

Not in WP

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CIA thwarted assassination plots

NEW YORK (AP) — Plots to kill masses of people with bombs in New York City and to assassinate elected officials in the United States have been thwarted by CIA infiltration of terrorist groups, former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird says.

Writing in defense of the Central Intelligence Agency, Laird also credits American intelligence with saving the nation billions in defense costs and, since 1973, with keeping peace between Israel and Egypt.

Laird's article, "Let's Stop Undermining the CIA," was written for The May Reader's Digest, the magazine for which he is senior counsellor for national and international affairs.

Laird did not identify the specific targets of the thwarted assassinations.

He wrote: "On at least two occasions, the CIA has forestalled assassins bound for the United States with orders to kill elected public officials.

"It has also thwarted plans to kill prominent American Jews with letter bombs."

He said the attempted bombings in New York City coincided with a visit of former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir on March 4, 1973.

He said, "Police rushed to busy midtown intersections and hauled away two cars with enough Soviet-made explosives to kill everybody within a 100-yard radius. The terrorist explosives were timed to detonate at noon, when streets would be most crowded."

Laird said that again in 1973, just before Christmas, "the CIA learned that six small, handcarried Soviet SA-7 missiles — extremely accurate against low-flying aircraft — were being smuggled in Libyan diplomatic pouches to Black September terrorists in Europe. The terrorists planned to shoot down a 747 landing in Rome. However, acting on CIA intelligence, European govern-

ments disrupted the operation and spared the lives of hundreds of holiday travelers."

Laird maintained that disclosures of intelligence activities by congressional investigations are compromising and paralyzing the agency's ability to function.

"For instance," he writes, "disclosures that the United States has used submarines in Soviet territorial waters to monitor Russian weapons tests have greatly diminished the flow of this vital intelligence."

"During the past 25 years," he continued, "the Soviet Union has not developed a single major new weapon without our knowing it well in advance. Without such knowledge, we undoubtedly would have wasted untold billions preparing to counter threat which did not actually exist."

As for the Middle East situation since 1973, Laird says U.S. intelligence has kept Israel and Egypt continuously informed of each other's military status. "Given proof that neither is about to pounce on the other, the Arabs and Israelis have been willing at least to try to devise a formula for Middle East harmony. Our intelligence has bought the necessary time."