

END OF G.I. COMBAT FORESEEN BY LAIRD

In Paris, He Asserts Troop
Role in Vietnam Will Be
Limited by Midsummer

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By JOHN L. HESS

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PARIS, Jan. 6 — Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, stopping off here today on his way to Southeast Asia, said that the United States would end its "combat responsibility" in South Vietnam by midsummer.

After that, Mr. Laird said at a news conference: "We will have a logistic role; we will have an air support role, and the combat forces which will be assigned to the logistic support and artillery roles will not be a combat mission but will be a security mission. They will be there to protect and to secure the forces that are assigned these roles."

Official and other observers said that while Mr. Laird had implied as much before, his outline today of the Vietnamization strategy was the most precise to date.

[At San Clemente, Calif., Ronald L. Ziegler, the Presidential press secretary, said that the United States had indicated that its ground combat responsibilities would be greatly reduced this spring, but he added "we are not prepared to say" specifically when they would be ended.]

They emphasized that the strategy did not mean an end to American combat in Vietnam. United States forces will continue bombing and artillery shelling, they said, and will

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help move supplies to American artillery bases and South Vietnamese positions. It is implied that security patrols and convoys will continue, but that no more substantial infantry actions will be initiated by the American forces.

Mr. Laird met the press at the United States Embassy midway through a stop-over, during which he conferred with the United States and South Vietnamese delegations to the Paris peace talks and lunched with Defense Minister Michel Debre, before leaving this afternoon for Teheran, Bangkok and Saigon. He was accompanied by Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

End of Combat Responsibility

The Secretary's exposition of the Vietnamization program came in response to the opening question: "How does one reconcile the statements being made here [by the four delegations to the peace talks] that no progress whatsoever has been made in the last year or two with the optimism that we sometimes find in Washington that the war is coming to an end?"

Mr. Laird cited the record of the Nixon Administration in lowering the troop ceiling from 549,500 men to 284,000 as of next May 1.

Asked whether American ground troops might be out of Vietnam this year, Mr. Laird replied that "the American

combat responsibility will be removed as far as South Vietnam is concerned."

"We are approaching that position on our May 1 troop ceiling deadline," he said.

The final turn-over of combat responsibility to Saigon, he continued, will complete Phase One of the Vietnamization program, ahead of schedule. Also ahead of schedule "in all aspects," he continued, was Phase Two — preparing the South Vietnamese to take over the air support, artillery and logistic functions.

"But Phase Two takes a little longer because of the training that is required," he added.

Mr. Laird did not predict when Phase Two might end nor did he refer to Phase Three, during which only American advisers would be left serving in South Vietnam.

Asked whether it seemed that the Soviet Union was preparing to service its nuclear submarines from Cuba — an activity that President Nixon warned against on television Monday night — Mr. Laird replied, "No, it does not." A reporter interrupted with a question on another subject, and the conference was terminated before the Cuban issue could be pursued.