

Vietnam War

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The Enemy

Reprinted with permission from *Review of the News*, November 9, 1966

Anyone who takes the trouble to follow the course of the Vietnam war must eventually come to the realization that if it were not for the Soviet Union and its East European satellites, North Vietnam would not be capable of waging one week of war against the combined American, Allied, and South Vietnamese forces now in Vietnam. While China is also aiding Hanoi, its contribution to North Vietnam's military power has been minimal when compared to the massive amounts of aid which have poured in from Russia and Eastern Europe. One authority has stated that North Vietnam's air defense system alone is "one of the most ambitious programs of Soviet military aid on record" (see *Analysis*, October 26, 1966). Yet, the American public is barely aware that such, indeed, is the case. The devil has been clearly painted with slanted Chinese eyes by the Pentagon and the mass media, while the Soviets and their East European cohorts have been depicted as reluctant partners of Ho Chi Minh. The facts, however, belie that impression. Here is some documentation. On January 9, 1966, the *New York Times* reported:

A Soviet mission led by Aleksandr N. Shelepin opened talks in Hanoi today with the aim of strengthening support for North Vietnam.... The Soviet visitors, who include a rocket specialist, conferred with President Ho Chi Minh, Premier Pham Van Dong and several other Government leaders, the official Soviet press agency Tass reported....

On his arrival in Hanoi, Mr. Shelepin, a member of the Soviet Presidium, said the delegation had been dispatched to proclaim "the firm and unwavering striving of the Soviet people to render comprehensive support and assistance" to Hanoi....

In Moscow, authoritative Soviet sources said the Russians intended to increase and coordinate help to Vietnam from Communist nations in the Moscow camp.

That trip by Shelepin, which included a stopover in Peking, has long since been forgotten by the general public, although it took place less than a year ago and was extremely significant in that the Kremlin envoy had been accompanied to Hanoi by Col. Gen. Vladimir F. Tolubko, chief of Russia's strategic rocket force, and Dmitry Ustinov, director of Russia's war production. One of the reasons why it has been forgotten is because it took place during one of our more spectacular peace offensives.

Even before Shelepin's noteworthy mission to Hanoi, fragmented bits of information in the press were beginning to reveal the pattern of Soviet aid. For example, in late 1965 reports were filtering through of North Vietnamese troops being equipped with Soviet-manufactured large anti-aircraft machine guns, 20mm. and 37-mm. anti-aircraft cannons, 120-mm. heavy mortars and light howitzers. One British journalist, James Cameron, who visited North Vietnam last December, wrote in the *New York Times* of December 10, 1965:

At dusk the roads become alive. The engines are started and the convoys grind away through the darkness behind the pinpoints of masked headlamps. There are miles of them, heavy Soviet-built trucks, anti-aircraft batteries, all deeply buried under piles of branches and leaves....

North Vietnam by day is abandoned; by night it thuds and grinds with movement....

In Hanoi I had run across groups of Russian mechanics, presumably service crews for the SAM's. I saw them because they stopped from time to time in my hotel....

There were a great number of Russians to be seen in Hanoi, but never one in uniform. If there were Soviet soldiers in North Vietnam, they escaped my view. The military aid is all of Soviet or East European origin—Czechoslovak small arms, for example The only Chinese aid I heard about was economic—machinery for textile factories. I saw no signs of Chinese personnel in any number.

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One gets the impression from Mr. Cameron's vivid story that the Soviet Union had already been hard at work for many months preparing for Mr. McNamara's escalation long before the American people were even aware of what Mr. McNamara had in store for them.

Nor was the American military any better informed than the American public. For example, the *New York Times* of December 13, 1965, reported:

After nine months of action in Vietnam by American combat troops, whose number is steadily increasing, the United States is still in a defensive position, although a strong one, according to important military authorities....

These authorities suggest that the "first build-up" of American combat troops, decided upon by President Johnson last July, has not achieved the expected results because of some widely shared mistaken assumptions.

"We had an assumption that North Vietnam was not going to reinforce the Vietcong forces in South Vietnam, as it has done," one officer said recently. He added that the introduction of at least nine North Vietnamese regiments into the South had brought "an entirely new dimension to the war."

Who was responsible for the "mistaken assumptions"? Robert S. McNamara? Dean Rusk? President Johnson? The Central Intelligence Agency? On what basis was the assumption made that North Vietnam would not reinforce the Vietcong forces in the South? Who gave our military men this bum information? The horror of our unpreparedness was dramatized by Hanson W. Baldwin, who wrote in the *New York Times* of December 6, 1965:

The nightmare of the Central Highlands is that a full North Vietnamese army corps—three divisions, perhaps with artillery support—may soon be operating in the Central Highlands, from Kontum to Pleiku and Pleime.

According to intelligence reports, verified by aerial observation and by prisoner-of-war interrogations, the trails and roads from North Vietnam through Laos to South Vietnam and Cambodia are clogged with streams of men and traffic....

"We never realized until recently that the enemy could reinforce so quickly and so greatly," General [Vinh] Loc [South Vietnamese II Corps commander] said. "The enemy is reinforcing more quickly than we are."

In other words, the Communists had fully anticipated American plans and were neither caught short-handed nor under-armed. They also seemed to know exactly how our men would be required to fight the war. As for weapons, the Soviet Union and the satellites had already poured in more than enough. An article in the November, 1965, *World Marxist Review*, entitled "Solidarity with the people of Vietnam," replete with Communist rhetoric and ambiance, tells us:

"In fulfillment of its internationalist duty the Soviet Union is rendering extensive aid to our Vietnamese comrades," said Comrade Brezhnev, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, at the recent meeting of the Central Committee. "We have already delivered a considerable amount of arms and military equipment to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam [DRV] and will continue our policy of giving the DRV the material and political aid necessary to repel American aggression. We welcome joint efforts by all the fraternal socialist countries in support of the Vietnamese people fighting imperialist aggression."

In a statement published in the Budapest newspaper Nepszabadsag the Hungarian Government notes: "the escalation of U.S. aggression makes it incumbent on us to support still more firmly and actively the just struggle of Vietnam against U.S. imperialism." In July, the newspaper tells us, Hungary sent a large consignment of goods and material to the DRV.

A resolution of the recent Congress of the Rumanian Communist Party published in the newspaper Scintera, said: "We hereby declare that the Rumanian people will extend every help to the people of Vietnam." . . .

Pham Van Dong, Prime Minister of the DRV, stated: "The fraternal socialist countries and the specialists from these countries are helping us to increase both the economic and defense potential of North Vietnam and to

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build up our armed forces. This is evidence of the solidarity and friendly relations that exist between our Republic and the socialist countries.”

The same article quotes similar messages of support from official Polish, Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, East German, and Mongolian publications. Please note, however, that the article reveals virtually no details concerning the nature of the aid being shipped to North Vietnam.

For that information we must go through American newspapers with a fine tooth comb, picking up a bit of information here and a bit there. For example, a story in the *Boston Globe* of December 14, 1965, tells us that U.S. Marines, mopping up in the Phuoc Valley, “found the mangled bodies of a dozen Viet Cong carrying Russian-made rifles, grenades and cartridge belts.” Then, a story in the *Boston Traveler* of December 18, 1965, informs us that “the North Vietnamese Air Force is known to have about 50 Mig17 and Mig19 jet fighter models.” The story also tells us:

Diplomatic sources in Moscow reported earlier this year that Vietnamese have been trained to fly and handle the Mig21, a supersonic fighter that could alter the present tactical balance.

The *New York Herald Tribune* of December 17, 1965, reported:

The North Vietnamese now have some 70 jet MiG fighters— about 20 more than they were believed to have had last summer. North Viet Nam also has a handful of aging, twin-jet IL28 bombers.

It is unknown if the Soviet Union or Communist China supplied the MiGs—mostly the older MiG-15, 17 and 19 models —and the IL-28s to the North Vietnamese.

One gets the impression that the Pentagon knows just about nothing about what the North Vietnamese have or where they got it from. If it does know, it isn't telling. For example, it required the defection of several Cuban seamen last December before it was revealed that Castro had ordered all Cuban ships traveling to the Far East to carry military equipment to North Vietnam. The *Boston Globe* of December 27, 1965, reported that one Cuban ship had been “ordered to pick up weapons in Shanghai and take them to North Vietnam.” A small item in the *New York Times* of December 22, 1965, told of another Cuban ship that had carried a dangerous cargo of carbide to North Vietnam. And finally, an item in the *New York Times* of December 31, 1965, revealed that “during the last six months three or four of the biggest Cuban ships have transported war materials from North Korea and Communist China for the supply of Hanoi.”

A tiny dispatch from Prague in the *New York Times* of January 9, 1966, reported:

A North Vietnamese delegation signed trade and credit agreements with Czechoslovakia today before leaving for Warsaw on the last leg of an eastern European tour aimed at rallying economic support.

Then, buried in an article about Sino-Soviet mudslinging in the *New York Times*, January 23, 1966, we find the following information:

[T]he Chinese Communists signed an agreement with the Russians on March 30 to transport military materials by rail to North Vietnam free of charge. . . . Soon after, Soviet technicians and heavy shipments of equipment for SAM (missile) sites and other arms started moving over the trans-Siberian railway to Manchouli in Manchuria and by express train down the Chinese rail trunk. The backlog was so large that it initially strained the Chinese railway system and for a time regular schedules were disrupted and foreigners were barred from travel on some lines. Shipments were hauled in about 10 days into the area of the North Vietnamese border town of Langson where some material went into depots constructed with the help of Chinese Communist engineer troops.

That, incidentally, is the only reference we have seen anywhere concerning these heavy shipments of SAM missiles and other Soviet military equipment being sent through Red China to North Vietnam. As for Poland, which gets most-favored-nation tariff treatment from us, Senator Thomas J. Dodd revealed the following in the American Security Council's *Washington Report* of February 9, 1966:

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During the past few months eight Polish ships, totaling 70,000 tons discharged in Haiphong cargoes brought either from Polish ports or from North Korea or Red China. How many of the 22 Polish ships with an aggregate of 220,000 tons entering Red Chinese ports during the period between 1 August—5 December 1965 visited Haiphong remains subject to speculation. . .

Perhaps the most detailed list of Soviet military equipment going to North Vietnam was revealed in a supposed “secret letter” sent out by the Soviet Union to Communist Parties all over the world criticizing Red China’s lack of cooperation. An excerpt from that letter was published in the *Washington Post* of March 22, 1966, as follows:

The Soviet Union delivers to the DRV (North Vietnam) a great quantity of weapons, among them rocket installations, anti-aircraft artillery, airplanes, tanks, coastal defenses, warship and others. In the year 1965 alone weapons and other war material worth about a half-billion rubles [\$1.10 per ruble] was placed at the disposal of the DRV. The DRV receives support through the training of pilots, missile personnel, tank drivers, artillerymen and so on. Our military help is supplied in the quantities which the Vietnamese leadership itself considers necessary.

Could the Russians be more explicit? If the reader thinks that 1965 was a big year for Soviet aid to Hanoi, here are some details about 1966. According to the *New York Times* of May 24, 1966:

The Soviet Union is supplying the world’s largest helicopters to North Vietnam.

A Defense Department spokesman said yesterday that two Soviet Mi-6 120-passenger helicopters, which can lift more than 13 tons, were based on airfields near Hanoi and that more were expected....

They could be utilized to transport weapons, soldiers and equipment from North Vietnam to staging areas along the Ho Chi Minh trail leading into South Vietnam. They could shift mobile antiaircraft missiles or components from site to site....

And a story from Moscow in the *New York Times* of September 26, 1966, provides this additional sobering information:

Soviet exports to the North Vietnamese have increased sharply since the United States began bombing North Vietnam early in 1965, according to foreign trade statistics just made public here....

Most of the exports to North Vietnam besides military equipment consisted of industrial machinery, power-generating equipment and road-building machines....

Details on Soviet military aid to Hanoi have not been made public but it is known that such aid includes antiaircraft weapons, some jet planes and transportation equipment. .

Other items of significant increase for North Vietnam included power-generating equipment, mobile generators, oil-drilling rigs, trucks, automotive maintenance tools, and excavators and other road-building equipment.

While Soviet oil exports to Communist China fell, deliveries to North Vietnam increased....

Total deliveries of petroleum products to North Vietnam by the Russians in 1965 rose to 121,000 tons, up 20,000 from 1964.

Then, in a dispatch from Bonn in the *New York Times* of October 13, 1966, the West German government revealed some details of East Germany’s aid to Hanoi. The story read:

About 200 East German military officers are on active duty in North Vietnam as instructors, an official of the West German Ministry for All-German Affairs reported today.

The East Germans are said to be training North Vietnamese troops in the use of rockets and communications equipment....

The East Germans have considerably stepped up their economic, technical and military aid to Hanoi since the beginning of the year. Still sharper increases are expected as a result of trade negotiations that ended last

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Monday....

Since June, 1965, the East Germans have donated nearly \$4-million in goods and capital aid to Hanoi. This does not include their trade with North Vietnam, which runs to more than \$1-million a year....

Nor does the figure of nearly \$4-million include the delivery of East German military supplies for the North Vietnamese army. This covers such items as bicycles and motorcycles for messengers traveling the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which supplies the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces in South Vietnam, electronic equipment and what the East German press has described as "weapons especially suited for the war in Southeast Asia."

Last, but not least, is the following dispatch from Warsaw which appeared in the *New York Times* of October 27, 1966, giving us the latest word on Soviet-bloc aid to Hanoi:

The Soviet Union and its allies agreed at the conference of their leaders in Moscow last week to grant North Vietnam assistance in materiel and money amounting to about \$1-billion, informed Polish sources said today....

Of the total, \$800-million is to come from the Soviet Union, the source asserted. Poland's contribution will be \$30-million, it was said.

The aid is to be furnished in the immediate future, according to the sources. .

It is significant that the Communist decision to extend \$1-billion in additional aid to Hanoi was made *after* LBJ's October 7 speech advocating increased East-West trade, the extension of U.S. guaranteed commercial credits to the Reds, and most-favored-nation tariff treatment to European Communist states. Obviously, the Reds were required to make no concessions on Vietnam. On the contrary, they have given every indication that they intend to step up the war against our men, many of whom are now returning home in coffins, or as amputees, or permanently disabled. These young men, hardly out of high school, have become the sacrificial lambs for a sadistic, treasonous, corrupt and degenerate government that would rather see a generation crippled and maimed than give up one iota of its power. How many lives must be lost and how much worse must things get before the American people understand what is being done to them? In the meantime, have the Reds shown any gratitude toward LBJ for extending the hand of trade, credits and foreign aid? Perhaps, in their perverse way, they did. The *Boston Globe* of October 29, 1966, reported:

North Vietnamese regulars hurled human wave attacks against untried troops of the U.S. 4th Division today and badly bloodied the infantrymen in their first major action.

The heavy fighting flared in jungle and elephant grass country of Viet Nam's central plateau near the Cambodian border.

Three U. S. helicopters were shot down, one of them a big medical evacuation chopper which had just picked up American wounded....

A US military spokesman officially described American casualties as moderate, a term usually denoting the units were severely mauled.

There are a few people in America who are obviously not too concerned about the G.I.'s getting mauled in Vietnam. For example, we are told by *Businessweek* of October 29, 1966, that when James G. Miles, vice-president of Control Data Corp. was asked what he thought of LBJ's new trade policies with the Reds, he replied: "I'm just delighted to see it."