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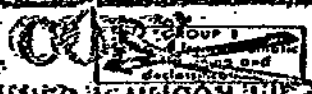
INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECENT JET FIGHTER  
CLASHES OVER NORTH VIETNAM

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE  
Office of Current Intelligence

Approved for Release  
Date 20 February 1981

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
26 April 1966

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Implications of the Recent Jet  
Fighter Clashes Over North Vietnam

Summary

Hanoi's decision to commit some of its MIGs to more aggressive action against US fighters operating in the northern DRV is probably indicative in part of growing DRV concern over the impact of the stepped-up US airstrikes in the Hanoi-Haiphong heartland. It also reflects the mounting, although still quite limited, capability of the North Vietnamese air force. The intensity of the recent North Vietnamese fighter reactions, in fact, suggests that Hanoi's military leaders feel that their fighter defenses are now sufficiently developed and expanded to risk US retaliatory strikes against DRV airfields. It is likely that more clashes will follow, particularly in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

Increased US Pressure

1. US airstrikes began hitting targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area at an increased rate during the first week in April. It was at this time that the North Vietnamese apparently decided to commit their MIGs against the attacking aircraft. On 14 April, Hanoi deployed a small complement of MIG 15/17s and MIG 21s to Kien An airfield near Haiphong. This was quickly followed by the scrambling of MIGs against US aircraft on 17 April. Since that time DRV fighter reactions have occurred almost daily. The more aggressive posture of the North Vietnamese fighter force is in marked contrast to its previous tactic of avoiding US fighter aircraft and attempting instead to pick off rescue,

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# AIRFIELDS IN THE HANOI AREA



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bomb laden or crippled aircraft, and unprotected reconnaissance flights.

2. So far, five air engagements have occurred, resulting in the downing of three MIGs and possibly one US fighter. Three of these encounters occurred on 23 April, and the last two on 25 April. In the first incident on 23 April, MIG 17s attacked a flight of four US aircraft equipped with air-to-air missiles.

[redacted] in a 5 to 10-minute dog fight two MIGs were downed by US missiles. The US pilots reported that the MIG pilots were well trained and very aggressive.

3. [redacted]

4. In the second encounter on 23 April, two MIG-21s reacting to [redacted] aircraft northeast of Hanoi were engaged by two US F-4 Phantoms flying cover. The MIGs [redacted] only broke off after four US air-to-air missiles were launched.

5. The third encounter on the same day developed when three MIG-17s attacked a group of four F-105 Thunderchiefs. Two of the MIGs singled out one F-105 and gave chase for approximately three minutes. The F-105 took evasive action when fired upon and was not damaged. The other three F-105s did not succeed in engaging the MIGs.

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6. In the first of the most recent encounters, on 25 April, two MIG-21s tangled with two F-4C Phantoms which were flying cover for a reconnaissance mission about 150 miles northwest of Hanoi. The Phantoms turned to engage the MIGs and gave chase. No losses on either side have been reported as a result of this engagement. In the second incident two MIG-21s

were engaged by F-4C Phantom jets. Once again there were no losses reported on either side.

#### Developments Prior to the Air Battles

7. Over the last few months, the North Vietnamese air force has been steadily increasing its capabilities. It is probable that the air force authorities in the DRV have been under pressure to show some results in the way of successful air defense in view of the considerable assets and time which Hanoi has devoted to developing an air arm.

8. The development of the North Vietnamese fighter forces apparently was a carefully planned program drawn up jointly by the Soviets and North Vietnamese. Implementation of this program began shortly after Premier Kosygin's visit to Hanoi in February 1965. It appeared to be a two-pronged effort with an initial contingent of Soviet air instructors and MIGs sent in shortly after Kosygin's visit. At the same time the selection and dispatch of North Vietnamese to the Soviet Union for the technical training required to man, fly, and maintain modern jet fighters was probably accelerated. In addition, the North Vietnamese began an ambitious program to furnish suitable bases for an expanded MIG inventory.

9. Since late 1965 it has become apparent that many of the North Vietnamese pilots trained in the Soviet Union are returning with approximately one year's instruction in their various specialties. Concurrent with this influx of personnel we have noted an increase in military hardware. The initial shipment of some 24 older MIGs and eight jet light bombers, which was delivered in the spring of 1965, was supplemented in September 1965 by about 15 MIG-21s.

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The aircraft apparently awaited the arrival of Soviet-trained Vietnamese pilots before becoming operational:

10. Further shipments of aircraft began arriving in North Vietnam early this year. Photography of 3 March revealed the presence of more than fifty aircraft packing crates at Phuc Yen airfield. The size of these crates suggested that approximately 25 of them contained MIG-21 fuselages. The others are believed to have housed the wings for these aircraft plus five additional MIG-15s. There are presently some seventy jet fighters in North Vietnam's air force, not including the aircraft believed contained in the crates photographed on 3 March. Of these, 55 are the older MIG 15/17s and 15 are supersonic MIG-21s.

11. Little is known of the organization of the North Vietnamese air force and air defense commands, but it is estimated that upwards of 40,000 men are involved in this branch of the service. The normal Communist air unit is the regiment which is composed of about 30 fighters. The North Vietnamese probably have followed this organizational line in their own forces.

12. An extensive airfield improvement program got under way in North Vietnam in mid-1965 to provide additional jet bases. It is essential for the North Vietnamese to have several jet capable airfields if they have to launch a more aggressive program of combat activity. Dispersal of the aircraft to a number of fields will lessen their vulnerability to air strikes as well as give them quicker reaction time to enemy air attacks over a wider area of the country.

13. The North Vietnamese undertook the construction of aircraft revetments, runway extensions, taxi aprons and other related building on seven different fields in the Hanoi area. By September 1965 they were able to disperse a portion of their MIG forces to Kep airfield northeast of the capital. They also deployed some of their ground support elements

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such as radar facilities to Kep. A squadron of about ten MIGs has operated from this field since that time.

14. Another of the airfields--Kien An near Haiphong--was activated on 14 April when a number of MIGs flew there from Phuc Yen. At the same time a new radar facility was detected in the Haiphong area. This will probably provide early warning and ground control for the MIGs stationed in the area. Further deployments of MIGs from Phuc Yen can be expected in the near future. The other airfields in the Hanoi region are just about ready for conversion to jet facilities.

15. There is tenuous evidence that a few MIG-21s deployed to Kep airfield at about the same time that Kien An airfield was activated on 14 April. Prior to this the North Vietnamese MIG-21s only operated from Phuc Yen airfield. The deployment of a few to Kep and the presence of at least four at Kien An suggests that the new shipment of MIGs noted in the 3 March photography is assembled and being phased into operation. The North Vietnamese would be following traditional military practice by dispersing their fighter force as widely as possible in order to make it more difficult for an enemy to eliminate them all in one strike. It is probable that the North Vietnamese plan to disperse their MIG-21s in squadron sized units of about ten aircraft each to a number of different fields.

#### Prospects for Future Engagements

16. The recent boldness on the part of North Vietnamese jet pilots is undoubtedly the result of a policy decision by the Hanoi military leadership to risk the possibility of US retaliatory strikes against DRV airfields. They may feel that the availability of additional airfields capable of handling jets, plus the activation of even a limited number of high performance jet fighters, will provide enough of an edge to warrant the risk. They probably would have preferred to wait until all the airfields were activated and more supersonic jets

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were available, but the US strikes near the capital may have forced their hand.

17. The chances of a continuing series of jet fighter clashes are thus good for at least as long as US strike aircraft are hitting targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. A return to a more cautious policy on the part of the North Vietnamese jet fighters may result only if they sustain heavy losses without a reasonably comparable score against US planes. The North Vietnamese probably hope that they can spur public pressure in the US against a continuation of American air attacks in the north-eastern DRV heartland by increasing the number of US aircraft destroyed. They are probably willing to accept a rather high loss rate of their own planes for at least a short period of time if they can significantly increase US air losses.

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