

Laird Tightens Hold on Intelligence

By Fred S. Hoffman
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Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird has acted to tighten control over military intelligence agencies, until now only loosely supervised from the top of the Pentagon.

Laird has directed Robert H. Froehlke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Administration, to oversee the operations of the Defense Intelligence Agency and the shadow National Security Agency.

A spokesman announced yesterday that Froehlke has been named a special assistant to Laird for intelligence, in addition to his other duties, and will prepare a report on his studies within 45 days.

Sources said the move was not prompted by either the Pueblo or EC-121 incidents, but had long been favored by some key officials of the past Democratic Administration.

"We need a focal point for supervision of intelligence below the Secretary of Defense," said one official of the Laird move. "The Secretary is just too busy with too many matters to give it the personal attention it should have."

So Froehlke, a friend of Laird, will act as his eyes and ears. Officials obviously feel both of the Defense Department's chief intelligence agencies should be watched over more carefully, both to avoid

duplication and to make sure they do not move into operations beyond their charters.

There are indications that some top officials feel the NSA is edging beyond its main assigned job of collecting information and into the business of evaluation. The agency is reported planning to buy big computers for that purpose.

Although the Navy has said that neither the spy ship Pueblo nor the EC-121 reconnaissance plane was on an NSA mission when they ran into grief off North Korea, the incidents in 1968 and this year heightened Congressional interest in U.S. intelligence operations and raised new questions about them.

Although the NSA and DIA

maintain some coordination, they now are in separate chains of command up to the Secretary of Defense.

Both maintain worldwide operations, the NSA, with more than 10,000 military and civilian staff members and DIA with more than 6000. Both are separate from the CIA, the Central Intelligence Agency.