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SPECIAL REPORT

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TEXT OF A STATEMENT ON U. S. AIR STRIKES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM
BY JERRY W. FRIEDHEIM, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C., MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1970

Gentlemen, security considerations now permit me to report to you details of the limited duration, protective reaction air strikes conducted against military targets in North Vietnam -- south of the 19th parallel.

The protective reaction strikes took place during a period of approximately seven hours.

As Secretary Laird stated here early Saturday morning, these protective reaction strikes were conducted against missile and anti-aircraft gun sites, and related facilities. The strikes were in response to enemy attacks on our unarmed reconnaissance aircraft. As Secretary Laird stated Saturday, we will continue to take protective reaction as necessary to protect the pilots of our unarmed reconnaissance planes.

When the United States halted the bombing of North Vietnam on November 1, 1968, it was with the understanding of the fact that our unarmed reconnaissance would continue.

These protective reaction missions were designed to protect the lives of United States pilots flying unarmed reconnaissance over North Vietnam -- and the lives of our pilots flying missions to interdict North Vietnamese military supplies moving through Laos toward South Vietnam.

As you know, Secretary Laird has been particularly concerned at the other side's breach of the understandings. An unarmed United States Air Force RF-4C aircraft was shot down November 13th over North Vietnam,

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and two crew members were lost. The Secretary also is concerned about the shellings this month of the cities of Saigon and Hue with the resulting injury of South Vietnamese civilians. In addition, we are concerned that the other side has not chosen to negotiate in any substantive or productive way at Paris.

The Secretary of Defense has stated many times that we remain ready to take appropriate action in response to attacks on our unarmed reconnaissance aircraft, in response to major infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone, or in response to the shelling of major South Vietnamese cities. The so-called understandings reached at the time the United States halted the bombing of the North more than two years ago included these three specifics.

Since the bombing halt, ten United States aircraft and one helicopter have been shot down in the North. During this time there have been more than 60 instances in which we have conducted protective reaction to safeguard American lives.

You will recall that during the period of 1 to 4 May, this spring, almost 500 U. S. aircraft participated in a series of reinforced protective reaction strikes in response to enemy firing on our unarmed reconnaissance aircraft.

I can advise you today that according to our latest reports, approximately 200 United States aircraft were involved in the latest protective reaction strikes.

I am particularly pleased to report that we suffered no -- I repeat no -- losses of any of these aircraft or their crews.

The total number of United States aircraft participating included -- of course -- the strike aircraft, combat air patrol aircraft, flak-suppression aircraft, electronic support aircraft, reconnaissance aircraft, and search and rescue aircraft. There were approximately 50 support aircraft of these types.

The strike missions themselves were flown by Air Force, Marine and Navy aircraft. The Navy aircraft came from the aircraft carriers Hancock, Ranger, and Oriskany.

The main areas in which the limited duration, protective reaction strikes were conducted, against military targets, included the approach

routes to the Mu Gia and Ban Karai passes into Laos -- and the similar approach route north and west of the Demilitarized Zone. There has been a particularly heavy buildup of enemy missiles and anti-aircraft guns in this area in recent months. Although there has been bad weather over the panhandle of North Vietnam since the protective reaction strikes, initial post-strike reports from our pilots indicate that about 100 secondary fires and explosions were observed in the target areas, and that more than 100 trucks near the anti-aircraft sites were struck. Several missiles and associated equipment were probably destroyed on the ground.

Our pilots reported several surface-to-air missiles were fired against them during the protective reaction strikes. None of them hit our planes.

I want to emphasize that the operational orders to the pilots prohibited any attacks on populated areas. And I would like to emphasize again that these limited duration, protective reaction strikes were initiated after the other side -- in violation of an understanding which preceded the halt of U.S. bombing -- had this month shot down an unarmed reconnaissance aircraft and had shelled the cities of Hue and Saigon.

We do not intend to tolerate violations of these or any other understandings.
