

# Fulbright clash

Also see Page A-2

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday the United States would remain in Vietnam until U.S. prisoners of war are freed.

"Vietnamization cannot be completed as far as I'm concerned until these prisoners are freed," Laird told the Senate foreign relations committee.

Laird testified on a proposal to pump \$255 million in foreign aid into Cambodia, acknowledging that "a com-

mitment" had already been made to Vietnam's embattled neighbor.

BUT MOST of the two-hour hearing was devoted to the prisoner-of-war issue and the circumstances surrounding the abortive Nov. 21 commando mission to rescue some of them from a camp near Hanoi.

Laird denied Chairman J. William Fulbright's charge that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had not been consulted about the issue. He bitterly assailed Fulbright for spreading "concocto" that the Administration knew in advance no prisoners would be found.

IT WAS LEFT to Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., to raise the question about overall policy regarding prisoners. He reasoned that, since the Vietnamization program is the alternative to a negotiated settlement, he could not see how it would ever lead to the release of prisoners—since Hanoi refuses to let them go until the fighting ends.

"This is one of the major concerns we have," Laird said. "The Vietnamization program cannot be completed as far as I'm concerned until these prisoners are freed." He said if other opportunities present themselves for rescue missions, "I will approve them again."

Laird, who was late for a

clined to talk afterwards about how large a force would be left in Vietnam while the prisoners are there.

FULBRIGHT earlier said that CIA Director Richard Helms told him his agency was not even consulted prior to the Nov. 21 raid on the Son Tay prison camp, 21 miles from Hanoi.

"I don't believe that can quite be the case," Laird said. "The director of the CIA was fully briefed, fully advised." He said Helms came to the Pentagon four or five weeks before the mission and was consulted.

Fulbright said it seemed "reasonable" to him that the Administration would order the rescue mission with the full knowledge that no prisoners were at Son Tay. He said the mission would have been far more perilous if the prisoners had been there.

"THERE COULD be other reasons justifying the decision," he said. "It's perfectly understandable that the President might want to make a gesture that the POW's won't be forgotten . . . and to demonstrate to the North Vietnamese just how helpless they are, to show we have the capability almost at will to invade their country."

Bristling, Laird accused Fulbright of blocking a resolution commanding the commandos and the mission itself, contending that Fulbright was questioning the "valor of these men."

Fulbright said he was not questioning anyone's courage, but only the decision behind the mission itself.