

## Statement by Laird

# Free Hand for Saigon in Cambodia

London

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said yesterday that South Vietnamese forces will be free to operate anywhere in Cambodia after June 30.

That date is the deadline set by President Nixon for the withdrawal of American troops now in Cambodia.

Laird said the deadline will definitely be met.

But he said he would not want to put "any limit" on South Vietnamese actions. The Communists, he indicated, are free to maintain "sanctuaries" anywhere in Cambodia and consequently South Vietnamese forces should be able to attack them.

Laird's replies to questions at a London news conference appeared to carry somewhat further the gradual shift of American policy toward allowing the South Vietnamese Free rein in Cambodia.

On May 8, at his news conference a week after ordering American forces into Cambodia, President Nixon was asked whether his June

30 deadline applied to South Vietnamese ground troops. He said no, but added:

"I would expect that the South Vietnamese would come out approximately at the same time that we do, because when we come out our logistical support and air support will also come out."

The Saigon government then said repeatedly and

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forcefully that it must have the right to continue attacking inside Cambodia after June 30. Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky said that the notion of its forces withdrawing by a fixed date was "a silly argument of silly people."

On June 3, Mr. Nixon said that the activity of South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, "after their withdrawal from the sanctuaries," would "be determined by the actions of the enemy."

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