Excerpts From the Transcript of Secretary Laird's

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Following are excerpts from a news conference by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird at the Pentagon yesterday, as recorded by The New York Times through the facilities of A.B.C. News:

Opening Statement

I want to make five points before taking your questions this morning.

One, as I meet with you today the United States air and sea forces are fighting Communist aggression in Southeast Asia.

Two, South Vietnamese forces are at the moment holding fast in a very difficult ground-combat situation caused by the massive Communist invasion across the demilitarized zone. The South Vietnamese face additional attacks by the enemy that have been made possible by the heavily supplied equipment of new and modern type which are being used in South Vietnam, supplied by the Soviet Union for the first time this year.

Third, General Abrams will continue our troop withdrawal program directed by the President of the United States. We have brought home 500,000 Americans and we will meet or beat the President's goal of 49,000 Americans in the country by July 1, 1972.

Four, the President has presented the most forthright and generous peace offer at any time in history. If the enemy agrees to an internationally supervised cease-fire and the return of our prisoners of war, we will withdraw our forces from Vietnam within four months. This will bring an end to the war and a return of our prisoners. It will allow us to continue the movement toward a generation of peace which is the goal of all Americans and is the goal of the Nixon Doctrine foreign policy, which is supported worldwide by our national security strategy of realistic deterrence.

Five, the American people always have supported our President when Americans are endangered and the cause of freedom has been threatened. This is no time for quitters or for a lot of talk about instant surrender. I don't think the American people want to clamber aboard some sort of a bugout shuttle.

I think they join the President and me in supporting General Abrams and our men and in opposing Communist aggression.

Questions and Answers

Q. It's continually said that U. S. intelligence has been quite accurate in assessing the Communist capabilities in the Vietnam theater. Why, in in view of that good intelligence, do we find that—which indicated that it was heavy Russian armaments available for the North Vietnamese—do we today find the South Vietnamese in a kind of ragged retreat from many parts of the country?

A. I do not believe the intelligence assessments which I gave to you on many occasions here in this room were in error. We notified you earlier of the road-building that was taking place in the DMZ. We also notified you of the military build-up of the North Vietnamese opposite Military Region III, opposite Military Region II and also north of the DMZ.

The difference, of course, in this invasion is the fact that the North Vietnamese are using the demilitarized zone in violation of the 1954 accord, as well as the 1968 understanding.

This has given them a very short logistic supply route, particularly in Military Region I. They have been conducting this invasion across the DMZ in Military Region I now for approximately five weeks. During this five-week period they have been able to push into Vietnam some 22 miles. The situation that exists today is different than any other military situation in view of the use of the demilitarized zone in Military Region I, and during this period of time, I might point out that there has been only one provincial capital taken in South Vietnam.

Q. Mr. Secretary can you tell us what kind of Soviet response has been made or are there any Soviet naval movements of any kind in the area?

A. There has been no indication along that line. We have, of course, various discussions going on with the Soviets at the present time. Many of you who cover the Pentagon regularly know that the incidents of the sea negotiations are presently in progress here in Washington.

The negotiations continued yesterday and are continuing today. As far as Helsinki is concerned, those negotiations went forward yesterday and are continuing today. As far as naval movement, to answer that specific part of your question, there is no such evidence, as of the time of this press conference.

Build-Up Is Continuing

Q. Is our air and sea build-up continuing? Can we expect to see more aircraft and ships?

A. Yes, it is continuing. We have on the line today for the first time the Newport News with its nine 8-inch guns. And our insurance reserves, or our augmentation force, is continuing to be expanded as far as the air and sea is concerned.

We also have the notification ships which are on station at the present time notifying all vessels in the area of North Vietnam of the mining operation and the fact that the mines will become active at 6 A.M. Washington time on Thursday.

Q. Mr. Secretary, two questions. One is, what's the United States going to do if the Soviet Union attempts to remove any of the mines that the United States has laid. And secondly, could you tell us how long those mines will remain?

A. First, we will take all steps that are necessary in order to maintain an adequate mining operation. As you know, mines are a passive weapon. No one has to get involved with a mine; that is a decision that is made not by us but is made by those people that confront the mines.

As far as the mine technology is concerned, the second part of your question, I will not discuss or divulge U.S. mine technology at this press conference. And I would hope that that technology not be made a part of the public record.

Q. Mr. Secretary, have any ships gone in or out of the harbors during the two daylight hours, or have any ships stopped or turned back outside the mine fields? And do you see any signs that they're trying to sweep up the mines or send mine sweepers down from Russia?

A. Well now, there are four questions there. I'll take the last part of your question first. No, there is no evidence at this time of a sweeping activity going on.

The third part of your question has to do with the turning around of any ships. When the A-6's left the two carriers and went in and carried on their successful first

Laird Puts Point Over With Sports Phrases

WASHINGTON, May 10 — Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, perhaps influenced by the sports-mindedness of President Nixon, twice turned to sporting expressions at his news conference today to describe military activities in Vietnam.

The intensified bombing throughout North Vietnam and the mining of its major harbors, he disclosed, is being done under the code name Operation Linebacker.

The three linebackers attempt to stop the progress of an opposing ballcarrier who has penetrated the first line of defense.

Describing the transfer of major consat responsibility from the Americans to the South Vietnamese, Mr. Laird used this analogy: "We have sort of an expansion ball club that's fighting in Vietnam at the present time. The South Vietnamese will not win every battle or encounter, but they will do a very credible job."

An expansion team in baseball or football normally is weaker at first then established teams.

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drop of mines on Monday evening, there were some ships that were in the process of transit in the particular area and there is some evidence that there was some change in course in some of those particular ships.

The second part of your question has to do with the ships in port, whether there is any evidence of a change in their particular movements during this time. As you know, there's one more daylight period for ships to move out of the port area before the mines become activated in the Haiphong channel. At the time the mines were being laid, there were some 36 ships that were in Haiphong. There were about 16 ships of the Soviet Union, 5 ships of the People's Republic of China, 4 which were carrying the flag of British Hong Kong, 2 Cuban ships, one East German ship, 3 Polish ships and there were 5 from Somalia.

Thus far there has been no major movement out of port or into port as far as these ships or the ships that were at sea destined for Haiphong. During the last daylight period there has been some ship movement within the port itself, but there has been no massive movement of ships out of port or into port during this period.

Effect on the Battle

Q. Mr. Secretary, once the mines are activated, how soon do you expect it to affect the battlefield in the northern part of South Vietnam and how deeply do you think the blockade or whatever you want to call it will affect the progress of the battle?

A. You have to take certain assumptions, and it depends on what those assumptions might be to give you a clear and precise answer. The conditions could vary somewhat. I can only say that in some areas the North Vietnamese have supplies on hand for two to three months. In other areas they may have supplies on certain items for a longer period of time and some a shorter period of time.

The effect upon the battle area will be whether or not the enemy makes the decision to continue an all-out effort and go to zero as far as their supplies are concerned or whether they feel that because of the interdiction or the stoppage of supplies that they can anticipate in the future, this will have an effect upon the level of battle in the particular area.

So the proposition that you place before us is one that is difficult to answer because the intentions of the enemy have to be read into the equation and I am not prepared to read those intentions—whether they are willing to go for broke in four or five weeks or whether they are willing to lose their supplies in a much more measured manner depending upon the success or failure, as they see it, of the supply movement and the logistics movement into North Vietnam.

Q. You say there has been no massive movement into or out of Haiphong harbor since the mining.

A. Yes, there has been some movement, but the problem is some of the ships were in the particular area of movement and before they actually got into the docks and alongside the docks, and there is a difference, and that's why I answered the question the way I did earlier this morning. What's the second part of your question?

'To Stop the Delivery'

Q. It has to do with the interdiction in the territorial waters or the claimed waters of North Vietnam. Should any flagship belonging to a country other than North Vietnam attempt to enter those waters to land cargo on the shore, is our policy to attack those by land or sea?

A. Our policy is to stop the delivery to the North Vietnamese of these supplies and we will take those actions that are necessary to stop that delivery.

Q. How about an airlift of AN-22's coming into North Vietnamese airfields? What do we do about those?

A. We will take those actions that are necessary to interdict and stop the supplies of equipment to North Vietnam.

Q. Do we have to interdict those aircraft?

A. I'm not going to get into a discussion of the operational orders and the contingencies that may arise. I can tell you that we will take the steps that are necessary to see that these supplies are cut off that are being used to carry on this aggression and this marauding throughout Southeast Asia.

Q. I think you should clarify one point that is at variance with Dr. Kissinger. At his briefing yesterday he said there was no intention to stop ships going in, the mining was the only thing. You are leaving the implication here that this is a possibility. Is that what you meant to leave?

A. That is what I meant to leave.

When Will First Enter?

Q. The mines will be activated at 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock tomorrow morning. On your information now, when will the first Soviet freighter run the risk of going into those mine fields?

A. Well, I'm not scheduling the freighters. There was one scheduled to go in, I believe, today or yesterday. It did not go in. I believe that question is a question that might at some future date cause me a credibility problem, and since I've been here I've tried to cause no credibility problems, and that's the reason I'm not giving you a specific answer.

Q. What was that freighter carrying, do you have any description by name or number?

A. We do have the information but I'm not going to make it available.

Q. What is that freighter doing, sir. Is it standing off outside?

A. That freighter is at sea beyond the territorial waters of North Vietnam.

Q. If the ships choose to remain in the harbor and continue to offload cargo after tomorrow morning, are they susceptible to attack?

A. I have answered that question. We will take those actions that are necessary to prevent the delivery in North Vietnam of these supplies. And the actions will be taken that are necessary to see that those deliveries are not made in North Vietnam.

The Nature of Delivery

Q. What do you consider delivery being made — at a dock?

A. Well, in the land mass of North Vietnam. I'm not going to get into just any specific dock. I consider the entire land mass of North Vietnam would constitute a delivery, if that is the question.

Q. You have notified them we will not permit the landing of supplies in North Vietnam, and does that include delivery by air?

A. We will take those steps that are necessary to prevent the delivery of supplies that can be used to assist the North Vietnamese in carrying out their military aggression in Southeast Asia. I don't know how I can be any more forthright or make it any clearer than I already have.

Q. In other words, Mr. Secretary, you're not playing games with the idea that they can offload the material and then we hit it on the docks. You're saying we're not going to allow them even to put it on the docks?

A. I am saying that we will take those actions that are necessary to prevent delivery into North Vietnam.

Q. Should Hanoi announce tomorrow that it accepts the cease-fire, what could or would be done about the mines?

A. I'm not going into the mine technology. I do not believe it serves a useful purpose for us to discuss mine technology, which is very important — there has been a very important improvement as far as mine technology is concerned over the years. We are not going to divulge the technology that the United States has acquired in this particular military field. We feel that it is a very fine, passive weapon and we've made improvements in this program.