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Laird: CBW Study Acts as Deterrent

United Press International

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday that the Soviet Union has larger stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons than the United States and that this country must continue development of such weapons as a deterrent to their use.

"As much as we deplore this kind of a weapon, if we want to make sure this weapon is never used we must have the capability to use it," Laird told a group of college students working in Government agencies this summer.

Laird said the United States would never be the first to employ poison gas. He pointed out that a review of the U.S. chemical and biological weapons research program currently is under way.

About 100 students questioned Laird on a broad range of issues during a 45-minute session at the Pentagon.

Responding to questions, Laird made these points:

• A bare but "firm" majority of 51 Senators is committed to the Nixon Administration's safeguard anti-ballistic missile program and there

would be no compromise on the issue.

• Russia and Britain, as principal signatories of the Geneva accords, should bring diplomatic pressure on North Vietnam to remove its troops from Laos. Hanoi has a "significant" number of troops there and they are "capable of overrunning Laos at any time."

• Growing tension between Russia and Red China would probably not result in a nuclear confrontation between the two Communist powers, but he avoided a direct answer as to whether a conventional war could result. He said the Pentagon was "aware of the tremendous movement of troops as far as the Soviet Union is concerned," and weapons, to the border of China.

• Reducing the armed forces from its current level of 3.5 million to 2.6 million after the Vietnam war is ended would save about \$3 billion per year. But the switch to an all-volunteer army, a long-range goal of the Administration, would off-set most of this saving.