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THE SOVIET ROLE IN VIETNAM

President Johnson and Secretary Rusk have, in repeated statements, made it abundantly clear that we have no intention of abandoning our commitment to South Vietnam and that, while we desire peace, we intend to insist on a peace which will effectively protect the freedom and independence of South Vietnam.

The Administration has adhered to this position with remarkable steadfastness in the face of the monumental lack of understanding on the part of our allies, the generally negative attitude of the U. N. majority, and the shrill clamor of our domestic minority of left-wingers and muddle-headed isolationists and appeasers. The firmness of the Administration resolve in the face of this international clamor was dramatically demonstrated by the announcement that we were resuming the bombing of the North and by the recent major offenses against the Viet Cong forces.

However, there are conflicting counsels within the Administration on certain aspects of the Vietnam war and these conflicting counsels sometimes find expressions in apparently conflicting policy. In particular it seems to me there is extreme contradiction between the firmness of our commitments to the defense of Vietnamese freedom and our insistence on ignoring or underplaying the Soviet role in the Vietnam war.

There is a growing accumulation of evidence that Moscow has no interest in encouraging or permitting an honorable settlement of the Vietnam war. The USSR has given and continues to give massive support to the Viet Cong through Hanoi, has refused to associate itself in any way with our peace offensive and has abused us in the most virulent terms for our efforts in Vietnam. Despite all this, there are men in high Administrative positions who persist in believing that Soviet statements and actions in Vietnam are a facade and that, deep down in their hearts, Kremlin leaders are as anxious as we are to see the Vietnam war settled on terms that would be acceptable to the West.

This is an exceedingly dangerous form of wishful thinking -- all the more dangerous because those who hold to this illusory estimate are frequently tempted to tailor the facts to conform with their starry-eyed theories about Soviet intentions in Vietnam. For example, not long ago, a State Department spokesman asserted that the bulk of military equipment supplied by the Soviet Union reaches Hanoi by rail and that the significance of Haiphong as a port of entry is rather small. This reply betrayed either an incredible ignorance of the limited capability of the rickety Chinese railway system or else it was an attempt to gloss over the significance of Haiphong, which thus far seems to be regarded as part of the "sanctuary zone."