

ROGERS AND LAIRD TERMED DOUBTFUL

Two Are Said to Have Held
Misgivings Over Sending
G.I.'s Into Cambodia
MAY 6 1970

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 5—There is increasing evidence that Secretary of State William B. Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird had serious misgivings about the use of American troops in Cambodia. And there are many indications that President Nixon's war decisions in the last two weeks have been reached in an atmosphere of confusion as well as dissension.

Some of the opposition to President Nixon's decision to move into Cambodia appears to have been only thinly disguised. The opposition was based on distrust of the military and intelligence estimates adopted by the White House.

But Mr. Rogers, Mr. Laird and some other senior officials appear to have been troubled most by their fears of the

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domestic political consequences, of a further division of American society and a defensive escalation of the President's rhetoric as well as policies. Implicit in Mr. Nixon's decision, apparently supported by Attorney General John N. Mitchell, was the contrary conclusion that the protest would be manageable and that the eventual withdrawal from war would be accelerated.

Rogers Statement Recalled

On April 23, one day after the National Security Council began to consider further action in Cambodia and four days before Mr. Nixon decided on his course, Secretary Rogers told a House appropriations subcommittee that the Administration had "no incentive to escalate."

"Our whole incentive is to de-escalate," he said in secret testimony from which excerpts were made available today. "We recognize that if we escalate and we get involved in Cambodia with our ground troops that our whole program [presumably the program of assigning combat duty to the South Vietnamese alone] is defeated."

If it ever came to the "sizable use" of American troops in Cambodia, Mr. Rogers continued, the Administration would want to consult fully with the Congress because the Administration recognized the need for public support.

Asked today whether the Secretary had advised against the use of American troops in Cambodia, his spokesman replied, "No comment."

Secretary Laird, meanwhile,

appeared to be fighting a rear-guard battle against the massive involvement of Americans in the Cambodia operation. He acknowledged the military logic of striking at enemy bases in hitherto untouchable regions while the United States still had sufficient combat strength in the war zone, but he is said to have argued at the end for no more than the use of American advisers and air support for South Vietnamese troops.

The swift and highly secretive pattern of White House decision-making in recent weeks has caused Mr. Laird a number of embarrassments, of which today's beaten discovery of a fourth air raid against North Vietnam last weekend is the freshest example.

A few days before those mas-

sive raids began — allegedly aimed at antiaircraft installations that were threatening American reconnaissance planes—Mr. Laird said in an interview with U.S. News & World Report that "our aerial reconnaissance missions have been interfered with only rarely."

Received Short Notice

And a week earlier, both Mr. Laird and some of the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff received only short notice from San Clemente, Calif., that Mr. Nixon would announce a one-year troop withdrawal target of 150,000 instead of the four-month goal of up to 50,000 that they had been privately predicting to associates.

Officials in the principal of-

fices of the State Department, recognizing that their superiors were not always in step with the White House, are now telling each other that they have reason to accept reports that Attorney General John N. Mitchell played an important role in persuading the President to demonstrate his combat muscle.

The Attorney General is acknowledged to have counseled Mr. Nixon on the political implications, probably to the effect that the short-term domestic protest would be tolerable if the action promised a long-range certainty that more American troops could be brought home. One informant reports that Mr. Mitchell urged the President to disclose nothing about the Cambodian operation—just as no disclosures

had been planned about the shipments of weapons captured from the enemy in South Vietnam to the Cambodians, or about increased bombing of North Vietnam.

The fear of information leaks appears to have compounded the confusion in the Administration and contributed to disillusion among many officials.

Information Leaks Feared

Senior State Department officials were cut off from important cablegrams and other papers because the White House blamed them for disclosure of the shipment last week of captured rifles to Cambodia. Estimates of the possible diplomatic repercussions of the move into Cambodia were therefore ordered not from the

State Department but from the Defense Intelligence Agency. (It is said to have predicted coolness in Britain, France and Italy, not so much because the allied Governments were opposed but because they had to contend with what were called sizable socialist and Communist movements.)

The suspicion that the United States had a hand in the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk on March 18 to set the stage for the current military operations had reappeared here, even in the Government. Although military and intelligence officials made no secret of their pleasure at the time of the coup by Lieut. Gen. Lon Nol, there has been no evidence of foreknowledge among senior officials.