



THE HISTORICAL OFFICE  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Presents a Roundtable Discussion and Book Launch for

*Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the  
Post-Vietnam Military, 1969–1973*



July 14, 2015

12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

William G. McGowan Theater  
National Archives  
Washington, DC

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military* examines the efforts of Defense Secretary Melvin Laird to reconstitute the Department of Defense during the final years of the Vietnam War. The new Secretary, who assumed office in January 1969, quickly staked out positions that challenged those of President Richard Nixon—especially on the Defense budget and the pace of Vietnam troop withdrawals. In Laird’s view, the Vietnam War was peripheral to core U.S. security interests and allowed the Soviet Union an opportunity to enhance its conventional and strategic position in the second half of the 1960s.

Laird played an influential, leading role in shaping and carrying out the U.S. Vietnamization program to improve and modernize South Vietnam’s forces so they could replace the withdrawing American combatants. During Laird’s tenure, South Vietnam’s armed forces doubled in size while the U.S. military presence in-theater dropped from 540,000 personnel in 1969 to fewer than 24,000 at the time the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in January 1973.

Laird also acted to mitigate the adverse effects of the Vietnam War on the Department and to prepare the nation’s armed forces for the future. Foremost was the transition from a military that relied heavily on conscripts to an All-Volunteer Force, a fundamental policy shift that ended an unpopular and inequitable draft system. He developed the concept of the total force, relying on the National Guard and Reserve Components to perform essential missions. Laird pushed the Pentagon to combat racial discrimination, improve race relations, handle a growing drug abuse problem, and improve opportunities for women serving in uniform.

Throughout Laird’s service as Secretary, he sought to carry out policies that the nation could afford, to keep the nation’s defenses strong, and to weigh the political costs of defense policies to the nation.



## SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

### Welcome and Introduction

The Honorable David Ferriero  
Archivist of the United States

### Welcome and Keynote Introduction

Dr. Erin Mahan  
Chief Historian, Office of the Secretary of Defense

### Keynote Speaker

The Honorable John Warner  
Former United States Senator (Virginia)

### Panel Introduction

Dr. Erin Mahan

### Comments

Dr. Jeremi Suri  
Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership  
in Global Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin

Dr. George Herring  
Alumni Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Kentucky

Dr. Richard Hunt  
Author, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military*

### Questions from Audience

## ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

**The Honorable John Warner** served in the U.S. Navy as an enlisted sailor in the last year of World War II and then served as a U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant in the Korean War from 1950–52. His last duty station with the U.S. Marine Corps was with Marine Air Group 33 in Korea. He received a degree in engineering from Washington and Lee University in 1949, followed by a law degree from the University of Virginia Law School in 1953. For a decade he was in private legal practice before receiving Presidential appointments as Under Secretary of the Navy in 1969 and then as Secretary of the Navy in 1972. Secretary of Defense Laird gave him additional assignments as Department of Defense representative to the Law of the Sea talks with the Soviet Union and as the Department’s negotiator and signatory for the 1972 “Incidents at Sea Agreement” between the U.S. Navy and the Soviet Navy. He was elected to the United States Senate from Virginia in 1978, reelected to four more terms, and retired in 2009. He was privileged to serve all 30 years on the Senate Armed Forces Committee and in his final years served twice as Ranking Member and three times as Chairman of the Committee. In 2008, the Navy designated SSN 785, the twelfth submarine in the *Virginia*-class, to be the USS *John Warner*.

**Dr. Erin Mahan** has been Chief Historian for the Office of the Secretary of Defense since 2010 and Director of the Pentagon Library since 2014. Previously she worked in the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction at National Defense University and in the Historian’s Office at the U.S. Department of State, where she was an editor of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. Dr. Mahan holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Virginia.

**Dr. Richard Hunt** is the author of *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969–1973*, Volume VII in the Secretaries of Defense Historical Series. Dr. Hunt earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Pennsylvania following military service in Vietnam. He served as a historian with the Army’s Center of Military History, where he headed the Oral History Program and produced books and studies on the Vietnam War, including *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds*.

**Professor Jeremi Suri** is the Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of six books, including the widely acclaimed biography of one of America’s most distinguished diplomats, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Harvard University Press, 2007). Professor Suri has just published a new edited volume on the past and future of international diplomacy, *Foreign Policy Breakthroughs: Cases in Successful Diplomacy* (Oxford University Press, 2015), co-edited with Robert Hutchings. He has received numerous awards for his research and teaching, and *Smithsonian* magazine named him one of America’s “Top Young Innovators” in the Arts and Sciences in 2007. Professor Suri’s writings appear frequently in newspapers, magazines, and digital media. His professional webpage is: <http://jeremisuri.net>.

**Dr. George Herring** is Alumni Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Kentucky where he began teaching in 1969. After service in the U.S. Navy, Dr. Herring earned a Ph.D. in history from the University in Virginia. A specialist in the history of American foreign relations, he has written extensively on the Vietnam War, producing what is now considered the standard survey of the conflict, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, now in its 4th edition. In 2008 he published the volume on foreign relations in the prestigious Oxford History of the United States series, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (5th edition), which won the 2008 Robert Ferrell Award from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations for the best book in the field. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Fulbright Program, and the Guggenheim Foundation.