

U.S. Said to Offer A New Justification For Raids in North

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By HEDRICK SMITH

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 30—

High Administration officials privately acknowledge that the United States is establishing and reinforcing a new rationale for American air strikes against North Vietnam.

The attack by a single American F-105 fighter-bomber yesterday against a North Vietnamese missile site was the first such mission since Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird warned on Nov. 21 that American pilots operating over Laos would resort to "protective reaction" against North Vietnamese missile sites that threatened them from across the Vietnamese-Laotian border.

[The Vietcong said in a broadcast that they would cease fighting for three days at Christmas and New Year and for four days at Tet, the lunar new year, Reuters reported. The South Vietnamese and United States commands have not announced any similar plans.]

Until yesterday, with one exception, all previous American air attacks on the North have been officially justified on the

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ground that they constituted retaliation for what were viewed as North Vietnamese violations of the 1968 understanding that ended the Johnson Administration's bombing of the north.

The single exception occurred last Sept. 5, but it received little notice and no high-level policy defense. The American command in Saigon reported on Sept. 5 that an American F-105 operating over Laos had fired on a North Vietnamese missile site 21 miles southwest of Donghoi and about five miles east of the Laotian border. A spokesman said the F-105 had struck the missile site after detecting enemy radar preparing for a missile firing.

Pentagon officials contend that in both incidents—yesterday's and the one on Sept. 5—American pilots were exercising the "inherent right of self-defense."

Secretary Laird asserted at a news conference today that the "pilot has the right—and as long as I'm Secretary of Defense I'm not going to send pilots up there [without it]—to use this electronic missile to go in on the site that has them locked in [on radar]."

But officials acknowledged that this was different from claiming the right to protect reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam. And high officials concede that on Nov. 21, Secretary Laird was deliberately warning Hanoi that there would now be a new policy of striking North Vietnamese missile sites along the Laotian

border when they threatened American planes operating over Laos.

Build-Up Charged

The Defense Department asserts that it has become convinced of the need for such a policy because of what is described as a build-up of North Vietnamese missile sites along the Laotian-North Vietnamese border.

The initial comments of Pentagon officials left the impression that on Nov. 21 some American planes had attacked North Vietnamese missile sites because of alleged interference with American operations over Laos.

But today, officials said this was not the case. They said that all the attacks had been undertaken at least 10 miles from the border, east of the mountain passes leading into Laos.

Mr. Laird made an unexpected appearance today at the regular Pentagon news briefing to defend himself against charges by Senator J. W. Fulbright that Mr. Laird had misrepresented the extent of American bombing of North Vietnam on Nov. 21.

Mr. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, charged in a television interview that in testifying last Tuesday Mr. Laird had not mentioned an air strike carried out near Hanoi in conjunction with the raid on the prisoner-of-war camp at Sontay.

Answers Questions

Mr. Laird suggested that the fault lay not with him but with members of the Foreign Relations Committee, who had failed to question him closely enough.

"I've been as forthright as one could possibly in answering all questions," Mr. Laird said. "Perhaps members of the committee were not asked. That is not my responsibility. Now, I answer questions, but I only answer the questions that are asked."

The Defense Secretary declared that early on Tuesday, at a closed hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, he had acknowledged that American planes had fired 12 to 14 Shrike missiles against North Vietnamese missile sites. Today, he said he had been in error and that only 11 Shrikes had been fired.

On Nov. 21, Mr. Laird dismissed as erroneous charges by Hanoi that an American prisoner-of-war camp had been bombed. Two days later, when the Sontay raid was first disclosed, Mr. Laird stood by as

Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor told reporters that there was "a minimum amount of firing" during the raid.

Mr. Laird's comments today were his first public acknowledgment that Shrike missiles had been fired at ground installations. Last week, Mr. Laird conceded that he had not even intended to make the Sontay raid public.

Just as in the case of American pilots flying along the Laotian-North Vietnamese border, Mr. Laird said, American pilots flying cover for the Sontay raiders "had the authority to use those [Shrike] missiles if the radar was locked in on them—just like the F-105 did yesterday when it was locked in by enemy radar."

'Inherent Right'

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 30 (AP)—"Protective reaction is the inherent right of self-defense," the United States command said in announcing that an American fighter-bomber made a "self-defense" attack on an antiaircraft position in North Vietnam today.

Informed sources said the pilot of the F-105 had learned from his electronic detection gear that he was being tracked by the post's radar and that it had begun computing the point at which to fire.

The pilot was said to have made his attack before the radar-controlled position could open fire. The position was five and a half miles north of the demilitarized zone.

Whether the pilot hit the target is not known, the United States command said. The attack was made at night through overcast skies with the aid of radar.

According to informed sources, the pilot's mission was to attack the North Vietnamese supply route, which runs through Laos to Cambodia and South Vietnam.

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