

Russia Questioning U.S. Good Faith



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THE RUSSIANS have protested bitterly to Washington over the rush of military supplies to South Vietnam in anticipation of a cease-fire.

This has put the Russians on the spot, since they gave Hanoi a guarantee of U.S. good faith. The Russians also quietly pressured Hanoi to end the fighting. They went so far as to imply that Soviet military aid might be curtailed if the war drags on.

Strictly speaking, the United States has not violated any understanding. Not until the shooting stops does the proposed agreement call for a halt of military shipments (except for replacements) into South Vietnam.

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IN AN obvious effort to strengthen President Nguyen Van Thieu's hand before the cease-fire goes into effect, the United States has swamped Saigon with supplies. The deliveries of warplanes and helicopters, in particular, has transformed the South Vietnamese Air Force into one of the world's largest, with a new total of 1850 aircraft.

The Russians have charged this violates the spirit of the truce negotiations. They point out that the North Vietnamese can't match the sudden U. S. build-up and, therefore, have been placed at a last-minute disadvantage. This has caused Hanoi to question the Soviet guarantee of U.S. good faith.

Footnote: U.S. reconnaissance flights and electronic monitors have detected no equivalent movement of supplies from the North into South Vietnam.

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BRIBERY? — It has been whispered around the White House that bribery was used to overcome President Thieu's opposition to a cease-fire. There is absolutely no indication he was paid off, himself. But our sources have official knowledge that other South Vietnamese leaders were slipped money to help persuade Thieu to go along with the U. S. cease-fire agreement.

This sort of black-bag diplomacy isn't exactly uncommon in Saigon. Our sources have heard Philip Habib, for one, tell privately how he bribed opposition leaders when he was the top political officer at the U. S. Embassy in Saigon in 1965-67. Now Ambassador in Seoul, Habib was heard to say he used to carry "a little black bag" in Saigon. "From that little black bag," he is quoted, "we bought out any opposition."

While Henry Kissinger was trying to sell the cease-fire to Thieu, Habib left his post in Seoul for a rush trip to Saigon. A spokesman denies that bribery played any part in these Saigon negotiations. He would say only that Habib flew to Saigon to discuss "Vietnamese matters" with Kissinger. Habib couldn't be reached for direct comment.