

# Bombing Richardson's Fund Appeal

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Defense Secretary Elliot L. Richardson suggested to the Senate Appropriations Committee yesterday that the bombing of Cambodia would continue even if Congress refused to provide additional spending authority to the Pentagon.

Without an emergency transfer of funds in the Pentagon budget, however, Richardson forecast a "near crippling" cutback in military operations in other parts of the world, with "the readiness of our world-wide forces degraded to a dangerously low level."

As probably one of his final acts as Secretary of Defense, Richardson, designated by President Nixon as the new Attorney General was thrown into a growing Congressional fight over financing of the Cambodian bombing.

The administration has requested, as part of a supplemental appropriations bill now before Congress, that the Defense Department be permitted to transfer \$500 million from one account to another, in part to pay for the bombing that has been going on almost steadily in Cambodia since early February.

## HOUSE

In the House, a move will be made Thursday to deny the Defense Department authority to use any of the transfer funds for the Cambodian bombing.

The current White House appraisal is that a move to cut off funds for the Cambodian bombing may succeed by a narrow margin in the House and almost certainly will prevail when the supplemental appropriations bill reaches the Senate.

The administration counter strategy was outlined in the Richardson statement presented to a closed meeting of the Senate Appropriations Committee. It emphasized that the transfer of authority was essential to meet military operating expenses in the remaining seven weeks of the fiscal year, which ends June 30, but not necessary to finance what Richardson described as the "relatively small" cost of the Cambodian bombing.

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Richardson suggested that even without the transfer authority, there would be ample funds to continue the bombing in Cambodia. In large measure, this assessment depended upon the cost that Richardson attached to the bombing.

Before the committee hearing, Richardson estimated that the cost of the bombing, "over and above what we otherwise would be spending," is now running at about \$5 million a month. In his prepared statement for the committee, he suggested that the bombing between now and the end of the fiscal year on June 30 would run to about \$25 million.

In contrast, based on the daily sortie rate of about 60 B-52 bombers and 160 fighter-bombers over Cambodia, Congressional estimates of the cost of the bombing have run to around \$5 million a day.

## ESTIMATE

Richardson's estimate, however, covered only the

cost of the fuel for the planes.

The net effect of the Richardson testimony — for four hours before the committee was to leave some senators, such as William Proxmire (Dem-Wis.), confused as to the actual cost of the bombing.

Richardson said the transfer authority is necessary because of a shortage of operating funds arising from three principal causes: devaluation of the dollar, higher subsistence costs resulting from the increase in food prices and "a higher than programmed rate of activity in Southeast Asia" in the first half of this year.

Without replenishment of the operating funds from other accounts in the defense budget, he said, a number of "drastic steps" would have to be taken, including curtailment of flying hours by the Air Force and "steaming hours" by the Navy, reduction in training programs and a freeze on promotions.

Just how much of the transfer authority would be used to finance the bombing in Cambodia was left unclear by Richardson in his prepared statement.