

# Memo Shows Bomb Policy Set by Laird

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A top secret 1969 memorandum shows that former Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird, acting on the recommendations of his top military adviser, ordered that all secret B-52 raids "against targets in Cambodia" be listed on flight orders as requests for strikes inside South Vietnam instead.

The memo, dated Nov. 20, 1969, was declassified by the Pentagon yesterday and released during another hearing by the Senate Armed Services Committee on clandestine U.S. air and ground activities in Laos and Cambodia in recent years.

Release of the document marks the closest the Pentagon has come thus far to explaining who authorized a controversial system of false reporting to mask—for all but a few people—a massive, White House-ordered bombing campaign in Cambodia covering 14 months in 1969 and 1970 and involving 3,630 B-52 sorties.

Laird, now President Nixon's top domestic counselor, stated at a July 26 press conference:

I have never ordered the falsification or misrepresentation of any information as far as any operation in the Department of Defense."

Aside from recommending that strike requests indicate raids inside South Vietnam rather than Cambodia, the Laird-approved memorandum from Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that other B52s could be used to actually bomb "cover targets in South Vietnam and other targets in Laos.

"Strikes on these latter targets will provide a resemblance to normal operations thereby providing a credible story for replies to press inquiries, the memo stated.

For a month now, since the scope of the Cambodian bombing campaign were first disclosed publicly through the testimony of a former Air

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Force major, the Senate committee has been trying to find out who ordered the false reporting system that covered up the attacks and that also led eventually to the supplying of false information to the Congress.

"This is the first indication of orders on paper to misrepresent... to enter false coordinates on the records, commented Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa).

"Well," said Deputy Secretary of Defense William P. Clements, "it's part of the cover-up. That's exactly right. I don't know of any other way to do this," he said.

Clements, who released the memo, appeared before the committee along with the current JCS chairman, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer.

Both top Defense officials reiterated the administration's contention that the cover-up plans were not "falsification" because the correct information on the targets was sent to commanders through a separate top secret channel.

The falsified information was included in the Pentagon's less-highly-classified computerized data files, which are used primarily for ordering bombs and fuel.

These were the files used to supply Congress information on the air war and thus to conceal from Congress and the public one of the largest and most controversial campaigns of the war.

During the course of the hearings, almost all the committee members, including Hughes, have said they can accept the military necessity for the bombing. The major irritant is the secrecy and deception.

The Pentagon insists there was no "intent to deceive" Congress and says the secrecy was needed because former Cambodian ruler Norodom Sihanouk had "acquiesced" in a long-standing Pentagon desire to bomb North Vietnamese base areas and troop sanctuaries just inside the Cambodian border.

Clements said that the 1969 memo was discovered in the Pentagon during the lunch break in yesterday's hearing. He said that the Pentagon, after a "diligent search," still has not found the original orders and plans for the secret Cambodian bombing operation which began in March, 1969.

The Wheeler memo actually covers a request for only one week of operations during November, 1969, some eight months after the first secret B-52 raids began in Cambodia.

But the language of the memo, according to Defense officials, illustrates how the system worked throughout the 14-month bombing campaign.

"All sorties," the memo says, "against targets in Cambodia will be programmed against pre-planned alternate targets in RVN (Republic of Vietnam) and strike request messages will so indicate. In

the event the operations should be cancelled," it says, "(bomb) release would be made on these alternate targets."

The Wheeler memo leaves open several questions. Still unknown is the origin

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the dual-reporting system. Unidentified as yet is the official who ordered post-flight reports to be falsified as to the location of the B-52 raids.

And Sen. Hughes yesterday continued to puzzle over why false reports about bombing in Western Cambodia were filed even after the U.S. was publicly announcing attacks in some areas of that country in mid-1970.

In defending its actions, the Pentagon also released yesterday a previously secret memorandum, dated Feb. 23, 1967, in which Defense officials of the Johnson Administration called for permission to use B-52s to bomb secretly in Laos.

Those raids were to be covered up against inquiries from the press, the memo says, by making "strikes against targets in nearby provinces" of South Vietnam "to serve as press cover."

The Laos memo was approved by the late John McNaughton, a former aide to ex-Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara. McNamara's office said the former Secretary would probably not be available to comment on the McNaughton memo.

Hughes and the acting committee chairman, Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) praised the Pentagon's action in releasing the Wheeler memo, which bore the markings: "top secret-sensitive-absolutely for eyes of addressee only."

Symington said that Clements "had gone a long way to clear up this problem" by finding the order and making it public.

The hearings yesterday also produced some heated moments, with Moorer accusing the press of not understanding the role of the Joint Chiefs and of poorly reporting the statements of Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim about who was responsible for sending inaccurate information to Congress.

At one point, Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) called the whole investigation "a lot of hullabaloo" and advised his colleagues "to get the Secretary of Defense up here to find out who gave these orders, and not try to embarrass these men in uniform."

The hearings also produced some evidence that Nixon administration guidelines given to Congress recently concerning the current bombing in Cambodia may not have been transmitted to the Pentagon.

Symington, noting the recent step-up in the level of U.S. air attacks, asked Clements and Moorer if they were aware of the White House assurances to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that no escalation of the bombing would be undertaken "unless provoked."