

New Estimate Of War Cost Up \$1 Billion

By Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writer

Vietnam war costs, including 12 days of heavy bombing in December, have risen \$1 billion to \$2 billion above previous estimates, according to Defense Department officials.

The 12-day bombing campaign alone added about \$500 million to the cost of the war.

Both the Pentagon and the White House are now concerned with finding a way to pay for these added costs.

Last July, after the North Vietnamese offensive into South Vietnam, the Defense Department raised its estimate of the full cost of the war in fiscal 1973 by \$1.1 billion, to a total of \$7.1 billion. That revised estimate, however, only included through Sept. 30. Authoritative defense officials now say operations since then—including the December bombing raids—have added another \$1 billion to \$2 billion in extra costs.

None of the options available to pay for these costs looks good at the moment, say Pentagon officials.

An additional supplemental appropriation to support added war costs would no doubt meet tough going in Congress at this time. And an attempt to take the extra funds out of the existing military budget has already met with protests from military leaders. Some of the extra costs could be added to the fiscal 1974 budget.

If a cease-fire can be negotiated promptly, some officials speculate, a supplemental could be sent to Congress labeled as a catch-all money request to end the war. Aside from the costs of fighting, it might also reflect the costs of moving the prisoners of war home and the final pullout of the last 24,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam and thus be more acceptable.

In addition to money problems, there was discussion of information problems at the Pentagon yesterday.

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird tightened the lid on details of the massive bombing raids last month, claiming that

release of such information could upset the Paris peace talks.

"No information will be put out of this building at any time that would possibly jeopardize the Paris peace talks."

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North Vietnam says U.S. planes bombed above 20th parallel Thursday. Page A12.

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ardize the success of those negotiations," Laird said. He said that he had ordered his chief spokesmen to "bear that in mind as they disseminate information during the next week or 10 days."

Laird commented while praising his top press spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, at a Pentagon ceremony in which Friedheim and three other defense officials were awarded distinguished civilian service medals.

Laird's order may make Friedheim's job easier. He has taken the brunt of the news media's demand to have some official public explanation of why the massive 12-day aerial blitz was carried out, the military justification for it, how much damage was caused, how many tons of bombs were dropped and precisely where they were dropped.

Last week, while the bombing was still going on, the U.S. military command in Saigon did release a list of 68 major military targets struck during the first week of bombing, Dec. 18-25.

Though a second list was promised within a day or two, Laird's statement yesterday appears to mean that no such list will be forthcoming for sometime covering raids between Dec. 26 and Dec. 30.

The Pentagon has not explained how the release of such a list would affect the negotiations, and statements by Laird and other defense officials seem to indicate that the Defense Department is acting on White House orders on this matter.

Release of the first target list revealed how close the strikes by big B-52 heavy bombers and smaller fighter-bombers had been to downtown Hanoi and Haiphong and provided some measure by which to judge Radio Hanoi's claim of extensive civilian casualties.

Releasing an account of the second week's activities at this

time would probably escalate the criticism here of the administration's bombing policy which has already brought about new end-the-war moves in Congress.

White House spokesmen have warned that such moves would "raise doubts in the mind of the enemy" and thus weaken chances for a settlement.

While withholding any target list or damage assessment, the Pentagon did say yesterday that during the four days between Dec. 26 and the bombing halt north of the 20th parallel on Dec. 30, 650 additional fighter-bomber strikes and 126 B-52 missions—which usually involve three planes each—were flown.

This would bring the 12-day bombing campaign total to about 1,650 tactical strikes and 820 individual B-52 strikes. Using bomb loads normally carried by these planes, the total dropped on North Vietnam's heartland during that period is probably at least 24,000 tons of high explosives.

Yesterday, Friedheim said that Laird would make additional information "on air operations" available to Congress behind closed doors, though not to the press.

It was also disclosed that four Communist MIG fighters were shot down during the bombing campaign, two of them by tail gunners on B-52 bombers. This was the first time the B-52 had ever been credited with downing enemy planes.

The United States has lost 30 planes to enemy ground fire during the attacks, with 97 airmen killed, missing or captured. Friedheim said 450 SAM missiles were fired during the last four days of the raids, with the level slackening off some at the end as the United States stepped up attacks on the SAM sites.

Failure to attack those sites more heavily early in the 12-day bombing campaign is said by some to be one cause for the loss of 16 B-52s.