

LAIRD SAYS SOVIET CAN LEAD BY 2 TO 1 IN MISSILES BY '75

Russians Can Surpass U.S.
in All Arms, He Asserts
in Plea for Safeguard

By WILLIAM BEECHER

WASHINGTON, April 25—
Defense Secretary Melvin R.
Laird asserted today that if the
Soviet Union continued the
pace of its missile buildup it
could have 2,500 long-range
missiles by 1975. The United
States now has 1,054, and does
not plan to increase the force
in the next five years.

"Based upon the best infor-
mation available to me as Sec-
retary of Defense," he said, "I
must conclude that the Soviet
Union has the capability of
achieving by the mid-nineteen-
seventies a superiority over the
presently authorized and pro-
gramed forces of the United
States in all areas—offensive
strategic forces, defensive
forces and conventional forces."

In a speech prepared for a
meeting of the United Press
International Florida News-
paper Editors Association in
Panama City, Fla., and released
here, Mr. Laird used his gloomy
projection of a growing poten-
tial threat to underscore his
plea for the Administration's
Safeguard antimissile program.

Minimal Step Necessary

"The Safeguard System is the
minimal step necessary at this
time to ensure that the safety
and security of the American
people will be preserved if arms
limitations talks are not suc-
cessful in the coming months
and years," he said.

The proposed \$6-billion to \$7-
billion Safeguard program is en-
countering determined opposi-
tion in Congress.

Many argue, Mr. Laird said,
that Russia will not maintain
its present level of defense
activity. But such arguments
are based primarily on guess-

work, he said.

"This could lead to a major
and irretrievable miscalcula-
tion if our judgment on inten-
tions proves faulty," he de-
clared.

Assumption Called False

By way of example, he said
that last year the "dominant
official assumption" by the
Johnson Administration was
that Russia "by now would
have begun to slow down and
halt the expansion of its
I.C.B.M. [intercontinental bal-
listic missile] force."

"That assumption proved
false," he said.

At present, Mr. Laird said,
the Soviet Union has 1,000 long-
range missiles in "hardened,"
or protected, silos and 140 older
missiles sitting on launching
pads. The United States has
1,054 intercontinental missiles.

Although he did not say so
it was apparent that his pro-

Continued on Page 17, Column

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

jection assumed that the Rus-
sians would continue into the
middle of the next decade their
present deployment rate of
about 250 long-range missiles
a year.

In the late nineteen-fifties
and continuing into the 1960
Presidential race, some argued
that if the Russians built long-
range missiles as fast as the
United States believed they
were capable of doing, the
United States would quickly
and dangerously fall behind.

Later, U-2 reconnaissance
photos showed that the Rus-
sians had actually built only a
small number of missiles.

Delay Called Risky

Mr. Laird attempted to head
off a line of argument based
on this by asserting that since
it takes five years or more
before a defensive system to
answer a potential offensive
threat becomes operational, the
United States could not afford
to delay deploying Safeguard.

"We cannot gamble on esti-
mates of Soviet intentions," he
declared. "If the Soviet Union
is developing a capability that
could endanger this nation, we
must be prepared to counter-
act it."

The Defense Secretary said
that the Russians had built sev-
en Polaris-type submarines,
armed with 16 missiles each,
and that if they continued their
current production pace they
could outstrip the United
States, which has 41 Polaris
submarines, by the mid-nine-
teen-seventies.

While multiple warheads
planned for United States mis-
siles would swing the nuclear
arithmetic back into the Amer-
ican column, he noted, the Rus-
sians are working hard on mul-
tiple warheads and may be able
to match the United States
qualitative improvements.

"Most of us still remember
vividly a moment of supreme
national peril in 1962," he said.
"It was widely assumed then
that the Soviet Union would
never install offensive missiles
in Cuba, and this presumption
prevailed right up to the time
that photographic evidence
proved it wrong."

"As Secretary of Defense,"
he continued, "I do not intend
for this country to go through
that kind of crisis again, but
if we must, I intend to see that
the United States is in a posi-
tion to meet such a crisis suc-
cessfully."