

A News Analysis

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Arms Aid to Hanoi Slowed by Soviets

By LEWIS GULICK

WASHINGTON (AP) — To hear administration officials tell it, Moscow is a major contributor to Hanoi's new offensive because of its shipments of heavy arms to North Vietnam.

But a reading of U.S. intelligence estimates indicates that Soviet weapons help to North Vietnam actually is far smaller now than earlier in the war.

Because words may be ambiguous and figures can be read different ways, it is difficult to pinpoint a contradiction. But since the Kremlin's aid flow has been going on for years, the administration's stressing it now is clearly a matter of choice.

IN HIS State of the World message in February, President Nixon spoke of Hanoi's getting "nearly \$1 billion" a year aid from her allies.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, mentioning a \$600-million figure, pointed last week to the Soviet Union as "the major supplier of the military arms and the munitions which are being used in North Vietnam." Therefore, Laird concluded, Russia is "a major contributor to the continuing conflict that exists in Southeast Asia."

U.S. government sources, not allowing use of their agency name, issued to newsmen Tuesday figures which had been prepared within the intelligence community before

Hanoi launched its offensive at the end of March.

The figures indicate that total Communist aid to North Vietnam in 1971 was about the same as the year before, as was the flow from Moscow, and that both were well below the peak reported before the United States halted its bombing of the North in 1968.

ACCORDING to the U.S. intelligence estimates:

—Combined Soviet, Chinese and East European military and economic assistance to North Vietnam totaled \$1.02 billion in 1967, \$765 million in 1970, \$775 million in 1971.

—The Soviets shipped \$505 million worth of arms to North Vietnam in 1967, \$70 million in 1970 and \$100 million in 1971. Russia's economic help amounted to \$200 million in 1967, \$345 million in 1970 and \$315 million in 1971.

Administration spokesmen have been pointing to the Soviet aid, they say, because it is the largest outside support for North Vietnam's drive and because it includes sophisticated weapons used in the current conventional-style military assault.

MOSCOW has been supplying such items as surface-to-air missiles, tanks, heavy artillery and oil. Peking's weapons help features small arms and ammunition.

But administration officials say Washington has made no diplomatic bid to Moscow on curbing the arms flow.