

Laird Predicts Lower Draft Calls in '71

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 28—Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird forecast today lower draft calls next year, the extent of the drop to depend largely on whether Congress is willing to vote costly increases in military pay and benefits.

Other Pentagon sources said planners were thinking in terms of a total 1971 draft of 80,000 to 120,000 men. This compares with draft calls totaling 163,500 this year.

Mr. Laird expressed confidence that, if Congress was willing to provide the funds to make military careers more attractive, reliance on the draft could be eliminated by mid-1973. Implicit in this date, previously projected, is the assumption that the scale of United States involvement in the Vietnam war will have been greatly reduced.

The armed forces at that point, Mr. Laird said, might be down to between 2 million and 2.4 million men, compared to 2.9 million now.

A Review and Forecast

Other points covered by the Secretary in a year-end review and forecast included the following:

Proposed manpower costs alone will increase 4 to 5 per cent in the next budget. That would peg the next spending request, which goes to Congress in February, at somewhere between \$74-billion and \$75-billion—up to \$2-billion above expected expenditures in the current fiscal year, ending June 30.

The recently discovered slowdown in construction of Soviet SS-9 missiles could not, in his view, be taken as a signal on the basis of which the United States would decide to postpone increasing its development work on an advanced bomber and an advanced missile submarine; a formal agreement to limit or reduce strategic weapons is a necessary precondition to American forbearance in this field.

Military investigations of civilians in connection with concern about urban riots "could more properly be performed by the Justice Department" rather than Army Intelligence agents. But he conceded, without providing any details, that in national security cases military sleuths had engaged in wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping "under terms prescribed" by Congress and the Attorney General.

The Pentagon is formulating a "new strategy of realistic deterrence" that will put much stronger emphasis than before on improved American non-nuclear forces and greater reliance on the military capabilities of America's allies in meeting threats to their security.

Mr. Laird expressed disappointment over Congress's not having provided funds this year for a 20 per cent increase in pay for the lower ranks of the armed forces. He promised to reintroduce that proposal along with additional requests for increases in pay, military housing and educational benefits.

Such incentives play an important part in increasing enlistments, he said.

Implicit in Mr. Laird's opti-

mism about moving to what he calls a "zero draft call" by mid-1973 is the expectation that the Vietnam war will have wound down to the point where there will be only a relatively small number of military advisers in Vietnam by that time.

One draft specialist suggested that if draft calls fall to about 100,000 next year, this could mean that young men with Selective Service lottery numbers higher than 20 might not be called. This year, he said, the draft reached men with numbers up to 195.

Soviet Ships in Cuba

Mr. Laird said there was a good deal of "harbor hopping down in Cuba" by Soviet vessels, including a submarine tender. But as to concern that Russia might attempt to establish a base at Cienfuegos to service nuclear missile sub-

marines, Mr. Laird repeated what he told reporters last month: that he would be "surprised if they serviced a Soviet nuclear submarine in the port of Cienfuegos in view of the statements they have made."

On North Vietnamese infiltration, Mr. Laird said that while actual "arrivals" into South Vietnam have been substantially below those of last year, there have been increases into southern Laos.

Other sources point out that the Administration has no way of knowing whether the troops in Laos will be kept there to rebuild and guard supply lines, or will be sent into Cambodia or South Vietnam on major new offensives.

Mr. Laird said intelligence analysts expected that infiltration into South Vietnam in the next three months would be higher than during the first quarter of last year.



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Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird at news session.