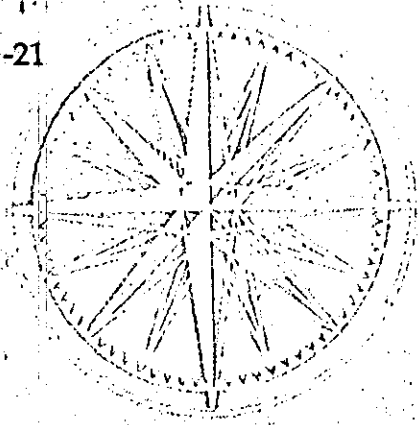


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SPECIAL REPORT

STATUS OF SOVIET AND CHINESE MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

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By [signature], NARS, Date 11/11/81

STATUS OF SOVIET AND CHINESE MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

The Soviet Union and Communist China seem to have staked out certain areas of specialization in their military support programs for the North Vietnamese. This does not appear to be the result of cooperation but rather is symbolic of the competition that has become endemic in their relationship. Each power is supplying those elements which it is best able to provide, but neither is supplying all it could, as fast as it could, and the North Vietnamese apparently feel that more can and should be done.

Soviet military aid is mostly for air defense, principally the surface-to-air missile (SAM) equipment that has appeared in North Vietnam in the past two months. The Soviets have also supplied anti-aircraft weapons, sophisticated radar equipment, some all-weather MIG fighters, and eight IL-28 jet light bombers, and have apparently taken over from the Chinese the training of North Vietnamese pilots. It is not known whether the Soviets insisted that in their role as supplier of air defense materiel they also replace the Chinese in the training of pilots or whether the Vietnamese requested the shift. The fact that Soviets now are training the pilots is indicative of their increasing involvement in the war and their improved position in the eyes of the North Vietnamese, who have traditionally relied on the Chinese for military aid.

While the Soviets are furnishing this relatively sophisticated equipment, which only they among Communist suppliers can provide in adequate quantities, the Chinese are also continuing and increasing their more routine assistance. They remain the chief source of small arms and most equipment for the North Vietnamese ground forces. Recently, moreover, their role has expanded. Chinese ground troops, probably in a logistic or construction support role at least for the moment, have appeared in North Vietnam in the past two months. So far there is no indication that major Chinese combat forces have been deployed there or that a build-up of ground forces on the Chinese side of the border has taken place, but ground combat support is the role the Chinese can best play if the Communists decide that foreign troops in force are required for the defense of North Vietnam.

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The Growing Soviet Presence

The Soviet military presence in North Vietnam is dramatically reflected by the growing quantity of SAM equipment appearing in the country. Construction of the first missile sites began about late March, and by now 18 sites have been identified. The first missile equipment was detected in July. The equipment apparently is constantly being shifted, and the total number of missiles now deployed in the DRV is not known. Photographic reconnaissance and ELINT intercepts of SAM radar systems indicate, however, that one to two SAM regiments are there. Each regiment normally consists of four firing battalions. It takes one firing battalion to operate one launch site.

in Cuba during 1963 and 1964, a complete Soviet crew and a full Cuban crew were at each SAM site for almost a year of operational training. Some reports state that the North Vietnamese are not expected to be able to operate the SAM units independently until this winter.

The demonstrated mobility of the SAM units and the effectiveness of their fire when they have gone into action is further evidence that at least some of them are Soviet manned. This performance reflects a degree of training and efficiency which could not be expected of recently trained North Vietnamese personnel.

Thus far four US aircraft, including one drone, have been shot down by SAMs. The first-- a USAF F4C Phantom II--was downed on 24 July. It was followed two days later by the loss of the reconnaissance drone. Both were shot down about 30 miles west of Hanoi by a SAM unit apparently firing from a temporarily occupied site. The area of the shootdown, which was well west of the then known SAM sites, now is known to contain two sites.

On 11 August a US Navy A4 Skyhawk was downed by a missile about 52 miles south of Hanoi. This also occurred outside the range of known missile sites. The most recent shootdown occurred on 24 August when a US Navy Phantom II was destroyed by a missile not far from where the A4 was shot down two weeks earlier.

Soviet SAM equipment has never before been used under conditions of continuing combat. There is little doubt that the Soviets are gaining useful experience with it in Vietnam. They have already effectively

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demonstrated that the mobility of the equipment can complicate its detection and destruction. The sites involved in the shoot-downs of 11 and 24 August have not yet been detected, and equipment noted at SAM site 8 on 9 August by photoreconnaissance had been removed when a strike was conducted against the site 12 hours after it was spotted.

The Soviets apparently replaced the Chinese in the flight training of Vietnamese pilots sometime around late March, when Chinese instructors were last noted in this role.

The arrival of Soviet aircraft in the DRV was first noted in early May. The Soviets are believed to have delivered about 25 all-weather jet fighters as well as the eight IL-28s. Like the Chinese-supplied jet aircraft, all these planes are now at Phuc Yen Airfield just north of Hanoi.

There has been a recent substantial increase in the number of North Vietnamese antiaircraft guns, and two sites of 100-mm. AAA guns have recently been identified for the first time. It is likely that this AAA equipment was provided by the USSR, although it appears to be under Vietnamese operation and control.

A total of 1,500 to 2,500 Soviet military personnel may be in North Vietnam now. Although North Vietnamese are being intensively trained to man air defense equipment themselves, the number of Soviet military personnel may well increase to bridge

the gap until the Vietnamese are fully trained.

The bulk of Soviet military personnel in Vietnam are SAM operators. If one or two missile regiments in Vietnam are manned and supported by a normal complement of troops, they would total 1,000 to 2,000 personnel.

In addition to missile personnel, there are some Soviet training and support experts in the country. Logic and comparison with Soviet operations elsewhere suggest that there are about 150 Soviet pilots and maintenance personnel in the air training group and possibly another 300 technicians engaged in administrative, communications, and logistic support activities. Soviet pilots have not been noted taking part in combat operations.

Chinese Assistance

The Peoples' Army of Vietnam (PAVN) was built up to its present size largely through Chinese material aid. Following the US air strikes in August 1964, Peking responded almost immediately by delivering 36 jet fighters to North Vietnam. In April 1965 they delivered eight more.

Peking apparently began stepping up its military deliveries to North Vietnam about the same time that Soviet aid was becoming evident. There is little specific evidence concerning the types of equipment and materiel being furnished, but the Chinese are probably supplying most of the small arms and ammunition and individual

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equipment as well as certain transportation equipment.

Equally as important as the supply of arms, and in the long run perhaps more important, is the appearance of Chinese Communist ground force elements in North Vietnam. This first became evident in mid-June

The only Chinese military unit actually identified in North Vietnam to date is the headquarters of the 2nd Railway Engineer

Division, which moved into the DRV in late June. Another authority, first noted on 10 June, is suspected of being a senior logistics authority. Two other elements have recently been detected in the DRV but their identities remain obscure.

Recent photography of the Langson area near the Sino-DRV border has revealed a high level of truck activity and some new construction on the important Hanoi - Dong Dang rail line. It thus appears likely that most of the Chinese units or authorities in the DRV are concerned with improving logistic support for the Vietnamese. While the Chinese may be making contingency preparations for the eventual introduction of troops into Vietnam, there is no indication that major Chinese combat forces have been deployed to North Vietnam or that a build-up of ground forces on the Chinese side of the border has taken place. However, there can be little doubt that if foreign troops in force are required for the defense of North Vietnam, they will come from Communist China.

Sino-Soviet Competition

Deployment of a limited but significant Soviet military presence into North Vietnam has unquestionably sharpened the already bitter Sino-Soviet competition for influence in Hanoi. The USSR's demonstrated willingness to make good its commitment to defend Vietnam has put Hanoi in a better position to take an independent stance and to play one Communist partner off against the other. The Vietnamese are

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almost certainly seeking to exploit the situation to increase the level of support given the DRV by both Peking and Moscow.

The latest Soviet intrusion in an area Peking hopes to develop as an exclusive sphere of influence is bitterly resented by the Chinese--the more so because they cannot match the kind of sophisticated equipment made available to the Vietnamese from Soviet arsenals. The appearance of the Soviet SA-2 missiles in the DRV during late July appears to mark the end of a long Chinese campaign to keep them out.

In this situation Peking has been attempting to offset increased Soviet support for North Vietnam. As already noted, a Chinese military presence in Vietnam, probably connected with logistical matters, began to show up in mid-June and has been expanding its activities. In mid-July Peking made new aid commitments to the DRV. Following the visit to Peking of a high-level DRV delegation, a joint communiqué was issued on 17 July stating that new grants of "gratuitous" economic and technical assistance had been made by the Chinese with a view to "jointly defeating" the US.

The next day Nhan Dan, the DRV party daily, ran an editorial concerning help received from Communist countries which treated the Chinese with special warmth. While expressing thanks for "wholehearted assistance" from the Soviets, Nhan Dan stressed the enduring character of support given

by the Chinese--"dear brothers and neighbors" who have always stood by "through thick and thin."

These Vietnamese Communist statements probably reflect real appreciation for Peking's backing and probably also an effort to placate the Chinese, following expansion of the Soviet military presence. Nevertheless, they are not as warm as they could be and, taken with other indications, reveal that the North Vietnamese would like to have an even firmer commitment from Peking, and probably a further step-up in the flow of basic military and economic support from China.

Hanoi, bearing the brunt of increasingly heavy US air attacks in the DRV, and feeling the pressure of more direct US participation in the war against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, is clearly anxious to increase all bloc aid commitments. Thus, recent effusive statements by DRV spokesmen about Soviet aid nearly match earlier commentaries on support received from China.

Although it seems likely that the North Vietnamese would prefer to have backing from a unified bloc, they probably see some advantages in the existing Sino-Soviet competition--reflected in continuing Chinese propaganda attacks on Soviet assistance to the DRV as inadequate and insincere. For example,

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in a speech in Tokyo on 28 July Liu Ning-i, a senior Chinese Communist Party spokesman, sneered at "certain people" who "are making gestures of support for Vietnam, playing a few anti-US imperialist tunes, and devising some little stunts" while at the same time secretly colluding with the US to promote "peace talks" and to "exchange information."

Moscow apparently considers its increasingly obvious and effective military aid to the DRV and its claims of Soviet-DRV unanimity on measures to repulse "US imperialism" effective weapons to undercut Chinese charges. Recent authoritative Soviet editorials have implicitly rebuked Chinese leaders for the failure to take "coordinated action" against the "US aggressor." Khrushchev's successors have repeatedly pleaded for "bloc unity" on Vietnam in an attempt to

"prove" their charges that Peking is willing to sacrifice the interests of the DRV in its drive to capture leadership of the world Communist movement and to discredit Soviet policy.

The Soviets have warned against "imitating those inclined toward adventurism." Moscow has taken great pains to avoid allowing its assistance to lead to a direct Soviet-US confrontation and continues to emphasize the defensive nature of its aid to the DRV. Nevertheless, in view of the apparent determination of the Soviet leaders to make good on their commitment, Soviet deliveries of sophisticated air defense weapons, including more SAMs and fighter aircraft, can be expected to continue, at least as long as US air strikes are carried out in the North.

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