

LAIRD SAYS RAIDS CAN GO ON IF FOE KEEPS UP INVASION

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He Tells Senate Committee Any Part of North Vietnam Is Subject to Bombing

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DENIES HALT IN STRIKES

Secretary Is Not Ruling Out Possibility of Blockade or Mining of Haiphong Port

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WASHINGTON, April 18 —

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said today that as long as the North Vietnamese continued their invasion of the South, any area of North Vietnam was subject to bombing attack by the United States.

Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Secretary said he would "not rule out the possibility" that the United States might even blockade or mine the harbor of Haiphong unless the invasion was ended.

Yesterday, Secretary of State William P. Rogers told the committee that the Nixon Administration would continue to take "whatever military action is necessary" to halt the enemy drive.

Saigon Reports Denied

Before today's session, Mr. Laird emphatically denied reports from Saigon that President Nixon had ordered a suspension of the bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area to see whether there would be any political response from the North Vietnamese Government. The White House underscored by saying that Mr. Laird was "stating the authorized position of the United States Government."

In Saigon, however, official United States military sources, to whom the reports were attributed, continued to stand by them, the Associated Press reported.

Mr. Laird branded the Saigon reports as false in response to a reporter's question. He added: "The bombing continues south of the demilitarized zone, in the demilitarized zone and north of the demilitarized zone."

Hint of Further Steps

Later, during questioning in his four-and-one-half hour appearance before the Senate committee headed by Senator J. W. Fulbright, Mr. Laird suggested that the United States might take the additional step of attempting to seal off Haiphong, the principal port of North Vietnam.

He said he would "not rule out" the possibility that the United States might impose a naval quarantine on Haiphong to stop the entry of ships carrying military equipment, or alternatively mine the channel leading into the harbor.

As Secretary Rogers did yesterday, Mr. Laird declared that the bombing of North Vietnam was necessary to protect American troops and to permit the

Continued on Page 16, Column 5

Laird Says Raids Can Continue Until Enemy Calls Off Invasion

Continued From Page 1, Col. 8

troop withdrawals to continue. But at various points, the Defense Secretary clearly indicated that one purpose of the bombing was to emphasize the need for military restraint upon both North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

"We have been very restrained," he said, "but our restraint has been answered by an invasion" across the demilitarized zone in "flagrant, massive violation" of a 1968 understanding that led to the end of the bombing of North Vietnam. Such a violation, he said, "must be treated as a very serious matter" and "could not be dealt with lightly by our Government."

So long as the North Vietnamese violation continues, he said, it would be "the height of irresponsibility" for the United States to resume peace negotiations. Only when North Vietnam withdraws the forces that invaded across the demilitarized zone, he said, will there be "a viable opportunity" to resume negotiations.

"The level of conflict is being established by the invading forces," he said, "and the level of conflict can be changed by the invaders."

At another point, Mr. Laird suggested that one purpose of the bombing was to impress upon the Soviet Union the necessity of restraining North Vietnam in the use of Soviet-supplied military equipment.

Contending that the North Vietnamese invasion would have been impossible without the supply of Soviet equipment, Mr. Laird complained that the Soviet Union had imposed no restraints on how the equipment was to be used.

The United States, he said, has been "very careful" to provide South Vietnam only military equipment that would give it an "in-country capability" of defending its security. In contrast, he said, the Soviet Union has imposed "no restraints" on

the type of equipment provided North Vietnam, with the result that there are now "12 North Vietnamese divisions marauding all over the countryside in Southeast Asia."

Mr. Laird, under questioning by Senator Charles H. Percy, Republican of Illinois, said he could not fully explain the Soviet motivation in supporting the North Vietnamese offensive. But he suggested that an underlying reason might be a Soviet desire to continue the war and the American involvement.

As long as the United States continues allocating large resources to the war, he said, the Russians apparently believe they have an advantage in modernizing their own armed forces. He also speculated that the Russians see "Vietnamization" is working, and this concerns them.

But Mr. Laird and Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who testified today, said that the weekend B-52 raids against targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas were "effective and precise" in destroying petroleum and transportation centers being used to support the invasion.

The targets, they said, were "carefully selected" petroleum depots, truck parks and other supply centers directly related to the invasion. In the case of Hanoi, they said, the closest targets were about six miles from the center of the city.

The committee members were somewhat more critical in their questioning of Mr. Laird than they were of Mr. Rogers yesterday.

Asked by Senator J. W. Fulbright, the committee chairman, what authority the President relied upon in ordering the renewed bombing of North Vietnam, Mr. Laird replied:

"It's the protection of American personnel. You don't need any more authority than that. It's sufficient, it's complete, and total. There should be no question about it."