

# U.S. AIDES BELIEVE THRUST MAY COST FOE YEAR OR MORE

Aims of Laos Drive Defined  
—Rogers and Laird Give  
Report to Legislators

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 9—Administration planners asserted privately today that the allied military incursion into Laos could buy a year or possibly two during which it would be extremely hard for North Vietnam to mount an effective offensive of any size in either South Vietnam or Cambodia.

That result could be achieved, they said, not only through the temporary destruction and disruption of enemy military supplies but also by establishing a precedent for South Vietnamese operations in southern Laos.

Senior Pentagon and State Department officials cited those aims as the specific objectives of the Laotian campaign. Its purpose was described in more general terms by the Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, and the Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird in Congressional appearances today. They said the goals were to improve South Vietnam's security and facilitate continued withdrawals of American troops.

[On the fighting front in Laos, bad weather virtually cut off United States air support, including helicopter supply runs. The South Vietnamese advance forces were said to be about six miles from the border, with advance units as far as 12 miles in. Page 15.]

## Laird Rebutts Critics

Mr. Laird, who had appeared before the armed services committee insisted to reporters on Capitol Hill that the Laos operation, rather than widening the war, as critics have asserted, had shortened it.

Senator George D. Aiken, Republican of Vermont, emerged from a briefing by Mr. Rogers for the Senate Foreign Relations committee to report that the drive should permit the United States to withdraw men more safely and probably at an earlier date than would have been possible otherwise. [Page 16.]

The Administration's analysis is based on the idea that the North Vietnamese cannot mount major, sustained offensives unless they are able to move thousands of tons of war materials along the 1,500 miles of dirt roads and tracks that make up the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Heavy American bombing throughout the war, the officials say, achieved the destruction of considerable supplies, but until the closing of Cambodian ports to North Vietnam last year the enemy was able to get enough rockets, grenades, mortars and other basic requirements to support extensive attacks. Now he is dependent on overland routes.

Ground assaults have always been regarded as more effective than bombing truck convoys, which usually move at night on heavily canopied jungle roads.

When ammunition bunkers, a

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# Drive Expected to Cost Enemy Time

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petroleum pipeline from North Vietnam, truck parts, communications facilities and roads between the South Vietnamese border and Tchepone, in Laos, are destroyed, the American officials say, Hanoi will be hard pressed to move up sufficient supplies to support big operations in Cambodia or the southern part of South Vietnam.

Even more important than the short-term tactical advantage for the allied forces, the analysts say, is the setting of a precedent — as we done in Cambodia last spring — under which South Vietnamese forces would be free to open ground attacks anywhere along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, particularly next year and thereafter, when the bulk of American forces have been withdrawn.

In private conversation, the Administration analysts tried to shy away from such expressions as "choking off" the trail. That would be attempted only if South Vietnam was prepared to put as many as three to five divisions along it and keep them there, they insisted. They said Saigon did not have troops to spare for such an extended operation, which would be in danger of being cut off over several months.

Raids of short duration, they continued, should so disrupt the North Vietnamese forces' ability to build up large stocks in forward positions that they would be reduced to small-scale guerrilla and terror attacks for some time.

With roughly six months of dry weather along the trail to accomplish major provisioning, the sources said, Hanoi should not be able to rebound until the spring of 1972 at the earliest, and additional attacks at that time could slow the enemy's timetable still further.

The analysis is based on the expectation that the current operation will be successful. If South Vietnamese troops are routed—despite heavy American air support—the picture will be quite different.

Indeed, the officials concede that a principal reason for staging the first operation at this time was to take advantage of the relatively large number of American bombers and helicopters still in Vietnam. Saigon is being provided with few fighter-bombers that could take over attacks on the trail when the Americans have pulled out.

The sources say the current campaign is aimed first at using armor to advance on Route 9 toward Tchepone to

secure a supply route into the operations area. The second phase will make heavy use of airborne troops in helicopter fleets to hit base areas north and south of Route 9.

## Reds Said to Buy Laotian Rice

The Washington Star.

VIENTIANE, Laos, Feb. 9 — Well-informed American sources here say that the South Vietnamese incursion into the Ho Chi Minh Trail area in the northern sector of the Laos panhandle will not cut the North Vietnamese off from food supplies.

Some 7,000 to 10,000 tons of rice are being sold to the Communists by Laotian officials farther south in the panhandle, according to the Americans — enough to supply a North Vietnamese division for a year.

The Americans also report what they describe as another case of corruption in the Laotian military. This one, it was said, led to the fall of Muong Soui, the neutralist position near the Plaine des Jarres, which was overrun by the Communists two weeks ago.

The sources say the neutralists at Vang Vieng base, 60 miles north of here, refused to reinforce Muong Soui because they had no winter clothing.