

# Laird Denies Authorizing Falsified Reports on Raids

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CHICAGO, Aug. 10—Former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said today that he had authorized "a separate reporting procedure" for the Nixon Administration's secret B-52 bombing raids in Cambodia in 1969 but insisted he had not sanctioned "the falsification of any Air Force, Navy or Defense Department records."

At a news conference here, Mr. Laird was asked about a highly classified Pentagon memorandum made public in Washington yesterday that discussed a method of hiding from the press clandestine bombing operations in Cambodia in 1969 and 1970.

Mr. Laird, now the President's counselor for domestic affairs, said several times at the news briefing that it was 1969 when he last saw the memorandum, initialed in his own handwriting and dated Nov. 20, 1969. He rebuffed attempts to have parts of it read to him from the morning newspapers.

The "eyes only" memorandum, released at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the falsification of reports, was written by Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, who was then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and is now retired.

It provided for a 41-plane force of B-52's to strike targets in Cambodia while other B-52's attacked normally assigned targets in South Vietnam and Laos.

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

The procedure outlined in the memorandum called for the Cambodian raids to be officially recorded in the military's classified data system as having

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taken place over South Vietnam. "I confirm completely that I recommended the strikes," Mr. Laird said of the Cambodian sorties. He added that he was convinced it was necessary to attack the "sanctuaries" of Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers in order to reduce American casualties.

The operations were conducted in secret more for diplomatic than military reasons, he said, because the Cambodian Government had told the State Department it would have to condemn them if they were made public but would support the raids if they "remained out of public knowledge."

"The press was told of the targeting in South Vietnam," Mr. Laird said, "but the secret strikes they were not told of."

### He Cites 'Sensitivity'

Because of what he termed "diplomatic sensitivity" and "not because of military significance," he said, "a separate channel of reporting was established for these particular attacks."

"I did approve the separate reporting procedure on the Cambodian strikes," he continued, but "I did not approve at any time of the falsification of any Air Force, Navy or Defense Department records."

As to any "falsification of reports," Mr. Laird said, "I cannot justify that, I did not order that. The only thing I ordered was a separate reporting procedure."

He was not, he said, directly involved in the mechanics of feeding military information into the Pentagon's data computers.

Mr. Laird was sketchy on how the "separate reporting procedure" operated, saying that it functioned "directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to me, and then to the President of the United States."



United Press International

Melvin R. Laird at his news session yesterday.

Asked whether the Nov. 29, 1969, memorandum had been signed or seen by either the President or by Henry A. Kissinger, Mr. Nixon's adviser on

national security, Mr. Laird did not reply directly.

What he did say was: "Well, I have not seen the memorandum since 1969. I can assure you that the matter was approved but I did not approve the strikes without total and complete discussion at the highest level of Government."

Sources at the White House said that when the secret Cambodian strikes were initiated in March, 1969, the White House was directly involved in approving them but that by November, when the memorandum is dated, "it became routinized."

Sources close to Mr. Kissinger said that "this was an internal defense document," that it involved a "routine renewal of authority" and that Mr. Kissinger could not recall having seen it.

Asked whether his credibility concerning his repeated assertions that he did not personally authorize any falsified reporting had been strained in light of his initials on the memorandum, Mr. Laird said that in news conferences dating to 1969 he had discussed the use of air power in Cambodia "when I was asked about it."

Did he discern a difference between "secrecy" and "lying," he was asked. "Yes, I think there certainly is," he replied, his tone getting sharper. "I would be glad to talk about my record in winding down the war," he said.

What did the American peo-

ple think about being deliberately misled in order to placate Cambodian Government officials, he was asked.

"The American people were pleased we were able to reduce our casualties," he said.

Mr. Laird is in Chicago to address the National Conference of State Legislators. In his remarks prepared for the ad-

dress he said: "You state legislators are not handwringers and wailers. You are doers in the service of your fellow citizens."

"Some in America talk about bankruptcy in the American way of life," he said. "These are the hand-wringers and wailers, the prophets of doom and gloom."