

# Laird Vows Full U.S. Air Support in Laos

Examiner News Services

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Melvin Laird said today the United States would use "whatever air power is required" to supplement the South Vietnamese operation inside Laos.

But he pledged anew to Congress that no U.S. ground combat forces or advisers would be involved.

Republican congressional leaders emerged from a two-hour meeting with President Nixon and said the operation would lower U.S. casualties and drastically reduce the Communists' capability.

Laird briefed the Senate and House Armed Services Committees separately on the Allied operations designed to disrupt the supply and infiltration network of the North Vietnamese in southern Laos.

Secretary of State William Rogers also briefed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

## Stennis Confident

Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.), chairman of the

Senate committee, told reporters later that he "felt better than ever" about South Vietnam's capability to fight and "this could be the one that cuts the jugular vein."

Laird said the United States would contribute both fixed-wing and helicopter planes to the operation and fly air combat, air logistics and medical evacuation sorties as needed.

Laird said the operation "would save additional American lives and enhance the security of the remaining U.S. forces inside South Vietnam and set the stage for bringing home additional thousands of Americans in coming months."

Laird's prediction came in a statement prepared for closed meetings of the committees.

## Jackson Backing

"This particular operation should have been carried out five or six years ago," Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) said later.

Laird said 50,000 more

troops must be withdrawn by May 1 to meet Nixon's deadline for a 284,000 troop ceiling.

"We will meet or beat that troop ceiling and we will go forward with our withdrawal program," Laird said.

## Javits Fails

But Sen. Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.) said he failed in an effort to get a commitment that all U.S. troops will be withdrawn at some definite future date.

Javits said the key unanswered question is whether the United States is so committed to the Republic of South Vietnam that "some kind of military presence" will remain indefinitely.

"I can't get an answer to that question as yet," he added.

## Implied Presence

Asked whether the committee failed to get assurances that all American forces will eventually be withdrawn, the New York Republican replied, "I would not say that. We failed to get it one way or another."