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# MELVIN LAIRD AND NIXON'S QUEST FOR A POST-VIETNAM FOREIGN POLICY

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COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY SERIES

SPECIAL STUDY 6

Richard A. Hunt

Series Editors Jeffrey A. Larsen • Erin R. Mahan

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#### Cover Photo

President Richard Nixon, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, and Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard at the Pentagon, 1 May 1970.

Source: OSD Historical Office.

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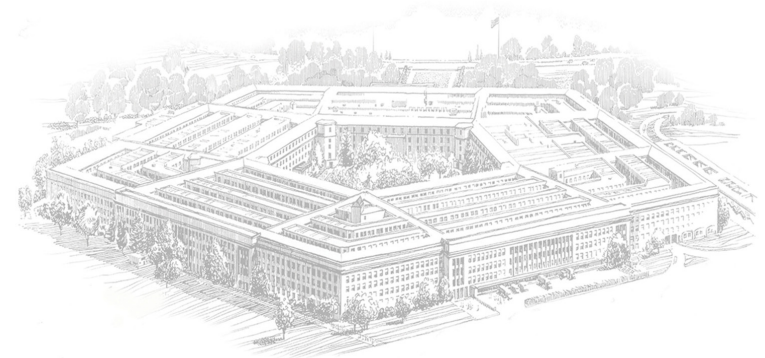
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## Foreword

This is the sixth special study by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Historical Office that emphasizes the secretary's role in the U.S. foreign policymaking process and describes how the position evolved between 1947 and the end of the Cold War. The present work focuses on President Richard Nixon's initial secretary of defense, Melvin R. Laird. In Nixon's first term, Laird proved a more influential policymaker than the secretary of state, whose authority was constrained by a new national security system and the president's desire to formulate and conduct foreign policy himself. Laird did not encroach on the traditional foreign policy sphere of the president or the secretary of state, but ceded no ground where foreign policy and defense issues met.

The Historical Office views this series as part of an ongoing effort to highlight varied aspects of the secretary's role and accomplishments. The series had its origins in a draft manuscript by Dr. Steven Rearden, author of *The Formative Years, 1947–1950*, the first volume in the Secretaries of Defense Historical Series. We anticipate that future series will cover a variety of other defense topics as they relate to the position of the secretary.

I wish to thank Cheryl Bratten at the U.S. Army Center of Military History for crossing organizational lanes and providing much-needed editorial support. I also continue to be indebted to Kathleen Jones in OSD Graphics for her expertise and design.

The series titles printed to date as well as other publications are available on the OSD Historical Office website. We invite you to peruse our selections at <<http://history.defense.gov/>>.

Erin R. Mahan  
Chief Historian  
Office of the Secretary of Defense

## Executive Summary

When Melvin Laird succeeded Clark Clifford as secretary of defense in January 1969, he realized that major changes in American foreign and defense policy, beginning with Vietnam, were only a matter of time. Yet the war was just one part of Laird's agenda during his four years as secretary of defense. Laird carved out a broad, independent role for himself and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, although he heartily endorsed the need for teamwork and cooperation with the White House and the National Security Council (NSC). He had too much Washington experience and too many powerful allies in Congress to be hemmed in or pushed to the sidelines by Richard Nixon's White House staff.

Laird made major contributions on several fronts. He transitioned the armed services from a conscripted force to an all-volunteer force (AVF), secured a strategic arms limitations agreement with the Soviet Union, and kept at bay congressional critics and White House budget cutters from slashing defense spending too severely. The secretary proved to be a key policymaker, particularly regarding Vietnam.

Laird assumed two formidable challenges when he became secretary. He sought to remove the U.S. military from Vietnam and ensure that the armed forces remained capable of carrying out U.S. national security objectives in Europe and Asia. Mired in a counterproductive war in Southeast Asia and facing antimilitary sentiment at home, the Department of Defense simultaneously experienced shrinking budgets in the late 1960s and unrelenting pressure for ever more reductions. Personnel and materiel problems

aggravated by the diversion of troops and equipment from NATO and other theaters to Vietnam further hampered Pentagon efforts to achieve a measure of stability. Laird viewed the costly Vietnam War as weakening the armed forces and thereby reducing their value as a deterrent against the Soviet Union. In this unsettled environment, Laird worked to shore up U.S. military ties in Europe and Asia. He also concentrated on strengthening American power and influence in foreign affairs. He believed that a strong conventional defense and a credible nuclear deterrent formed the foundation of a sound foreign policy.

During his tenure, Laird successfully fought efforts to impose what he believed were ruinous cuts in defense spending demanded by public and congressional critics. He expected an influential policymaking role in areas where defense and foreign issues overlapped, but Nixon insisted on conducting most foreign affairs himself. Nixon's plan to enhance the NSC's role forced Laird to oppose measures that would insert the national security adviser between the president and the secretary of defense or limit his authority over the Defense Department. Laird favored a strong and active NSC in foreign policy, but not if it infringed on the secretary's customary authority.

The Vietnam War consumed the majority of Laird's time and energy. Laird contributed to lessening U.S. military involvement with Vietnamization, the U.S. effort to improve and modernize South Vietnam's forces so they could assume a greater share of the combat and permit U.S. forces to withdraw. In addition, given the special problems and sensitive nature of U.S. prisoners of war and servicemen missing in action, Laird treated those matters separately from other Vietnam policy issues. He supported Nixon's 1969 decision to widen the war by bombing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong base areas in Cambodia.

Relations between the White House and Laird worsened during his tenure, reaching a low point during the Vietnamese Easter

Offensive of 1972. Laird clearly lost influence and status during this period when the administration was under severe strain. The administration seemed to be waging war on its key officials at the same time it was fighting North Vietnam and pursuing peace talks in Paris. Laird's role in the Paris negotiations was largely behind the scenes, although he demanded that the return of U.S. POWs be part of a peace settlement.

At the start of his administration the president expressed his intention to change the character of U.S. relations with the Soviet Union from one of confrontation to negotiation and to hold talks on strategic arms. Nixon's administration also embarked on two major strategic arms initiatives: deployment of an antiballistic missile (ABM) system to defend against incoming Soviet missiles and strategic arms limitation talks (SALT) with the Soviets to limit the growth of nuclear weapons. Nixon and Laird considered ABM deployment as indispensable to serious strategic arms limitation talks, viewing the antimissile system as a bargaining chip in negotiations. Laird had less confidence than his immediate predecessors in what arms control could accomplish, but it was an issue he could scarcely ignore.

Except when circumstances dictated, Laird rarely participated directly in the day to day details of the SALT process, but he was instrumental in shaping the U.S. negotiating position. Laird's role was pivotal during the crucial final stages when the SALT agreements went to Congress. Laird supported a strategic arms limitation agreement as a means of slowing the momentum of the Soviet strategic buildup and as a first step toward the success of expected follow-on arms control discussions. He stressed, however, that his support of these agreements was largely conditional upon congressional approval and full funding for a broad range of improvements in the U.S. strategic posture.

As a member of NATO's Defense Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group, Laird was a major participant in establishing

guidelines for the use of NATO's military assets, including nuclear weapons. Laird pushed allies to shoulder a larger share of the burden of defending Western Europe. In the mid-1960s the United States had withdrawn units, personnel, and equipment from NATO to fight the war in Vietnam, and the Nixon administration wanted its European partners to fill those gaps. But Laird's exhortations had little effect.

Constantly fighting budget cuts, Laird tried to lower costs wherever possible—NATO included. He made several attempts to reduce U.S. naval forces committed to NATO, but Nixon would not go along. Laird's tenure also coincided with a transition in relations with two key Asian allies, Japan and South Korea.

By the time the Paris peace accords were signed in January 1973, all U.S. combatant forces had redeployed from Vietnam, and the United States remained a major contributor to NATO and its force structure. In addition, the military had become an all-volunteer force with the end of conscription. As the principal architect of both Vietnamization and the AVF, Laird believed that he had accomplished what he had set out to do. He left office shortly after Nixon began his second term.

## **Introduction**

When Melvin R. Laird became secretary of defense in January 1969, he assumed the formidable challenges of withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam and maintaining a military force capable of carrying out U.S. national security objectives in the postwar era. Mired in a counterproductive war in Southeast Asia and facing growing antimilitary sentiment at home, the Department of Defense experienced shrinking budgets in the late 1960s and unrelenting pressure for even more spending reductions. Personnel and materiel problems aggravated by the diversion of troops and equipment from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other theaters to Vietnam further hampered Pentagon efforts to achieve a measure of stability. Laird viewed the costly Vietnam War as weakening the armed forces and thereby reducing their value as a deterrent against the Soviet Union. In this unsettled environment, Laird worked to shore up U.S. military ties in Europe and Asia. He also concentrated on strengthening American power and influence in foreign affairs. In his estimation, a strong conventional defense and a credible nuclear deterrent formed the foundation of a sound foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

Reluctant to give up his seat in Congress and a leading role in the Republican Party, Laird agreed to serve as president-elect Richard M. Nixon's secretary of defense but only for four years. Laird was convinced that staying in the post longer than that would result in diminishing effectiveness. To win over his new defense secretary, the president-elect made an important concession, granting him authority to make military and civilian appointments without interference from the president or members of his administration. This arrangement, combined with his ties to Congress, gave Laird



a unique degree of independence. During his tenure as secretary of defense, Laird played a central role in formulating Vietnam War policy, oversaw the drawdown of U.S. forces from Vietnam, worked to reshape military relations with U.S. allies in Europe and Asia, and successfully fought efforts to impose what he believed were ruinous cuts in defense spending demanded by public and congressional critics.<sup>2</sup>

Based on his experience as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice president in the 1950s, Nixon may have expected Laird—a last minute replacement when his first choice for secretary of defense, Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA), backed out—to be deferential. President Eisenhower's secretaries, Charles Wilson and Neil McElroy, had resigned themselves to being managers from the start. Loyal and dutiful, they had seen to the execution of presidential decisions. Nixon may have hoped for the same from Laird.<sup>3</sup>

As a congressman, Laird had developed a basic approach to foreign policy. Harkening to Eisenhower's position that a strong economy and a strong defense went hand in hand, he had been uneasy with the Kennedy administration's allocation of resources and its freewheeling approach to defense spending. He was also critical of military assistance for Third World countries. Laird's most pointed criticism concerned strategic weapons, believing Kennedy's accommodations had in the long run weakened the West's security. He was convinced that the United States should exploit its strength to roll back communist power and influence.<sup>4</sup>

Laird had similar concerns over President Lyndon B. Johnson's foreign policy. The Vietnam War had weakened U.S. forces generally and the U.S. security posture in Europe, heightening political differences with allies. In Laird's view, strong defense required equally strong alliances to help keep the peace and protect U.S. interests. With the United States heavily engaged in Vietnam, the number of Soviet strategic missiles had grown substantially in the second half of the 1960s. As secretary of defense, Laird would be

the administration's chief public advocate of an antiballistic missile (ABM) system as a means to defend the nation from the growing Soviet missile threat and as an essential bargaining chip to reach a strategic arms limitation agreement. Concerned that strong defense and foreign policy required adequate funding, Laird fought defense budget cuts, trying to inform the public and Congress how quickly and dramatically the nondefense portion of the federal budget had grown and how that growth corresponded with fewer resources for national security.<sup>5</sup>

Laird supported Nixon's foreign policy of reorienting U.S. relations with the Soviet Union. Nixon was convinced that the Sino-Soviet split was a unique opportunity for dramatic foreign policy changes, a chance to break free of the rigid anticommunist mindset of U.S. foreign policy and to change the character of U.S. relations with communist powers. As a conservative, Nixon felt he could convince other conservatives to accept his new approach and win over the American public as well. Despite improved East-West relations, Laird, however, perceived fundamental differences that limited the scope of détente. He cited the Soviet resupply of North Vietnam and the continuing Soviet strategic buildup during his tenure as evidence of détente's limited impact. Wary of communism, Laird found it difficult to imagine any alternative to the historically hostile pattern of East-West relations, especially while the war in Vietnam continued.<sup>6</sup>

### **Laird and a Reorganized National Security Council**

Laird expected an influential policymaking role in areas where defense and foreign issues overlapped, but Nixon insisted on primarily conducting foreign affairs himself. Within hours of being inaugurated, the president approved National Security Decision Memorandum 2 setting up new national security policymaking procedures and abolishing the Senior Interdepartmental Group, chaired by the State Department during the Johnson administration. The president looked to Henry Kissinger, his national security



adviser, to lead a revitalized National Security Council (NSC) system similar to the one that Eisenhower had used. Nixon attributed the foreign policy setbacks of the previous eight years in large part to “the inability or disinclination of President Eisenhower’s successors to make use of” the NSC. To Nixon, sound policies and sound organization were inseparable.<sup>7</sup>

The NSC was the principal forum for the consideration of policy issues requiring presidential attention. Nixon resuscitated Eisenhower’s practice of adopting broad budgetary and policy reviews, authorizing Kissinger to request detailed reviews, National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM), on a wide range of national security and foreign policy issues.<sup>8</sup>

Kissinger also oversaw a network of specialized interagency committees to review issues before they reached the NSC. The Senior Interdepartmental Group reemerged as the NSC Under Secretaries Committee. Other interagency committees covering a wide range of issues included the Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG) to assess policy and progress in the war, the Defense Program Review Committee (DPRC) to review the defense budget and programs, the Verification Panel to evaluate strategic arms proposals, and the Washington Special Action Group established to manage crises after North Korean fighter jets shot down an unarmed U.S. reconnaissance aircraft in April 1969. Kissinger’s bureaucratic skills and his direct contact with the president enhanced his role in shaping foreign and national security policy. He was the linchpin of Nixon’s NSC.<sup>9</sup>

The new National Security Council system especially irritated Secretary of State William P. Rogers, who felt isolated over the lack of consultation on issuing NSSMs. The NSC staff frequently complained that the papers prepared by the State and Defense departments were unresponsive or too narrow and bureaucratic. Senior defense officials in the Offices of Systems Analysis and International Security Affairs (ISA) frequently complained about

requests for too many, sometimes redundant NSSMs, poor coordination, a lack of follow-through, and insufficient time to prepare fully staffed responses.<sup>10</sup>

Caught off guard by Nixon’s plan to enhance the NSC’s role, Laird raised objections from the start. The defense secretary insisted that any department or agency, not just the White House, should have the right to propose the initiation of policy studies. Most significantly, he opposed measures that would insert the national security adviser between the president and secretary of defense or limit his authority over the Defense Department. Laird rightly pointed out that the president’s assistant for national security affairs was not a statutory member of the NSC.<sup>11</sup>

Laird favored a strong and active National Security Council in foreign policy, but not if it infringed on the secretary’s customary authority. Kissinger tried to exercise oversight of the military budget through his chairmanship of the Defense Program Review Committee. Laird insisted on a limited role for the DPRC, which he envisioned as addressing broad problems (the allocation of resources within the economy, for example) and not the details of specific defense programs and weapons. Using delaying tactics and providing incomplete responses to requests for budget plans, Laird and Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard ensured that the DPRC acquired no real authority over the formulation of the defense budget. As the chief of naval operations, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., later explained: “Mel had enough support in Congress to be able to treat Kissinger not as an all-powerful potentate, but as a mere assistant to the President, with no standing in the chain of command and certainly no right to give orders to a member of the Cabinet.”<sup>12</sup>

From the start, Laird made it clear to the president, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) that he wanted all communications with the White House and NSC to go through his office. He sent numerous memos to Nixon on

the need to establish a single point of contact and liaison between the White House and Pentagon. Laird's pleas did not stop Nixon, Kissinger, and the JCS from using private channels to bypass the defense secretary.<sup>13</sup>

Laird and Kissinger had known one another since the 1964 Republican National Convention when Laird had chaired the platform committee and Kissinger had been a foreign policy adviser to New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. Although Laird and Kissinger often disagreed bitterly on Vietnam, they found agreement on other issues, remained friends, and respected each other. Once or twice a month Kissinger joined Laird at the Pentagon for breakfast.<sup>14</sup>

Early policy differences strained relations between Laird and the White House. In 1969 Nixon and Kissinger developed a plan for secretly bombing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong bases located inside officially neutral Cambodia. Laird supported the idea of bombing these enemy sanctuaries, but argued it was a serious mistake to do it secretly because of the inevitability of public disclosure. When the press eventually uncovered the secret campaign, Nixon and Kissinger wrongly accused Laird of leaking the information.

In April 1969, North Korean MiG fighters shot down an EC-121 reconnaissance plane over international waters. Nixon and Kissinger wanted to retaliate to show American resolve. Laird advocated a more cautious approach, pointing out that retaliation against North Korea could lead to hostilities, opening a second war theater for which the United States lacked sufficient troops, equipment, and ammunition. Laird and Rogers even threatened to resign if Nixon went ahead with plans to hit North Korean air bases, forcing Nixon to back down. The new president was not prepared to handle the loss of two key cabinet members early in the administration. During the crisis, Laird, to Kissinger's dismay, also canceled all U.S. reconnaissance flights to review the costs and benefits of the aerial reconnaissance program and minimize

the likelihood of losing another aircraft. Laird deflected Nixon's repeated orders to resume the flights.<sup>15</sup>

Laird and the White House also differed over the pace of U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam. Laird favored faster redeployments and used the defense budget as leverage to hasten the pull out and set the Vietnam troop ceiling below the level that the White House favored. His independence in these policy areas frustrated Nixon and Kissinger, leading them to circumvent Laird on other issues so he could not stymie their plans. To preserve their freedom of action, Nixon and Kissinger developed back-channel contacts for bypassing the State and Defense departments, as they did on the Paris peace talks, for example. Toward the end of his tenure Laird met with Nixon less frequently. Laird had made clear that he would serve only four years, so his influence would wane in any event as he entered the last months of his service. Nevertheless, by the spring of 1972, relations between Nixon and Laird had reached a low point in regard to Vietnam policy. In April, Laird told Kissinger that he felt the president had lost confidence in him.<sup>16</sup>

Laird and Nixon largely agreed on the topic of military assistance. In July 1969 the president announced the Nixon Doctrine, calling on America's allies in Asia, supported by U.S. military assistance, to do more to provide for their defense and rely less on the presence of U.S. forces. The doctrine was intended to reduce direct U.S. involvement in future wars like the one in Vietnam, where problems of internal security predominated.<sup>17</sup> Laird saw the Nixon Doctrine as an opportunity for the Department of Defense to reduce outlays and revamp its foreign military assistance program. Laird welcomed the new program, although as a congressman he had been an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign aid policy.

Like Eisenhower a decade earlier, Nixon looked on security assistance largely as an investment to promote the defense of other countries and limit direct U.S. military expenditures. The blueprint for reform came from a 1970 report by the President's

Task Force on International Development, chaired by Rudolph A. Peterson, a California banker. The task force recommended a new International Security Cooperation Program, designed with stricter criteria for awarding assistance and devoted to facilitating the withdrawal of U.S. forces overseas by encouraging more local self-reliance.<sup>18</sup>

Laird took steps to exercise greater control over military assistance funds so they could be employed more effectively. He integrated military grant aid and credit sales into the annual defense planning and budget cycle. In September 1971 he placed responsibility for the Military Assistance Program under a new organization, the Defense Security Assistance Agency, with its own director. The establishment of the agency represented a significant departure from the previous mode of operation, under which the regional deputy assistants in ISA had been responsible for broad policy in the security assistance field. But as funds for programs became tighter, centralized control over the allocation of resources grew, irritating ISA's regional desk officers.<sup>19</sup>

### **Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos**

The Vietnam War consumed the majority of Laird's time and energy. The war affected U.S. foreign policy, arousing popular opposition at home and overseas, complicating relations with U.S. allies, and draining military resources from NATO. Beginning with Robert S. McNamara, the Pentagon had shifted troops, equipment, and ammunition from NATO and other commands to the war effort in Southeast Asia, which weakened the readiness of alliance units facing Warsaw Pact forces. The long, controversial war also tarnished the military's public reputation, contributed to reductions of the defense budget, and forced the Pentagon to defer much modernization.

Laird made a signal policy contribution to lessening U.S. military involvement with Vietnamization, the U.S. effort to improve and

modernize South Vietnam's forces so they could assume a greater share of the combat and permit U.S. forces to withdraw. The concept emerged from Laird's trip to Vietnam in February 1969, the first of his annual journeys to consult with U.S. commanders and the U.S. ambassador and garner their support for a new approach to the war. During these trips he also held discussions on U.S. policy with South Vietnam's military and political leaders. Extricating from the quagmire was necessary politically and would allow the Pentagon to refocus on America's Cold War rival, the Soviet Union.

Vietnamization became a critical component of Nixon's policy to bring the war to an "honorable" conclusion. Another tactic was to use military pressure on the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong—intensified bombing and cross-border operations—to induce the enemy to negotiate a settlement. The White House believed this "two-track" approach could provide the United States an exit from the war. Shortly after assuming the presidency, Nixon, expecting that a combination of bombing, military pressure, and negotiations would prove effective, confidently told his cabinet that he anticipated the war in Vietnam would be over inside of a year. It was only at the end of January 1973 that the United States and North Vietnam signed an agreement calling for a cease-fire, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and the return of American prisoners of war.<sup>20</sup>

In surveying the prospects for turning the war around, Laird assumed that the newly established administration had a breathing spell of six months to a year in which it could act more or less with a free hand. The secretary of defense supported a negotiated settlement, but he doubted whether one could materialize before public and congressional opinion turned hostile to the administration's conduct of the war, just as it had turned against President Johnson. Nor was he optimistic, as he reported to Nixon, that the United States could achieve a military victory in the foreseeable future. He promoted Vietnamization because it was militarily feasible and politically pragmatic. Winding down American military involvement in Vietnam was necessary in his

view because of growing public frustration with the stalemated conflict. Vietnamization was formalized as U.S. policy after an NSC review on Vietnamizing the war (NSSM 36) in the spring of 1969, in which Laird had a prominent voice.

Laird and the White House disagreed, however, over the pace of Vietnamization. Laird acted on the premise that he had a broad mandate to carry out the new policy. For political and budgetary reasons, he wanted a fairly fast-paced transfer of responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese. Nixon and Kissinger, supported by the Joint Chiefs, wanted to proceed more slowly and retain sufficient American military power in theater as long as possible to maintain military pressure on the enemy. Kissinger feared the planned withdrawals would become inevitable and taken for granted, weakening any incentive for North Vietnam to make concessions and negotiate. Laird believed that the White House's cautious approach entailed greater political risks, especially at a time of growing war weariness. Moreover, he worried that a slower withdrawal schedule would delay the necessary process of reshaping and restoring the armed forces for the post-Vietnam, Cold War era.<sup>21</sup>

At the outset of his presidency, Nixon issued strict instructions that there was to be no public or private criticism of South Vietnamese leaders, orders Laird scrupulously observed during his four years at the Pentagon. All the same, from what he witnessed personally of Vietnam's military and government, Laird had mixed feelings about the country's future after U.S. combat forces departed. Though distressed by the continuing high incidence of graft and corruption among senior South Vietnamese officials, he was encouraged that the process of nation building was going forward and that South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu had a broad, popular mandate to govern. However, during his last trip to Vietnam in November 1971, Laird worried that Thieu was "dissipating" his political leverage by surrounding himself with sycophants and cronies and making no attempt to broaden his government with

new faces. Nor had South Vietnam's president acted decisively to remove ineffective general officers.<sup>22</sup>

To monitor progress, Laird established a Vietnam Task Force similar to the one that had operated in ISA during McNamara's tenure. The task force, comprising deputy assistant secretaries from OSD, a representative of the Joint Staff, and observers from the State Department and CIA, met biweekly to review Vietnamization progress and to resolve issues having policy, planning, or programmatic implications. For the next three years Laird met almost daily, sometimes for two hours or more, with his Vietnam advisers in an effort to keep up on developments and to refine plans for American disengagement. Headed initially by Maj. Gen. David E. Ott, the task force reported directly to the secretary of defense and functioned in effect as his operating and planning arm within the Pentagon and as his principal liaison with other agencies for Vietnam matters. Laird had only the highest praise for the task force's work.<sup>23</sup>

Under Vietnamization, U.S. withdrawals were related to progress in the war. In the fall of 1969 Nixon set up the Vietnam Special Studies Group, an interagency panel to develop more accurate and reliable measures of progress. Kissinger, who served as chairman, envisioned the group as providing systematic analyses of U.S. programs and activities in Vietnam. By an unwritten, prior understanding between Laird and Kissinger, the VSSG concerned itself with developing a common statistical database and assessing the situation in the countryside and prospects for a cease-fire. The VSSG completed detailed studies on the course of pacification in critical provinces to assess how they would fare vis-à-vis local communist forces if hostilities ceased. The Vietnam Special Studies Group was set up to assess the war independently and not from the perspective of the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam or the military command. The White House believed that the VSSG measurements and studies often offered more candid and insightful perspectives than those found in the routine reports of the U.S. command in Vietnam.<sup>24</sup>

Because of the special problems involved and their exceedingly sensitive nature, Laird treated matters concerning U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and servicemen missing in action (MIA) separately from other Vietnam policy issues. At the beginning of his tenure he had concluded that the Johnson administration's policy of "quiet diplomacy" for dealing with POW and MIA issues had failed. He believed it was imperative to publicize Hanoi's refusal to honor its obligations to POWs under the Geneva Convention. Despite State Department reservations, in the summer of 1969 Laird launched the "Go Public" campaign, with the strong backing of other DoD officials. The aim was to highlight North Vietnam's intransigence and violations of the Geneva Convention for refusing to provide information on American POWs and for barring impartial international inspections of prisoner-of-war camps. Laird saw Hanoi's inhumane treatment of U.S. POWs as a vulnerability to exploit and a way to force North Vietnam to comply with the Geneva Convention and negotiate the return of U.S. prisoners. In February 1971, Laird directed the creation of a deputy-level POW/MIA Task Group and a POW/MIA Task Force in ISA, headed by a general officer with a full-time staff. Initially, this policy paid worthwhile dividends in the form of somewhat better treatment of Americans held as prisoners and a bolstering of support at home. But as time went on, in Kissinger's view, it became an additional contributor to the pressure for U.S. concessions to hasten a peace settlement.<sup>25</sup>

Laird supported Nixon's 1969 decision to bomb North Vietnamese and Viet Cong base areas in Cambodia. The administration had solid grounds for bombing the sanctuaries, which North Vietnamese forces occupied and from which they launched attacks into South Vietnam. Bombing offered the possibility of strategic gains and would signal U.S. resolve and demonstrate Nixon's willingness to escalate the conflict. However, Laird believed it was a mistake to do it secretly as Nixon and Kissinger proposed. Laird was certain that the strikes would eventually become public knowledge and their disclosure would increase public distrust of

the administration. When stories about the Cambodian bombing appeared in the press, a furious Kissinger blamed Laird for leaking the information. The White House requested that the FBI wiretap the home telephone of Col. Robert Pursley, Laird's military aide. The 18-month wiretap found nothing to implicate Pursley. Laird vehemently denied Kissinger's accusation.<sup>26</sup>

The 1970 Cambodian incursion also strained relations between Laird and the White House. After the overthrow of the Sihanouk government in March, Laird hoped to preserve Cambodia's neutrality and provide military assistance to the new government of Lon Nol without the participation of U.S. forces. The White House, however, examined options for cross-border operations, including limited U.S. missions against enemy bases and supply lines inside Cambodia, without informing Laird or Rogers, both of whom were on record as opposing the use of U.S. ground forces in Cambodia. Laird favored continuation of small-scale South Vietnamese cross-border missions and protested personally to Nixon when in late March Kissinger had them suspended.<sup>27</sup>

As the situation in Cambodia deteriorated, Nixon considered additional military steps. Planning for the U.S.–South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia in April–May 1970 took place through back-channel messages between Kissinger in Washington and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and General Creighton Abrams, the American commander, in Saigon. Laird and Rogers were not consulted in the early stages, although Laird knew that a major planning effort was under way. Questions he raised with the Joint Chiefs concerning the impact on the Vietnamization program of a possible cross-border attack, the redeployment of U.S. forces, and other operations in South Vietnam were all but ignored by the Joint Chiefs and the White House. In his memoirs, Nixon speculated that the real reason for Laird's opposition was the "apparent snub of the Pentagon in our decision-making process." But in actuality Nixon did not want to hear objections to the incursion. He wanted no repeat of the EC–121 episode when Laird and Rogers



had argued against retaliation. The Cambodian incursion went forward as planned, with Nixon claiming stupendous military results and declaring that the incursion's success allowed U.S. withdrawals to continue. The operation did reduce the enemy military threat from Cambodia, contributing to increased security in South Vietnam's countryside.<sup>28</sup>

The incursion had both military and political drawbacks. It failed to capture or destroy the Viet Cong headquarters located inside Cambodia, one of its major goals. At home, Congress took action to restrict U.S. military operations in Cambodia and Laos, and antiwar protesters took to the streets in the largest demonstrations yet seen. Protests, some of them violent, broke out on over 400 campuses. At Kent State University in Ohio four students were killed by National Guardsmen sent to restore order on campus.

Hoping to capitalize on the improved security in South Vietnam, Laird resolved to accelerate the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Improvement and Modernization Program. This included not only the training and arming of South Vietnamese troops but also the fostering of a more self-reliant South Vietnamese economy, a necessary foundation for Vietnamization. As part of the war effort the United States financed a liberal import program and economic aid to maintain the standard of living in South Vietnam. The program had its negative aspects, including keeping the Vietnamese economy highly dependent on outside subsidies. To remedy this situation, the Vietnam Task Force, supported by ad hoc study groups and outside consultants, recommended a system of currency and fiscal reforms that in August 1970 restructured the U.S. aid program and sharpened the focus on building a more stable and self-sustaining South Vietnamese economy.<sup>29</sup>

The Cambodian incursion served as precedent for the 1971 strike by South Vietnamese forces against enemy supply routes and bases inside Laos. As in the Cambodian incursion, Nixon excluded Laird and Rogers, not wishing to contend with their likely objections.

In November 1970 Admiral Thomas H. Moorer discussed with Kissinger and Deputy National Security Adviser Alexander M. Haig, Jr., a preliminary plan that included an operation to send South Vietnamese ground forces across the border to cut the flow of enemy supplies going through Laos. Laird was informed of the plan only in late December. The operation, named Lam Son 719, began in February 1971 and quickly encountered stiffer than expected resistance that slowed the advance toward the main objective, the town of Tchepone. Unwilling to risk heavy losses, President Van Thieu pulled his forces out of Laos earlier than the operational plan envisioned. South Vietnamese forces held Tchepone only briefly before withdrawing. Although Laird publicly supported Lam Son 719, the planning for it revealed the administration's distrust of the defense secretary. After the operation ended, Nixon and Kissinger claimed that the Pentagon had withheld vital information.<sup>30</sup>

Relations between the White House and Laird reached their lowest point during the Easter Offensive of 1972. The buildup of North Vietnamese forces for a widespread offensive worried General Abrams, who early in March 1972 requested authority for a sweeping air offensive in North Vietnam to blunt the expected offensive. Fearing the domestic political effects of a new bombing campaign in an election year, Laird scaled back Abrams' request before passing it to Kissinger. Not wishing to jeopardize the nascent relationship with China, Kissinger in turn urged Nixon to reduce the air campaign even further. Nixon took Kissinger's advice, but limited action offered little chance of derailing the visible enemy buildup. After the offensive began, Kissinger lambasted Laird for paring Abrams' bombing request, forgetting that he had cut the authorities Abrams had sought even further. President Nixon also blamed Laird, denigrating him in Admiral Moorer's presence. Later when Kissinger was willing to acknowledge his error, an upset Laird confronted him. He said he was willing to take the heat within the Pentagon for the White House's decision to curtail the Abrams' bombing request, but he was utterly dismayed by the lack of trust in him that Nixon and Kissinger displayed. Kissinger, nonetheless,

still wanted to bypass Laird and deal directly with Moorer and Abrams during the enemy assault. Laird had clearly lost influence and status during the Easter Offensive. Under severe strain, the administration was waging war on its key officials at the same time it was fighting North Vietnam and pursuing peace talks at Paris.<sup>31</sup>

Laird's role in the Paris negotiations was largely behind the scenes, although he continued to ensure that the return of U.S. POWs had to be part of a peace settlement. He received feedback from a full-time military liaison to the talks in Paris, but Kissinger and Rogers had responsibility for the negotiations. By late 1972, with the Paris peace talks seemingly poised for a breakthrough, Laird's list of "essential" elements of an agreement had narrowed to a handful: unencumbered air reconnaissance to verify North Vietnam's compliance with any accord, delivery of all war materiel currently en route to South Vietnam, the release and return of all American POWs, and a full accounting of all missing in action to be obtained with the explicitly pledged cooperation of all parties. By the time the Paris peace accords were signed in January 1973, all U.S. combatant forces had redeployed from Vietnam. As the principal architect of Vietnamization, Laird believed that he had accomplished what he had set out to do when he left office shortly after Nixon began his second term.<sup>32</sup>

### Strategic Arms

At the start of his administration President Nixon expressed his intention to change the character of U.S. relations with the Soviet Union from one of confrontation to negotiation and to hold talks on strategic arms. As a presidential candidate, Nixon had advocated U.S. nuclear superiority; as president, he adopted a policy of strategic sufficiency, a nuclear weapons capability that would provide an acceptable defense of the United States and its interests in lieu of overwhelming retaliation against the Soviet Union. In its first year, Nixon's administration embarked on two major strategic arms initiatives: deployment of an ABM system to defend against

incoming Soviet missiles and strategic arms limitation talks (SALT) to limit the growth of nuclear weapons. Nixon wanted a clean break from his predecessor.<sup>33</sup>

In 1962 the United States had decided to accept strategic parity with the Soviet Union in the number of offensive missiles and built no additional land-based missiles. In contrast, the Soviets had embarked on an ambitious program of building large land-based offensive strategic missiles, achieving equivalence with the United States by the late 1960s. The huge Soviet SS-9 missile, in particular, posed an offensive threat to U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) sites. An additional worry was the deployment of a Soviet defensive missile system code-named *Galosh* to defend Moscow. Concerns about the ability of the U.S. strategic missile force to withstand a nuclear attack from the growing number of Soviet offensive missiles led to consideration of a modified ABM system. Nixon and Laird considered antiballistic missile deployment as indispensable to serious strategic arms limitation talks, viewing the antimissile system as a bargaining chip in negotiations. In their judgment, if the United States had no ABM system and no plans to build one, it would have less leverage during arms talks and might be forced to accept a settlement that in effect codified Soviet superiority.<sup>34</sup>

Suspicious of Soviet intentions, Laird publicly stated his concerns over the continuing buildup of Soviet offensive and defensive strategic missiles. Laird initiated a review of the ABM program, directing his deputy David Packard and representatives of other agencies to examine options to reconfigure the system as begun under McNamara. He did this before Nixon decided in March 1969 that he wanted to build the defensive missile system. Laird played a critical role in securing initial Senate approval of funds in the summer to deploy an ABM system. Through personal, behind-the-scenes talks, he persuaded a key opponent of antiballistic missiles, Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), not to oppose the ABM system because its rejection would make arms talks unlikely. The



Senate approved funding for the system by one vote. Between 1969 and 1972, when a SALT agreement was signed, Laird worked hard to ensure that Congress continued to fund the antimissile system, albeit on a smaller scale that included fewer sites than originally envisioned in 1969.<sup>35</sup>

The grave security threat of the growing Soviet strategic offensive missile program led Laird to advocate arms limitation talks as being in America's interest. In mid-February 1969 he warned Kissinger that, militarily, a prolonged delay in reaching an arms control agreement would work to the Soviet Union's advantage. Laird knew from intelligence reports that the Soviet strategic buildup was continuing apace. The longer the Soviet program remained unchecked, the less chance the United States would have of keeping its edge in strategic nuclear power.<sup>36</sup>

Early efforts to formulate negotiating options foundered. At the president's direction, Kissinger in early March initiated a full-scale study (NSSM 28) of arms control negotiating options. Almost from the start, the project revealed deep interdepartmental differences over policy and the need for a more cohesive coordinating organization. Major disagreements between the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Joint Chiefs involved the treatment of multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs), which the United States had begun testing in 1968, and verification procedures. Laird agreed with the Joint Chiefs on the need for further MIRV testing in the face of preliminary evidence that the Soviets had embarked on a MIRV-testing program of their own.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the preparations for SALT and into the negotiations themselves, Laird routinely looked to Deputy Secretary Packard to represent the Defense Department and to coordinate the input of senior defense officials. Laird correctly assumed that many of the critical issues in SALT were likely to be technical in nature, and that Packard's engineering and scientific background provided him solid command of the emerging issues. This change in handling

arms control recast relationships throughout the department, giving a large role to Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis Gardiner L. Tucker and Director of Defense Research and Engineering (DDR&E) John S. Foster. The OSD representative to SALT I, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul H. Nitze, was on the rolls of DDR&E but dealt directly with Laird or Packard.<sup>38</sup>

Except when circumstances dictated, as at NSC meetings, Laird rarely participated directly in the day-to-day details of the SALT process. Delegating that participation to Nitze and Packard, he was invariably kept regularly informed on developments. He wanted it firmly understood by members of the U.S. delegation—State and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency representatives, particularly—that ultimate authority for review and approval of their actions rested in Washington.<sup>39</sup>

Although not directly involved in talks with the Soviet delegation, Laird was instrumental in shaping the U.S. negotiating position. Well before the arms discussions began, Laird fully understood that the Safeguard ABM program was essential to the negotiations. He refused to budge from his insistence that an agreement on defensive missiles had to be an integral part of the deal on limiting offensive weapons. The Soviet Union had no incentive to discuss offensive weapons because the United States had already stopped building them, making defensive missiles the critical negotiating issue. Without the credible threat to deploy the ABM the United States would have entered the talks in a weaker position and might have had to accept an agreement that allowed the Soviet Union even greater superiority in ICBM and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers. Laird played a crucial role in convincing the Senate to approve the first phase of the ABM and insisted in public on continuing to deploy the full system.<sup>40</sup>

Laird recommended a strategic arms limitation agreement to Congress as a means of slowing the momentum of the Soviet strategic buildup and as a first step toward the success of expected follow-on

arms control discussions. He stressed, however, that his support of these agreements was largely conditional upon congressional approval and full funding for a broad range of JCS-recommended improvements in the U.S. strategic posture, including the Trident submarine, an advanced manned strategic bomber (the B-1), a submarine-launched cruise missile, and new strategic warheads.<sup>41</sup>

In helping broker the SALT accords through Congress, Laird made a significant contribution, convincing wavering Republicans to add their approval. Had Laird balked at supporting the SALT agreements, the results undoubtedly could have been grave—a personal embarrassment for Nixon as he headed into the 1972 presidential campaign and a foreign-policy fiasco of the first order. Laird understood the importance of approving the SALT agreement and the political problems that would arise if Congress failed to go along.

Laird's role in SALT was not particularly visible, but it was pivotal, especially in the crucial final stages when the SALT agreements went to Congress. Laird had less confidence than his two immediate predecessors—McNamara and Clark Clifford—in what arms control could accomplish, but it was an issue he could scarcely ignore. Increasingly institutionalized throughout the executive branch, arms control would occupy an ever-growing part of the secretary's agenda in the years ahead.

### **Strains in NATO**

NATO celebrated its twentieth anniversary shortly after Laird became defense secretary. Although the organization and basic policies were well established, Laird contended with essentially the same issues that had beset McNamara and Clifford. Reconciling disparities, especially in the size of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces and between the American and European military and financial contributions to NATO, framed policymaking in the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

The semiannual meetings of NATO defense ministers brought Laird into direct contact with other alliance leaders. As a member of NATO's Defense Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group, Laird was a major participant in establishing guidelines for the use of NATO's military assets, including nuclear weapons. Through these and other contacts Laird developed a close, personal rapport with the West German minister of defense (later chancellor), Helmut Schmidt. Without that personal relationship, members of Laird's staff doubted whether a 1971 offset agreement, under which the West German government agreed to pay \$160 million toward the rehabilitation of barracks for U.S. soldiers, would have come to fruition; or whether, on another occasion, it would have been possible for U.S. forces to move sensitive munitions across German territory without public protest.<sup>42</sup>

The maturing alliance came up against a number of vexing issues. During the period of postwar reconstruction in NATO's early years, alliance members, devastated by World War II, of necessity had relied on the United States to carry the main responsibility for defending the continent. Despite growing affluence in the 1950s and 1960s, European allies resisted the higher military spending or increases in their armed forces that the United States advocated. From the U.S. perspective, NATO did little to address the troubling disparity between Warsaw Pact and NATO forces. The United States wanted European nations to increase their defense spending to ensure that NATO provided credible deterrence. European nations were reluctant to do more, regarding a Warsaw Pact offensive as unlikely. At the same time, a restive Congress was looking for ways to cut the high cost of stationing large numbers of armed forces in Europe. Mindful of the increasing U.S. balance of payments deficit and Europe's prosperity, Senator Mike Mansfield (D-MT) and others in Congress advocated a permanent reduction in the number of U.S. troops in Europe.

Laird pushed allies to shoulder a larger share of the burden of defending Western Europe. In the mid-1960s the United States

had withdrawn units, personnel, and equipment from NATO to fight the war in Vietnam. The high cost of the Vietnam War, looming cuts in defense budgets, and growing Soviet military might, in his view, precluded increases in the U.S. commitment to NATO. Further, he urged European allies to make a determined effort to improve the combat effectiveness and readiness of their conventional forces. His exhortations had little effect.

Constantly fighting budget cuts, Laird tried to lower costs wherever possible—NATO included. He made several attempts to reduce U.S. naval forces committed to NATO, but Nixon would not go along. The president insisted the United States continue to provide a credible conventional defense for Western Europe and demonstrate a steadfast commitment to the alliance. The president was reluctant to demand that European nations provide more assets to NATO or allow his administration to take steps that indicated diminished U.S. support. Those imperatives ruled out troop reductions. Nor would Nixon seek any additional European financial support to offset the dollar costs of stationing U.S. troops in Europe. Moreover, he decided to cut overall fiscal year (FY) 1972 DoD expenditures, putting Laird in a bind. Nixon not only prevented Laird from cutting forces to save money, he also directed the secretary to improve the U.S. military in Europe.<sup>43</sup>

The FY 1972 reductions followed decreases in FYs 1970 and 1971. Having to deal with three consecutive years of cuts, the secretary concluded that defense spending could not go any lower, a position that Nixon and Kissinger also adopted. If Nixon expected Laird to improve the readiness and capability of U.S. forces in Europe, then in the future the president would have no choice but increase defense spending.

### **Change in Asia**

Laird's tenure coincided with a transition in relations with two key Asian allies, Japan and South Korea. Both countries had become

more stable and prosperous since the end of World War II, and under the Nixon Doctrine, the administration expected its Asian allies to play a larger role in regional defense. Laird wanted to lessen their dependence on the presence of U.S. military forces. Greater involvement by the Japanese and South Koreans could also ease somewhat the pressure on DoD to cut back U.S. defense spending. This was analogous to his efforts to have America's NATO allies assume a greater share of the defense burden in Europe.

The war in Vietnam complicated Asian relations. Some Japanese political groups opposed U.S. involvement in the war and protested the presence of U.S. bases in Japan and Okinawa, from which the United States waged the war. Strategically located in the Pacific, Okinawa was a staging area for troops and equipment for Vietnam, the location for numerous U.S. military bases, and a storage depot for strategic and chemical weapons. Basing forward-deployed military forces on the island was indispensable to U.S. strategy. The Japanese desire to rule Okinawa, which the United States controlled since Japan's defeat in World War II, was well-nigh universal.

Reversion of Okinawa to Japanese control at some point was certain and necessary to maintain good relations with Japan. Growing pro-reversion sentiment in Japan could not be ignored, but Laird wanted to ensure that a hand-over of the island did not compromise U.S. national security. JCS Chairman General Earle G. Wheeler feared a reversion settlement that would hamper military operations.<sup>44</sup> The agreement signed by the United States and Japan in June 1971 returned Okinawa to Japan but allowed Washington to keep most of its military personnel and installations on the island. The United States also obtained renewal of a security treaty with Japan and the right to mount operations from U.S. military bases on Japanese soil. At Laird's insistence the Japanese government agreed to increase its share of the costs of keeping U.S. military units in Japan and to pay reimbursement for relinquished facilities and their relocation. The reversion of Okinawa strengthened the alliance with Japan without diminishing American military might or presence in the Pacific.<sup>45</sup>

South Korea was also growing stronger economically and militarily but still desired the continued presence of two U.S. Army combat divisions to help defend the demilitarized zone and likely invasion corridors. It could not yet protect itself without U.S. forces and military assistance. To keep South Korea secure and independent, the United States had signed a formal defense treaty with the Seoul government and provided economic and military aid. It would not prove easy to win Korean support for a smaller U.S. military presence.<sup>46</sup>

During a time of retrenchment in U.S. spending, Laird had the Joint Chiefs consider how large a force the United States needed to keep stationed in Korea as well as how much assistance was required to modernize South Korea's armed forces. The president forced the issue, however, demanding in December 1969 the development of a plan to have the South Korean army assume the defense of Korea with only U.S. air and sea support. Then, in March 1970, Nixon decided to withdraw 20,000 U.S. military personnel from Korea by the end of FY 1971. This was not as many as Laird wanted to pull out. As part of the withdrawal, the United States agreed to provide South Korea with a \$1.5 billion modernization program. The United States would also continue to support stationing two Korean divisions in South Vietnam despite Laird's attempts to have them return to South Korea.<sup>47</sup>

Although Laird was not directly involved in Nixon's breakthrough visit to mainland China in February 1972, that event portended a change in relations with China and Taiwan that would be felt only after Laird was long out of office. Nixon wanted better ties with the People's Republic of China but not at the cost of harming long-term allies. The Shanghai communiqué of February 1972 issued by the United States and China at the end of Nixon's visit ensured continuity of U.S. policy toward Taiwan in the near term. In the communiqué the United States also affirmed its existing regional defense commitments with Japan and South Korea.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

When Melvin Laird succeeded Clark Clifford as secretary of defense in January 1969, he realized that major changes in American foreign and defense policy, beginning with Vietnam, were only a matter of time. The Vietnam War, to Laird's chagrin, dominated his agenda, as it had McNamara's and Clifford's. During Laird's tenure the United States began to redeploy forces from Vietnam. The social, economic, political, and military costs of the war were too onerous, and Laird succeeded in withdrawing U.S. combatants from Vietnam. Yet the war was only one part of Laird's agenda during his four years as secretary of defense.

President Nixon changed the policymaking process, forcing Laird to operate under a new national security system intended to circumscribe his sphere of action. After eight years of what he considered loosely structured Kennedy-Johnson policymaking, Nixon sought to impose a more ordered process that stressed White House oversight and coordination. The new system created fresh problems, owing to Nixon's penchant for conducting policy and diplomacy secretly at times.

Laird carved out a broad, even independent role for himself and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, although he heartily endorsed the need for teamwork and cooperation with the White House and NSC. He had too much Washington experience and too many powerful allies in Congress to be hemmed in or pushed to the sidelines by Nixon's aides. Laird had broad knowledge and experience in national security affairs, having served in the House of Representatives for 16 years. He was a member of the Defense Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations. He made major contributions in transitioning the armed services from conscription to an all-volunteer force, in helping secure a strategic arms limitations agreement with the Soviet Union, and in keeping at bay congressional critics and White House budget cutters. Laird remained a major policymaker, particularly regarding Vietnam.

Further, he insisted and obtained, as a condition of his becoming secretary of defense, the right to select and promote his civilian and military subordinates, a significant concession that Nixon later regretted on more than one occasion. Laird enjoyed the advantage of an independent power base that included friends in the news media and, most important of all, strong bipartisan connections on Capitol Hill. Intimately familiar with the ways of Washington politics, he was an adept practitioner of the backstage maneuvering that flourished during Nixon's presidency. With grudging admiration, Kissinger considered Laird his most formidable and challenging bureaucratic rival.<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This study is drawn from Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969–1973*, vol. 7 of Secretaries of Defense Historical Series (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Dale Van Atta, *With Honor: Melvin Laird in War, Peace, and Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 3–6.

<sup>3</sup> See *Evolution of the Secretary of Defense in the Era of Massive Retaliation: Charles Wilson, Neil McElroy, and Thomas Gates, 1953–1961*, Cold War Foreign Policy Series, Special Study 3 (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, September 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Melvin R. Laird, *A House Divided: America's Strategy Gap* (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1962), 48, 123, 135, 145–146.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of Congressman Laird's views on the Vietnam War, see Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Melvin Laird, interview by Maurice Matloff and Alfred Goldberg, 29 Oct 1986, 20, OSD Historical Office Oral History Collection.

<sup>7</sup> Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 340; Department of State, "Evolution of the Position of National Security Adviser, 1947–1980" (Office of the Historian, Research Project No. 1225, Apr 1980), 8; Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 38 (quote); National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 2, 20 Jan 1969, subj: Reorganization of the NSC System, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 30–33 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*).

<sup>8</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. 60, no. 1548 (24 February 1969): 163; John P. Leacacos, "Kissinger's Apparatus," *Foreign Policy* 5 (Winter 1971–1972): 5; Helmut Sonnenfeldt, "Reconstructing the Nixon Foreign



Policy,” in *The Nixon Presidency*, Kenneth W. Thompson, ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 319; NSDM 1, 20 Jan 1969, Establishment of NSC Decision and Study Memoranda Series, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 2:29–30.

<sup>9</sup> Chester A. Crocker, “The Nixon-Kissinger National Security Council System, 1969–1972: A Study in Foreign Policy Management,” in *Report of the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy: Appendices*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 1975), 79–99; Peter W. Rodman, *Presidential Command* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009); John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: Morrow, 1991), 273.

<sup>10</sup> Memo, William Rogers for Henry Kissinger, 26 Feb 1971, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 2:300; see also 2:225–229.

<sup>11</sup> Memo, Laird for Kissinger, 9 Jan 1969, Your Memo Jan. 3, 1969 concerning a New NSC System, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 2:22–24; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 44–45.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1969–1972* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013), 6–7; Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1976), 241.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen P. Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Easter Offensive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 19–20.

<sup>14</sup> Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 89–90.

<sup>15</sup> *FRUS 1969–1976*, 8:425. For a recent account of the EC–121 episode see Richard A. Mobley, *Flash Point North Korea: The Pueblo and EC–121 Crises* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> See Hunt, *Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military*, for details of the changing relationship.

<sup>17</sup> Nixon's informal remarks in Guam with newsmen, 25 Jul 1969, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1969* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), 544–556.

<sup>18</sup> “Special Message to the Congress Proposing Reform of the Foreign Assistance Program,” 15 Sep 1970, *Nixon Public Papers 1970*, 745–756;

“Special Message to the Congress Proposing Supplemental Foreign Assistance Appropriations,” 18 Nov 1970, 1074–1076, *ibid.*; President's Task Force on International Development, *U.S. Foreign Assistance in the 1970s: A New Approach—Report to the President* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> Laird, *A House Divided*, 138, emphasis in original; DoD Directive No. 5105.38, 11 Aug 1971, subj: Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSSA). Also see U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings: Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1973*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), pt. 1, 716–717; and Stanley L. Harrison, “Congress and Foreign Military Sales,” *Military Review* 51 (October 1971): 79–87.

<sup>20</sup> Nixon, *Memoirs*, 380–381.

<sup>21</sup> Willard J. Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1969–1970* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2002), 12–14.

<sup>22</sup> “List of Actions Resulting from NSC Meeting on January 25, 1969,” attached to memo, Kissinger for Vice President, et al., 28 Jan 1969, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 6:42–44; Webb, *JCS and the War in Vietnam*, 9–12.

<sup>23</sup> Richard A. Ware, “The Pentagon's Office of International Security Affairs, 1969–1973,” 7, in *The G. Warren Nutter Lectures in Political Economy* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1986). Ware was Nutter's deputy. Vernon E. Davis, *The Long Road Home: U.S. Prisoner of War Policy and Planning in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 2000), 178, 198; Van Atta, *With Honor*, 142. Laird's papers at the Gerald Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, contain an extensive collection of memoranda for the record of the numerous Vietnamization meetings.

<sup>24</sup> NSDM 23, 16 Sep 1969, Vietnam Special Studies Group, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 2:156–157; Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 210–211.

<sup>25</sup> Memo, Laird for Service Secretaries, et al., 13 Feb 1971, POW/MIA Task Force Files, OSD Historical Office; Davis, *The Long Road Home*, 532–535; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 303.

<sup>26</sup> Laird, interview by Alfred Goldberg and Richard Hunt, 11 Oct 2001, OSD Historical Office Oral History Collection.

<sup>27</sup> Memo, Alexander Haig for Kissinger, 1 Apr 1970, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 6:745–49; msg, WHS 0012 Haig to Bunker, 31 Mar 1970; msg, 933 Saigon to State, 8 Apr 1970, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 6:798–799; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 487–492.

<sup>28</sup> Webb, *JCS and the War in Vietnam*, 234–235; H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1994), 152; Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 202; Nixon, *Memoirs*, 450.

<sup>29</sup> Webb, *JCS and the War in Vietnam*, 236–237.

<sup>30</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 201; Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, 82–83. See also Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 239–245; and John Prados, *Vietnam: History of an Unwinnable War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 406–410.

<sup>31</sup> Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons*, 52–53, 80–93.

<sup>32</sup> Memo, Laird for Kissinger, 10 Nov 1972, folder Vietnam 1158–1162, box 43, Melvin Laird Papers, Ford Library.

<sup>33</sup> Burton R. Rosenthal, “Formulating Negotiating Positions for SALT: 1968, 1969–72,” Appendix K, *Report of the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975), 333–334.

<sup>34</sup> *The Military Balance, 1969–1970* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970), 1–6; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 196–197. See, for example, Laird's testimony of 20 February 1969 in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: Nonproliferation Treaty*, 90th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), 387ff; and Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 28.

<sup>35</sup> Van Atta, *With Honor*, 191–193.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 188–190.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial note, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 32:9–10; *ibid.*, 26–39; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 147–148; John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York: Henry Holt, 1973), 158.

<sup>38</sup> Paul H. Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision: A Memoir* (New York: G. Weidenfeld, 1989), 302.

<sup>39</sup> Van Atta, *With Honor*, 194–195.

<sup>40</sup> Paper Prepared in the Department of Defense, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 32:2–6; Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, 265.

<sup>41</sup> Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I concluded in 1972 and resulted in two accords: the five-year Interim Agreement governing strategic offensive launchers (ICBMs and SLBMs) and the Antiballistic Missile Treaty. For the text of these documents see *FRUS 1969–1976*, 32:908–917. See also Laird's testimony of 21 June 1972, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: Strategic Arms Limitation Agreements*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), 60–117.

<sup>42</sup> Van Atta, *With Honor*, 285–289.

<sup>43</sup> Nixon, *Memoirs*, 370; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 394, 399–400; Poole, *JCS and National Policy, 1969–1972*, surveys U.S. policy toward NATO during Laird's tenure.

<sup>44</sup> Van Atta, *With Honor*, 290–291; Poole, *JCS and National Security, 1969–1972*, 232–239.

<sup>45</sup> Van Atta, *With Honor*, 296–297; William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 139, 141.

<sup>46</sup> Bundy, *Tangled Web*, 136–137.

<sup>47</sup> Memo, Nixon for Kissinger, 24 Nov 1969, folder HAK/President Memos 1969–1970, box 341, Subject Files; memo, Kissinger for Nixon, 25 Nov 1969, folder Haig Chron Dec 9–16, 1969 [2 of 2], box 960, Haig Chron Files: both in NSC, Nixon Library.

<sup>48</sup> *FRUS 1969–1976*, 17:812–816.

<sup>49</sup> See Kissinger, *White House Years*, 32–33.



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