

U. S. Prepared to Interdict North Vietnam Bombing; Moscow Protests Aides

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HANOI ATTACKED

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Aides Say Nixon Must Authorize Strikes on Sensitive Areas

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WASHINGTON, April 16 — Administration officials declared today that the United States was prepared to bomb military targets almost anywhere in North Vietnam.

The statement followed weekend air raids on Haiphong and Hanoi by waves of fighter-bombers and eight-engine B-52 bombers. The attacks were the first against those cities since the end of March, 1968, and marked the first time that B-52's had been used against Haiphong or Hanoi.

In a terse statement today, the United States Command in Saigon said the planes struck fuel dumps, warehouses, truck parks, "and other activities which are supporting the invasion of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese forces."

[In Saigon, the United States Command announced Monday that Hanoi as well as Haiphong had been bombed, and that two American warplanes had been shot down. Military authorities said the raids "on the outskirts of Hanoi" had heavily damaged North Vietnamese petroleum storage areas.]

Sensitive Areas Cited

In discussing the raids, United States officials in Washington emphasized that President Nixon must personally authorize future raids in areas that are considered politically sensitive.

In this regard, they said that no consideration was being given "at this time" to hitting targets near North Vietnam's border with China and that the attacks made on Haiphong by B-52's and fighter-bombers did not involve the docks or harbor.

This statement followed a report by the Hanoi radio that a Soviet freighter in the harbor had been damaged and one of the ship's officers injured when bomb fragments and 20-mm. shells from American planes struck the vessel.

Spokesmen for the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon declined to offer a rationale for the raids into the heartland of North Vietnam.

But senior military and diplomatic sources said that the rapidly expanding air campaign against the North sought, among other things, the following objectives:

¶To disrupt the flow of war supplies and reinforcements toward North Vietnamese units pressing offensives throughout South Vietnam.

¶To warn Hanoi that if it planned to conduct weeks or even months of heavy fighting in the South, it would face mounting raids in the North.

¶To persuade the Soviet Union to use its influence— partic-

Continued on Page 10, Column 6

ularly in regard to future shipments of heavy weapons and ammunition—on North Vietnam to scale down or terminate soon its offensive operations in the south.

A ranking Defense Department official, asked whether repeated strikes were contemplated in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, said:

"We'll play it day by day. It depends on what North Vietnam does. There will be recommendations from our commanders in the field and various considerations here. But decisions will be made by the President."

He said, however, that the bulk of American air strikes would continue to be focused on enemy concentrations in South Vietnam.

In addition, he said, a large portion of the air campaign will continue hitting supply movements in the southern part of North Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh complex of trails in Laos. Disruption of Hanoi's resupply effort in those areas, he continued, will have a more immediate impact on the course of battle than raids deep in the North.

Earlier in the war, some military experts argued that the best way to intercept combat material was to mine Haiphong harbor—through which most heavy weapons and petroleum

arrive—and to strike supplies concentrated in storage yards, warehouses and fuel dumps in the areas of Hanoi and Haiphong.

Blockade Ruled Out

The mining or blockading of Haiphong harbor, knowledgeable officials now say, has been ruled out for fear of upsetting President Nixon's visit to Moscow late next month.

Because of the stockpiles of enemy supplies that have already entered South Vietnam, some military men said today, raids in the far north now will not affect the course of the battle for some time.

"There's a heavy dose of diplomacy involved in the Hanoi-Haiphong strikes," one Pentagon official said.

White House, State Department and Pentagon officials report that President Nixon was "extremely angered" by the unexpected movement of large numbers of tanks, self-propelled artillery and troops through the demilitarized zone into South Vietnam two weeks ago.

They said that Mr. Nixon felt that such a major effort would not have been attempted without at least tacit advance support from the Soviet Union.

Raids Originally Barred

Despite the North Vietnamese build-up, the White House originally ruled out strikes in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas, hoping for some sign of restraint from North Vietnam, they said. But supplies continued to move across the demilitarized zone, attacks were enlarged throughout South Vietnam, and the North Vietnamese 325-C Division was reported starting south from the Hanoi area toward the demilitarized zone. It is now reported below Vinh, about 150 miles south of Hanoi.

Concern grew, the officials said, that although the onset of the monsoons would force Hanoi to taper off its attacks north of Saigon and in the Central Highlands next month, the North Vietnamese were planning a second armor-supported push in Quangtri province.

When all signs indicated that Hanoi was determined to continue its offensive for weeks or months—despite public warnings from Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that American bombings of the North would go on as long as the offensive was pursued—the President decided to "send another signal" to North Vietnam, the officials said.

The decision to order the raids on Haiphong and Hanoi came sometime Friday night or yesterday morning when the President was in Ottawa, well-placed sources said. (14 APR)

While major decisions on the target areas are made by the President, the sources said, the planes carrying out the missions are under direct command of Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of American forces in Vietnam, and Gen. John W. Vogt Jr., who was dispatched from Washington a week ago to take charge of the Seventh Air Force in Saigon.