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Nixon Administration Aides Insist Nuclear Weapons Will Not Be Used in Vietnam

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 12 — The Nixon Administration moved quickly today to reaffirm that the United States had rejected the use of nuclear weapons in the Vietnam war. The White House, the Defense Department and the State Department all issued statements reasserting the "No nuclear" policy to head off both foreign and domestic concern that might have been aroused by testimony yesterday by William P. Clements Jr., President Nixon's nominee to be deputy secretary of Defense. Appearing before the Senate Armed Services committee, Mr. Clements, a Dallas businessman, said in answer to questions that he would not rule out the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

Questioned by Hughes

Asked by Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, whether he would recommend the use of nuclear weapons over North Vietnam if no agreement to end the war was reached in Paris, Mr. Clements answered:

"I would have to study the answer to that. I would not say I either would not or would."

Further questioning elicited the same kind of noncommittal answer.

His ambiguous replies were

published in the morning newspapers today and given wide publicity in Europe. Among the first to respond was the West German Red Cross, which expressed deep concern.

In Washington, Jerry Gordon, national coordinator of the National Peace Action Coalition, an antiwar group, said that Mr. Clements' testimony "shows the kind of maniacal thinking that prevails in the White House" and continued: "The position of the President's appointee naturally reflects the position of the man who will be inaugurated on Jan. 20."

Demonstrations Urged

The coalition is urging demonstrations against Mr. Nixon on inauguration day.

But the Nixon Administration firmly denied any change in the policy against the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

The White House Press Secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said: "The President has made clear that nuclear weapons were not one of the contingent elements he would use in relations to Vietnam. He has said that repeatedly."

The President's views on the subject were made public on April 17 by Secretary of State William P. Rogers, testifying on the decision to resume the bombing of North Vietnam after the spring offensive against South Vietnam. He told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

"We are not going to reintroduce American ground combat troops to South Viet-

nam and we are not going to use nuclear weapons in South Vietnam or North Vietnam."

The State Department spokesman, Charles W. Bray 3d, said that Mr. Rogers' statement

At the Pentagon spokesman, The Pentagon spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, at first avoided a direct answer to questions about Mr. Clements' statement, but then an aide handed him a note from Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, which he read: "Secretary Laird recalls for you that he has said before that he would not recommend the use of nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia."

Apparently, Mr. Laird had been listening in on the briefing.

Later, the Pentagon issued a memorandum quoting Mr. Clements as saying he was "in complete agreement" with Mr. Rogers' statement of April 17.

Sharp Reaction in Europe

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PARIS, Jan. 12—White House efforts to take the edge off the reaction to Mr. Clements' statement with disclaimers of any such intention to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam did not catch up with the criticism the statement provoked in Europe.

The head of the West German Red Cross, Walter Bargatzky, held a news conference protesting the statement, in which he said:

"Even if the U. S. is not seri-

ous when it refers to the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam, it is nonetheless to be feared that this statement will later be viewed as moral justification for such acts."

Here in Paris, the newspaper Le Monde called for a public declaration of Western governments refusing "to follow the U. S. any longer on the path of crime and madness" unless the "White House quickly repudiates Clements' implied threat."

Hanoi's delegation here issued a statement denouncing "the war hysteria of belligerent American Government circles" and calling for "action from world opinion to halt their criminal hands."

Referring specifically to Mr. Clements' remark about not ruling out nuclear weapons, the North Vietnamese statement said, "This threat is a cynical provocation, not only against the Vietnamese people but also against large sections of the American people and the whole of humanity."

Headline in Saigon

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 12—The semiofficial newspaper Tin Song ran a banner headline today saying "United States Would Dare to Use Atomic Bomb If Paris Talks Break Down." *

The headline was over an Associated Press dispatch from Washington quoting William P. Clements Jr., President Nixon's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense, as saying he could not rule out the use of nuclear weapons in North Vietnam.

Asked about the Pentagon report today, Maj. Jere K. Forbus, a spokesman for the United States military command, said: "The Department of Defense has a policy of not addressing questions about the location or deployment of nuclear weapons."

Tin Song was the only Vietnamese-language paper to use the report today.

* Nixon news conference, 17 Feb 71.

* See also
Wx Post
13 Jan 73,
Michael
Getler,
filed POWs.