

May 13, 1967

**Discussion between Chinese Deputy Foreign
Minister Qiao Guanhua and Vietnamese Ambassador
Ngo Minh Loan**

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Summary:

Qiao Guanhua disagrees with the plan to send Soviet planes to Vietnam via air instead of rail.

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CHINESE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER QIAO GUANHUA AND VIETNAMESE
AMBASSADOR NGO MINH LOAN

Beijing, 13 May 1967

Qiao Guanhua: I have a problem to discuss with Comrade Ambassador. It is a specific problem relating to the Soviet aid to Vietnam.

On 6 May 1967, we were informed both in Hanoi and in Beijing by Comrade Deputy Minister Nghiem Ba Duc[1] and Comrade Pham Thanh Ha[2] respectively that in May and June 1967, the Soviets would provide Vietnam 24 Mig-17 and Mig-21 planes (12 planes of each type) and we were also asked to help transport them via China.

On 9 May 1967, Comrade Pham Thanh Ha officially informed our External Economic Relations Committee that these 24 airplanes would be transported by railway. There would be two shipments, each of which could handle 12 airplanes.

On the same matter, however, the Soviet Union informed us differently: on May 8, they requested that their AN-12 aircraft carry these 24 airplanes over China's air space in a 10-day period from May 16 to May 24 1967.

On 9 May 1967, Comrade Nghiem Ba Duc in Hanoi proposed the [same] plan for air transportation.

Our leadership puts this issue high on the agenda. We have studied the requests by both Vietnam and the Soviet Union very carefully. On behalf of the Chinese government, I would like to inform you, Comrade ambassador, that we agree with the plan proposed by Comrade Pham Thanh Ha for railway transportation of these 24 airplanes, but not with the plan for air transportation.

The air transportation of these 24 airplanes is a question of great importance. As Comrade Ambassador has known, our opinions have long been different from those of the Soviets. Since early 1965, when Soviet aid started coming to Vietnam, the Soviets more than once proposed that their shipment go to Vietnam by air, over China's air space. In general, we do not agree with the idea. Before, Vietnam also did not agree with air transportation because you understood our position [in this matter]. This time, I would like to make it clearer to Vietnamese comrades the reasons why the Soviet Union wanted this method of transportation for its aid to Vietnam.

For the last few years, using its mass media, the Soviet Union has been trying to publicize its large-scale aid to Vietnam. We hold that the Soviets intentionally do so in order to let the US know of the Soviet large-scale aid to Vietnam and by so doing, the Soviets reveal some secrets to the US.

For the last few years, we have helped Vietnam transport the aid by train, which is very timely and safe. The Vietnamese side has been very satisfied.

So why do the Soviets this time ask for air transportation? If the Soviets resort to air transportation in a grandiose manner, US spy planes—which are always flying over Chinese air space—would detect it at once after the Soviet airplanes take off from Irkutsk. Our position on this matter has been clear to Vietnam: the Soviets, by doing so, want to be boastful to the US [about its aid to Vietnam], publicly revealing military secrets to the enemy. They also make use of its aid to Vietnam in order to control the situation and cooperate with the US to force Vietnam to accept peace negotiations. The Western press has even mentioned that the Soviets increased their aid to Vietnam in order to create a situation of direct Soviet-American confrontation

which will clear the way to compromises. I refer to this judgment of ours on this matter with a view to making you clearly understand our position. We, however, have no intention to impose it on you. In short, we hold that:

(1) the Soviet proposal for air transportation has bad intentions and is a conspiracy,

(2) transportation of these planes is a major military act, but the Soviets did not consult with us and [want to] force us to accept. This is nothing else than a chauvinist attitude.

[1] Nghiem Ba Duc, DRV Vice Minister of Foreign Trade from 1954; member of the economic delegations to the USSR and Eastern Europe between 1965 and 1975. Thereafter economic adviser in Laos.

[2] Pham Thanh Ha was a military logistics officer in the PAVN who headed the military assistance mission in Vietnam's embassy in Beijing from 1965 to 1973.