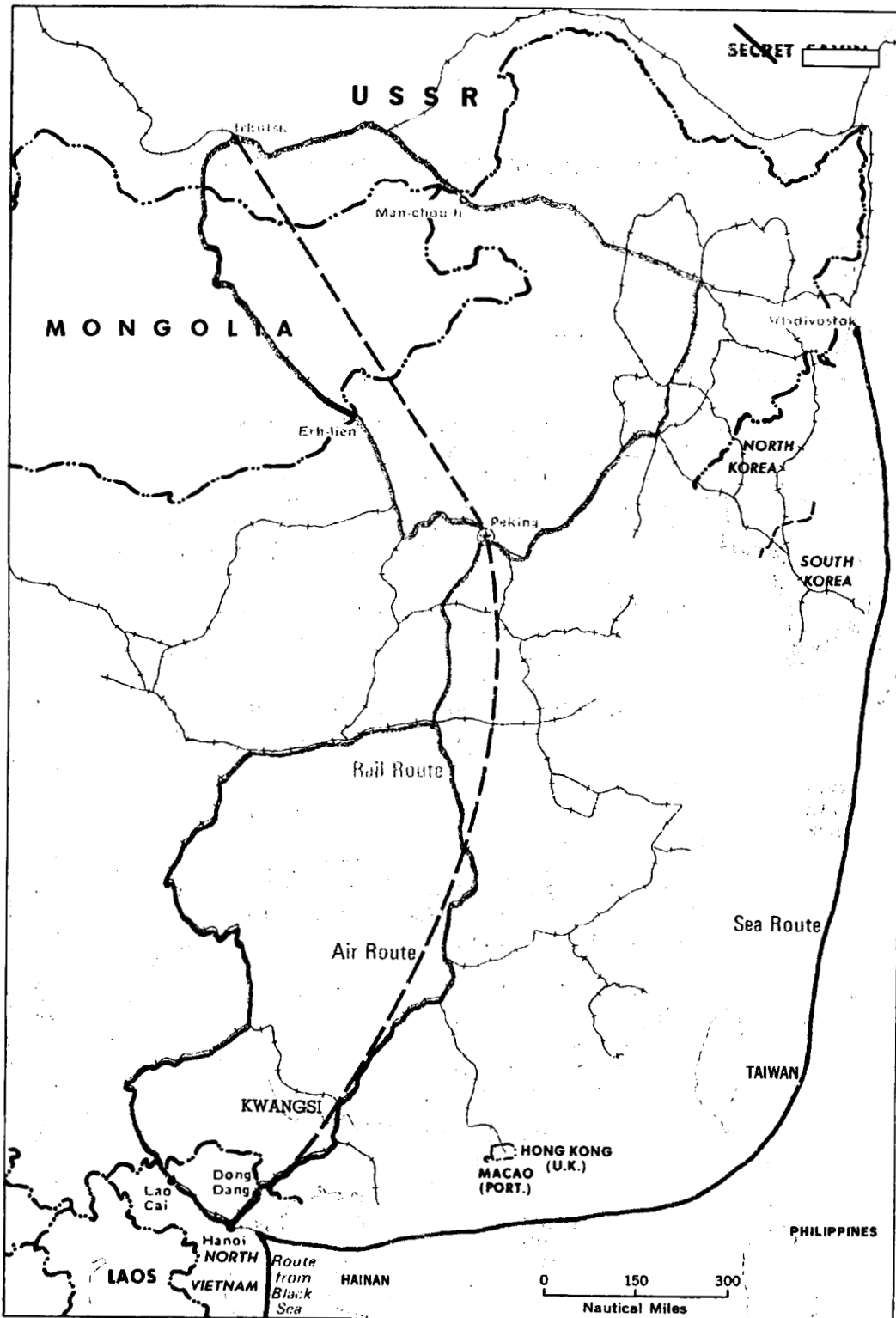
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THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE ON AID TO NORTH VIETNAM (1965-1968)

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Soviet Aid Routes to North Vietnam



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CONCLUSIONS

For three and a half years the Soviet Union and Communist China have been haggling over the military aid each is providing North Vietnam and over the mechanics of moving Soviet aid to North Vietnam. The dispute is a facet of the broader Sino-Soviet conflict and is interwoven with issues arising from U.S.-North Vietnamese negotiations. Parts of the continuing argument have surfaced, periodically, in polemical exchanges between Moscow and Peking. However, most of what we know of the story is gleaned from [redacted] intelligence collection.

Despite gaps and lack of precision in the available information, the evidence does support three general conclusions. Firstly, both Moscow and Peking, throughout the dispute, have had other considerations in mind in addition to North Vietnam's war needs. A paramount Soviet purpose has been to use aid to Vietnam as a means of strengthening Moscow's influence over Hanoi and elsewhere at the expense of Peking. The Chinese have been motivated by similar desires to expand their influence, but they also have a greater and more direct stake than the Soviets in a Communist victory in Vietnam.

Secondly, Sino-Soviet political enmity and military rivalry have worked to limit to some extent what aid the North Vietnamese have received and how they have received it. Because of China's insistence on a right to inspect Soviet shipments in transit to North Vietnam, the Soviets appear to have held back or delayed shipment of some sophisticated military equipment. For their part, the Chinese have refused certain Soviet requests for facilities to transmit aid to Vietnam, being unwilling to give either political or propaganda advantage to the USSR.

Thirdly, both Moscow and Peking have been constrained in their aid to North Vietnam by a desire to avoid a direct conflict with the U.S. Although Moscow and Peking

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frequently differ in their assessments of the level of tolerable risk, their constraint has had a restrictive influence on what military aid the North Vietnamese received and the channels through which it has been received.

The evidence also supports a number of tentative observations concerning the effect of the dispute on the North Vietnamese war effort. It is clear that difficulties between Moscow and Peking applied primarily to the receipt of sophisticated hardware for the defense of North Vietnam and to only a limited degree to the delivery of weapons and support items needed by the DRV to pursue the campaign in the south. Consequently, it does not appear that the dispute has had any significant effect on Hanoi's ability to maintain the war south of the 18th parallel.

However, the question of possible adverse effects on North Vietnam's aerial and coastal defense capabilities is much more complex. There is no [redacted] intelligence regarding the transit and delivery of sophisticated Soviet military equipment such as SA-2 missiles or crated MIGs. Estimates of the rates of delivery of such weapons depend on inferences from later [redacted] observations of their use in North Vietnam and from sporadic and incomplete photographic evidence of existing inventories. Evidence [redacted] makes it clear that certain DRV expectations regarding sophisticated weapons deliveries have not been fulfilled, but we can only speculate as to the extent the DRV felt its war effort was being hindered. Thus, the occasional periods when the rate of SA-2 firings seemed relatively low might have been associated with delays in Soviet missile shipments through China, but this is difficult to demonstrate. Similarly, it is not definitely known what plans the North Vietnamese leaders had for the Soviet Komar missile boats that were denied to them, that is, whether the DRV did indeed intend to use them to attack U.S. carriers.

Nevertheless, the evidence does point to an impressive array of incidents in which shipments of air and coastal defense equipment apparently were obstructed or denied. The evidence indicates:

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(1) that North Vietnam throughout the month of March 1965 was deprived of all Soviet military aid because of Sino-Soviet squabbling over the terms of rail transshipment;

(2) that operation of a Soviet-supplied SA-2 missile system was delayed from March until July 1965 at least in part because of Chinese pressures on North Vietnam;

(3) that a Soviet rail shipment to the DRV of "ten military technical workshops and forty anti-aircraft guns" was held up by the Chinese throughout the fall of 1965;

(4) that there were again serious deliberate Chinese delays in Soviet military rail shipments to the DRV in January and February 1967;

(5) that there were other delays to Soviet shipments through China caused by Mao's reluctance to crack down on Red Guard disorders in the summer of 1967 and again in May-July 1968;

(6) that "trainloads" of SAM missiles were held up by the Chinese at the Sino-Soviet border for a month in September 1967, and again in June 1968, apparently because of these disorders;

(7) that the Chinese in February 1965 blocked a flight of thirty Soviet transport planes to the DRV carrying anti-aircraft guns and ammunition, in May 1967 blocked a flight of six Soviet planes apparently carrying crated MIGs, and since June 1967 have banned virtually all Soviet transport flights to Vietnam;

(8) that the USSR has declined DRV requests for KOMAR missile boats and coastal defense missiles, largely because of Soviet fears that use of such weapons might lead to a direct clash with the United States. In the case of the KOMARs, the Soviets apparently refused also because they were unwilling to deliver the vessels directly to North Vietnamese ports and the Chinese were

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unwilling to accept them in Chinese ports for transferral to North Vietnam by Chinese and North Vietnamese crews.

The conclusion indicated by this panorama of incidents is that at least for short periods the North Vietnamese air and coastal defense capability probably was impaired in some degree. Probably the political impact was greater than the military effect. There is no doubt that the DRV leadership was often greatly disturbed by, and still resents, Chinese obstruction of Soviet aid and Soviet caution in rendering aid. On several occasions North Vietnam has had reason to be seriously worried that difficulties and delays in aid shipments might be prolonged. But thus far the bottlenecks for items of prime importance such as missiles have been temporary, and those problems which became more or less permanent (such as the Soviet withholding of the KOMARs, or the Chinese curtailing of the Soviet air transport flights) have not seemed to be of critical importance.

This situation could change if the Chinese were to impose barriers to Soviet military rail shipments to the DRV, as they have done before, and maintain the barriers over a long period of time, as they have threatened but not yet done. Major North Vietnamese concessions in the Paris negotiations could provide the occasion for such a Chinese decision.

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I. THE ISSUE OF RAIL TRANSIT OF CHINA

A. The Initial Impasse and the Sino-Soviet Rail Agreement of 1965

The main disagreement on aid to Vietnam has revolved about the shipping of Soviet military goods by rail through China. The argument has been through several phases. The initial impasse came soon after Kosygin's return from his February 1965 visit to Hanoi and Peking. At that time the first Soviet arms to be shipped by rail to North Vietnam in accordance with Kosygin's promises to Hanoi were held up while Moscow and Peking haggled over the terms of shipment. The main point at issue was China's insistence on a right of rigorous inspection of all arms shipped across Chinese territory. The Soviets finally, and reluctantly, yielded but the inspection issue and the agreement have been continuing subjects of controversy between Moscow and Peking.

Although the agreement was not published, [redacted] and a number of Chinese statements have revealed its basic provisions. It was dated and apparently became effective on 30 March, and it was for the two-year period, 1965 to 1967. The agreement was renewed in March 1967. The agreement, and the negotiations leading to it, were bilateral; in keeping with China's rejection of any "unity of action" with the Soviet Union, Mao's regime has refused to engage in any tripartite Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese agreements or negotiations.

The agreement covers military supplies only. This is a point of importance in subsequent polemics because the Chinese agreed to transport free of charge only military goods, as defined by themselves. Everything else not covered by the original or by supplementary Sino-Soviet rail transport agreements was categorized as "economic supplies." Shipment of economic supplies was to be a matter of ad hoc arrangements between Chinese and

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Soviet railroad authorities, and was to be paid for, as usual, in rubles. It seems likely that both sides have obfuscated in their later polemics on this matter, the Soviets charging that the Chinese were demanding payment for military supplies, the Chinese denying it. It appears that the Chinese define "military goods" narrowly to exclude many military-support articles and such items as medicines; the Soviets, on the other hand, define the term broadly.

According to the agreement, the Chinese were apparently obliged to transport only categories of weapons listed in the document. The agreement specified that a certain number of freight cars would be 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 the shipments until a supplemental agreement was negotiated. Furthermore, they would not sign such a supplement until they had themselves confirmed that North Vietnam wanted the weapons. This provided the Chinese continuing opportunities to lobby privately with the North Vietnamese.

Soviet annoyance and concern with the provisions of the rail agreement have continued for a number of reasons. Delays occasioned by inspection--said to involve "inspecting every crate and dismantling every weapon," and to take days for each train--have been used in repeated Chinese efforts to pressure the DRV into restricting its reliance on Soviet military aid. Chiao Kuan-hua, a Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, told [redacted] in May 1966 that the Chinese were "assisting" the

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DRV by inspecting Soviet shipments and giving the DRV "appraisals" of the quality of the equipment. Also, the Soviets appear to have been influenced in their decisions as to which weapons to furnish the DRV by the knowledge that every shipment would be examined and might, therefore, assist indirectly Chinese weapons programs. And finally, the Soviets apparently do believe that the Chinese have occasionally removed parts of Soviet weapons during inspections, although most Soviet public statements on this subject are probably exaggerated. [redacted]

[redacted] citing as his sources Czech Minister of Defense Lomsky and the senior Warsaw Pact representative in Prague, Soviet Col. Gen. Kushchev, claims that when the Soviets were able to inspect shipments after the Chinese have done so, they have found parts of some equipment, particularly missiles, missing.

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

During the four months following the March rail agreement, shipments including many types of weapons transited China to the DRV apparently without serious difficulty. However, construction of SAM sites in North Vietnam seemed strangely protracted. The delay apparently was caused by a dispute over who was to man the SAM sites and over the transit of Soviet SAM and other military personnel through China.

A number of authoritative Chinese sources indicate that 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 strongly objected, but they repeatedly claimed in April and May that it was North Vietnamese reluctance to accept Soviet personnel that had caused the offer to be rejected. On the other hand, the Soviets claimed that the Chinese were placing a limit on the transit of Soviet personnel; that is the version, for example, that the

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Soviet leaders told [redacted]

An Italian party delegation in Hanoi, however, was told by a Pravda correspondent on 5 May that the North Vietnamese had refused to permit the Soviets to man the rockets being installed in order to avoid "alienating" the Chinese. He thus suggested that it was indeed the DRV that was preventing the Soviets from sending personnel to operate the SAMs, but only as the result of pressure from the Chinese. Some two weeks before this, Pham Van Dong is reported to have told Kim Il-sung in Djakarta that the Chinese had persistently demanded that North Vietnam cut off Soviet aid and had sometimes become threatening in trying to enforce the demand.

All in all, the evidence suggests that throughout the spring of 1965 the DRV vacillated between yielding to Chinese pressure and thus deferring completion and activation of SAM sites until the fall, when North Vietnamese cadres could complete their training in the USSR to operate them, or flouting Chinese wishes and accepting enough Soviet personnel to put the SAMs into operation more promptly. Finally, under the influence of the mounting U.S. bombing, the DRV seems to have opted for the latter course, and prevailed upon Peking to permit a limited quota of Soviet SAM personnel to pass. It was not until 24 July that the SAMs were fired for the first time, by Soviet crews.

C. August-December 1965: Another Blocked Shipment

An exchange of secret party letters between the Soviets and the Chinese in the fall of 1965 makes it clear that the Chinese deliberately held up a specific rail shipment of Soviet weapons for several months. This shipment, comprising 10 "military technical workshops" and 40 AA guns, had been sent following a July 1965 visit to Moscow by DRV Vice Premier Le Thanh Nghi that arranged for "supplementary assistance" in addition to the Soviet aid rendered under agreements previously concluded. The

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shipment was blocked by the Chinese 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. After extensive haggling the shipment was released for transit near the end of the year. Soon thereafter, leaked Soviet charges of Chinese obstruction led to repeated Chinese Foreign Ministry protests to the USSR and to a public Chinese denial.

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

During the first half of 1966 the DRV had to cope both with transport problems resulting from U.S. bombing of DRV rail lines and with continued and increasingly public Sino-Soviet friction over transit arrangements. In early 1966 shipment of some Soviet economic goods was shifted from rail to sea because of temporary DRV rail disruption and in February the Chinese told the East European representatives in Peking that no more non-military rail shipments could be accepted.

On the basis of [redacted] reporting [redacted]

[redacted] there are strong grounds for believing that Ho Chi Minh made an unannounced visit to China for two or three weeks in late May 1966. Only exceptionally grave matters could have taken the aged DRV President out of the country in the midst of the war and for the first time in five years. 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.

It is also likely that he wished to discuss questions relating to the transportation of military supplies to Vietnam. At the time, the DRV apparently was deeply concerned over the possibility that the United States might blockade the port of Haiphong and that Soviet and

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East European aid might be appreciably reduced in consequence. It seems likely that Ho was now anxious to determine whether, in such an event, the Chinese would permit increased transportation of Soviet aid across China.

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. In brief, the evidence indicates that it was at that time--and not in the spring 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.

Soviet Ambassador to the United States Dobrynin has revealed that in August 1966 the USSR made a "final" effort to work out a Sino-Soviet accord on the transshipment of Soviet goods. While Dobrynin did not say what the Soviets wanted at this time, it is conceivable that the Soviets made a new approach to the Chinese over the issue of inspection of rail shipments. In any case, according to Dobrynin, this "final" Soviet effort was rejected and, in consequence, arrangements were then made whereby the North Vietnamese "accepted" Soviet shipments at the Sino-Soviet rail crossing points. Other sources had previously indicated that secret Sino-Soviet negotiations were indeed going on in August and later confirmed that the arrangement for the new DRV role was made in the last half of 1966. The North Vietnamese charge d'affaires in Pyongyang has stated that the new system was put into effect before October. It is not certain whether the North Vietnamese under this system actually accompanied the trains through China or whether they merely confirmed the arrival of Soviet weapons in good condition in China from the USSR. In any case, there appears to have been no serious difficulty for the rest of 1966.

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F. January-March 1967: The Crisis

Late in January 1967, the Chinese initiated their most serious threat to Sino-Soviet diplomatic relations --and to the Soviet overland supply route to Hanoi. Following a series of deliberately planned and provoked diplomatic incidents in Moscow and other capitals around the world, the Chinese organized a siege of the Soviet embassy in Peking. The siege lasted from 26 January to 11 February and appeared designed to force the Soviets to break state relations. That would have made it impossible for the Soviets to conduct negotiations with the Chinese necessary to continue rail shipments to Vietnam.

In January and February, DRV officials in various parts of the world made an unusual series of statements indicating that the Chinese had reimposed delays on Soviet military shipments through China, despite the new role the North Vietnamese had assumed in rail transport.

There are some grounds to support the conjecture that these Chinese actions in January and February were intended to inhibit the DRV from proceeding further toward negotiations with the United States by raising a direct threat of a permanent cut-off of Soviet aid to the war effort.

For example, [redacted] indicate that Le Duan was sent on a secret visit to China shortly before the events of January to notify Mao of a recent North Vietnamese politburo decision to accept negotiations when conditions were judged propitious. We know that the Chinese were annoyed, and they are reported to have told Le Duan as much. Chinese Central Committee official Wu Hsiu-chuan also told a foreign Communist in mid-December that the Chinese would oppose negotiations as "deviationist." In early January the DRV Foreign Minister issued a public statement which removed some of the previous ambiguity in the DRV position and indicated more strongly than before that a permanent bombing halt alone could suffice to bring talks. The Chinese actions against the Soviet embassy and apparently against Soviet shipments followed within the next three weeks.

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Moreover, the Chinese pressures were relaxed in the second week of February at precisely the moment when the North Vietnamese received a new offer on negotiations from President Johnson and informed the Chinese that they would reject it. Ten days of North Vietnamese-Chinese negotiations in Peking immediately thereafter appeared to unblock the Soviet shipments and reaffirm DRV responsibility for the shipments at the Sino-Soviet border. The February Sino-Vietnamese talks in Peking also probably facilitated the secret Sino-Soviet negotiations in March that resulted in the renewal of the 30 March 1965 Sino-Soviet rail transit agreement.

According to statements made in a secret CPSU document shown to other parties in Moscow the following November, the new agreement, like the one for 1965-1967, covered "military freight" only, and it seems likely that the financial arrangements remained unchanged despite the DRV role in assuming responsibility for the shipments. The November 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 tons a year across Chinese territory" and 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." (These figures are all apparently in addition to economic rail shipments.) The Soviets charged 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 military tonnage reflected not malevolent intent but rather the objective difficulties encountered by or anticipated for the North Vietnamese and Chinese railroad systems.

With the conclusion of the new agreement, the Soviets --and to a lesser extent the DRV--began to disseminate many reports, often deliberately misleading, about the DRV role in assuming responsibility for Chinese transshipment of Soviet supplies. (Some such reports claimed that a "tripartite" Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese agreement had been signed, although others contradicted this.) The aim

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in floating these reports was apparently to convey to the United States the message that transshipment difficulties were a thing of the past. However, a new source of difficulties soon appeared.

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

Since April 1967, the major problem for Soviet rail shipments to Vietnam has been disruptions on Chinese railroads resulting from Red Guard activity, particularly in the summer of 1967 and again in May-July 1968.

There is considerable evidence that Red Guard factions seeking weapons to use against their factional opponents seized weapons bound for Vietnam in July and August 1967. In a speech of 20 September reported in the Red Guard press, Chou En-lai revealed that "trains with military aid for Vietnam" had been "ambushed," and military stores destined for Vietnam looted. Chou's references to the passive attitude enjoined on the PLA generally by Peking in that frenetic period explained how special trains guarded by PLA troops could be successfully "ambushed." It was not until the fall that the PLA's instructions were changed to permit the army, among other things, to defend its weapons. These incidents may explain delays in certain September rocket shipments about which the Soviets later complained.* Peking may have wished to wait until order had been sufficiently restored so that embarrassing incidents would not occur with such sensitive weapons.

*A secret CPSU document has formally charged that "trainloads" of SAM missiles were held up by the Chinese for a month in September 1967. The Chinese apparently claimed at the time that the delay was necessitated by rail bottlenecks in Vietnam, but the troubles caused by Red Guards in China seem a more likely explanation.

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Similar difficulties recurred in the spring of 1968, when the Chinese cultural revolution again entered a leftist phase. Once again, it was Chou En-lai's task to cope with the damage. In a speech on 12 May Chou lamented traffic tieups at three major rail junctions on the main railroad line from the USSR to Vietnam, and said that at the town of Liuchow, in Kwangsi adjoining Vietnam, "traffic is at a standstill" and "material cannot be transported...to Vietnam."

[redacted] Passenger service between Peking and Hanoi was suspended in June and low-priority freight either halted or shifted to sea transportation.

Through this period, however, [redacted] shipments for Vietnam of higher-priority Soviet economic or military support goods continuing to be dispatched by rail from the Soviet border. Since it does not seem reasonable that the USSR would keep funneling shipments into China if none were reappearing in the DRV, the inference would seem to be that some shipments were actually arriving in North Vietnam, however much delayed.

Nevertheless, weapons shipments, the highest-priority traffic of all, seem to have been in a particularly precarious position because weapons were the special target of Red Guard factions harrassing the rail lines. A 13 June directive of the Chinese leadership revealed that a shipment of Chinese "support-Vietnam supplies" had been looted in Kwangsi. On 19 June Chou En-lai intervened once more (for the second time in two months) and demanded that these supplies be returned in toto and railway traffic restored. In this atmosphere it seems likely that Soviet military equipment bound for Vietnam was also affected, as the Soviets have in fact claimed. Several Soviet officials stated privately that some Soviet arms shipments had been marooned in China, and a Soviet Foreign Ministry official asserted in June that the Chinese had stopped accepting trains with weapons for Vietnam and that five such trains were halted at the Sino-Soviet border. It is credible that the Chinese would do this--as they apparently did in September 1967--because of a temporary

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inability to protect sensitive weapons shipments. The USSR is reported to have formally protested.

By early July the North Vietnamese had begun to complain to foreigners, perhaps as a means of putting pressure on the Chinese. For example, a [redacted] diplomat in Peking was told by the North Vietnamese that the flow of Soviet military supplies had been "disrupted" in China. The North Vietnamese may also have complained directly to the Chinese in early July. A 3 July directive, personally endorsed by Mao, reiterated in threatening tones the demand for the full restoration of rail traffic and the return of all supplies looted, and a convoy of three high-priority trains was rushed south through Kwangsi under military escort on 5 July. [redacted]

[redacted]

In mid-July a North Vietnamese delegation in Peking is reported to have pressed the Chinese for guarantees with regard to rail transportation. [redacted] evidence shows a gradual improvement in the rail situation in the remainder of July and August.

The chaotic rail transit picture was further complicated during May and June by the coincidence of another leftward shift in Chinese domestic policy and the beginning of North Vietnamese talks with the United States in Paris. To show the DRV his feelings about the talks, Mao authorized simultaneous unpublicized demonstrations in early June outside the DRV consulates in Nanning, Kunming, and Canton protesting the negotiations.

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 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

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sacrificing the current overall leftist line. When that did not suffice, the PLA in early July was ordered to crack down hard on railroad troublemakers despite the fact that the PLA at the time in some other places was still being forbidden to crack down on Red Guard factional struggle. The North Vietnamese war effort was temporarily a victim, but not a target, of one of Mao's domestic aberrations.

However, the possibility of a resumption of the politically-motivated Chinese obstruction of previous years remains an important weapon held in reserve by Peking. The Chinese chargé in Paris, Yi Su-chih, is [redacted] reported to have stated [redacted] that while China was still furnishing aid to North Vietnam, it might be forced to "reconsider" this aid should the Paris negotiations bring results unsatisfactory to China. The rail traffic provides China a means of applying pressure against North Vietnam, as it did in early 1967, on the subject of negotiations. After all that has transpired, it seems possible that Peking might indeed cut the flow of rail supplies to the DRV if a major decision unwelcome to Mao should 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 has been mirrored in the last three years in a secondary running battle over Soviet efforts to use military air transports across China. Despite Soviet protests, the Chinese remained adamant, and, consequently the Soviet airlift has been small-scale, intermittent, and marginal in importance.

The Soviets at one time--in February 1965--sought an "air corridor" across China for mass flights of transports to the DRV like the airlifts the Soviets have staged in other parts of the world. The Chinese on 28 February 1965 flatly refused, in part because the Chinese feared that such large-scale flights would be unduly provocative to the United States, and in part because they feared the Soviets would use these flights for espionage purposes. In addition, the Chinese may have felt a Soviet right of mass overflight would undercut their asserted "sovereign" right to inspect all Soviet military cargoes passing through China to Vietnam.

There is good evidence [redacted] [redacted] to show that on two occasions, in February-March 1965 and again in May 1967, the Chinese regime took last minute action to block mass transport flights to Vietnam which the Soviets were about to set in motion in the belief that Chinese permission would be or had been obtained. The Chinese action apparently surprised the North Vietnamese and was deeply resented by them. On another occasion, during the siege of the Soviet embassy in Peking in February 1967, the Chinese made it impossible for one Soviet transport which had gone to Vietnam to return home 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.

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III. The Issue of Shipment by Sea

A. Private Chinese and Soviet Statements

The questions of shipping military hardware to North Vietnam by sea, and of Soviet reluctance to do so, seem to have arisen in private Sino-Soviet negotiations from the time of the first controversies over rail and air transit in the spring of 1965. As recriminations over rail transit delays grew, Chinese private comments about sea shipment grew more sharp. A secret letter of 5 November 1965 from the Chinese to the Soviet party answering Soviet charges about the blocking of a rail shipment asked, "Why do the Soviets not use the numerous ocean-going vessels to ship their military supplies to Vietnam?"

When Soviet-sponsored charges about Chinese rail obstruction began to multiply in the Western press late in 1965, the Chinese surfaced charges of a cowardly Soviet refusal to use the sea route.

Authoritative private Soviet statements further reinforce the impression that the Soviets have refused requests to ship arms by sea. For example, [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." 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."

The USSR has repeatedly suggested that it believes the Chinese wish to provoke a conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Gulf of Tonkin. A widely-distributed CPSU letter to other parties in

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February 1966 claimed that the Chinese sought such a conflict "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 circulated a document at the 23rd CPSU Congress which accused the Chinese of trying to force the Soviet Union to ship its military aid by sea and risk a clash with the Seventh Fleet, and thereby to force a Soviet-U.S. showdown.

What the Soviets apparently have wanted is a way to carry weapons by sea to the Far East, 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 shipments at Chinese ports--such as Canton--for transshipment to the DRV either by rail or by Chinese ship. At various times the Chinese have accepted Soviet economic cargoes, such as POL, for transshipment. The Soviets apparently have tried and failed to get the Chinese to handle some military shipments in the same manner. For example, 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.

The secret Chinese letter to the CPSU of November 1965, mentioned earlier, asked why the Soviets had not sent certain "naval vessels" which, according to the Chinese, the Soviets had promised the DRV.* The letter charged that 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." In November 1966 both Cuban and Czech diplomats in Hanoi told [redacted] representatives there that the pro-Soviet bloc countries had recently asked the Chinese to open a port on the Gulf of Tonkin where bloc military goods could be unloaded for transshipment to Vietnam by rail. The Chinese, once more, were said to have refused and to have insisted that the Soviets send their shipments direct to Haiphong, This

*The vessels were probably KOMAR missile-firing patrol boats.

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issue was surfaced on only one occasion in the Soviet press. On 30 March 1967, an Izvestiya article charged 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."*

To sum up: there is a body of substantial evidence from political sources which supports [redacted] the U.S. intelligence finding that Soviet ships probably have not carried arms to North Vietnam. The conclusion is strongest regarding sophisticated, large, or bulky weapons, and less strong regarding small, simple weapons. Soviet ships may have made unobserved clandestine deliveries of rifles or ammunition to Haiphong as the Chinese may 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--seems to be of such importance to the USSR as to make it unlikely that the Soviet Union would make exceptions to a general ban on arms shipments to convey lower-priority weapons which could as well be sent by rail.

B. The Soviet Attitude Toward a Potential Blockade

The USSR has obviously had great anxiety over the sea supply route to North Vietnam--the main channel for Soviet economic and military-support shipments to the DRV. The Soviets over the past three years have been concerned over U.S. bombing of DRV ports and over the possibility that the United States might take steps to close DRV ports by mining or blockade. Through repeated vigorous protests the Soviet Union has sought to convey the impression that the USSR regards access to DRV ports as important to Soviet

*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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interests. One report suggests that the Soviet leadership has decided its interests would justify serious risk of confrontation with the U.S.

[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.

It should be noted, however, that this 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 at the DRV port of Campha, a Soviet Foreign Ministry note threatened "to take appropriate measures to insure the safety of Soviet ships" if the incident were reported. On 5 January 1968, after two more incidents had actually occurred, a Soviet protest note said that "the corresponding Soviet departments will be compelled to take measures for insuring the safety of Soviet vessels bound for DRV ports." However, no Soviet naval escorts were in fact provided. It seems evident that this is a matter which the Soviet politburo keeps under close scrutiny and continuing review. To some extent the [redacted] report has been in error.

It is possible 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 [redacted] later reported in slightly garbled form. While it is conceivable

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(although we think on balance less than probable) that the Soviet leadership might come to the decision [redacted] reports, it has probably not as yet decided what it would do in the event of a U.S. blockade.

IV. The Weapons Withheld

The Soviet Union has indicated that some of the weapons requested by the DRV have been denied. The CPSU document on Soviet military aid to Vietnam circulated among visiting foreign Communists in Moscow in November 1967, stated that "the USSR has speedily satisfied practically all the requests of the DRV for delivery of military equipment." A few paragraphs later, the document states, without elaboration, that "through the fault of the Chinese side, it has not been possible to deliver some types of weapons to the DRV."

A. The KOMARs

The DRV has not received the KOMAR or OSA-class guided-missile-firing patrol boat, which it wanted and, apparently, at one time thought it was going to receive. The failure to receive such boats must be particularly annoying to the DRV because, over the past decade, the USSR has distributed KOMARs and OSAs to about a dozen countries around the world, including some whom the DRV must regard as far less deserving than itself.

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[redacted] declared that "some time after August 1964"-- that is 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

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because of subsequent Soviet reluctance. The Soviets had presented the excuse that "current Sino-Soviet relations prevent delivery." [redacted] own view was that the Soviets had refused because they believed that the DRV would attack American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Important confirmatory evidence is contained in the secret party letter sent by the Chinese to the CPSU on 5 November 1965, in which the Chinese asked why the Soviets had not sent military supplies to Vietnam by sea and why the Soviets had not sent "the naval vessels promised to the Vietnamese comrades." The letter also stated that the vessels could have been sent direct to ports in Vietnam but that the Soviets wanted to transfer them to the Vietnamese comrades by Chinese ports." These "naval vessels" were probably the KOMAR mentioned by [redacted] in July 1966.

The evidence suggests that after an original offer had been made in late 1964 to furnish KOMARs to the DRV, the USSR changed its mind after regular U.S. bombing began in 1965, the Soviets being unwilling to run a serious risk of conflict with the U.S. in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Unlike other weapons the USSR has supplied to North Vietnam, it was not practical to ship the KOMARs by rail or air across China; they would have to travel from Soviet ports to Haiphong as deck cargo under U.S. surveillance. 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 apparently refused, primarily for political reasons.

It is also conceivable that the USSR was also reluctant to have the KOMARs in DRV hands at all because of concern at the possibility that the DRV would use them to attack major U.S. ships, with uncalculable possibilities of U.S. counteraction. 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

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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.

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 35-40 n.m. Samlet or the 22 n.m. SS-N-2 (Styx)--the weapon carried on the KOMARs and OSAs. Supplying such weapons to the DRV would have been somewhat less dangerous for the Soviet Union than supplying KOMARs or OSAs. The Samlets or Styxs could be transported without great difficulty 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.) Also, 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 readily calculated in advance.

However, longer-range weapons, such as the 300 n.m. cruise missile Shaddock, would present a real threat to American carriers and other major ships. Their possession by the DRV would conjure up for the USSR many 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 the Styx or Samlet. On either count, it may be concluded that if the Soviets declined to furnish the DRV with the Samlet or Styx, they are quite unlikely to furnish the Shaddock or longer-range guided or ballistic missiles.

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The evidence regarding the Samlet and Styx is ambiguous. There is no convincing "hard" evidence that such missiles were ever shipped to the DRV. A number of [redacted] reports suggested that the Soviets had sent or were going to send such weapons to North Vietnam, but on balance they seem less convincing than other [redacted] reports originating with Japanese Communist representatives in Hanoi which deny any such plans or shipments. The [redacted] in fact, assert that the USSR refused repeated North Vietnamese requests for coastal defense missiles.

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

It is probable that the Soviets have been so concerned over U.S. reactions that they have been unwilling to give the DRV even the short-range defensive missiles. It is conceivable that they may also have been reluctant to allow the Chinese to inspect such missiles during transit to Vietnam.* This seems less likely; the USSR is reported to have furnished models of these weapons to the Chinese before the Sino-Soviet break.

C. "Certain Aircraft"

[redacted] has stated that there was evidence available in the Czechoslovak Defense Ministry indicating 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 crews.

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

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[redacted] explanation for the alleged Soviet unwillingness in this case does not seem plausible 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, the SU-7 fighter bomber for example, that the Soviets were reluctant to provide the Chinese an opportunity to inspect them either enroute to Vietnam or, subsequently, at south China airfields where the North Vietnamese periodically deploy their planes for safekeeping.

D. Caveats for the Future

The Chinese are known to have built between eight and fourteen OSA and KOMAR guided missile boats. They have produced both the Samlet and the Styx missile, and there is evidence that they have deployed coastal defense missiles on land installations. To date they have furnished neither coastal missiles nor KOMARs to North Vietnam. The possibility that they will do so will grow as the small Chinese inventory of these items increases. Chinese diplomats in London may have been alluding to the KOMAR and the coastal missiles when they told a British journalist on 5 June 1968 that China was 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." Any possibility that the Chinese might give the coastal missiles or KOMARs to North Vietnam would dwindle if the North Vietnamese were to make a major concession in the peace talks. It is unlikely that the Chinese yet are in a position to give the DRV surface-to-surface guided missiles with a range much longer than that of the Styx, and it seems unlikely that China would do so even if such weapons were available to give.

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On the Soviet side, the marginal decision not to furnish North Vietnam with the Styx or Samlet might be reversed in time, but it is not likely that the Soviet's negative attitude on sending longer-range surface-to-surface guided missiles to North Vietnam will change.

A more pressing Soviet problem, and temptation, might arise if the Vietnam negotiations should lend to a ceasefire and the subsequent withdrawal of most U.S. naval units from the Gulf of Tonkin. Some Soviet leaders might then argue for transporting of some Soviet military hardware to Vietnam by sea in order to establish, under conditions of minimum risk, a precedent which the U.S. might thereafter accept, as it now accepts Soviet sea transportation of weapons to Cuba.

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