

## Laird Says Thousands Have Already Left Cambodia



Associated Press

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird with Senator Margaret Chase Smith, Maine Republican, as she greeted Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations, at Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. At left is John F. Foster Jr. of defense research and engineering.

By HEDRICK SMITH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 12—Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said today that several thousand American troops had already been withdrawn from Cambodia and that more would be withdrawn this week. Testifying

before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Mr. Laird also said that "the major portion of our forces" will be withdrawn from Cambodia by June 15. He reiterated President Nixon's pledge that all American troops would leave Cambodia by the end of June. In answer

to a question, Mr. Laird said he would not rule out the further use of American air power in Cambodia to strike at supply routes. He refused to exclude the possibility that South Vietnamese forces might go back into Cambodia

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on their own in the future if Communist forces move back into the sanctuary areas.

In response to a question as to whether the United States had consulted with the Cambodian Government before beginning military operations, he said: "The Cambodian Government was informed, and it had no objections."

Asked about reports that South Vietnamese forces were now digging in as if they meant to stay in Cambodia, Mr. Laird said, "I will not permit South Vietnamese forces to be tied down to such an extent that it in anyway slows down the withdrawal of American forces."

The Secretary was also asked what had prompted President Nixon to decide to go into Cambodia April 30 after he had announced plans 10 days earlier for continued withdrawals from South Vietnam.

Mr. Laird replied: "I think the important thing that had an effect on the President was the information that was developed that the North Vietnamese would in the coming months be using sanctuaries at an increasing rate to increase American casualties and this would have a decided effect on public opinion in the United States. The President decided in the interest of protecting Americans."

It was only after two hours that the Secretary was allowed to get to the issue that he had intended to discuss with the committee: The strategic balance and arms limitation.

On that topic, he said that stopping work on the controversial Safeguard antiballistic missile system and on multiple-warhead missiles would be "inconsistent with the purpose" of the arms talks now going on in Vienna.