

SECRETARY IS FIRM

Will Do Whatever Is
'Necessary to Stop'
Cargoes to NorthBy WILLIAM BEECHER
Special to The New York Times

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Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said today that "we will take those actions that are necessary to stop the supplies of equipment to North Vietnam," whether by airlift or by any ships that might evade American mines.

He also left open the possibility that American forces

Excerpts from Laird's news conference are on Page 18.

would stop ships from entering North Vietnam's ports if they tried to bypass the mines.

But under persistent questioning at a Pentagon news conference, he declined to say how these operations would be carried out.

Firm About Airlift

Asked whether the United States would attack any ship other than those of North Vietnam that entered its territorial waters and attempted to land cargo, Mr. Laird declared:

"Our policy is to stop the delivery to the North Vietnamese of these supplies and we will take those actions that are necessary to stop that delivery."

He gave a similar answer in reference to any attempt to airlift cargo.

Mr. Laird also said that one Soviet freighter headed toward Haiphong harbor had veered away. Other sources said that a Soviet vessel in the harbor had departed after delayed-action mines were dropped Monday at the entrance to the harbor.

Mr. Laird's position seemed at variance with a statement yesterday by Henry A. Kissinger.

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Secretary Would Block
Both Sea and Air Cargo

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ger, the President's national security adviser, that American ships would only inform other vessels of the presence of mines "but not interfere with them if they decided to proceed into the minefields at their own risk."

At the White House, Ronald L. Ziegler, the press secretary, declined under persistent questioning to dispel the apparent contradiction between the Laird and Kissinger positions. Both were "correct," he insisted.

SEEK TO SOFTEN IMPACT

In interviews, senior Defense Department officials attempted to soften the impact of Mr. Laird's remarks by insisting that the rationale behind mining North Vietnamese ports and not establishing a blockade of warships was to avoid a military showdown with the Soviet Union, China or any other supplier to North Vietnam.

"Mr. Laird did not publicly rule out a mining operation three weeks ago, when it was not at the top of the option list, and mining was ordered," one official said. "He is clearly not prepared to foreclose any other options now."

Without reference to Mr. Laird's statements, John B. Connally, the Secretary of Treasury, who reportedly played a major role in advising Mr. Nixon before the mining decision, told reporters at a luncheon that the President's action was "not in any sense a confrontation, a throwing down of the gauntlet" to the Russians.

The Soviet Union has sufficient "self-confidence that they don't have to wildly react," he said. The United States did not treat the Soviet invasion of Hungary as a challenge," Mr. Connally said, adding that he was "very hopeful" the Russians would act with similar self-restraint.

EXPLANATION IS OFFERED

One well placed Administration official suggested that Mr. Laird's ambiguous threat might be aimed, in part, at influencing of Moscow and Peking on what response they should make to the American effort to isolate North Vietnam.

"The more dangerous the game appears, the less likely that others will want to play," he declared.

Mr. Laird furnished no further details about the Soviet freighter, scheduled to move into Haiphong harbor "yesterday or today," that he said had decided against proceeding. The mines are to be activated at 6 A.M. tomorrow, Washington time (6 P.M. Hanoi time).

Other sources said the vessel had turned away and appeared headed for an alternate port outside North Vietnam.

At the time the mines were laid by United States aircraft Monday night, Mr. Laird said,

the following ships were in Haiphong Harbor: 16 Russian, 5 Chinese, 4 British (Hong Kong), 2 Cuban, 1 East German, 3 Polish and 5 Somalian.

MOVEMENT WITHIN
HARBOR

There has been some movement of these ships within the harbor Mr. Laird said. Other ships that were entering the estuary leading toward Haiphong at the time of the mining turned around and pulled out, other sources said.

Mr. Laird said there was no evidence of Soviet naval movements that appeared to be related to the mining of North Vietnamese ports.

Asked to explain how American naval operations off the North Vietnamese coast differed from a blockade, Mr. Laird said that a blockade would involve challenging ships beyond the territorial waters of North Vietnam, on the high seas.

He said: "We are merely giving notification to all shipping that the harbors of North Vietnam have been mined and we have notified the entire world, and we have notified the United Nations that we will not permit the landing of supplies in North Vietnam."

Officials of the Defense Department and other agencies subsequently explained that there was at present no intention to fire at either ships or planes attempting to deliver supplies.

They pointed out, however, that in the unlikely event that significant deliveries were made that avoided the minefields, these cargoes could be bombed on shore.

And if a massive airlift was mounted, they said, it is very likely that major airfields would be bombed—presumably when Soviet planes were absent—to interfere with such operations.

"Can you really see us shooting down unarmed Soviet transport aircraft?" one official asked rhetorically.

Officials added that of Soviet minesweepers appeared and started to clear a path toward Haiphong and other ports, the United States, rather than interfere with them, would more likely lay additional mines, a fairly quick and easy procedure with air-drop techniques.

They made clear, however, that if North Vietnamese barges ventured beyond minefields to attempt to unload freighters in international waters, the North Vietnamese would be subject to air and sea attack.

Mr. Laird admitted he had been overruled by President Nixon on the terms for ending the bombing of the north and resuming negotiations. The Defense Secretary had declared that Hanoi must first withdraw its forces from South Vietnam.

But in his speech announcing the mining operation Mr. Nixon said the United States was prepared to end all acts of force and withdraw all troops from Vietnam four months after

an internationally supervised cease-fire and the return of American prisoners of war.

There was no mention of North Vietnamese withdrawals from territory already captured. In his news conference yesterday, Mr. Kissinger said that question would have to be negotiated. But he quickly added that the United States would take a "generous position in its desire to end the fighting quickly."

"My position is out of date," Mr. Laird said today.

Mr. Laird suggested that North Vietnam might have enough supplies for four or five weeks of heavy combat, or a longer period of less intense warfare.

But he hinted that if the air and sea campaign to close off further supplies and to destroy existing stockpiles was successful, he was hopeful that Hanoi would not wait until its stocks were empty before turning to a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Laird insisted that in the intensified bombing campaign in the north, code-named Linebacker, the United States was making every effort to "minimize civilian casualties."

He attempted to contrast this with what he described as a "lack of respect for human life and civilian casualties" by the North Vietnamese in their shelling of cities in the south.

Cites Shelling in South

About 35,000 rounds were fired at Anloc, north of Saigon, he said, and 13,600 rounds at Quangtri on the coast north of Hue in a four-day period.

"They sprayed artillery into those civilian centers just as if they were using a water hose," he said.

Mr. Laird said American troop withdrawals would continue and that, in his view, South Vietnamese forces had the training, the equipment and

the will to defend their country. He did express disappointment at the performance of certain unspecified South Vietnamese units, however.

In remarks addressed to critics of the Administration's policy, he declared:

"This is no time for quitters or for a lot of talk about instant surrender. I don't think the American people want to clamber aboard some sort of bugout shuttle."