

U.S. Conditions

For Bomb Halt

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Washington

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday that heavy United States air and naval bombardment of North Vietnam will go on until Hanoi "withdraws" its invading forces back across the demilitarized zone and shows "a willingness to seriously negotiate" a peaceful settlement to the war.

Laird did not say if a withdrawal of the enemy troops and heavy arms that have crossed the DMZ into South Vietnam in the past week would signal that Hanoi was ready to negotiate seriously, but his remarks strongly implied that the United States would not return to the Paris peace talks at least until such a withdrawal takes place.

Using the toughest language to come from the Nixon administration thus far on the military showdown in Vietnam, Laird condemned not only the North Vietnamese but was sharply critical of the Soviet role as Hanoi's chief arms supplier.

"The Soviet Union, in my opinion," Laird said, "is a major contributor to the continuing conflict . . . in Southeast Asia; . . . 80 per cent of the equipment being used in this particular conflict continues to be supplied . . . by the Soviet Union."

The Russians, he said,
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have "placed no restraints upon the use of this equipment outside of North Vietnam," and now 12 of Hanoi's 14 regular army divisions are "operating outside their country, marauding through Southeast Asia."

Laird has hit this theme before, but never so sharply, and did it yesterday when President Nixon's visit to Moscow was only about six weeks away.

Laird has said in previous interviews that he is hopeful that negotiations on mutual cutbacks on arms shipments into Vietnam can be held during the Moscow summit.

'VIOLATION'

At a Pentagon press conference yesterday, the defense chief said the "invasion" across the DMZ was a "flagrant violation" not only of the 1954 accords on Vietnam but the "understand-

ings" which led to the U.S. bombing halt in November, 1968.

But Laird stopped short of saying that the United States has now completely abandoned any policy of restraint in use of air power over the North.

"If the enemy decides to withdraw and go beyond the DMZ and shows a willingness to seriously negotiate in Paris," then, he indicated, the current bombing attacks would end.

"The enemy," however, "has shown no willingness to seriously negotiate in Paris. It has shown no movement back across the DMZ, and until those conditions are met . . . we will continue to use the necessary power in order to protect our forces as we withdraw them from Southeast Asia."

Laird said the United States is "augmenting our naval and air power," a ref-

erence to more squadrons of tactical fighter-bombers and the probable addition of another aircraft carrier to the U.S. armada already carrying out massive raids in the battle area.

In a formal statement before his press conference, Laird drew on Hanoi's action in no uncertain terms to support U.S. policy.

"The enemy," he said, "has scornfully rejected the American people's patience, restraint and desire for peace. Our patience has been met with propaganda and with provocation. Our restraint — in the form of troop withdrawals — has been answered by invasion. The enemy has escalated the actions and has committed new forces. 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."