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China Reported Stealing SAMs Going to Hanoi

LONDON (UPI)—Communist diplomatic sources reported today that Peking was stealing Soviet rockets en route to North Vietnam across the Red Chinese mainland.

The sources said the Chinese were using the rockets to bolster their own stepped-up ballistic missile program.

The rockets were described as SAM2's, Russia's most advanced surface-to-air missiles which Hanoi is using against American warplanes. The SAM2s are equipped with the latest electronic gear and guided by radar.

Rumors Confirmed

The sources confirmed recent rumors that Peking "grabbed several of these rockets" as they were passing by rail across the Communist mainland to Hanoi and seize their technological equipment for the development of their own rockets.

The confirmation came amid increasing indications that Red China has double-timed its own missile development program. Peking announced that one of its recent nuclear tests was carried out from a rocket in flight.

China watchers believe Peking may now have medium range ballistic missiles in operation within two or three years and intercontinental rockets by the early 1970s—an advance by several years on previous assessments.

Communist diplomats said the Chinese have been helped in their efforts by stealing Russian rocket equipment as they apparently did during the development of their atomic bomb.

The Russians have insisted they never gave the Chinese the know-how to produce an A-bomb. While admitting that they supplied Peking nuclear reactors, the Russians have insisted that this was merely to help the Chinese develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Chinese-Soviet nuclear cooperation ended in 1958 when the two countries clashed over Russia's refusal to implement an agreement to supply Peking with a "sample" atom bomb.

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The Russians sent nuclear physicists in the early 1950s to China, and the Chinese were invited to Russia to study nuclear development projects.

Passage Delayed

Developments in Chinese rocketry are ostensibly worrying Moscow, especially in the light of mounting Sino-Soviet hostility which is expected to grow in intensity if Mao Tse-tung emerges as the victor in the current power struggle in China.

The Chinese are being accused by Communist quarters of having actively "sabotaged" some of the Soviet arms convoys as they were passing through Chinese territory to North Vietnam.

Some time ago the Chinese were reported to have changed labels and markings on Soviet and East European arms for North Vietnam in transit, so as to make them appear to be of Chinese origin.

Later, they delayed the passage by all sorts of bureaucratic measures.

Subsequently they demanded payment in hard currency by Russia for the transport of arms through their territory.