

# LAIRD LINKS PAGE OF TALKS IN PARIS TO FURTHER RAIDS

Tells Senators That a Lack  
of 'Serious' Negotiations  
Imperils Bombing Halt

## SYMINGTON IS CRITICAL

He and Fulbright See Move  
to Step Up War Despite  
the 1968 Understanding

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 11 — Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird suggested today that the absence of progress at the Paris peace talks could provide another justification for renewed bombing of North Vietnam.

The Secretary, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also warned that the 1968 understanding that led to the halt in the bombing of North Vietnam could be discarded if Hanoi refused to recognize the right of the United States, under the understanding, to fly reconnaissance flights over its territory.

In listing the conditions under which the United States halted the bombing, Mr. Laird laid particular stress upon what he described as the North Vietnamese understanding that "we expected them to sit down for serious negotiations in Paris." North Vietnam has consistently denied publicly that it agreed to any understanding to end the bombing.

## No Clear Denial Made

The comments of Mr. Laird, combined with those of President Nixon at his news conference last night, contributed to a growing impression on Capitol Hill, particularly among the critics of the Vietnam war, that the Administration was broadening its interpretation of the 1968 understanding, and, in the process, establishing a justification for renewed bombing of the North.

Senator Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, told Mr. Laird, "It is as clear as light to me that we have now decided to escalate the war over North Vietnam" — a statement that did not provoke any immediate, clear denial from the Secretary.

## Linked to Infiltration

Senator J. W. Fulbright, the committee chairman, said that the Administration — through retaliatory bombings against North Vietnam, military aid for Cambodia and the rescue mission to a prisoner-of-war camp near Hanoi last month — had made some fundamental changes that constitute "a reversal of policy" and "a resumption of the warfare conducted by the preceding Administration."

Like the Johnson Administration, Mr. Fulbright said, the Nixon Administration appears to be seeking a Vietnam settlement "through the application of superior force on North Vietnam."

The Administration's stiffening attitude on the possibility of bombing North Vietnam ap-

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## Laird Links Further Bombing to Pace of Talks

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peared to lie partly in a desire to warn Hanoi not to take military advantage of the continuing American troop withdrawal from South Vietnam. But Administration sources also suggested that the warnings were related to what they termed the high rate of continued troop infiltration from North Vietnam.

According to those sources, United States intelligence projections show that the build-up of North Vietnamese forces will continue through the current dry season. Most of the North Vietnamese troops, according to the intelligence reports, are moving into Cambodia, with some units entering southern Laos and others the northern section of South Vietnam.

Officials involved in the analysis of Hanoi's strategy were reportedly coming to the conclusion that North Vietnam was taking the calculated risk of a resumption of American bombing in order to improve its positions in all military theaters of Indochina.

The first explicit Administration step toward broadening the interpretation of the 1968 understanding — in what Johnson Administration officials are privately describing as "a complete departure" from past policy — was taken by President Nixon at his news conference last night.

### Conditions for Bombing

Discussing the understanding, Mr. Nixon said he would order the bombing of military sites and supply lines in North Vietnam if the Communists "increased the level of fighting" as American troops were withdrawn.

The President also said that if American reconnaissance planes were fired upon, he would order the bombing of the anti-aircraft missile sites and the military complexes around them.

The understanding reported-

ly called for North Vietnam to respect the demilitarized zone, cease shelling population centers in South Vietnam and enter meaningful negotiations at the Paris talks.

Mr. Laird told the Senate committee today that there was no question that North Vietnam understood that it had to respect the demilitarized zone, refrain from shelling major population centers and permit American reconnaissance flights.

Then after a pause, Mr. Laird said, "Most important, they understood we expected them to sit down for serious negotiations in Paris."

When the understanding was reached, the Johnson Administration interpreted the condition of "meaningful" negotiations as acceptance of South Vietnam at the negotiating table — an interpretation concurred in today by a high-ranking Johnson Administration official who declined to be quoted by name. But the implication of Mr. Laird's comment was that continuation of the understanding was contingent upon progress at the peace talks, which have long been stalemated.

### Supplementary Aid Sought

Mr. Laird appeared before the Foreign Relations Committee in support of the Administration's request for \$1-billion in supplementary military aid, including \$255-million for Cambodia. But the Cambodian issue became almost forgotten in the discussion of the bombing halt and in heated comments by Senator Fulbright on whether the Defense Department had known if there were American prisoners in the camp near Hanoi when the rescue attempt was staged.

Senator Fulbright suggested that the Defense Department had known that there were no prisoners in the camp when the raid was ordered. Protesting that the Arkansas Democrat was spreading innuendoes

reflecting upon his truthfulness, Mr. Laird said the raid had been undertaken with the expectation that there would be "a 50-50 chance" of rescuing prisoners.

The Senate Appropriations Committee, meanwhile, approved the additional military aid funds, including the Cambodian program. But the committee made the granting of the funds conditional upon the passage of authorization legislation now before the Foreign Relations Committee.

### Hanoi Critical of Nixon

PARIS, Dec. 11 (AP)—Hanoi's delegation to the Paris peace talks said tonight that the United States was "maintaining an obstinate attitude" to the conference "with heightened perfidy" that was "posing a grave menace to its work."

Commenting on President Nixon's news conference, a statement by the delegation termed his remarks "extremely bellicose and threatening."