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U.S. WARNS HANOI ON DMZ BUILD-UP

Threatens Air Raids if Foe
Fires From Neutral Zone

By WILLIAM BEECHER

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WASHINGTON, March 25 —

The Defense Department issued a veiled warning today that air strikes against North Vietnamese artillery and rockets might have to be ordered if they fired from new positions within the Demilitarized Zone that straddles the border between the two Vietnams.

Jerry W. Friedheim, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, raised this prospect in guardedly discussing the movement of the North Vietnamese weapons into the zone within the last several weeks.

Other sources said that several battalions of long-range artillery and rockets, involving dozens of weapons, have been dug into positions at several points in the northern half of the six-mile-wide DMZ, most of them near the Laos border. From such forward locations, the sources said, the weapons could fire at numerous allied positions in the northwest corner of South Vietnam.

Mr. Friedheim recalled that on several occasions Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird has declared that it is his "responsibility to recommend whatever protective reaction steps prove most feasible to protect allied and U.S. forces."

Use of 'Protective Reaction'

The expression "protective reaction" is used by the Pentagon to describe, among other things, bombing of North Vietnamese anti-aircraft guns and missiles that have fired at American reconnaissance planes.

Mr. Friedheim declined to say whether the Administration regarded the new development as a violation of the so-called understanding under which heavy, regular American air raids on North Vietnam were halted on Nov. 1, 1968 in return for a pledge that the Demilitarized Zone would not be used by military forces. Hanoi has consistently denied any such understanding.

While there have been previous reports of placement of artillery, rockets, mortars and anti-aircraft guns in the DMZ since the bombing was halted, Pentagon officials said, this is considered by far the largest such deployment.

Mr. Friedheim said the weapons were moved in shortly before the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos on Feb. 8, and raised a number of lines of speculation on the purpose of the move.

Possible Reasons Offered

North Vietnam, he suggested, might have been planning an offensive in northern South Vietnam in the spring and might have wanted to move artillery forward to support its troops. Other sources said there were reports of a possible offensive, including troop and tank build-ups in the border area.

Or, Mr. Friedheim said, North Vietnam, aware of rumors of an invasion into Laos, might have wanted artillery in position to strike the support elements.

Or, finally, he continued, Hanoi, concerned about rumors of a possible incursion into North Vietnam, might have moved artillery into position to resist it along one possible invasion route.

Officials said they could not be sure whether the deployment was essentially tactical and would be of limited duration or whether Hanoi has now decided to move large numbers of weapons and possibly combat troops into the Demilitarized Zone for the long term.

Terms of Arrangement

At the time of the halt in the bombing, Johnson Administration officials explained that the raids were being called off on the understanding that Hanoi would negotiate substantively in Paris, would not use the DMZ for military purposes, would not fire rockets at the cities of South Vietnam, and would not fire at unarmed American reconnaissance planes.

While North Vietnam has violated all aspects of this so-called understanding, officials say now, Hanoi has shown considerable restraint in most instances, presumably in the belief that the Nixon Administration might otherwise resume full-scale bombing of the north.

South Vietnamese military men, whose troops have primary responsibility for maintaining defensive positions south of the Demilitarized Zone, have been urging the United States to attack the new weapons positions, informants said.