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SECRETARY LAIRD SPEAKS
BEFORE CHAMBER

HON. JOHN J. RHODES

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 14, 1970

Mr. RHODES. Mr. Speaker, I am proud and pleased to have the opportunity to insert in the Record the fine speech

which was delivered by the distinguished Secretary of Defense MELVIN R. LAIRD in San Antonio, Tex., on October 9 at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon.

REMARKS OF HON. MELVIN R. LAIRD

Mr. Mayor, Congressman Fisher, Commanding General, General Critz of the Fourth Army, General Simler, distinguished men in uniform who are guests of the luncheon committee this noon.

I first want to express to you my deep regret in having to cancel out on my originally scheduled appearance with your Military Affairs Committee. It was originally scheduled and then our Commander-in-Chief, President Nixon, had some other ideas about the Secretary of State and myself taking the trip with him to Europe, and for that reason the dinner was postponed until today.

And I apologize for the inconvenience to your committee and to all of you that had something to do with making those arrangements, I know how difficult it is to make those kinds of changes.

This is not my first visit to San Antonio. I have visited here before, but as a Member of Congress. I visited here on several occasions and have been a guest at each of the military installations along with the Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Committee, George Mahon. The last visit as a Member of Congress was in 1967. And prior to that we had visited the installations along with Congressman Fisher in 1965 and before that with Congressman Shepherd of California, the Chairman of the Military Construction Committee, as we looked over some of the military construction requests.

For nine terms in the Congress I served on the Defense Appropriations Committee and on the Military Construction Committee, along with the Health, Education, and Welfare Appropriations subcommittee, and I know something about the development of the Army and the Air Force in this region, and the manner in which this community has opened their arms and has welcomed each succeeding group of enlisted men and officers that have been assigned to these important bases.

My visit to San Antonio is a most rewarding one for me because it is my first visit here as Secretary of Defense. I was invited to your Armed Forces Dinner and could not be present and my high school classmate and now the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Robert Froehlike, substituted for me at that time.

But I assured you at that time that I would come to San Antonio on my first opportunity.

This opportunity gives me the chance to inspect the pilot project of our program work with civilian health officials in applying the lessons we have learned in Vietnam, to the medical emergencies we face in the United States.

As you may know, the largest killer in the United States of people of 37 years of age and under, the largest killer is highway accidents. That is why, as a Member of Congress, I urged that we seek means to delivery timely medical assistance to trauma victims on our highways.

I suggested then, while serving in the Legislative Branch of our government, that we expand the use of helicopters as an ambulance to reach accident scenes in the crucial early minutes following an accident, particularly when the site is located some distance from a hospital. When I became Secretary of Defense, I appointed a group to work with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to establish a test program. This culminated in Project MAST, which was referred to in the introduction—Military Assistance for Safety in Traffic, and we initiated that program right here in San Antonio last July.

Since then we have extended the test program to serve other areas throughout the United States, and, as of 11 o'clock this morning, October 8, 1970, the five MAST test sites throughout the United States have carried out a total of 93 missions, moved 139 patients and have 138 flying hours that have been utilized in this important program.

We have extended the test program to these five areas and we are going to continue it this year on a pilot basis. I look forward this afternoon to meeting with our helicopter rescue groups, most of whom have served in Vietnam, and to receive an updated report of the results of this test program which has looked so promising thus far.

Today we meet here at this luncheon at a time of momentous transition, momentous transition in foreign, in military, and in domestic policy as far as our country is concerned.

President Nixon has changed the course of our nation. Of many transitions now in process, the most basic and indeed the most important in my view, is the transition from war to peace. The Nixon Administration has been and remains committed to the goal of achieving a just peace in Vietnam.

We are also committed to ending American ground combat involvement in that war. The President's Vietnamization program instituted last year is both to complement and is an alternative to negotiations. Through Vietnamization, American military forces in Vietnam are steadily being reduced from the high point of authorized strength of 549,500 troops at the time the President took office. The authorized strength has now been trimmed to 384,000, this troop ceiling that will be effected this week.

By next spring it will be down to 284,000, approximately half the size of the force built up in Vietnam at the time the President took office.

Yesterday, in Paris, Ambassador Bruce and Ambassador Habib laid on the negotiating table the historic proposals for peace which President Nixon outlined in his speech on Wednesday night. It is my fervent hope that the other side will eventually respond favorably to this new initiative for peace and will agree to a cease fire in the immediate release of all prisoners of war. [Applause.]

Ladies and gentlemen, many consequences flow from the transition from war to peace. The change in the nation's course resulted in a sharp decrease in American casualties. It has enabled us to reduce substantially the number of young men that we must take into military service by the draft, and it has permitted us to move forward towards a zero draft call and an all-volunteer force. This change in course has permitted us to have the lowest casualties at any time in the last four and a half years in Vietnam. This past week those casualties were 38. One casualty is too many, but when one stops to realize that the casualties in Vietnam were running at the rate of 300 a week when the President took office and the casualty rate this past week has been reduced to 38, I think this in itself is a substantial and an important change in direction as far as the responsibility of American troops.

[Applause.]

On the ground in Vietnam.

Our progress so far in the transition from war to peace in Southeast Asia and from the confrontation of the past to the negotiation of the future has enabled us to make significant reductions in defense spending. Our nation's economy is undergoing an important transition as we shift manpower and other productive resources from war to peace. This shift of resources makes it possible for the nation to devote its energies to the solution of many domestic problems.

In recent years the American people have demanded an intensified effort by government to cope with a number of the ills that trouble our society. I need not run through that agenda of major domestic tasks in which concern is growing.

It would include matters of higher priority, of course—the improvement of our educational system, stronger action to curb the pollution, raising the living standards of the poor, reduction of crime and violence, and the establishment of broader equal opportunities throughout the country. All of these tasks require spending money as part of the prescription for successful action. And in most cases, the amounts are considerable. Some have argued that the only way to get the money needed for the solution of our domestic problems is to take more away from the defense budget, and from national security spending.

It is plain distortion of fact to argue as some do that increased defense spending over the course of the past few years has gobbled up the major part of additional government outlays. Those who make this argument have not looked carefully at the budget as far as the public sector is concerned.

Even during the mid-1960s, when defense outlays were growing because of the increasing American involvement in Vietnam, public spending on non-defense purposes increased by nearly three times as much as the spending for defense. Nevertheless, we in the Defense Department, have not been insensitive to the strain on the taxpayer when both defense and non-defense spending are increasing. Easing that strain was one of the most compelling reasons for reducing the defense budget as soon as this could be done without exposing our nation to unwanted risks as far as its national security and safety were concerned.

Defense spending, ladies and gentlemen, has been cut significantly. Resources formerly channelled into war have been freed for the solution of domestic problems and for other peacetime purposes. And, we are today well along the path of the transition from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy.

The budget which President Nixon presented to the Congress last February marked an historic change in our national priority. In the current fiscal year, for the first time in 21 years, defense spending is no longer the biggest category of federal spending. This year, more of the Federal budget is devoted to human resource programs than to national security and to defense. The first time in 21 years.

This year for the first time in 21 years, defense spending is less than 40 per cent of the total Federal spending.

This year slightly more than \$1 out of every 3 distributed by the Federal treasury is being spent for defense.

This year for the first time in over 20 years, defense expenditures are down to 7 per cent of the Gross National Product from the 9.6 per cent of the Gross National Product in 1968.

The reductions made in the defense budget largely were the results of the progress in Vietnamization in turning over the ground combat responsibilities and other responsibilities of the war in Southeast Asia to the military forces of South Vietnam.

As far as the war in Vietnam is concerned, as it decreased in intensity and as American participation declined as a result of the progress that we have made with this program, the impact of the war on our budget has lightened. The estimated full cost of the war in Vietnam was \$29 billion in fiscal year 1969. It was decreased to about half of that cost in this fiscal year's budget, as we end fiscal year 1971.

While Defense spending in dollars in terms of constant purchasing power was reduced by more than \$17 billion since 1968, spend-

ing for non-defense programs in constant dollars has increased by 18.4 billion dollars. Thus, the so-called peace dividend for the domestic sector has already resulted in reduced defense spending.

Reductions in military manpower make possible another transition, the transition to a zero draft and an all-volunteer military service.

We are moving towards a zero draft goal that we hope can be achieved by 15 inductions in 1970 are at a new six-year level.

In addition to the personnel reductions within the Department of Defense, there have been concurrent reductions in defense-related industries throughout the nation. We realize, of course, that the shift from a wartime to a peacetime economy brings with it certain inevitable problems, and these problems are felt right here in San Antonio.

Let me tell you what we are giving high priority to in this important change from wartime to a peacetime economy. We are going to go forward and expand our program of helping the communities affected by defense reduction to meet these problems.

Within the Department of Defense I have assigned high priority to the job of our Office of Economic Adjustment, which is working with community leaders in many parts of the country to help them maximize the peacetime potential of both the human and the material resources formerly dedicated to defense uses.

We understand the problems involved, and we intend to do what we can to minimize the disruptions that stem from these reductions. The planned reductions and cutbacks in defense go as far as we can in the present world environment without exposing ourselves to imprudent risks.

The reduction of some two billions dollars made by the House of Representatives in the defense budget as submitted by the Administration, by action yesterday on the floor of the House of Representatives, I believe represent an imprudent risk as far as the safety and security of the United States is concerned.

We in the United States must never close our eyes to the threat which our arm forces must be prepared to face. [Applause.]

That threat has not diminished. The position seems to continue to grow and the threat continues to grow as far as our country is concerned and I believe that the billion additional cut which I will reclaim to the United States Senate next week represents an imprudent risk as far as our security is concerned.

In the past five years the Soviet Union has gone forward and this threat has been expanding. It has expanded its strategic offensive forces with a rapid and a persistent momentum. As a result it has achieved a position of parity and, in some cases, superiority.

As one striking example, the Soviet Union has forged ahead of us in the number of strategic land-based missiles. Our estimate of the large, monstrous Soviet SS-9 intercontinental ballistic missile deployed or under construction has been increased from some 230 a year ago to more than 300 today.

The Soviet Union now has some 28 Polaris type ballistic missile submarines operation or under construction, and, at present construction rates, will exceed our fleet of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines early in 1974.

In contrast, our nation has not increased its force level of strategic offensive missile launchers since 1965.

During this same period, the Soviet Union has pushed the development of its strategic offensive forces with a momentum which shows no sign of slackening.

As Secretary of Defense, I indeed urge that the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks which resume in Helsinki in less than a month—

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on November 2nd—will result in success. We are striving hard to achieve that success, but I must also report to the American people that if these talks are not successful we will face some hard, tough decisions that cannot be delayed much longer if we are to assure the nation's safety and survival.

There are other developments as well which heighten the threat of our security.

The increasing naval capability of the Soviet Union, its growing military research and development program and the powerful conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact in Europe and in Communist China and in North Korea are well to note.

I returned last week from the Mediterranean area where there is visible evidence of expanding Soviet power. I commented there and I would repeat here to the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce that the expansion of the military power of the Soviet Union is not limited, however, to the Mediterranean. We have reported to the American public during recent weeks the increased naval and Soviet fleet operations in many oceans of the world, including the Caribbean.

I know the people of this State, the State of Texas, I know that you with your long coast line along the Gulf of Mexico are particularly aware of Soviet fleet activities in these waters even in the Gulf.

We dare not let down guard as we strive to achieve an enduring peace throughout the world based on President Nixon's three principles of partnership, strength, and a willingness to negotiate.

In order to be successful, however, in negotiations, we must negotiate from a position of strength. [Applause.]

That is why it is essential that the Congress approve the bare bones, rock-bottom budget requests now pending for fiscal year 1971, which began on July 1 of 1970. Any major reduction in these requests will endanger our national security and our pursuit for peace. We have pared this budget to a position, and I know after serving 18 years on the House Appropriations Committee that this budget has been pared and is a rock-bottom, bare bones budget, and it cannot take the substantial reductions which were voted in the Congress just yesterday.

I say this in the light of the momentum which the Soviet Union has developed and is maintaining in weapons procurement, in research, and also in weapons development.

Finally, and most importantly, the safety and the security of our country will depend on the dedicated services of men and women, because the men and women are indeed the important asset we have, and more important than any weapons.

The defense of our nation requires that we maintain not only strong military forces, but also a strong industrial base, and all of us in the defense community appreciate the effective contribution which the people of Texas have long made to our nation's strength.

As a Member of Congress and now as Secretary of Defense I have been aware of the great contributions to the national security which the people of this State have made. That is why I intend to do everything that I can to enhance the status, to enhance the prestige of the men and women who wear the uniform of this country. [Applause.]

And that is why I am concerned about the welfare of the civilian defense workers, whether they are employed by the government or employed by defense industries. I know that there are some who believe that it is trite to say that in national defense people are our most precious asset, but I firmly believe this and want to close my remarks here in San Antonio with this thought:

I want to reaffirm my pride in and the

responsibility which I have as Secretary of Defense for these people and for their families. These are the people who contribute so much to the national security and to the safety of the United States of America.

Thank you.