

## No Assurances

# Laird Isn't Sure A Truce Will Last

## Farewell Meeting With Press

Washington Post Service \*

Washington

Outgoing Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday he could offer no firm assurances that fighting would not break out again in Vietnam after a cease-fire.

Fighting between the Vietnamese "has been going on for 30 years," Laird noted.

Asked if he foresaw peace in the area for the next five to ten years, Laird said, "I would never make that assurance to anyone."

At the same time, the defense secretary warned the South Vietnamese that if they stand in the way of a cease-fire agreement or fail to show "the will and desire" to defend themselves "they will have a very difficult time" getting further arms aid and financial support from the U.S.

### VIETNAMIZATION

The defense secretary reiterated his contention that his "Vietnamization" program to train and equip the South Vietnamese has given them the capability to defend themselves.

In so doing, Laird indicated that the chances for any further U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, in-

cluding future use of airpower, even if the war heated up again, are remote.

Asked if U.S. air power might be used if a major breakdown in a cease-fire occurred, Laird said he preferred not to answer such an "iffy" question directly.

But he pointed out that the Vietnamization program had taken into account the ability of Saigon's own air and ground forces to meet "the combined threat of North

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Vietnam and the Viet Cong."

### CONDITION

The only other condition cited by Laird involved the possibility that Russia or China might send large new shipments of warplanes to the North, which could cause the U.S. to "re-examine" its plans.

Laird said he did not expect such shipments from Hanoi's main arms suppliers, but he also reiterated his past emphasis on getting some sort of a big power arms agreement with Russia and China to limit war supplies moving into Southeast Asia.

Laird said he "would be very hopeful that in years to come" such a pact could be worked out.

In declining to offer any assurances that a cease-fire agreement could stop the fighting in Vietnam, Laird made it clear that he was referring to any possible agreement and not just the one which is expected to be announced soon.

As if to re-emphasize his caution about chances for lasting peace, he recalled how he had voiced similar reservations about the 1962

accords which were supposed to bring peace to Laos.

Laird, who will stay in office an extra few days until his successor — Elliot L. Richardson — is confirmed by the Senate, also made these points at a lengthy farewell meeting with reporters in his Pentagon office:

- Asked for his comment on the massive 12-day bombing raids against the Hanoi area and whether he thought such attacks were necessary, Laird said only that he thought "it was really quite an extraordinary use of air power." He said that it was "well executed" and that he had only the highest praise for the men who carried it out.

- Asked about reports over the years that he was not in accord with some U.S. war moves involving Cambodia, Laos and bombing policy, Laird said he would not discuss matters of private communications.

But he noted that he had "certain responsibilities that are different from the Joint Chiefs of Staff" and that he "always tries to present the pros and cons" of an issue. "I can only state that I support those actions of the President . . . and I always supported them."

- Laird also chided some unnamed White House aides for the way the changeover in the Nixon administration's second term was handled.

He called the manner in which across-the-board requests for resignations and some subsequent departures were handled as "rather cold." Yet he said it was "not the President's style" to do things that way, indicating it was someone else's idea.