

Laird Denies Split With Nixon on Arms

Examiner News Services

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Defense Secretary Melvin Laird denied today that he differs with President Nixon in demanding approval of new U.S. weapons systems along with the Moscow arms limitation agreement.

"I don't believe there is a difference," Laird said in response to Chairman J. William Fulbright (D - Ark.), at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the SALT agreements.

Fulbright said that Dr. Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, had urged, in speaking for the President, that both the treaty and the weapons systems stand on their own merits.

"It seems," he told Laird, "that there is a difference between you and the President."

"I do believe," Laird elaborated, "that the defense budget stands on its own merits."

"It is my view that what

we are considering is a triple play for peace. We must take into account at the same time all three elements of this triple play," Laird said.

He said the antiballistic missile treaty and the interim agreement on offensive weapons are in the interest of America and the world. "But by themselves they do not automatically guarantee these national security gains."

Fulbright said he was very puzzled "that the arms limitation agreements are being used as an excuse to increase enormously the same race."

Laird is arguing that Congress cannot afford to ratify the missile accords President Nixon signed in Moscow May 26 unless it agrees to provide the billions that will be required for the B-1 bomber and the Trident missile-carrying submarine.

Hard Questioning

Laird faced five hours of hard questioning on that proposition yesterday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is usually disposed to give him what he asks.

He encountered even harder questioning today from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee whose members insistently ask why an arms limitation agreement should result in an increase in arms spending.

The toughest questioning came from Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), the only senator who is a member of both committees. Symington contends the national economy cannot afford both the bomber and the submarine.

\$13.4 Billion

Symington, a former Air Force secretary, says his "very good sources in the Pentagon" tell him the cost of 10 Trident submarines would be \$13.4 billion, plus the price of the nuclear warheads on their missiles.

The 24 B-1 bombers that are contemplated would cost about \$7.2 billion — making the price tag of the package something like \$20 billion. Both weapon systems are to be ready for use in the late 1970s.

The Moscow agreements limiting deployment of defensive missiles and freezing offensive missile deployment for five years must be tied to new weapons procurement, Laird said.

"Without any one, I believe the national security requirements of our country are jeopardized," he said.