

Laird, Rogers Testify

Raid Publicity Defended

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Disclosure of the commando-type attempt to free U. S. prisoners in North Vietnam was required to preserve the Defense Department's "credibility," Secretary Melvin R. Laird testified yesterday.

"We are being accused of something we had not done," Laird told the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "We are accused of sending wave upon wave" of attacking planes against the Hanoi-Haiphong area, he said.

"I think it would have cre-

ated a tremendous problem in the United States" to let those reports stand unchallenged, said Laird, because they conflicted with Administration claims that the war is winding down and the Vietnamization program is a success.

Laird said, "It was not my plan to bring this (raid) to the attention of the public necessarily," but the Defense Department, he said, was placed in the position where "a certain problem of credibility could be created for us," so "I did recommend that we go public."

In addition, said Laird, "when we hit them in the North, if we ever do—I don't want them to think that we hit so softly."

Laird's testimony shed new light on how and why the Administration converted a bold mission that failed into a publicized example of national valor and honor. Laird and Secretary of State William P. Rogers joined yesterday in insisting that the unsuccessful raid can have no adverse diplomatic consequences.

There can be no diplomatic damage to the Vietnam negotiations in Paris, Rogers maintained, because, "the fact of the matter is that no progress has been made in Paris — it is as simple as that."

"If the other side is interested in a settlement," Rogers told the House committee, "the prospects for peace are good. But I can't tell you what the other side has in mind."

EFFECT

"I don't think it (the raid) will have an effect on the talks one way or another," said Rogers. "I think the other side will make it look like it will have adverse effects . . . but I don't believe that for a moment."

Rogers told committee chairman Thomas E. Morgan (Dem Pa.) that what is important in peace negotiations is not "public relations" getsture but "where you stand in the war." If North Vietnam comes to realize that the war "is not worth fighting," said Rogers, "the prospects in Paris might be enhanced . . ."

Laird and Rogers were appearing in support of the Administration's request for \$1.035 billion in military and economic aid funds, which includes \$500 million in sales credits for Israel and \$255 million in arms and economic aid for Cambodia.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where Laird dominated the scene Tuesday with justifications of the raid, met in closed session yesterday to hear Under Secretary of State John N. Irwin II.

RATIONALE

After hearing Irwin, the committee's ranking Republican, Senator George D. Aiken (Vt.) gave newsmen the following wry characterization of the Administration's rationale for the unsuccessful raid:

"It was like a prizefighter who brings his girl home, blacks both her eyes, knocks her down, breaks both her arms and says, 'That's for nothing, now be careful.' That was the purpose of the raid."

Representative John C. Culver (Dem-Iowa), a former captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, who expressed full accord with the purpose of the mission, challenged Laird's publicizing of it.

Culver noted that Laird had said Tuesday the U.S. commando unit landed at the only prisoner camp that U.S. intelligence found suited for such a rescue attempt.

REPROACH

Culver reproachfully told Laird, "It seemed to me you revealed a great deal of highly classified material and possibly put into jeopardy future missions . . ."

The usual practice is to applaud a success, not a failure, said Culver.

"It seems to me," he told Laird, "that this kind of (public) exercise" was "not for military purposes but for political purposes . . . I find it impossible to justify in terms of genuine military interest."

Laird then volunteered that U.S. "credibility" was at stake, and the raid would not "necessarily" have been made public otherwise. This left the implicatpon that the original intention may have been to publicize only a successful raid, although Laird did not say so.