

BOMBING OF NORTH CALLED DEFENSIVE

Rogers and Agnew Describe Raids as Protective—Deny Any Change in Policy

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WASHINGTON, May 3 — The Nixon Administration today described its large bombing raid against targets in North Vietnam as only a continuation of a long-standing policy of self-defense for American forces.

In separate and hastily arranged television interviews today, Vice President Agnew and Secretary of State William P. Rogers described this weekend's attack as a "protective reaction," to suppress enemy ground fire and destroy missile sites.

"It was a very large complex," Mr. Rogers said, "with SAM [missile] sites and other military installations — anti-aircraft installations — in the area."

Well-placed Administration sources, quoted in The New York Times today, disclosed that 128 fighter-bombers had struck supply dumps and other targets just north of the Vietnamese demilitarized zone and near the Laotian border on Friday or Saturday. They disclosed that the raid was considerably larger than any others since the halt of the full-scale bombing of North Vietnam in November, 1968.

Today official spokesmen for the Administration would still not confirm or deny the number of aircraft involved, or confirm that supply depots and staging areas were the prime targets of the raid, as The Times's sources reported.

One White House official acknowledged that the raid was an "upgraded reaction," compared with many others that the United States has con-

Continued on Page 7, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

ducted in the last year or so for the stated purpose of protecting the unarmed reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam.

Mr. Rogers said that an enemy build-up in recent weeks in the border area was so large that unusually heavy "suppressive fire" may have been needed. He said the build-up included heavy anti-aircraft batteries and surface-to-air missile placements.

Hanoi Charges Denied

Defense Department officials remarked that even if the anti-aircraft batteries were the prime targets, these were deployed so close to the supply depots that there could have been considerable damage beyond their immediate radius. They declined to report on the results of the raid, but denied North Vietnamese charges that heavy bombardment was continuing.

Secretary Rogers stressed that the raid did not represent any shift in policy. "It is not a new policy at all," he said. "We have before on previous occasions made these attacks when it was necessary to protect reconnaissance flights, part of the arrangement made with North Vietnam when we stopped the bombing."

Both Mr. Rogers and Vice President Agnew described the bombing in North Vietnam and the continuing military operations against the enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia as limited in time and space and said that the operations they did not represent an escalation of the Vietnam War.

Mr. Agnew was interviewed on the Columbia Broadcasting System radio and television program, "Face the Nation," and Secretary Rogers appeared on a special C.B.S. documentary on the Cambodian crisis. The White House is understood to have informed the network only yesterday that the two officials would be available.

O'Brien Challenges Statement

Lawrence F. O'Brien, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, took prompt issue with the Vice President's argument. In a statement issued shortly after Mr. Agnew's appearance, Mr. O'Brien said: "The air strikes into North Vietnam, combined with the invasion of Cambodia, means, in effect, that the American policy of disengagement has ended."

The Administration's action of the last week, Mr. O'Brien said, "signifies a major escalation of the war in Indochina."

Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and other influential Democrats have concurred in this critical judgment, despite the Administration's arguments to the contrary.

"There is no occupation of Cambodia envisaged or even contemplated in this operation," Mr. Agnew said. "Eight weeks was the outside limit that was discussed, as the time necessary to destroy these installations." He referred to the underground bunkers, field hospitals and munitions plants that the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces are reported to have long maintained along Cambodian and South Vietnamese border.

Secretary Rogers also cited the eight-week time limit. He said that he had "serious doubt" that the American public would support the operation if it went on any longer than that.

The Vice President confirmed that the full scope of the Cambodian operation might not yet be evident. "We have other troops on standby that can be sent in there because we don't intend to take forever to complete this operation, and we are going to send what force is necessary to do it."

He said that President Nixon was determined to approach the Cambodian sanctuaries from a position of "overwhelming strength, in order to keep the casualty rate down."