

# Laird: 'We'll Try to Stop All Deliveries'

Examiner News Services

WASHINGTON — Heralding a further stepup in American action, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird indicated today that the United States will try to stop all methods of delivering weapons to North Vietnam, by sea or by air, in addition to the mining of seven harbors.

Laird also suggested that ships now in North Vietnam's ports will be subject to attack if they attempt to unload their cargoes.

"We will take those actions necessary to prevent the delivery of supplies in North Vietnam," Laird said in a Pentagon news conference. "I will consider delivery to be on the land mass of North Vietnam."

Laird implied that White House adviser Henry Kissinger's position that the ships would be free to run the risk of a mine explosion had been reversed. Asked whether he had done so intentionally, Laird replied: "That is the implication I wanted to make."

Laird appeared to have gone past statements yesterday by presidential adviser Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger had said no attempt would be made to prevent ships from entering the mined harbors, but Laird said today repeatedly all steps necessary would be taken to stop deliveries.

Laird said that one Soviet freighter that had been scheduled to enter Haiphong harbor either late yesterday or today had remained at sea, apparently because of the mines that were dropped in the harbor approaches Monday night.

The mines are set to become lethal at 4 a.m. PDT tomorrow, and the 36 ships now in Haiphong harbor have until that time to get out safely.

Laird said, however, that none had yet attempted to do so.

Laird said that among the 36 ships in Haiphong, are 16 Soviet vessels, five Chinese, two Cuban, one East German, three Polish, five Somali and four from British Hong Kong.

He refused to identify the Soviet freighter he said had

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apparently changed plans to enter Haiphong.

He said U.S. officials knew what kind of cargo was aboard the unnamed ship but declined to give any details.

Laird did not make clear whether the United States would wait until the deadline tomorrow before trying to stop all deliveries by any means into North Vietnam.

Asked whether the United States would interfere with ships which made any attempt to unload equipment outside North Vietnamese ports and send it ashore in small boats, Laird said, "We will take those actions that are necessary to prevent the landing of military supplies in North Vietnam."

In answer to questions about all types of possible weapons delivery — airlift, unloading of ships now in the harbor, and approach of other ships into the territorial waters claimed by North Vietnam — Laird replied: "We will take those actions that are necessary to stop the delivery of supplies to North Vietnam."

## 'No Unloading'

The implication was clear that the United States would not allow an airlift, perhaps going so far as to shoot down cargo planes trying to land, and would not allow unloading of the freighters now in port.

Laird said there had been no sign so far that the Russians might send in minesweepers to try to remove the explosives planted at seven ports but added, "We will take all steps necessary to maintain an effective mining effort."

Laird sought to differentiate the mining operation, calling mines a "passive weapon" which would explode only if a vessel chose to run the risk of explosion in trying to enter port.

Likewise, he said the U.S. blockade was untraditional in that there was no intention of challenging ships on the high seas outside North Vietnam's territorial waters.

However, Laird at one point seemed to have open the possibility that the United States under certain circumstances still might attempt to interfere with ships trying to sail into mined harbors after the three-day safety deadline expires.

#### **S. Viet Responsibility**

As for the South Vietnam's ability to stop the North Vi-

etnamese offensive, Laird said it was not a question of weapons at present, but it is a question of the leadership.

"The South Vietnamese will have to understand — and they do now understand — that the ground combat responsibility is theirs," he said.

Laird generally attempted to give an optimistic outlook on the current situation, which heated up Monday night when President Nixon ordered the mining of the harbor entrances and the interdiction of other Soviet and Chinese supply routes to North Vietnam.