

# STENNIS SAYS U.S. MAY HAVE TO EASE CURB IN CAMBODIA

After Briefing by Laird, He  
Asserts Wider Operations  
Could Be Required

## SECRETARY NOTES GAIN

But Senator Says Reverses  
Might Call for Controllers  
on Ground for Planes

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 27 —

Senator John Stennis, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said today, after a briefing by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, that it might become necessary to relax the present Congressional restrictions on military operations in Cambodia.

If the military situation worsens in Cambodia, Senator Stennis suggested, it may be necessary to expand American operations there. One possibility he raised was that the United States would have to send in ground controllers to direct the American planes providing air support for Cambodian and South Vietnamese troops.

This would not be permissible under the Cooper-Church amendment, which Congress attached last year to a supplementary military aid bill. The amendment forbids the President to introduce ground combat troops or military advisers into Cambodia.

## Criticism Develops

Mr. Laird appeared before the Armed Services Committee amid developing criticism in the Senate that the Administration was violating the intent of the Cooper-Church amendment with the recent introduction of American air support for Cambodian and South Vietnamese forces.

Mr. Laird gave the committee what Senator Stennis described as a "strongly confident" report that the military situation was "improving" in Cambodia and that "fair progress" was being made through the use of American air support.

One question raised on Capitol Hill was whether the Defense Department was using Senator Stennis, a past defender of the Vietnam war, to prepare his colleagues and the nation for a deeper military involvement in Cambodia.

Even without an answer to that question, however, the probable immediate reaction to the briefs of the Armed Services Committee will be to strengthen a latent movement within the Senate Foreign Relations Committee toward tightening the Cooper-Church amendment to bar air operations also.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers is scheduled to brief the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Cambodia tomorrow, and the Stennis comments are certain to increase the fear on the committee that the Administration, despite restrictions, is deepening its military

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# Stennis Says U.S. May Have to Ease Cambodia Curb

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involvement in Cambodia.

The Defense Secretary insisted after the hearing that there had been "no violation of either the language of the law or the intent of Congress" in Cambodia.

In a televised response last night to President Nixon's State of the Union Message, Senator Mike Mansfield, the Senate Democratic leader, asserted that Mr. Laird's interpretation that it was conforming to the Cooper-Church amendment was "contrary to the fact."

The Laird opinion was shared by Senator Stennis, who said he was "satisfied as of now" that the Administration was "living within the limits" of the Congressional restrictions.

Both the Defense Secretary and the Senator emphasized that the Cooper-Church amendment did not prohibit air support, and the Senator argued that the absence of such a prohibition constituted authority for air operations over Cambodia.

But repeated emphasis was

put on the phrase "as of now." Senator Stennis said he was not predicting that "under present developments" it would be necessary to relax the restrictions, but the "margin is so thin," he said, that no one could predict with certainty.

Senator Stennis said he did not foresee the need for "a large, new commitment" of ground combat troops to Cambodia. But if the military situation grows "substantially worse," he said, "we may have to re-examine our policy and restrictions."

Senator Stennis said the possibility of introducing ground controllers into Cambodia had not been raised by Mr. Laird. But it was apparent that the Senator's comments reflected Mr. Laird's appraisal.

Mr. Laird, meanwhile, explained that the 15 to 20 American military men who retrieved two damaged helicopters at the Pnompenh airport wore civilian clothes at the suggestion of the American Ambassador, Emory C. Swank.

The Ambassador, he said, apparently felt that the United

States should "keep its profile as low as possible."

Expressing some disagreement with the Ambassador's request, Mr. Laird said he would recommend "most strongly" that on any such future missions, the men wear their uniforms. The Defense Secretary said he saw "no problem" in assigning military men on such a mission, which he described as part of the military assistance program to Cambodia.

A Columbia Broadcasting System television report tonight identified the soldiers who landed at Pnompenh as members of the 520th Transportation Battalion, Phuloi, South Vietnam.

The three soldiers interviewed said that this was their first mission wearing civilian clothes and their first mission to the Cambodian capital.

Cambodian air losses in the enemy attack on the Pnompenh airport amounted to 10 MIG's, 10 C-47's, 8 helicopters and 5 T-28's, according to State Department officials.

Mr. Laird also defended the

assignment of "military delivery teams" to Cambodia to "audit" the shipment of American arms. The assignment was necessary, he said, to carry out a "commitment" he gave to Congress last year that the delivery of the American arms would be so "audited."

While Mr. Laird apparently mollified most members of the Armed Services Committee, his briefing, combined with the comments of Senator Stennis, will probably contribute to an effort within the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to strengthen the Cooper-Church amendment.

As it originally passed the Senate, the Cooper-Church amendment prohibited the use of American air power in support of the Cambodian Government. But in the closing days of Congress, this prohibition was dropped as the price for winning House and Administration acceptance.