

LAIRD WARNS BIG U.S. RAIDS IN NORTH MAY BE REPEATED TO PROTECT G.I.'S IN SOUTH



The New York Times/George Tames

Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense, pausing during his news conference yesterday to take a drink of water.

HANOI IS ACCUSED

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Secretary Says It Has Broken All Terms of '68 Understanding

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 27—Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird warned North Vietnam today that large-scale bombing raids like the ones mounted by American bombers over the weekend might be repeated occasionally.

Speaking at a news conference, Mr. Laird said the over-

Excerpts From Laird News
Conference, Page 8.

all purpose of the raids was to protect the American servicemen still in Vietnam. He also linked the raids to what he

termed violations by North Vietnamese of the 1968 understanding under which the United States halted daily air strikes on the North.

Other sources listed as factors leading to the decision the boldness of recent North Vietnamese air and artillery attacks on American aircraft in northern Laos, in which four planes were lost, together with a build-up of military supplies in North Vietnam destined for delivery to the war zone and an increase in the numbers of anti-aircraft artillery and missile sites along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Another Explanation Given

Still another senior Pentagon official explained the situation somewhat differently:

"Look, these so-called reinforced protective-reaction strikes amount to a limited, selective resumption of the bombing. They are limited in time and in geographic area. But, as the President and Mr. Laird have said repeatedly, we don't intend to allow Hanoi to take advantage of our troop drawdown to threaten a rout against those who remain. Every once in a while we feel we have to remind Hanoi of this."

Mr. Laird, at his Pentagon news conference, in which he gave a brief accounting of the year's activities, declined to specify either the number of planes involved or the targets hit.

Nor would he expand on his explanation that the raids were needed to protect the American ground forces, which are not involved in offensive operations. He said merely that the raids "have the primary emphasis of protecting the remaining forces of Americans that are in Vietnam today."

Pentagon officials have reported that North Vietnam is taking advantage of the dry season to move supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Unless the supplies are knocked out, the officials say, they could be

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LAIRD SAYS RAIDS MAY BE REPEATED

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used in attacks on American troops at their bases.

The Secretary also asserted that Hanoi might be planning an offensive in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam prior to President Nixon's visit to Peking late in February. He foresaw other military "high points" to embarrass the Administration just before the Presidential election in November.

The defense sources said the air strikes currently under way were substantially similar to large raids staged in May and November of 1970 and in March and September of this year. In each of those 200 to 500 aircraft were involved.

Two smaller missions, both last February, are counted in the same category of so-called reinforced protective-reaction strikes of limited duration even though the aircraft involved did not exceed 50.

Mr. Laird said the latest bombings were approved by Mr. Nixon after recommendations from field commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In discussing the allegations that Hanoi had violated the 1968 understanding, Mr. Laird said that all the terms had been violated, some quite recently. Replying to a question, he denied that the understanding was now "a dead letter."

At the time the understanding was reported, American officials said it included recognition by the North Vietnamese that the bombing would not resume as long as they did not shell the major cities of the South, use the demilitarized zone for military purposes or shoot at unarmed American reconnaissance planes and that substantive negotiations to end the war were to begin in Paris.

Mr. Laird sought to distinguish between the air strikes before the 1968 bombing halt and the current raids by noting that the current ones were of limited duration.

Asked whether future strikes

of longer duration might be carried out if Hanoi fails to "get the message," Mr. Laird said he would not discuss future operations and would not rule out such operations.

He insisted that, notwithstanding any intensified enemy operations, he expected the