

## Asia Strength

# No Fast Pullout Of U.S. Planes

### Washington

Pentagon planners report that U.S. aircraft are to be withdrawn from Southeast Asia very slowly in the initial period after any cease-fire.

"Until every one of our prisoners of war has been returned and the missing accounted for," one high-ranking Defense Department official declared, very few of the approximately 1000 Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps combat aircraft will be pulled back during the first 60 days of a truce.

Thereafter, the Pentagon officials say, many B-52 and fighter-bomber squadrons will be reassigned. But, they add, several hundred aircraft probably will remain for several months.

### THAILAND

Over the longer run, assuming there are no major military operations by North Vietnamese forces, the planners continue, the U.S. will probably cut air strength in Thailand down to three to six combat squadrons, totaling 72 to 144 aircraft.

Under this plan one air-

craft carrier with 70 to 90 planes would occasionally cruise off the coast of Indochina to demonstrate that additional aircraft would be available to oppose any invasion of the south.

There are now about 50 B-52s in Thailand, but well-placed sources said the future force there would probably consist exclusively of fighter-bombers.

### LAIRD

In a farewell news conference last Friday, retiring Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird was asked: "Do we have a further commitment to reinvoke American air or sea power in Vietnam should things go badly in the next year or two?"

Laird dodged a direct answer, saying only that the South Vietnamese had been armed and trained to provide for their own defense.

He also spoke of the need for efforts among the major powers to restrict large new deliveries of weapons to North Vietnam or South Vietnam so as not to upset the balance of power in Indochina.

*N.Y. Times Service*