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LAIRD REMARKS AND STATEMENTS: WORLD TRIP

Jan 1971

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## LAIRD DEPARTURE INTERVIEW (TEXT) (700)

WASHINGTON -- FOLLOWING IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF A PRESS INTERVIEW WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MELVIN R. LAIRD PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM WASHINGTON JANUARY 5:

(BEGIN TEXT)

CHAIRMAN MOORER AND I ARE LEAVING THIS MORNING TO MEET WITH THE PARIS NEGOTIATORS -- AMPASSADOR BRUCE, AMPASSADOR HABIB, AND GENERAL EWELL-TOMORROW. I ALSO WILL BE HAVING A MEETING WITH THE FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER, AND ADMIRAL MOORER WILL BE MEETING WITH GENERAL FOURQUET. FROM THERE WE WILL GO TO THAILAND AND THEN INTO VIETNAM. PURPOSE OF THE TRIP IS TO ASSESS THE PROGRESS BEING MADE IN THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM AND TO MAKE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FUTURE TROOP WITHDRAWALS WHICH CAN BE MADE AS A RESULT OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM AND AS A RESULT OF THE MILITARY SITUATION THAT DOES EXIST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

I AM SURE THAT MOST OF YOU REALIZE THAT IT WAS 11 MONTHS AGO THAT I MADE A SIMILAR VISIT TO VIETNAM AND AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME WE HAD GREAT HOPES OF REDUCING THE AMERICAN PRESENCE AS A RESULT OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, AND IN THAT 11-MONTHS PERIOD WE HAVE REDUCED AMERICAN PRESENCE IN VIETNAM BY 130,000. TODAY IN VIETNAM WE HAVE 335,000 MEN. WHEN WE TOOK OVER IN THIS ADMINISTRATION, THE TROOP CEILING IN THAT COUNTRY WAS 549,500. THE AMERICAN PRESENCE WILL CONTINUE TO GO DOWN IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND IN VIETNAM.

AS YOU KNOW, WE WILL BE VISITING THAILAND AND WE'VE ALREADY REDUCED AMERICAN PRESENCE IN THAILAND THROUGH THE ANNOUNCED REDUCTIONS WHICH WE HAVE MADE BY 16,000. THIS IS PART OF THE CONTINUING APPLICATION OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE IN ASIA; TURNING OVER GREATER MANPOWER RESPONSIBILITIES TO OUR ALLIES AND FRIENDS IN THAT AREA; GIVING THEM THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE THAT'S NEEDED AND NECESSARY FOR THEM TO DO THE JOB.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, I'D BE GLAD TO RESPOND.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, LAST NIGHT THE PRESIDENT SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT THERE MIGHT BE A STEP-UP IN WITHDRAWALS. DO YOU SEE ANY POSSIBILITY OF THAT?

PAGE 2 -- LAIRD TEXT

SECRETARY LAIRD: I WILL BE MAKING AN ASSESSMENT AFTER THE TRIP, BUT I'M CONFIDENT THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE A PROGRAM OF REDUCING AMERICAN PRESENCE IN VIETNAM. WE HAVE A TROOP CEILING OF 284,000 TO MEET ON MAY 1, AND I CAN ASSURE ONCE AGAIN THAT WE WILL MEET OR BEAT THAT TROOP CEILING THAT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES ON MAY 1. THIS IS THE SIXTH CEILING THAT WE HAVE HAD TO MEET, AND ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE COVERED THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE KNOW THAT WE'VE ALWAYS GONE AHEAD OF OUR CEILING. AS I SAID, THE TROOP LEVEL IN VIETNAM TODAY IS 335,000. OUR TROOP CEILING AS OF TODAY IS ALMOST 9,000 MORE THAN THE ACTUAL PRESENCE IN VIETNAM, SO WE WILL MEET OR BEAT THE TROOP CEILING OF MAY 1. AS FAR AS A FUTURE ASSESSMENT, THAT WILL BE MADE AND I WILL REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ALONG WITH THE CHAIRMAN ON ANY FUTURE (INAUDIBLE).

QUESTION: IS THIS TRIP GOING TO DEAL WITH JUST UP TO MAY 1, OR ARE YOU GOING TO BE LOOKING BEYOND?

SECRETARY LAIRD: WE WILL BE LOOKING BEYOND. THE PURPOSE OF THIS TRIP IS TO LOOK BEYOND THE MAY 1 TROOP CEILING AND TO ASSESS THE PROGRAM AS FAR AS VIETNAMIZATION AND THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FOR 1971 AND AS WE FACE THE FUTURE THE APPLICATION OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE IN THAT AREA OF THE WORLD.

I WAS PLEASED LAST NIGHT THAT THE PRESIDENT AGREED WITH ME THAT PERHAPS THE GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE LAST TWO YEARS HAS BEEN THE PROGRESS THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE WITH THE

VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, AND DISENGAGING AND REDUCING THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND PARTICULARLY IN VIETNAM.

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QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, WHEN WOULD YOU ANTICIPATE THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD HAVE ANOTHER TROOP WITHDRAWAL ANNOUNCEMENT DEALING WITH THE SITUATION AFTER MAY 1?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I WOULD NOT WANT TO FIX ANY DATE. I AM NOT ONE FOR MAKING PROJECTIONS AS TO THE EXACT DATE THE ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE MADE ON A NEW TROOP CEILING, BUT I CAN ASSURE THAT IT WILL BE MADE ON OR BEFORE THE FIRST OF MAY, BUT I AM NOT GOING TO GIVE ANY PROJECTED DATE. I WILL MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, OUR COMMANDER IN CHIEF, AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WILL MAKE THAT DETERMINATION.

QUESTION: WOULD YOU ANTICIPATE THEN THAT WE WOULD HAVE ADDITIONAL TROOP WITHDRAWALS BEYOND THE ANNOUNCED GOAL, AND BEYOND MAY 1 THIS YEAR?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I WOULD CERTAINLY ANTICIPATE THAT TROOP REDUCTIONS WOULD CONTINUE AS WE'VE MADE PROGRESS THIS PAST YEAR, AND AS WE CONTINUE TO MAKE PROGRESS WITH OUR VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM. SO, I WOULD ANTICIPATE THE FUTURE WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICANS IN VIETNAM, BUT AS FAR AS NEW TROOP CEILING ANNOUNCEMENTS, CERTAIN RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE MADE AFTER THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS AND I HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS THE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND THOSE RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE MADE TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WHEN I RETURN.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, GENTLEMEN. (END TEXT) ITEM

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LAIRD PRESS CONFERENCE IN PARIS (EXCERPTS) (2,100)

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PARIS -- FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS OF THE TRANSCRIPT OF SECRETARY LAIRD'S PRESS CONFERENCE IN PARIS JANUARY 6:  
(BEGIN EXCERPTS)

SECRETARY LAIRD: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I AM DELIGHTED TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH YOU FOR A FEW MINUTES THIS MORNING TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS.

I WOULD FIRST LIKE TO GIVE YOU A BRIEF REPORT ON THE REASONS FOR OUR MEETING HERE TODAY WITH THE NEGOTIATING DELEGATION REPRESENTING THE UNITED STATES, AND A MEETING ALSO WHICH CHAIRMAN MOORER OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND I HAD WITH THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE DELEGATION, AMBASSADOR LAM AND HIS PRINCIPAL DEPUTY. THE ADMINISTRATION ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE NEGOTIATIONS HERE AT PARIS AND THE IMPORTANT WORK BEING CARRIED ON BY AMBASSADOR BRUCE AND THE NEGOTIATING TEAM HERE IN PARIS. THE AIM, OF COURSE, AND THE GOAL OF THIS ADMINISTRATION IS STILL VERY MUCH A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AS FAR AS SOUTHEAST ASIA IS CONCERNED.

WE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HAVE HAD THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUSHING FORWARD WITH THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM AND HAVE ALWAYS EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM AND ITS IMPORTANT ASSOCIATION WITH A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT.

VIETNAMIZATION DOES NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF NEGOTIATION -- IT MERELY COMPLEMENTS NEGOTIATIONS, AND SHOULD NEGOTIATIONS FAIL, THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, PARTICULARLY THE MILITARY ASPECTS OF IT, GIVES A SUBSTITUTE AND GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WITHDRAWAL AND FOR DISASSOCIATION AND DISENGAGEMENT AS FAR AS THE UNITED STATES MILITARY FORCES ARE CONCERNED. AND THIS PROGRAM, DURING THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS, HAS MADE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES HAVE BECOME MUCH BETTER EQUIPPED, MUCH BETTER TRAINED, AND THE LEADERSHIP HAS IMPROVED TO THE POINT WHERE THEY ARE ABLE TO TAKE OVER THE MILITARY BURDENS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND PARTICULARLY IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

THIS PROGRESS THAT WE HAVE MADE WITH THE MILITARY ASPECTS OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, HOWEVER, IS IMPORTANT. BUT WE STILL ATTACH GREATER IMPORTANCE TO THE NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AS FAR AS INDOCHINA IS CONCERNED, AND WE BELIEVE THAT THE PROGRESS THAT WE HAVE MADE IN VIETNAMIZATION DOES PUT OUR NEGOTIATING TEAM IN A STRONGER POSITION HERE IN PARIS.

PAGE 2 -- LAIRD

THIS MORNING WE HAD A LENGTHY DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR BRUCE, AMBASSADOR HABIB AND WITH GENERAL EWELL CONCERNING A WIDE RANGE OF QUESTIONS THAT ARE UNDER DISCUSSION AS FAR AS VIET-NAM IS CONCERNED. BUT WE PARTICULARLY DEALT AT SOME LENGTH ON THE EFFORTS WHICH OUR GOVERNMENT IS MAKING ON THE PRISONER OF WAR ISSUE AND THE TREMENDOUS SUPPORT WHICH WE HAVE RECEIVED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD FROM CAPITALS ALL OVER THE WORLD AND FROM INDIVIDUALS AND FROM PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ON THE CONCERNS

WHICH WE HAVE FOR THE SAFETY, THE HEALTH, THE WELL-BEING AND THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS AS FAR AS THE TREATMENT

OF PRISONERS OF WAR, AND THE EFFORTS WHICH WE WILL MAKE ON BEHALF OF THE PROTECTION AND THE RELEASE AND THE HEALTH AND THE WELL-BEING OF THESE MEN, TO SEE THAT THEY CAN ONCE AGAIN BE FREE MEN. AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE AN ALL-OUT EFFORT FOR THE FREEDOM OF THESE PRISONERS OF WAR, TO SEE THAT THE ENEMY DOES LIVE UP TO THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS.

I DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS TO MAKE. I THINK IT WOULD BE BETTER IF I RESPONDED TO YOUR QUESTIONS.

AS YOU KNOW, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND MYSELF WILL HAVE SOME MEETINGS WITH THE FRENCH THIS NOON. I WILL BE ATTENDING

A LUNCHEON WITH DEFENSE MINISTER DEBRE, AND ADMIRAL MOORER WILL BE MEETING WITH GENERAL FOURQUET. LAST DECEMBER, WHEN I WAS HERE, I HAD A SIMILAR MEETING WITH THE FRENCH MINISTER OF DEFENSE, AND AT THAT TIME WE HAD A VERY GOOD DISCUSSION, AND I HAVE ACCEPTED HIS INVITATION TO BE WITH HIM THIS NOON FOR LUNCH. FROM HERE WE WILL THEN GO TO BANGKOK AND TO SOUTH VIET-NAM AND THE RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, MANY OF US WHO HAVE COVERED THE PEACE TALKS FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS HERE HAVE OFTEN BEEN SOMEWHAT CONFUSED AND EVEN BAFLED BY SOME OF THE OPTIMISTIC STATEMENTS THAT COME OUT OF WASHINGTON ABOUT THE WAR COMING TO AN END, AND THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF MENTIONED THIS THE OTHER EVENING.

NOW, THIS DOESN'T SEEM TO SQUARE WITH WHAT THE FOUR DELEGATIONS ARE SAYING HERE AT THE PEACE TALKS. AND WE WONDER WHETHER THERE IS SOMETHING THAT WE DON'T KNOW THAT WASHINGTON DOES, OR HOW ONE RECONCILES THE STATEMENTS BEING MADE HERE THAT NO PROGRESS WHATSOEVER HAS BEEN MADE IN THE LAST YEAR OR TWO WITH THE OPTIMISM THAT WE SOMETIMES FIND IN WASHINGTON THAT THE WAR IS COMING TO AN END.

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SECRETARY LAIRD: WELL, AS FAR AS THE UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH VIET-NAM IS CONCERNED, I THINK ONE ONLY HAS TO POINT TO THE RECORD. AND DURING THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS THE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT HAS BEEN WINDING DOWN. WHEN I BECAME SECRETARY OF

DEFENSE AND WHEN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION TOOK OFFICE, OUR TROOP CEILING IN SOUTH VIET-NAM WAS 549,500. THERE WAS A GOAL ESTABLISHED FOR THE END OF THIS CALENDAR YEAR FOR TROOP PRESENCE IN SOUTH VIET-NAM OF 344,000. WE BEAT THAT GOAL AND ARE AT A FIGURE OF 335,000 AT THE PRESENT TIME. WE HAVE A NEW TROOP CEILING GOAL FOR MAY 1 WHICH IS 284,000. WE WILL MEET OR BEAT THAT GOAL AS FAR AS TROOP CEILING IS CONCERNED, AND WE WILL BE BELOW THE 284,000 ON THE FIRST OF MAY. THIS IS SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS. THIS, COUPLED WITH THE REDUCTION OF CASUALTIES BEING SUFFERED BY THE AMERICAN FORCES IN VIETNAM, I THINK, IS SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE FURTHER REDUCTIONS OF AMERICAN TROOP PRESENCE IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

I THINK ONE HAS TO LOOK AT THE OVER-ALL REDUCTIONS WHICH WILL BE MADE DURING THIS PERIOD OF TIME. BY THE END OF THIS FISCAL YEAR, WE WILL HAVE REDUCED AMERICAN PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA BY WELL OVER 320,000 IN MILITARY PERSONNEL. WE HAVE DONE THIS AT THE SAME TIME THAT THE MILITARY CAPABILITIES OF OUR ALLIES AND OUR FRIENDS HAVE BEEN INCREASED.

SO WE HAVE MOVED INTO A STRONGER POSITION AS FAR AS THE AMERICAN ALLIES AND FRIENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND THEY HAVE GREATER MILITARY CAPABILITY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE AMERICAN MANPOWER PRESENCE HAS BEEN REDUCED.

AND I BELIEVE THAT ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT THAT, THAT IS SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, PRESIDENT NIXON IN HIS APPEARANCE ON MONDAY NIGHT SAID HE COULD SEE THE END OF THE U.S. COMBAT ROLE IN VIET-NAM AND IMPLIED IT COULD COME BEFORE 1972. DO YOU THINK THAT U.S. GROUND TROOPS MAY BE OUT OF VIET-NAM THIS YEAR?

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SECRETARY LAIRD: WE WILL BE IN A POSITION IN THE COURSE OF THIS YEAR WHERE THE AMERICAN COMBAT RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE REMOVED AS FAR AS SOUTH VIET-NAM IS CONCERNED. WE ARE APPROACHING THAT POSITION ON OUR MAY 1 TROOP CEILING DEADLINE. NOW, THE POSITION OF AMERICAN FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM AFTER THE MID-SUMMER PERIOD OF 1971, CALENDAR '71, WILL BE SUCH THAT WE WILL HAVE A LOGISTIC ROLE, WE WILL HAVE AN AIR SUPPORT ROLE, AND THAT THE COMBAT FORCES WHICH WILL BE ASSIGNED TO THE LOGISTIC SUPPORT AND ARTILLERY ROLES WILL NOT BE A COMBAT MISSION BUT WILL BE A SECURITY MISSION. THEY WILL BE THERE TO PROTECT AND TO SECURE THE FORCES THAT ARE ASSIGNED THESE ROLES.

IN THE PHASE ONE OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, WHICH WILL BE COMPLETED THIS YEAR, THE COMBAT RESPONSIBILITY IN SOUTH VIET-NAM WILL BE COMPLETELY TURNED OVER TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. IN PHASE TWO OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, AS WE MOVE FORWARD TO TURN OVER THE RESPONSIBILITY IN LOGISTICS, ARTILLERY AND IN AIR SUPPORT, THERE WILL BE COMBAT TROOPS ASSIGNED IN A SECURITY ROLE. BUT PHASE TWO OF THE VIETNAMIZATION TAKES A LITTLE LONGER BECAUSE OF THE TRAINING THAT IS REQUIRED IN THE AIR SUPPORT ROLE, IN THE LOGISTIC ROLE, AND THE ARTILLERY ROLE.

BUT I WANT TO MAKE IT EVIDENT TO ALL OF YOU THAT WE ARE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE IN PHASE TWO OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM IN TURNING OVER THE ARTILLERY, THE LOGISTIC AND THE AIR RESPONSIBILITIES, WHICH IS PHASE TWO OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, FROM THE MILITARY STANDPOINT. AND WE ARE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE IN ALL ASPECTS OF PHASE TWO OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM. WE ARE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE IN PHASE ONE, WHICH IS TURNING OVER THE COMPLETE COMBAT RESPONSIBILITY IN-COUNTRY TO THE FORCES OF SOUTH VIET-NAM.

Q. WELL, SIR, DO YOU THINK THAT THIS VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM IS COMPLETELY IRREVERSIBLE? SUPPOSE WE GO THROUGH PHASE ONE AND WE GO THROUGH PHASE TWO AND THE COMMUNIST FORCES THEN LAUNCH AN OFFENSIVE WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE A GOOD POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESS. DO WE THEN LEAVE THINGS WHERE THEY ARE, OR DO WE HAVE THE CAPABILITY OF COMING BACK?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I THINK THERE IS SOME MISUNDERSTANDING, FROM THE QUESTION, OF WHAT THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM IS. THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, AS PLANNED AND AS IMPLEMENTED BY THIS ADMINISTRATION, PLACES THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE IN A POSITION WHERE THEY CAN MEET NOT ONLY THE VC THREAT, BUT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE THREAT AS WELL. AND OUR PLANNING IS ON THAT BASIS.

Q. YOUR PLANNING, SIR, HAS SOMETIMES BEEN OFF BEFORE.

SECRETARY LAIRD: I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT HAS BEEN OFF, BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN AHEAD OF SCHEDULE ON THIS VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM AT ALL TIMES. AND THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM WAS FIRST SET FORWARD BY ME AND OUTLINED TO THE .../... CONGRESS ON BEHALF OF THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION. AND OUR PLANNING HAS NOT BEEN OFF BY ONE DAY OR ONE WEEK. IT HAS BEEN AHEAD OF SCHEDULE IN ALL CASES.

Q I'M REFERRING TO ESTIMATES OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE CAPABILITY OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

SECRETARY LAIRD: WELL, I WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THOSE ESTIMATES DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS. I RAISED SOME QUESTIONS PRIOR TO THAT TIME, BUT I WILL NOT TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY PRIOR TO THAT TIME.

Q MR. SECRETARY, FROM YOUR LATEST ASSESSMENT NOW TODAY OF THE NEGOTIATIONS HERE IN PARIS, DO YOU FEEL THAT THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM HAS IN ANY WAY SOFTENED THE ATTITUDE OF THE OTHER SIDE IN THESE NEGOTIATIONS OR CHANGED IT IN ANY WAY, OR IMPROVED THE AMERICAN POSITION HERE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I CANNOT MAKE SUCH AN ASSESSMENT. I HAVE NOT SEEN SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS AS FAR AS THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE CONCERNED. I BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE HAD SOME PROGRESS AS FAR AS THE PRISONER OF WAR ISSUE IS CONCERNED. SINCE WE HAVE MADE THIS AN INTERNATIONAL ISSUE AND HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING IT PUBLICLY, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME INDICATIONS OF IMPROVEMENT AS FAR AS COMMUNICATIONS ARE CONCERNED AND AS FAR AS THE NUMBER OF LETTERS BEING RECEIVED IN THE UNITED STATES. WE HAVE NOT HAD ANY MOVEMENT, HOWEVER, AS FAR AS LIVING UP TO THE GENEVA CONVENTION AND WE STILL WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS ON THAT.

I THINK, HOWEVER, THAT WE ARE VERY CONFIDENT THAT THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM WILL WORK FROM A MILITARY STANDPOINT. I THINK IT IS WORKING. AND THE CAPABILITY OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CONTINUES TO IMPROVE. AND I THINK THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE VIET CONG CAN DO VERY WELL TO TAKE NOTICE OF THIS CONTINUING PROGRESS THAT IS BEING MADE AS FAR AS SOUTH VIETNAM IS CONCERNED....

Q MR. SECRETARY, AT A RECENT NEWS CONFERENCE YOU DESCRIBED THE NORTH VIETNAMESE RELEASE OF A LIST OF POW'S AS BEING INADEQUATE AND INHUMANE, AND, IN EFFECT, THAT IT WAS SOME SORT OF A CHEAT. NOW, WHAT EVIDENCE --

SECRETARY LAIRD: YOU HAVE DONE A VERY GOOD JOB QUOTING WHAT I HAVE SAID, BUT I THINK IT IS COMPLETELY OUT OF CONTEXT, AND I DON'T THINK THAT IS AN EXACT QUOTE. BUT I THINK IT GIVES SORT OF A FLAVOR OF WHAT I SAID.

Q RIGHT. WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE, HAVE THAT THERE ARE MORE

PRISONERS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN REPORTED?

SECRETARY LAIRD: WELL, I THINK ALL WE NEED TO DO IS TO POINT TO THE GENEVA CONVENTION. IT MAKES IT VERY CLEAR WHAT THE RULES, THE REGULATIONS, ARE. AND THERE IS NO REASON THAT THESE POW CAMPS SHOULD NOT BE OPENED UP TO INSPECTION BY THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT IS INHUMANE FOR FAMILIES, FOR MOTHERS, FOR PARENTS OF MEN THAT ARE MISSING IN ACTION TO BE KEPT IN THIS KIND OF SUSPENSE OVER SUCH A LONG PERIOD OF TIME. I WOULD SAY IT IS INHUMANE. I SAY THAT THE OTHER SIDE, THE ENEMY, CAN HANDLE THIS BY MERELY LIVING UP TO THE GENEVA CONVENTION AND SATISFYING THE REQUIREMENTS, THAT EVERY NATION, I BELIEVE, THAT HAS BEEN A PARTY TO THE CONVENTION SUPPORTS WHOLEHEARTEDLY.

Q. WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT THERE ARE MORE PRISONERS?

SECRETARY LAIRD: WE KNOW THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT ARE MISSING IN NORTH VIETNAM AND IN LAOS AND SOUTH VIETNAM. WE KNOW THAT MANY OF THESE SUPPOSED LOSSES USED PARACHUTES, THEY WERE IN A POSITION WHERE THEY WERE CAPABLE OF BEING CAPTURED. WE DO NOT SEE ANY REASON WHY THIS SHOULD NOT BE MADE A MATTER OPEN TO PUBLIC INSPECTION. AND WE DO NOT SEE ANY REASON WHY THESE WIVES, THESE MOTHERS, THESE FATHERS SHOULD BE KEPT IN THIS STATE OF SUSPENSE.

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IT IS VERY EASY FOR THE OTHER SIDE TO OPEN UP THIS WHOLE MATTER TO PUBLIC INSPECTION, AND WE INSIST THAT THAT BE THE CASE. WE ARE DOING IT AS FAR AS ANY CAPTURED PRISONERS IN THE SOUTH WHICH HAVE BEEN TURNED OVER TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE. THIS IS A MATTER OF PUBLIC REVIEW ON A REGULAR BASIS. WE SEE NO REASON WHY THERE SHOULD BE ANY QUESTION ABOUT THIS MATTER. THERE WOULD BE NO QUESTION ABOUT IT IF THE GENEVA CONVENTION WAS UPHELD.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, FOR THE SAKE OF CLARIFICATION, I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR DEFINITION OF THE WORD "VIETNAMIZATION."

SECRETARY LAIRD: IF YOU WANT A DEFINITION OF THE TERM "VIETNAMIZATION," IT IS A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE, AND ONE HAS TO UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY THE NIXON DOCTRINE, WHICH IS A DOCTRINE OF PARTNERSHIP, STRENGTH, AND A WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE. THE VIETNAMIZATION IS A PART OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE IN THAT IT IS BUILDING UP A PARTNER OF OURS TO FACE THE MILITARY THREAT IN VIETNAM. THIS PARTICULAR VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM PLACES GREAT EMPHASIS ON BUILDING UP THE ECONOMY, THE MILITARY STRENGTH, THAT IS NEEDED AND NECESSARY TO FACE THE POTENTIAL THREAT FROM THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE VC, TO FACE THIS THREAT WITHOUT RELYING UPON AMERICAN MANPOWER.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, WHEN PRESIDENT NIXON PROPOSED HIS OCTOBER FIVE POINT PEACE PROPOSAL HE TALKED IN A VERY GENERAL WAY ON THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM. I BELIEVE IT IS THE POLICY OF YOUR ADMINISTRATION TO LEAVE THE POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE. NOW, OBSERVERS HERE IN PARIS TO THE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN EXPECTING THAT THERE MIGHT BE A MOVE FROM THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT TO GO BEYOND THE RATHER VAGUE STATEMENT OF "GENERAL ELECTIONS" WHICH PRESIDENT THIEU PROPOSED SOMETIME AGO. WHEN YOU SEE GENERAL THIEU WILL YOU DISCUSS THIS WITH HIM?

SECRETARY LAIRD: GENERALLY, WE BELIEVE THE QUESTION OF THE ELECTIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM IS A MATTER THAT SHOULD BE HANDLED BY THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM. THERE HAVE BEEN VARIOUS OFFERS MADE AS FAR AS SUPERVISION OF THESE ELECTIONS BY VARIOUS GROUPS OF INTERNATIONAL



BODIES. THESE PROPOSALS ARE WELL KNOWN TO ALL OF YOU. BUT THE MATTER OF THE CONDUCT OF THE ELECTIONS IS A MATTER THAT IS AN INTERNAL MATTER THAT MUST BE HANDLED BY THE PEOPLE IN SOUTH VIET-NAM.

I HAVE SEEN ON MANY OCCASIONS, AS YOU HAVE, A WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT TO HAVE THESE ELECTIONS INSPECTED, SUPERVISED, SO THAT THEY ARE FAIR AND OPEN ELECTIONS. THE MATTER OF THE ELECTIONS IS A MATTER WHICH WILL BE HANDLED BY THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIET-NAM, AND I THINK THAT THAT IS THE PROPER MANNER IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE HANDLED. (END EXCERPTS) ITEM

1/6/71 535P GD

EPP-48

LAIRD INTERVIEW AT BANGKOK AIRPORT (EXCERPTS) (550)

BANGKOK -- FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS BY DEFENSE SECRETARY MELVIN R. LAIRD ON HIS ARRIVAL AT THE BANGKOK AIRPORT JANUARY 7:

(BEGIN EXCERPTS)

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, WHAT SPECIFIC SUBJECTS WILL YOU DISCUSS HERE, SIR?

SECRETARY LAIRD: OF COURSE, BEING SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, I HAVE CERTAIN RESPONSIBILITIES AS FAR AS THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE CONCERNED AND ALSO AS FAR AS MEETING OUR TREATY OBLIGATIONS WHICH WE SHARE IN THIS AREA OF THE WORLD. WE ARE DOING WHAT WE

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AN TO SEE THAT THE NIXON DOCTRINE OF PARTNERSHIP, OF STRENGTH, AND A WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE IS UNDERSTOOD NOT ONLY IN ASIA BUT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. AS WE APPLY THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE, OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT IN MEETING THE TREATY OBLIGATIONS WHICH WE SHARE WITH THE THAI GOVERNMENT.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM?

SECRETARY LAIRD: THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM HAS MOVED AHEAD OF SCHEDULE; AND ALL PHASES, AS FAR AS TURNING OVER THE COMBAT RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES, AS FAR AS PREPARING THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE TO TAKE A GREATER ROLE, AS FAR AS AIR, ARTILLERY AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT, WE ARE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE AS FAR AS THIS PROGRAM IS CONCERNED. IT HAS PERMITTED A REDUCTION OF AMERICAN FORCES WHICH HAS TAKEN PLACE AND IS TAKING PLACE AND IT HAS PERMITTED (WILL PERMIT) A REDUCTION AS FAR AS THAI FORCES ARE CONCERNED IN VIETNAM. THE PROGRAM HAS MOVED FORWARD VERY WELL, AND THESE ANTICIPATED REDUCTIONS WHICH WILL BE MADE DURING THIS PARTICULAR CALENDAR YEAR ARE POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE PROGRESS OF THE MILITARY ASPECTS OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM.

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QUESTION: HOW WILL THE NIXON DOCTRINE AFFECT MILITARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND?

SECRETARY LAIRD: AS FAR AS THE EFFECT OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE ON THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, IT WILL MEAN THAT THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE AS FAR AS THE DIRECT AID IS CONCERNED AND THE EXCESS MILITARY STOCKS WHICH ARE MADE AVAILABLE TO OUR ALLIES, WILL BE INCREASED DURING THE PERIOD OF THE NEXT DECADE. AS WE APPLY THE THEORY OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE OF PARTNERSHIP, OF STRENGTH, AND A WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE, OF COURSE WE WILL BE RELYING ON THE MANPOWER, TO A GREATER EXTENT, OF OUR ALLIES. BUT BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF RESOURCES THAT DOES EXIST AS FAR AS MANY OF OUR ALLIES ARE CONCERNED, IT WILL NECESSITATE MILITARY ASSISTANCE, AND THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM WE ANTICIPATE WILL BE INCREASED AS FAR AS THE APPLICATION, AND IN THE APPLICATION, OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE.

QUESTION: MR. SECRETARY, ARE YOU GOING TO MEET WITH THE CAMBODIAN OFFICIALS, SIR? EITHER HERE OR IN VIETNAM?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I DON'T HAVE SUCH A MEETING SCHEDULED AT THIS TIME.

QUESTION: DO YOU HAVE ANY PLANS TO GO TO PHNOM PENH, MR. SECRETARY?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I HAVE NO PLANS AT THIS TIME. I AM GOING FROM HERE TO VIETNAM.

QUESTION: HAS A DEADLINE BEEN SET FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE UNITED STATES COMBAT TROOPS IN VIETNAM? FOR EXAMPLE, MAY 1ST?

SECRETARY LAIRD: BY MAY 1ST, WE WILL HAVE A TROOP STRENGTH IN VIETNAM WHICH IS A CEILING WHICH HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED BY THE PRESIDENT WHICH IS 284,000. THIS IS A REDUCTION OF THE CEILING FROM 549,500 TO 284,000 AS OF MAY 1. A MAJOR PORTION OF OUR COMBAT FORCES THAT HAVE A COMBAT RESPONSIBILITY OR A COMBAT ASSIGNMENT WITHIN COUNTRY WILL HAVE BEEN WITHDRAWN BY THAT TIME. HOWEVER, I DON'T WANT WILL NOT BE A COMBAT RESPONSIBILITY AS SUCH. IT WILL BE PRIMARILY A SECURITY RESPONSIBILITY AS WE PROCEED WITH PHASE II OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM WHICH TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE ARTILLERY, THE LOGISTIC SUPPORT, AND THE AIR SUPPORT; AND THESE COMBAT FORCES WILL BE ASSIGNED THE SECURITY ROLE AS FAR AS THESE REMAINING FORCES, AS WE PROCEED WITH PHASE II OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM. (END EXCERPTS) ITEM.

EPF 57

LAIRD NEWS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT (EXCERPTS) (1,600)

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1-70

WASHINGTON -- FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPT OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LAIRD'S NEWS CONFERENCE JANUARY 20 DEALING WITH HIS RECENT VISIT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SUBSEQUENT EVENTS.

(BEGIN EXCERPTS)

SECRETARY LAIRD: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AS I TOLD YOU BEFORE I LEFT ON THE TRIP TO PARIS AND TO SOUTHEAST ASIA, TO THAILAND AND VIETNAM, THAT I WOULD REPORT TO YOU ON MY RETURN AFTER I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES...

I REPORTED TO THE PRESIDENT THAT IN MY VIEW IT WAS CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF VIETNAMIZATION THAT WE USE OUR AIR AND OUR SEA RESOURCES, FIRST TO PROTECT THE LIVES OF THE MEN THAT ARE SERVING UNDER THE SUPERB LEADERSHIP OF GENERAL ABRAMS, AND SECONDLY, TO ENHANCE VIETNAMIZATION AND TO ENABLE US TO BRING HOME ADDITIONAL THHOUSANDS OF AMERICANS FROM VIETNAM...

SECRETARY LAIRD, YOU ASSURED US SOME MANY MONTHS AGO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CREDIBILITY GAP HERE. AND YET, THERE HAS BEEN A CREDIBILITY GAP THAT HAS BEEN YAWNING WIDER AND WIDER IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS, AND THAT IS THAT IN JUNE OF 1970, MR. NIXON AND OTHERS IN THE WHITE HOUSE INDICATED THAT THERE WOULD

BE AN END TO COMBAT AIR SUPPORT AND OUR LOGISTICS SUPPORT DIRECTLY IN CAMBODIA ONCE OUR TROOPS ON THE GROUND HAD LEFT THERE. THIS POLICY SEEMS TO HAVE CHANGED IN RECENT WEEKS. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THIS CHANGE IN POLICY IS?

LAIRD: FIRST, I WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS MYSELF TO THE CREDIBILITY PART OF YOUR QUESTION. SINCE I HAVE SERVED OVER HERE IN THIS BUILDING, WE HAVE MADE SEVERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM TIME TO TIME AS TO WHERE WE WOULD BE AND WHAT WE WOULD DO. THESE ANNOUNCEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND EACH TIME AN ANNOUNCEMENT HAS BEEN MADE, THE CREDIBILITY OF THOSE ANNOUNCEMENTS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN QUESTIONED. I THINK THE BEST JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER THEY ARE CREDIBLE OR NOT IS IN THE DELIVERY. WE HAVE ANNOUNCED SIX SEPARATE TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM VIETNAM, AND ON EVERY OCCASION WE HAVE DELIVERED ON THOSE ANNOUNCEMENTS.

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THIS IS SOMETHING THAT HAD NOT HAPPENED BEFORE AS FOR AS SOUTH-EAST ASIA IS CONCERNED DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO CALL TO YOUR ATTENTION THAT EACH TIME THOSE ANNOUNCEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE THERE HAVE BEEN THOSE THAT HAVE DOUBTED WHETHER WE WOULD DELIVER. THE RECORD WILL SHOW THAT EACH OF THE LAST FIVE HAS BEEN MET. I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THE SIXTH INCREMENT OF OUR WITHDRAWAL WILL BE MET AND THAT WE WILL BEAT THE TROOP CEILING OF 284,000 ON MAY 1.

THEN THERE WAS ANOTHER ANNOUNCEMENT WHICH WAS CHALLENGED AS TO WHETHER IT WAS CREDIBLE OR NOT. THAT WAS THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT OUR GROUND FORCES WOULD BE OUT OF CAMBODIA AFTER THE OPERATIONS WERE CONCLUDED DURING THE 60-DAY PERIOD WHICH WAS OUTLINED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

I JUST RECENTLY REREAD SOME OF THE EDITORIALS WHICH WERE WRITTEN THAT THIS WAS A PROBLEM AND THAT WE WOULD NOT DELIVER. EVERY GROUND SOLDIER WAS REMOVED FROM CAMBODIA AT THE CLOSE OF THE SANCTUARY OPERATIONS ON SCHEDULE OR AHEAD OF TIME. THAT ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MET.

THE SECOND PART OF YOUR QUESTION DEALS WITH THE FOLLOWUP OF THE CAMBODIAN SANCTUARY OPERATIONS OF 1970 IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT SAID, I BELIEVE ON JUNE 30, THAT AIR SUPPORT WOULD NOT BE USED OR NOT NECESSARY DURING THE TERMINATION OF THOSE SANCTUARY OPERATIONS. THIS WAS A CORRECT STATEMENT, BECAUSE THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE AT THAT TIME FELT THAT THEY COULD PERFORM THE AIR SUPPORT THAT WAS NEEDED AND NECESSARY TO FINISH UP THOSE SANCTUARY OPERATIONS PRIOR TO THE RAINY SEASON SETTING IN, WHICH OF COURSE TERMINATED THAT PHASE OF THE CAMBODIAN OPERATION AS FAR AS THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WERE CONCERNED.

WE DID, HOWEVER, USE AIR POWER IN CAMBODIA, AND WE HAVE CONTINUED TO USE IT, ALTHOUGH IT WAS NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE SANCTUARY OPERATION. WE HAVE CONTINUED AND AS THE PRESIDENT SAID IN THAT SAME STATEMENT ON JUNE 30, HE SAID WE WILL CONDUCT WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT-- I AM PARAPHRASING THIS--AIR OPERATIONS AGAINST ENEMY FORCES AS THEY MOVE SUPPLIES AND PERSONNEL THROUGH CAMBODIA TOWARDS SOUTH VIETNAM AND REESTABLISH THEIR SANCTUARY AREAS.

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I DON'T WANT TO GET INTO A SEMANTIC PROBLEM HERE OF WHAT THIS

MISSION IS CALLED, OR THAT MISSION. I HAVE ALWAYS CALLED IT "AIR ACTIVITIES," "AIR SUPPORT" AS FAR AS CAMBODIA IS CONCERNED, AND I DON'T CARE TO GET INTO A QUESTION OF SEMANTICS ON THAT. WE WILL USE AIR POWER, AND AS LONG AS I AM SERVING IN THIS JOB, I WILL RECOMMEND THAT WE USE AIR POWER TO SUPPLEMENT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES, AS FAR AS THE AIR CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA. I THINK THAT THAT IS DONE FOR VERY GOOD REASON. AS I STATED IN MY REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT, FIRST, TO REDUCE AMERICAN CASUALTIES AND PROTECT AMERICAN LIVES AS WE CONTINUE TO WITHDRAW AND REDUCE THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND PARTICULARLY IN VIETNAM; SECONDLY, AS WE CONTINUE TO SEE THAT THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM AND THE SUCCESS OF THAT PROGRAM IS ASSURED AND AS THE PHASE II OF THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM GOES FORWARD.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WILL BE IN A POSITION, AS THE CAMBODIANS WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION. THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARE ACQUIRING THE AIR CAPABILITY, AND THE MOVEMENT THAT WE'VE MADE WITH THE TRANSFER OF WELL OVER 300 HELICOPTERS IN THIS LAST YEAR, I THINK IS SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS. THE PROGRESS WE ARE MAKING AS FAR AS THE FIXED WING AIRCRAFT IS CONCERNED IS IMPORTANT. BUT WE ARE GOING TO SUPPLEMENT AS FAR AS AIR POWER IS CONCERNED.

I DON'T WANT ANYONE TO LEAVE THIS ROOM WITH ANY OTHER UNDERSTANDING. I HAVE OUTLINED THAT TO THE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES. WE HAVE THIS AUTHORITY. IT WAS SPELLED OUT CLEARLY IN THE CONGRESSIONAL LEGISLATION WHICH PASSED. THE AUTHORS OF THE AMENDMENTS WHICH LIMIT GROUND COMBAT ACTIVITIES, WHICH I SUPPORT, AND WHICH I WILL SEE ARE LIVED UP TO BY THIS ADMINISTRATION AND BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.

WE WILL FOLLOW THOSE CONGRESSIONAL MANDATES. BUT AS FAR AS AIR AND SEA ACTIVITIES, THE LAW IS VERY CLEAR THAT AS FAR AS THE SANCTUARIES OR AS FAR AS PROTECTING THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM, PROTECTING AMERICAN LIVES, INSURING WITHDRAWAL, ALL OF THOSE TERMS ARE WRITTEN VERY EMPHATICALLY AND CLEARLY INTO THE CONGRESSIONAL LEGISLATION, WHICH PASSED IN THIS LAST SESSION OF CONGRESS. WE WILL ABIDE BY THOSE CONGRESSIONAL MANDATES AND WE ARE LIVING WITHIN THOSE CONGRESSIONAL MANDATES TODAY.

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Q. MR. SECRETARY, WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE FORCE IN TWO MOUNTAIN PASSES IS ATTEMPTING TO REESTABLISH A SANCTUARY IN CAMBODIA; THAT THE USE OF HELICOPTER GUN SHIPS TO ATTEMPT TO DISLodge THEM IS AN INTERDICTION OF SUPPLIES THAT MIGHT EVENTUALLY COME INTO VIETNAM AND THAT THAT IS NOT A BROAD END DEFINITION OF WHAT YOU AND THE PRESIDENT AND JERRY FRIEDHEIM AND EVERYBODY ELSE IN TOWN WAS SAYING LAST JUNE?

LAIRD: I KNOW WHAT I WAS SAYING LAST JUNE, AND PRIOR TO THAT TIME, THAT WE WOULD USE AIR POWER IN CAMBODIA. I THINK IF YOU WILL REREAD THE TESTIMONY IN WHICH I WAS QUIZZED BY THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, IT'S VERY CLEAR. AND I KNOW YOU'VE REREAD THAT.

Q. I HAVE. HAVE I ASKED TOO MANY QUESTIONS? I WOULD LIKE ONE ON THAT HIGHWAY.

SECRETARY LAIRD: IF YOU WANT TO GET INTO THAT PARTICULAR OPERATION, SUPPLEMENTAL AIR POWER HAS BEEN USED TO SUPPLEMENT THE FORCES OF SOUTH VIETNAM. AS YOU KNOW, OUR INFORMATION OF THE PREVIOUS LOGISTIC SUPPLY ROUTE FOR IV CORPS AND III CORPS INDICATES VERY CLEARLY THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF ALL OF THE SUPPLIES THAT MOVED INTO III AND IV CORPS DID ORIGINATE IN THAT AREA NEAR THE PORT OF KOMPONG SOM, FORMERLY CALLED SIHANOUKVILLE. THIS HAS BEEN A MAJOR LOGISTIC SUPPLY ROUTE TO SUPPLY THE FORCES

IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THIS ROUTE TO THE SEA IS IMPORTANT, AND EVERY EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO SEE THAT IT CANNOT BE USED AS FAR AS A SUPPLY ROUTE BY THE ENEMY.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CONTRARY TO SOME REPORTS WENT INTO THIS AREA ON THE GROUND, AND THERE HAS BEEN SOME AIRLIFT WITHIN THE AREA, WHICH BOTH THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE PROVIDED. THERE HAS BEEN AIR SUPPORT FLOWN BY THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE, THE CAMBODIANS, AND THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCES. I CONSIDER THIS AN IMPORTANT USE OF AIR POWER, AND BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEE THAT THE LOGISTICS SUPPLY ROUTES AND THE RESTOCKING OF THE SANCTUARIES BE MADE AS DIFFICULT AS POSSIBLE DURING THIS VERY IMPORTANT DRY SEASON...

Q. MR. SECRETARY, YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT THE NIXON DOCTRINE AND YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT MATERIAL ASSISTANCE. HAVE YOU BROADENED IT BY SAYING IT ALSO INCLUDES AIR ASSISTANCE AND SEAPOWERS ASSISTANCE?

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LAIRD: THE SITUATION IS SUCH THAT AS FAR AS OUR COMMITMENTS ARE CONCERNED AND OUR OBLIGATIONS IN ASIA, WE ARE NOT BACKING AWAY FROM ANY OF THOSE TREATY OBLIGATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN PASSED BY THE UNITED STATES SENATE, APPROVED UNDER OUR CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS. WE ARE MAKING IT CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT OUR ASSISTANCE WILL BE IN THE WAY OF MATERIAL; WILL BE MAINTAINED IN THE FORM OF SEA AND AIR POWER, BUT THAT WE DO NOT PLACE THE RELIANCE ON THE COMMITMENT OF GROUND COMBAT FORCES THAT THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION DID IN THIS AREA. I DON'T CARE TO GET BACK AND DEBATE THE 1965 DECISION, BECAUSE THAT DOES NOT SERVE US ANY PURPOSE AT THIS TIME.

Q. ARE YOU SAYING THAT THE NIXON DOCTRINE ONLY PRECLUDES THE USE OF GROUND COMBAT FORCES, PERIOD?

LAIRD: THE NIXON DOCTRINE APPLIES TO BUILDING UP THE STRENGTH OF OUR ALLIES IN THAT AREA AND PERFORMING THE NEEDED AND NECESSARY SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS IN ORDER FOR US TO MAINTAIN AN ADEQUATE DETERRENT AS WE MOVE TOWARDS PEACE IN THAT AREA, AND IT DOES PLACE THE EMPHASIS ON THE IDEA OF PARTNERSHIP AND STRENGTH...

Q. CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY. DOES THIS MEAN THAT THERE MIGHT BE OTHER GROUND FORCES INTRODUCED? SECONDLY, DOES THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION FEEL THAT NO MATTER WHAT HAS BEEN SAID AT ONE TIME, THAT IT HAS NO RIGHT TO CHANGE ITS MIND AND TAKE A DIFFERENT STEP IF THE EXIGENCIES OF THE SITUATION DEMAND IT AND IT IS NOT OUTLAWED BY CONGRESS?

LAIRD: I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE MAINTAIN OUR RELATIONSHIPS AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE AND LIVE WITHIN THE CONGRESSIONAL MANDATES THAT WE HAVE AND WE ARE DOING THAT. I THINK THAT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD. WE ARE CARRYING ON A MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM IN CAMBODIA. THIS WAS APPROVED BY AN OVERWHELMING VOTE OF THE CONGRESS. WE ARE GOING TO DO OUR BEST HERE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND WITHIN THIS ADMINISTRATION TO ASSURE THAT THIS MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM WILL BE CARRIED OUT AS EFFECTIVELY AND AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE.

THIS WILL REQUIRE, OF COURSE, THAT WE AUDIT THE DELIVERY OF EQUIPMENT AND AMMUNITION UNDER THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. AS I TESTIFIED AT THE TIME THE SUPPLEMENTAL WAS BEFORE CONGRESS,

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THAT AUDIT RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY OUR MILITARY EQUIPMENT DELIVERY TEAMS. THIS IS A RESPONSIBILITY THAT THE CONGRESS HAS CHARGED THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE TO BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE MILITARY EQUIPMENT, MILITARY SUPPLIES THAT ARE DELIVERED TO CAMBODIA UNDER THIS PROGRAM. IN ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION, WE WILL KEEP THE MILITARY DELIVERY ASSISTANCE TEAMS AT A VERY MINIMUM LEVEL. I THINK YOU WILL PROBABLY FIND THAT THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE WILL HAVE MORE PEOPLE CHECKING IT THAN WE DO BECAUSE WE ARE MAKING AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO KEEP THE MILITARY PRESENCE, AS FAR AS THE MILITARY DELIVERY TEAMS ARE CONCERNED, TO THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM.

THIS SHOULD BE NO NEWS TO ANYONE. I WOULD HOPE THAT YOU WOULD REREAD MY TESTIMONY BEFORE SENATOR MCGEE'S SUBCOMMITTEE THAT CONDUCTED HEARINGS ON HOW WE WOULD ACCOUNT FOR THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN CAMBODIA. I TRIED TO OUTLINE IT THERE AS CLEARLY AND AS EFFECTIVELY AS I POSSIBLY COULD...

Q. MR. SECRETARY, AS I READ THE PRESIDENT ON JUNE 30, HE WOULD PERMIT INTERDICTION ACTIVITY IN CAMBODIA AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF OUR TROOPS, BUT WOULD PRECLUDE BOTH CLOSE SUPPORT AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT. AS I UNDERSTAND YOU TODAY, YOU SAY THAT CLOSE SUPPORT AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT, HOWEVER DESCRIBED, ARE NOW PERMITTED.

LAIRD: I DON'T USE THOSE TERMS. I TALK ABOUT AIR SUPPORT. I HAVE ALWAYS TALKED ABOUT AIR SUPPORT.

Q. THAT KIND OF ACTIVITY, HOWEVER DESCRIBED, IS PERMITTED BY TWO THINGS: ONE, A DEFINITION OF WHAT THE NIXON DOCTRINE IS REALLY ALL ABOUT; AND, TWO, THE FACT THAT THE CONGRESS DIDN'T PRECLUDE THIS KIND OF ACTIVITY IN VOTING A SUPPLEMENTAL AND RESTRICTING GROUND COMBAT ACTIVITY?

LAIRD: YOU ARE CORRECT IN BOTH CASES. THE CONGRESS DID NOT PRECLUDE THIS, AND IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ANTICIPATED BY ME IN ALL OF MY TESTIMONY THAT AIR SUPPORT WOULD BE USED.

THE USE OF HELICOPTER GUN SHIPS AND THE IMPROVEMENTS THAT WE HAVE MADE IN THE LAST YEAR ON THE HELICOPTER GUN SHIP HAS BEEN IMPORTANT. IT'S BEEN MUCH MORE EFFECTIVELY USED, AND SOME OF THE OTHER GUN SHIPS ARE MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THEY WERE A YEAR AGO AS FAR AS STOPPING LOGISTIC MOVEMENT. SO I AM NOT MAYBY ANSWERING YOUR QUESTION. BUT YOU SORT OF STATED A FACT AS FAR AS THE ACTION OF THE CONGRESS. I THOUGHT I HAD MADE THAT PRETTY CLEAR....

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Q. AS THE LEGISLATION IS DRAWN, AS YOU ARE DISCUSSING IT, DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF PRECLUDED FROM OPERATING, SAY, DIVISION OR REGIMENTAL LEVEL ADVISORS, TO THE CAMBODIANS AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE OPERATING IN CAMBODIA?

LAIRD: YES.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, HOW MUCH MORE AIR POWER ARE WE PREPARED TO USE IN CAMBODIA ABOVE PRESENT LEVELS?

LAIRD: I WOULD DOUBT THAT WE WOULD GET UP TO THE LEVEL OF LAST YEAR, BUT WE COULD. I DON'T WANT TO BE IN A POSITION OF PUTTING A SORTIE LIMITATION AS FAR AS CAMBODIA, IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WANT. I AM NOT GOING TO DO THAT. BECAUSE I HAVE TOLD GENERAL ABRAMS THAT I WANT HIM TO DO EVERYTHING HE CAN TO CONTINUE TO KEEP AMERICAN CASUALTIES LOW.

WE HAVE MADE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS IN THAT AREA. WHEN I CAME IN THERE WERE SOME WEEKS THEY WERE RUNNING 300. THIS WEEK THEY ANNOUNCED IN SAIGON THAT IN THE LAST 7 DAYS THERE WERE 37. ONE CASUALTY IS TOO MANY.

THEY ARE GOING TO DO EVERYTHING THE CAN, TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE PROTECTION OF AMERICAN LIVES, THE DANGERS INVOLVED TO THE AMERICANS THAT ARE PRESENT IN VIETNAM, BECAUSE WE'RE TAKING OUR PEOPLE OUT. AND AS WE CONTINUE TO TAKE ADDITIONAL THOUSANDS OUT OF SOUTH VIETNAM I HAVE INSISTED THAT OUR COMMANDERS HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO PROTECT THOSE REMAINING FORCES IN COUNTRY. I AM NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING THAT WILL RESTRICT THEIR CAPABILITY TO PROTECT AMERICAN LIVES.

Q. MR. SECRETARY, DOES THAT MEAN THAT THERE ARE NO INHIBITIONS OF ANY KIND ON THE USE OF AMERICAN AIR POWER IN CAMBODIA?

SECRETARY LAIRD: I DON'T CARE TO DISCUSS THE OPERATING ORDERS. I HAVE NEVER DISCUSSED THE OPERATING ORDERS WHICH I HAVE APPROVED IN SUBSTANCE. I CAN ONLY SAY TO YOU THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN PROTECTIONS WRITTEN INTO THOSE ORDERS; THERE ARE CERTAIN CONTROLS THAT ARE WRITTEN INTO THOSE ORDERS. (END EXCRPTS) ITEM

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