

NYTimes JAN 12 1973 Clements Won't Rule Out A-Bomb Use

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 11—William P. Clements Jr., nominated by President Nixon to be Deputy Secretary of Defense, said today he would not rule out the use of nuclear weapons over North Vietnam.

At a Senate hearing on his confirmation, the Dallas businessman was asked by Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, about a resumption of bombing if the peace negotiations in Paris should break down.

"Would you recommend the use of nuclear weapons over North Vietnam if no agreement is reached?" the Senator asked.

"I would have to study the answer to that," Mr. Clements answered. "I would not say I either would not or would."

Senator Hughes pressed the issue, asking him if he could eliminate the use of nuclear weapons "in your own mind."

"No sir," Mr. Clements replied. "I would not eliminate it. That is not to say I would be in favor of it either."

Later, Senator Hughes brought the subject up again for clarification, saying there was a distinction between use of conventional and nuclear weapons.

"Is there a line we should not cross?" the Senator asked.

'Sensitive Area'

Mr. Clements replied that it was "a very sensitive area."

"I don't want to get into that at this time. I recognize a difference. There's an awful difference," he said.

He said that the use of nuclear weapons depended on a time frame, on where, when and against who they were to be used.

"I can't answer that," he said.

Senator Hughes asked Mr. Clements, if the President should recommend nuclear bombing "would you support it?"

"I'd either support the President or if I didn't I'd be on my way back to Dallas."

In a discussion of the heavy December bombing raids over North Vietnamese cities, Mr. Clements startled the Senate Armed Services Committee, where he was testifying, by saying that Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had suggested the heavy bombing as "a contingency plan."

"Moorer was consulted," Mr. Clements said. "He did understand the whole operation."

"Admiral Moorer helped make the plan for the Dec. 18 bombing."

Dec. 18 was the date the heavy raids began following a breakdown of the peace talks in Paris.

Lapse Held Possible

Mr. Clements added, "In my new capacity, I may have said something I shouldn't have said, but I don't think so."

Senator John C. Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi who is the committee chairman, said, "It was inferred to this committee that the President acted unilaterally" in ordering the bombing.

The committee said it would resume the hearing on Mr. Clements tomorrow. They met in executive session after today's hearing to go over Mr. Clements's private financial affairs. He is the chairman of a Dallas construction company in the oil industry called SEDCO, Inc.

Earlier in the day, the committee finished questioning Elliott L. Richardson, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare who has been designated by the President as the new Secretary of Defense.

Aside from Senator Hughes's questioning, the committee members seemed ready to accept both nominations and recommend them for full Senate approval.

Mr. Clements and Mr. Richardson will be opposed on the floor by Senator Hughes who said he believed that all of President Nixon's appointments should be

held up to force an end to the war.

Senator Thomas J. McIntyre, Democrat of New Hampshire, issued a statement saying he "may have to vote against the confirmation" of Mr. Richardson unless there are clear signs that the "savage bombing of innocents" will not resume if the peace talks fail.

* See NYTimes 10 Jan 73, William Beecher, "U.S. Letting Pilots Pursue Foe North of 20th Parallel," this file.