

LAIRD SAID TO ASK IF ASIA PULLOUT CAN BE ADVANCED

Query to Abrams Reported
to Be Based on Gains Made
in Cambodian Operation

REPLY TO DISSENT SEEN
MAY 27 1970
White House Denies It Plans
to End Action in Cambodia
Before June 30 Deadline

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WASHINGTON, May 26—Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird is said to have asked American commanders in Vietnam whether, in light of recent operations against Communist base areas in Cambodia, the United States can withdraw more troops from Vietnam by May 1, 1971 than the 150,000 announced by President Nixon last month.

The reply is expected later this week, according to high-ranking Pentagon sources, who said there were at least three factors behind the request to accelerate the withdrawals, as follows:

¶The capture or destruction of thousands of tons of weapons and ammunition and rice and medicine in the sanctuaries, which, it is estimated, should take North Vietnam 6 to 12 months to replace.

¶A demonstration of combat effectiveness by a large number of previously unimpressive South Vietnamese military units.

¶A desire to cool dissent in Congress and on the campus by demonstrating that the much-criticized assaults across the Cambodian border should speed the American disengagement from Vietnam.

Report Is Questioned

At the White House, the Presidential Press Secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, described as inaccurate a report published in The New York Times today to the effect that Administration plans contemplated the completion of the withdrawal of American troops from Cambodia ahead of the June 30 deadline set by Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Ziegler emphasized that the operation would be completed by June 30.

"We have no intention of sending any personnel back in," he added. "We've announced our schedule, we are on schedule and everything is proceeding well."

The request for recommendations is said to have been made

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within the last two weeks and to have gone through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Adm. John S. McCain Jr., commander of American forces in the Pacific, and to Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of American troops in Vietnam.

The chronology of the pertinent events, as pieced together from Administration sources, indicates that early in April American field commanders and the Joint Chiefs urged the Administration to defer a new announcement on troop reductions, for about 60 days because of delays in training South Vietnamese forces and because of expected enemy attacks over the summer and early fall.

On April 20 President Nixon surprised many generals and officials by announcing that 150,000 men would be withdrawn in the period ending May 1, 1971, reducing the troop level to 284,000 men.

Privately, according to the accounts, the military men were told that they could defer actual withdrawals during April, May and June but should look to reductions of roughly 100,000 by the end of the year and 50,000 more by May 1, 1971.

General Abrams, it is said, reported that such a schedule might be hazardous, particularly in light of the vast enemy supplies along the Cambodian border, since the foe might try to take advantage of the situation by hitting American units as they tried to withdraw.

Administration sources say this was one of the factors influencing the President in his decision to launch the American and South Vietnamese ground and air attacks on the sanctuaries. He announced the basic policy change on April 30.

At the same time, they say, he authorized a series of heavy air raids on Communist supply concentrations and air defenses north of the demilitarized zone in North Vietnam. Administration spokesmen will acknowledge only that the raids were against air-defense installations.

When it became clear a couple of weeks later that the

Cambodian venture was tactically successful but politically explosive the officials relate, the decision was made to seek a step-up in the troop reduction.

The officials point out that Mr. Laird, both in news conferences and in Congressional tes-

timony, has suggested that the Cambodian operation should be judged on the basis of whether it enables the United States to speed the transfer of the major responsibility for fighting the war to Saigon and whether it permits an increase in the troop reductions.