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Hanoi-POWs

HONG KONG AP -- North Vietnam said today that the U.S. commando attempt last week to free American prisoners from North Vietnam was an excuse for the extremely serious war act of renewed air attacks against our nation and our people."

Hanoi Radio made the charge in what it said was an official statement by the North Vietnamese government. The Vietnamese-language broadcast said at one point that the United States had "invented" the commando raid, but it was not clear whether or not Hanoi was accusing the United States of making up the story about the raid.

It was possible that the word "invention" referred to the idea for carrying the raid out.

The statement also accused the United States of "Inventing . . . the lie that there was an understanding that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam would permit spy flights over its territory after the unconditional halt of all U.S. bombing of DRVN territory."

Prior to the Nov. 21 air attacks against North Vietnam, U.S. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird said such an agreement of understanding had been reached by Hanoi and Washington at the time of the 1968 U.S. bombing halt in North Vietnam. Laird said this agreement was being violated by North Vietnam by the shooting down of unarmed U.S. reconnaissance planes, and he warned at that time of retaliatory air strikes.

Today's broadcast said "such inventions" as Laird's claim and the report of the U.S. commando raid "are blatant excuses for continuing the aggressive air war against the DRVN.

But neither of these perfidious arguments can prevent our people and our fighters meting out the just punishment due the U.S. aggressors for their war crimes," the statement said.

Nor can either of these invented and false excuses hide from the public, in the United States as well as throughout the world, the serious war crimes perpetrated by wave after wave of American war planes attacking more than 80 civilian populated targets in our nation and killing scores of innocent civilians."

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