

An Admission on B-52s

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Undersecretary of State John N. Irwin II disclosed yesterday that the United States, in support of the Laotian government, has been attacking Communist targets in northern Laos with B-52 bombers.

The bombers, Irwin told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, are being used to

attack Communist "troop formations and supply lines."

They are under "very careful rules to seek to avoid bombing villages," he added.

Irwin's statement, in response to a question by Senator Clifford P. Case (Rep-N.J.), was the first official acknowledgement that B-52s were used in the war in northern Laos between the royalist government and North Vietnamese and the

pro-Communist Pathet Lao forces.

The disclosure provided still another public footnote to a long, secret war that the United States has conducted in northern Laos in support of the Laotian government.

Since 1964, American planes based in Thailand have been providing support to Laotian forces as well as a

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semi-autonomous army of Meo tribesmen financed by the Central Intelligence Agency.

SENATE

But until the issue was forced out in the open last year by a Senate foreign relations subcommittee headed by Senator Stuart Symington, the military activity in northern Laos was kept secret by the Johnson and Nixon administrations, which repeatedly gave the impression that American bombing was limited to the Ho Chi Minh trail in southern Laos.

William H. Sullivan, former ambassador to Laos and now deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, disclosed after the hearing that B-52s had been used in northern Laos for "about two years."

Symington said that during his subcommittee's 1969-70 investigation of the American involvement in Laos no mention had been made of the use of B-52s. Sullivan was among the State Department and Pentagon officials who testified before the subcommittee in order, 1969.

KENNEDY

Nor did Sullivan make any mention of the use of B-52s when he appeared ten days ago before a Senate judiciary subcommittee on refugees headed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy to rebut charges by Representative Paul N. McCloskey (Rep-Calif.) that American bombing in northern Laos is a major cause of refugees in Laos.

As he had before the Ken-

nedy subcommittee, Sullivan emphasized that Air Force bomber missions in northern Laos are controlled by the U.S. embassy in Laos to make sure there are "no inhabited villages in the area of strike."

Case expressed astonishment when both Irwin and Sullivan — as well as a platoon of advisers seated behind them — said they did not know whether the B-52 raids in northern Laos had increased in the past year. "I can't believe that none of you, including the undersecretary of state, do not know such information," the senator exploded.

The explanation offered by Sullivan was that the B-52s — designed for strategic bombing — are being "used as tactical aircraft," and therefore their missions are not kept separate from sorties by other aircraft, such as the F-4 fighter-bomber.

Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright, said, however, that the committee has information indicating a "substantially higher" B-52 bombing rate in northern Laos this year than last. His information was apparently based on a report from James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose, two committee staff members, who recently returned from an inspection trip to Laos.

In contrast to fighter-bombers, which normally conduct low-level B-52s bombing from a high altitude and carry out saturation bombing over a large area. A single B-52 can carry up to 30 tons

of 500 pound mid 750-pound bombs, in contrast to the six 750-pound bombs carried by the F-4 Phantom.

THAIS

On grounds of security, Irwin also declined to discuss reports that the United States under a recently concluded agreement, is providing most of the financial backing for a force of 4000 to 6000 Thais to fight in Laos.

Irwin appeared before the committee to present the administration's opposition to various "end the war" resolutions being considered by the committee, such as the amendment by Senate George S. McGovern of South Dakota and Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon that would require withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam by the end of this year.

In his prepared testimony, Irwin reiterated the administration position that a withdrawal deadline would undermine the American negotiating position in the Paris peace talks. He also challenged the argument of sponsors of the various resolutions that a withdrawal deadline could lead to North Vietnam's release of American prisoners of war.

Under cross-examination by Fulbright, who questioned why the administration is interested in "freedom" for South Vietnam but not apparently for the people of Greece, Irwin retreated from the phrase "free people" as an objective in South Vietnam to the concept of "self-determination."