

## Secretary Assails Hanoi

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WASHINGTON, April 7 — Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said today that heavy bombing of North Vietnam would continue until it withdrew the tanks and troops that crossed into South Vietnam last week and showed interest in "serious" peace talks.

"There has been a spectacular disregard" of the demilitarized zone between the two Vietnams, he said at a news conference at the Pentagon, and it is continuing "at this very minute."

The Nixon Administration, Mr. Laird said, is prepared to halt large-scale daily bombing, which was resumed Wednesday after a layoff of almost three and a half years, if its conditions of withdrawal and serious

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negotiations are met.

But he implied that even in that event the United States would feel free to resort again to heavy air strikes if North Vietnamese actions jeopardized the dwindling number of American troops or threatened South Vietnam's independence.

Mr. Laird also charged that the Soviet Union had been "a major contributor" to the continuing war by not restraining Hanoi from using Soviet-supplied heavy weapons outside North Vietnamese borders.

Mr. Laird declined to say how far north the American bombers would be allowed to strike. Other sources said it was reasonable to assume the "upper limit" of any raids would be the 20th Parallel, about 200 miles above the demilitarized zone and about 70 miles south of Hanoi.

### Withdrawals to Continue

There were indications that, for the time being, American pilots are not permitted to approach even that upper limit. Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said yesterday that United States planes had bombed military targets 40 to 50 miles north of the border and would probably range still farther north after concentrating on targets closest to the major battle in Quangtri Province.

Mr. Laird stressed that American ground troops would not be reintroduced into Vietnam and that the withdrawal of troops there under the command of Gen. Creighton W. Abrams would continue.

"Even as the enemy pursued his invasion this week, General Abrams protected his men, supported our allies and continued to send Americans home to meet President Nixon's new troop ceiling in South Vietnam of 69,000 by May 1," Mr. Laird said. "We will meet or beat that goal."

The secretary expressed confidence that the South Vietnamese "have the capability to handle the situation on the ground."

Asked whether the new policy on air warfare would allow heavy bombing of North Vietnam "any time in the future" if remaining American troops or the South Vietnamese allies are threatened, he responded:

"If the enemy decides to withdraw and go beyond the DMZ and shows a reasonableness and a willingness to seriously negotiate in Paris, the answer to your question, of course, would be no."

But, he continued "if the South Vietnamese are threatened through these violations, the answer to your question is yes."

The phrase "these violations" presumably referred to the movement of troops and weapons through the demilitarized zone and the firing of surface-to-air missiles and artillery from the North or the zone into South Vietnam.

As an indication of how important the air war is becoming in the minds of top Administration officials, the Pentagon announced a sudden decision to replace the current commander of the Seventh Air Force in Vietnam. Gen. John D. Lavelle, with Gen. John W. Vogt Jr., director of the staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

General Vogt, who received his fourth star yesterday and

was scheduled to leave this summer to become chief of staff of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, has been ordered instead to leave this weekend for Vietnam.

General Vogt is highly regarded by Administration officials. The official reason given for General Lavelle's replacement was "ill health."

Military sources said that the build-up of planes and warships for Vietnam that started in February was continuing.

The aircraft carrier Midway, at San Francisco, has been ordered to leave within the next few days for waters off Vietnam. She will either replace one of the four carriers there or temporarily become the fifth carrier conducting air strikes.

In a formal statement at the start of his news conference, Mr. Laird tried to contrast restraint by the United States in South Vietnam with belligerence by North Vietnam.

"The enemy has scornfully rejected the American people's patience, restraint and desire for peace," he said. "Our restraint has been answered by invasion. Our actions have been to withdraw our forces and to reduce tensions. The enemy has escalated the actions and has committed new forces."

### Says Hanoi 'Dared Us'

"He has dared us to abandon our allies, and we will not. He has challenged us to protect our men as they come home, and we will."

Mr. Laird said the Administration tried every avenue, public and private, to seek a negotiated settlement. He said also that it had warned that "we would take action if the enemy escalated the threat to our diminishing United States forces in Vietnam; the enemy has escalated and we are responding."

The Secretary charged that North Vietnam had "completely set aside the understandings of 1968" under which heavy, daily American bombings of the North were halted.

At the time of the halt Johnson Administration officials said it was done with the understanding that North Vietnam would not shell the cities of the south, violate the buffer zone or fire at unarmed reconnaissance planes, and would enter substantive peace talks in Paris with the United States and South Vietnam.

The officials noted that while North Vietnam had not formally agreed to any of the conditions, it was made to understand that if the violations

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**WARNS HANOI: Melvin R. Laird, Defense Secretary, at news session.**

occurred, the United States might resume the bombing.

North Vietnamese officials have consistently insisted that they did not agree to any conditions.