

# Saigon Orders New Attacks

## Laird: No Promises

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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, even though he sees the chances for peace as better now in Southeast Asia and around the world.

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

When asked if he foresaw peace in the area for the next 5-10 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 stood in the way of a cease-fire agreement or failed to show "the will and desire" to defend themselves afterward, "they will have a very difficult time" getting further military hardware and financial support from the United States.

The Defense Secretary reiterated his contention that his "Vietnamization" program to train and equip the South Vietnamese had now given them the capability to defend themselves.

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

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ture use of airpower even if the war heated up again, were remote.

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

But he pointed out that the Vietnamization program had taken into account Saigon's air and ground force capability to meet "the combined threat of North Vietnam and the Vietcong."

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 United States to "re-examine" its plans.

Laird said he did not expect such shipments from Hanoi's main arms suppliers, but reit-

erated his emphasis on getting some sort of big-power 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 was certain to 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, Laird recalled how he had voiced a similar reservations about the 1962 accords which were supposed to bring peace to Laos.

Laird, who will stay in office a few days extra 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 his attitude toward 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 airpower." He said it was "well executed" and that he had only the highest praise for the men who carried it out.

He referred to President Nixon's speech of May 8 which set the basic conditions of U.S. air retaliation against the north for the Communist invasion of the south, as well as the harbor mining, and provided that they would continue until negotiations were serious. After the October-November pause in the bombing, Laird said there came a time in December "when the people in charge" felt negotiations were not moving, so the suspended May 8 authorizations were restored.

While not discussing his specific stance, he said, "I support the President completely as do all the members of the National Security Council."

- 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 tried "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 personnel changes in the Nixon administration's second term were handled.

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

- While suggesting that there may well be fighting "in various sections of the world during the next 5-10 years," Laird said, "I can say that as far as American involvement in that fighting, we have applied the Nixon Doctrine and as we look to the next 5-10 years we are no longer in the position where the U.S. is the cop on every beat. Our allies are in a position where they can take on that responsibility in their own neighborhoods."

- Laird said he felt that U.S. trade was "even a stronger weapon than airpower" when it came to future dealings on the military balance with the Soviets, who he indicated have food and investment needs.

- The defense chief produced for newsmen what he called a "very accurate" drawing of Russia's first aircraft carrier, a 45,000-ton warship designed to handle planes that can take off and land vertically or in very short distances.

He said the angled-deck ship was 900 feet long, about the size of the old U.S. Essex-class carriers, and would be commissioned soon.