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June 16, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant to the President for National  
Security Affairs

SUBJECT: PRC Allegations and Possible Airspace  
Intrusions

This memorandum is in response to the allegations that US aircraft intruded into PRC airspace during the period 9-10 June 1972 and that splinters hit the PRC merchant ship Hong Chi 150 (Hung Qu 150) in the vicinity of Hon La Island as a result of US combat action.

US operational commanders were directed to conduct a complete investigation of operations which could have generated the PRC complaint. Our findings are as follows:

A. 9 June 1972. Alleged Penetration of PRC Airspace over the Ning Ming and Tunghsing areas.

(1) There were no US Navy aircraft in the area of the alleged intrusion. A total of [redacted] Air Force aircraft (strike, escort, and reconnaissance) were operating southwest of the alleged PRC border violations.

(2) The strike and escort aircraft maintained their position visually and with [redacted]. Other support aircraft, including those involved in a MIG engagement were also under control of the USS LONG BEACH. The two RF-4C aircraft, escorted by F-4 aircraft, [redacted] but never approached closer than 3 nm to the border.

(3) We have no reason to believe US aircraft violated the PRC border. However, LONG BEACH did have two plots on an unidentified aircraft, ten minutes apart, in the Tunghsing area.

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PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
Date: 6/30/05

There were no known US aircraft (including drones) in the area at the time of these plots. Additionally, none of the aircraft identified above are operated at a speed of 192 knots which is the speed indicated by the time and distance factors resulting from the unidentified LONG BEACH radar fixes.

B. 9 June 1972. Allegation that US Bomb Splinters struck the PRC ship HONG CHI 150 (Hong Qu 150) in the vicinity of Hon La Island (2 1/2 nm off-shore).

(1) The USS STODDERT engaged two waterborne logistic craft (WBLCS) near the PRC merchant ship HONG CHI with the closest shell impacting 1400 yards from the merchant ship.

(2) US Navy aircraft also struck a WBLC and barges approximately 1 nm from the merchant ship. Bomb hits were spotted by the USS STODDERT and all impacted at least 1600 yards from the ship.

(3) Neither bombs, gun projectiles nor flares, (US or NVN) were observed to impact near the Hung Chi. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that splinters were thrown on the ship as alleged.

C. 10 June 1972. Allegations of intrusions of PRC airspace in the area of Ping Hsiang and the bombing of PRC structures in a small village.

(1) The US Air Force had no aircraft north of 21 degrees north four hours before or after the alleged incident.

(2) The US Navy did launch six A-7 aircraft for strikes along the northeast railroad and Route 1A near the border area in question. However:

(a) All aircraft navigational systems were operational with less than one-half mile error at the update point. The weather was clear in the target area, Lang Son was visible from 20 miles, and the northernmost target which was attacked was some 19 nm south of the area of the alleged incident.

(b) The ingress and egress of all aircraft was monitored by an E-2 airborne early warning aircraft, and while not tracing all aircraft continuously, the E-2 did monitor their progress. No border violations were observed.

(c) All indications are that the A-7 aircraft did in fact remain in NVN and no ordnance was dropped by US aircraft in the PRC.

A thorough review of the reports submitted by the Air Force and Navy commanders concerned, regarding the alleged intrusions of PRC airspace and bombings, does not reveal evidence to support such allegations. Major considerations evolving from evaluation are:

A. Adverse weather was not a factor.

B. Ingress and egress routes and target areas were verified visually by aircrews. Target operating areas were further verified, in part, by photostrike photography.

C. Aircraft navigation systems, control procedures exercised by LONG BEACH and the E-2 aircraft, and visual contact maintained between strike forces and escort aircraft all verify that the operations were conducted within NVN airspace and over international waters.

D. Only experienced aircrews are selected for these important missions, and the avoidance of border violations is stressed during aircrew briefings. These efforts are specifically directed towards prevention of PRC airspace incursions and strikes against unauthorized or misidentified targets.

The seriousness and sensitivity of these allegations and complaints are well recognized. Every effort has been and will continue to be made to avoid inadvertent intrusion into the PRC airspace and to insure that ordnance is only delivered upon authorized targets.

/s/ Melvin Laird