

## Laird Says Air and Navy Units Will Stay After Pullout of G.I.'s

By TERENCE SMITH

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WASHINGTON, April 13 — Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said today that the United States would maintain a naval and air presence in Southeast Asia after American ground troops had been withdrawn from Indochina.

Such a presence, the Secretary said at a news conference, is required if the United States is to maintain a policy of "realistic deterrence" in Asia during the nineteen-seventies.

The Secretary appeared to be outlining a military corollary to the Nixon Doctrine when he said that American air and naval power would be required to bolster allied Asian forces during the next decade.

Asked if he envisioned American air and naval units as continuing to fight in South Vietnam after the withdrawal of American ground troops, he replied: "I wouldn't care to discuss that question," adding that he looked forward to "a reduction of warfare in that area of the world."

### Sees Balance of Realities

In formulating a strategy of "realistic deterrence," the Secretary said, the United States must balance the fiscal and manpower realities that prevail at home against the "strategic realities" of the Soviet Union and — into the nineteen-eighties — Communist China.

"To say that we would not have a presence in Asia under this realistic deterrent strategy would be very misleading," he said.

Stressing the central theme of the Nixon Doctrine—Asian

self-reliance—Mr. Laird said:

"We should not make the mistake of committing massive manpower to that part of the world. Military assistance, yes; manpower, no."

The Secretary repeated his forecast that combat responsibility in South Vietnam would be turned over to Saigon's forces "sometime this summer," but he refused to give a more specific date.

He also emphasized, as he has before, that an American security force would remain behind to protect United States support troops and that they might become involved in defense combat.

### Question on Residual Force

Despite the most persistent questioning, Mr. Laird refused to say whether the Administration planned to leave a residual force of American troops in South Vietnam for an indefinite period.

He avoided a direct answer by referring newsmen to President Nixon's address last week. Advised that the President had not addressed himself directly to the question, he smiled and said: "I support the President."

"That's not an answer," a reporter said.

"I think it's a pretty good answer," Mr. Laird said.