

Laird Acts to Tighten Rule Over Military Intelligence

Orders Wide Reorganization by Feb. 1 in Step to Guard Constitutional Rights —Calls Correction of Abuses Urgent

By WILLIAM BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 23—Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird issued a directive today aimed at strengthening his direct control over military intelligence activities, particularly investigations within the United States.

In a policy memorandum made public here, he said that he wanted to make sure that military intelligence and counterintelligence activities were "completely consistent with constitutional rights, all other legal provisions and national security needs."

While Mr. Laird's memo did not specifically mention recent assertions about alleged investigations by Army intelligence agents of groups and individuals engaged in antiwar and other political activities, it did

say: "One matter of particular concern to me is the one related to" certain activities by military investigators.

"Actions have been taken to eliminate some past abuses incident to such activities," the memo said, "but further corrective actions are necessary as a matter of urgent priority."

Controversy over military intelligence activity within the United States, which flared up earlier this year, was revived recently when Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, charged that the Army had spied on Senator Adlai E. Stevenson 3d, former Gov. Otto Kerner and Representative Abner J. Mikva, all of Illinois.

The charge was denied by

Continued on Page 22, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, but Representative David B. Obey, Democrat of Wisconsin, called for a Congressional investigation.

Senator Ervin's charge was based on allegations made by John O'Brien, a former Army intelligence agent, who said that he and other Army agents had spied on 800 Illinois civilians, including the three Illinois Democratic politicians named by Senator Ervin.

Similar allegations, involving surveillance of student political groups on college campuses and other civilian political activity, were made this year by other former Army intelligence officers.

Mr. Laird directed a sweeping review and reorganization of the Defense Department's intelligence organization, to take place by Feb. 1.

The director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieut. Gen. Donald V. Bennett, will henceforth report directly to him, Mr. Laird said, rather than to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The review, he said, will be conducted by Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert F. Froehlke, General Bennett and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Daniel Z. Henkin, the Defense Department spokesman, said that it was his under-

standing that all domestic intelligence gathering by the military would be placed "under the direct policy control" of Mr. Laird, Mr. Froehlke and General Bennett. At present he said, such activity is under the control of the service Secretaries and their military intelligence branches.

Mr. Henkin said that the army's correction of abuse last June resulted in the destruction of all computer data banks containing investigative reports on individuals.

Other sources said that such data banks had been discovered at Fort Holabird, Md., Fort Monroe, Va., and Fort Hood, Tex. All stemmed from investigations attempting to predict possible civil disturbances in cities to which the Army might have to send troops.

No New Organizations

Since 1968, the Army has been under orders to be prepared to send as many as 10,000 troops simultaneously to each of 25 cities in the event of major riots.

Mr. Henkin said that he was unable to identify other abuses that Mr. Laird said must be corrected as a matter of "urgent priority."

He said that today's directive in no way suggested that the abuses had stemmed from the fact that the D.I.A. had been reporting to the Joint Chiefs rather than to the Secretary of Defense.

But Mr. Laird, he said, wants to insure that civilian control

over all intelligence is centered in his office.

The D.I.A. will continue to support the intelligence requirements of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and no separate intelligence organizations will be established, Mr. Laird said.

The agency currently has over-all responsibility over all military intelligence activities, including Air Force space satellites, photo interpreting units and military attaches in American embassies overseas.

Mr. Laird's memo said that General Bennett would review all instances in which operational control of intelligence units had been delegated either to individual services or to special commands, such as the military command in Vietnam.

A decision can then be made, on a case-by-case basis, on which activities shall remain under delegated operational control and which centralized under the director of D.I.A. and the Secretary of Defense.

At present, the services are directly responsible for the conduct of domestic investigations of persons requiring security clearances for work on secret projects, both military and civilian, and in cases where threats have been made to the security of military installations.

Presumably, a decision will have to be made on whether they will retain this authority.

REMEMBER THE NEEDIEST!