356

~~TOP SECRET~~

SC 06654-66a
Orig

Mr Bromley Smith

THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS CODE WORD MATERIAL

WARNING

This document contains classified information affecting the national security of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, US Code, Title 18, Sections 793, 794, and 798. The law prohibits its transmission or the revelation of its contents in any manner to an unauthorized person, as well as its use in any manner prejudicial to the safety or interest of the United States or for the benefit of any foreign government to the detriment of the United States.

THIS DOCUMENT MUST BE KEPT IN COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE CHANNELS AT ALL TIMES

It is to be seen only by US personnel especially indoctrinated and authorized to receive COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE information; its security must be maintained in accordance with COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE REGULATIONS.

No action is to be taken on any COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE which may be contained herein, regardless of the advantages to be gained, unless such action is first approved by the Director of Central Intelligence.

~~TOP SECRET~~

356

26b

~~TOP SECRET~~

9 February 1966

SC No. 06654/66
Copy No. 12

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

NORTH VIETNAMESE AIR CAPABILITIES INCREASING

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
Office of Current Intelligence

~~THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS CODE WORD MATERIAL~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

SC No. 06654/66

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
9 February 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

North Vietnamese Air Capabilities Increasing

1. The North Vietnamese now have a small number of advanced supersonic jet fighters, possibly equipped with some type of air-to-air missile, and they have the advantage of operating from bases much nearer the area of probable conflict than do US aircraft. It is nevertheless unlikely that they can seriously challenge US air superiority over North Vietnam. The US air forces continue to have numerical superiority, better weapons systems and radar, and better trained pilots. Although North Vietnamese pilots have shown a certain degree of increased aggressiveness during the past two weeks, they will probably continue to exercise a considerable degree of caution in engaging US strike aircraft.

DRV Fighter Defenses

2. The North Vietnamese air force has gradually increased in strength since the first jet fighters were introduced in August 1964. Hanoi now appears to have approximately 120 jet fighters, eleven of which are MIG-21 Fishbeds. All of the MIG-21s may be equipped with air-to-air missiles.

3. The MIG-21 is the most significant addition to the North Vietnamese inventory. It is in a class with the best US fighters (F-4 Phantom and F-8 Crusader) now flying protection missions over North Vietnam. It nears or equals the speed, ceiling, combat radius, and attack capabilities of these fighters. The MIG-21 is more maneuverable than these US fighters at high altitudes, but its weapons

and supporting radar do not match their capabilities. North Vietnam does not now have enough MIG-21s to challenge US air superiority seriously; a considerable increase--on the order of 30-40--would be required to create a serious threat.

4. Of the 100 or so MIG-15/17 Fagots/Frescoes in the North Vietnamese air force, a limited number--probably 25-30--are thought to be the all-weather version. These fighters could also be equipped with air-to-air missiles.

5. The number of qualified North Vietnamese pilots is unknown, but [redacted] approximately 100-120 pilots in North Vietnam. Half of these, about 60, are thought to be combat qualified. These pilots have been trained in North Vietnam. There are definite indicators that other North Vietnamese pilots--those who fly the MIG-21s--were trained in the Soviet Union. At present, there are approximately 8 to 16 of these pilots in North Vietnam. How many others are now in training in the USSR is unknown, but it is probable that continuing flight instruction is being given by the Soviets. EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs (S)

6. There are nine DRV radar sites [redacted] deployed throughout North Vietnam. [redacted] EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs (S)

Evidence of Increased Capabilities

7. The North Vietnamese air force has displayed an increased aggressiveness since the resumption of US air strikes. On at least four occasions since 31 January North Vietnamese MIGs have been active against US strike forces. On two of these occasions, the aircraft involved had a definite hostile intent. One of the aircraft even ignored national boundaries and pursued its target some 50-60 miles into Laos.

8. [redacted] EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs (S)

[redacted] In earlier clashes, DRV ground fire had shot down some Communist aircraft.

EO 12958
3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
(S)

9. [redacted]

EO 12958
3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
(S)

10. This unusual aggressiveness, which probably reflects a new-found confidence derived from the introduction of advanced equipment and the increased proficiency of DRV pilots and ground personnel, will probably remain limited in scope. More determined attacks on small groups of three or four US fighters and reconnaissance aircraft and their fighter escorts, however, can be expected.

Problems in US Air Operations

11. US patrols over North Vietnam are presently hampered by the distances involved and the lack of an integrated tactical air control system. Fighters staging out of bases in Thailand are refueled prior to entry into North Vietnam, giving them approximately 40-60 minutes flying time over North Vietnam. Fighters from Da Nang and Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers are not refueled and have approximately 40-50 minutes of flying time over North Vietnam. This time is reduced when air engagements increase the fuel consumption. The DRV MIGs, on the other hand, have approximately one and one-half hours flying time over the DRV.

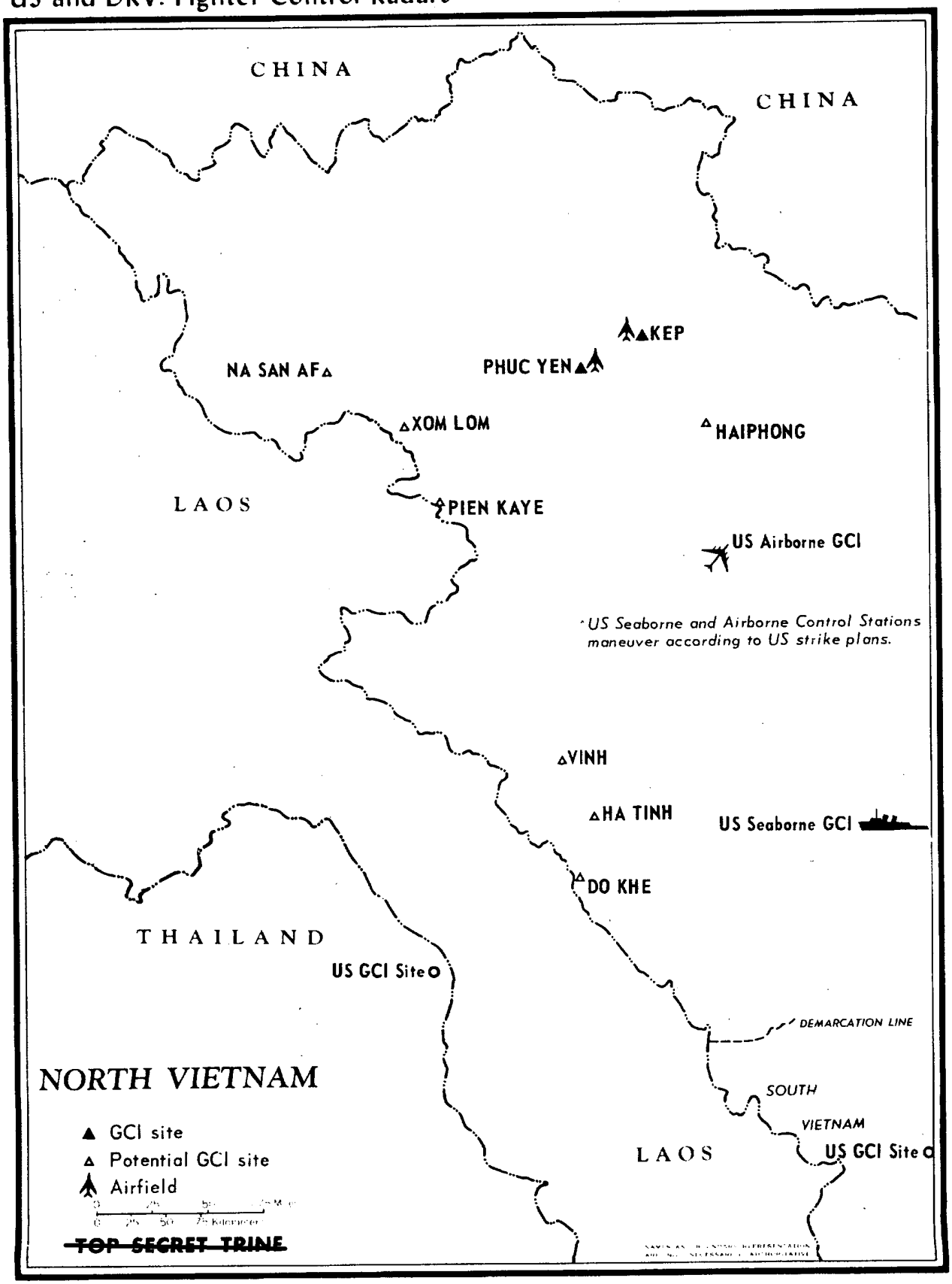
12. Control of US fighters is exercised from four locations: a GCI radar site at Da Nang air base, another GCI site along the Laos-Thai border, a seaborne radar aboard a US destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, and

an airborne platform flying at low altitudes over the Gulf. These radars have a range of approximately 90 miles. US fighters operating in the northwest DRV or areas north of Hanoi are in the fringe areas of radar control and must rely on their own airborne radar and airborne COMINT platforms for warning of MIGs aloft.

13. There is a new Southeast Asia Tactical Air Control System (SEATACS) on the way to completion which will create an integrated air control system effective over all of North Vietnam. This project was begun in October 1965.

14. Despite the difficulties, there is no doubt that the US will continue to control the air over North Vietnam for some time to come. In addition to the overwhelming numbers of aircraft that the US can put into the air, these fighters are equipped with superior air-to-air missiles and airborne radar than that which is estimated to be in North Vietnamese hands. Equally important, the average experience and training of US pilots is far superior to that of the North Vietnamese.

US and DRV: Fighter Control Radars



61039 2-66 CIA