

Laird Hints Stronger
Action to Halt Arms
to the North

"Necessary" Steps Will Be Taken

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The United States will take whatever steps it considers necessary to cut off arms shipments to North Vietnam that the enemy has used for "marauding throughout Southeast Asia," Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday.

He refused to foreclose such possible steps as attacks on ships remaining in Haiphong harbor or on cargo planes attempting to fly supplies into North Vietnam.

"I'm not going to get into a discussion of the operational orders and the contingencies that may arise," Laird told a news conference.

"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.

FREIGHTER

Laird reported that a Soviet freighter which had been expected to enter the port of Haiphong Tuesday or yesterday had changed course, away from the port.

But there still was no indication as to what the Soviet Union planned in response to the mining of the North Vietnamese ports and other U.S. steps.

Negotiations between the two countries on specialized subjects continued to be held in Washington.

Diplomatic officials continued to speculate whether President Nixon's trip to Moscow will proceed as scheduled, whether the Soviets will use minesweepers to clear the ports or whether Russia might wait for the next heavy fighting in South Vietnam to take some action.

MOREMENTS

Asked whether Soviet naval movements to date suggested a response, Laird said, "There has been no indication along that line."

Laird's stern suggestion of a variety of possible military actions followed presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger's warning Tuesday that U.S. ships would stop vessels approaching North Vietnam and warn them of minefields, but allow them to proceed at their own risk.

Asked whether he meant

See Back Page

From Page 1

to imply that the U.S. might go beyond the plan as discussed by Kissinger, Laird answered, "That is what I meant."

Laird was not necessarily disputing Kissinger, who had refused to discuss what he called the "rules of engagement" or to say what might happen after approaching ships had been warned of the risk confronting them.

SWEEPERS

Laird refused to say how the U.S. would react if the Soviet Union or North Vietnam attempted to use minesweepers to clear out the mines placed Monday night in the entrances to seven North Vietnamese ports.

Once again he said: "We will take all steps that are necessary in order to maintain an adequate mining operation."

Two Soviet minesweepers were reported to have left the port of Vladivostok about ten days ago, but the Pentagon said there is no evidence they were in Vietnamese waters. A spokesman said the Soviets have hundreds of minesweepers but none of them are in the Vietnam area.

SHIPS

Laird said there has been no evidence of attempts to remove the mines. Nor, he said, has there been movement of any of the 36 ships

in Haiphong away from the port.

The mines parachuted by Navy jets while Mr. Nixon addressed the nation Monday night are set to be activated at 3 a.m. PDT today.

Laird opened his press conference with a plea for public support for the actions taken by Mr. Nixon.

"This is not a time for quitters or for a lot of talk about instant surrender," he said. "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 (Creighton) Abrams and our men and in opposing communist aggression."

'QUITTERS'

Asked who he meant by "quitters," Laird said, "I am referring to those individuals that would give the world the impression that the United States is going to abandon its allies."

Despite the fall of Quang Tri and a developing battle for the northern city of Hue, Laird portrayed the South Vietnamese army as "holding fast in a very difficult ground combat situation."

"The fact that three divisions of the regular (North Vietnamese) forces have been able to move (only) 22 miles in five weeks in the area where the attack first started, I think speaks very well," he said.



UPI Telephoto

SECRETARY LAIRD Blast at 'Quitters'

"I don't want to say that everything is perfect as far as the South Vietnamese forces are concerned, because it is not. In some cases the South Vietnamese have not fought as well as they should, and have not the strong leadership that is needed and necessary to have success in the ground battle that is going forward."

"But in most cases, this leadership and this ground combat has been performed by these individuals in a very creditable fashion."

Laird said North Vietnamese forces in the south have supplies in some places to last for two to three months,

and some items for longer periods.

The effect of the mining and increased bombing, he said, will be influenced by how the North Vietnamese decide to fight from now on.

"The effect upon the battle area (depends on) 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 stoppage of supplies, that they can anticipate the future."

"I am not prepared to read those intentions," Laird said, "whether they are willing to use their supplies in a much more measured manner, depending upon the success or failure of supply movement and the logistics movement into North Vietnam."

Asked for his personal assessment of whether the South Vietnamese can weather the offensive, Laird said they "have the capability, they have the equipment and they have the manpower to be able to do this."

Pressed for a more explicit judgment as to whether they will, he said: "My evaluation is, on the best information that has been made available to me by military commanders, that they do have the will and the desire to carry out this defense of their home country."