

Laird's Pitch

An Argument for Aid to Cambodia

Washington

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday that congressional refusal to provide the requested \$155 million in military aid for Cambodia could slow down American troop withdrawals from Vietnam.

Laird described the Administration's Cambodian-aid program as a "good investment" in permitting a reduction of the American military presence in Southeast Asia. Should that investment be rejected by Congress, he told reporters, this would have a "substantial effect" on troop withdrawal plans from Vietnam.

The Administration request faces considerable opposition in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where there is concern among many of the members that a large-scale aid program for Cambodia could lead to a deepening American involvement in that country.

CONSULTANTS

Senator J. William Fulbright (Dem-Ark.) the committee chairman, announced yesterday that two committee staff consultants — James G. Moose — were being sent to Cambodia so that the committee could have a first hand report on the situation there before considering the Administration's request.

In making the announcement, Fulbright noted that Secretary of State William P. Rogers, in testifying before the committee on April 27, shortly before the Cambodian intervention, had expressed concern that a large-scale military assistance program for Cambodia would probably be followed by the need for American

military advisers and subsequently for troops.

The Secretary, the Senator observed, also emphasized the danger of becoming "supportive of the Cambodian government."

WITHDRAWALS

In meeting committee opposition, it is becoming apparent that the Administration is laying considerable emphasis upon the linkage between Cambodian aid and troop withdrawals from Vietnam.

Laird said that if the Cambodian forces were unable to "retain" North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, then "the North Vietnamese forces will be back in South Vietnam facing South Vietnam and American forces there."

Laird delivered his warning following an appearance before the Senate Appropriations Committee to ask for restoration of various weapons programs that the House cut out of the military budget.

The Defense Secretary said that the Administration was prepared to accept \$1.5 billion in reductions in its original \$69.4 billion appropriations request for the Pentagon — a request that Laird last February had described as "a rock bottom budget." But he cautioned that any further Congressional reductions "may ultimately prove self-defeating by reducing our capabilities below acceptable levels."

Laird asked the Senate to restore \$1 billion of the \$2 billion cut made by the House. He also asked for an additional \$354 million to meet "new requirements," such as equipping Navy planes with electronic gear to counter Soviet anti-aircraft missiles and for training the National Guard to deal with civil disturbances.

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