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Committees Meet With Secord on Eve of Testimony

Leadoff Witness Expected To Offer New Disclosures

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On the eve of the long-awaited Iran-contra hearings, congressional investigators continued meeting privately with their leadoff witness, retired major general Richard V. Secord, whom they expect to reveal publicly new details of the Reagan administration's most controversial foreign policy initiatives.

Speaking of the months of testimony ahead, Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the House select committee, said that much of it would be familiar to the news media and the public. But he added: "I think a good deal of the testimony will be new," beginning with Secord's appearance this afternoon.

In related matters, Hamilton disclosed that:

- The committee will vote at a later date on the release of classified documents and classified testimony of some 300 witnesses given to investigators in private over the course of the four-month prehearings inquiry. Rep. Dick Cheney (R-Wyo.), vice chairman of the select committee, said he expected that "the [amount of] material that will remain classified will be relatively small."

- The House committee does not anticipate calling President Reagan as a witness at this time, but there has been no final judgment on this and it "depends on how the hearings develop," Hamilton said.

- The private, preparatory questioning of Rear Adm. John M. Poindexter, former national security adviser, which lasted almost eight hours Saturday, will continue, but probably not until the weekend because of the hearings. Poindexter is considered the most knowledgeable witness concerning what the president knew of the secret funding of the contras during the cutoff of U.S.

military aid, and the diversion of U.S.-Iran arms-sale funds to the Nicaraguan rebels.

- Congressional investigators still have not reached agreement with the Israeli government over the release of a "financial chronology" of the Iran-contra events compiled by officials in Jerusalem. Hamilton described the financial material as extensive and called the cooperation of Israeli officials "very good."

The handling of classified information took up most of a meeting yesterday of the House select committee.

Sources said the members decided that during the public hearings, witnesses would be alerted if the questioning was expected to take them into classified areas. Of particular sensitivity is the subject of other nations that allegedly supported the contras.

The most prominent example is Saudi Arabia, which is widely believed to have provided \$33.5 million to the contra forces immediately before and after Congress stopped direct U.S. military aid. Testimony concerning the alleged Saudi contribution is expected during Secord's appearance.

Saudi officials repeatedly have denied that their government was the source of the funds.

Also, the State Department has never officially acknowledged that a donation to the contra cause was solicited from the sultan of Brunei.

For each witness, only after hearing testimony in public will the congressional committees vote on whether to release related classified information.

Hamilton said yesterday that relatively little of the Secord testimony would deal with classified material. The retired Air Force general served as the principal private op-

erator in the effort to channel military supplies to the contras after direct U.S. military aid was cut off in 1984, and in the arms sales to Iran.

While at the Pentagon, Secord was deeply involved in administration lobbying leading to congressional approval in 1981 of the sale of AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) surveillance planes to the Saudis.

In 1984-86, Secord served as the principal private operator first in the effort to resupply the contras, and then in last year's U.S. arms sales to Iran. He also worked in a semi-official capacity. For example, in the November 1985 shipment of U.S.-made arms to Iran, according to the Tower review board report, he acted to obtain government flight clearances for the aircraft on its way to Iran.

Secord also on several occasions helped arrange dual use for aircraft in two operations.

In November 1985, for example, Secord delayed a planned arms shipment from Portugal to Central America in order to use the same aircraft to send arms to Iran. Last May, Secord arranged for a Southern Air Transport Inc. charter to carry U.S.-made military equipment destined for Iran to Israel, and then have the same aircraft return via Lisbon to pick up arms shipments for the contras.

Last October, when the U.S. Customs Service subpoenaed information from Southern Air after a C123 cargo plane was shot down over Nicaragua, airline officials called Secord, who in turn notified Lt. Col. Oliver L. North—then a National Security Council aide—of their concern that the documents might show a connection to the Iran hostage program. North called a top official at the Customs Service and the records were not taken from Southern Air.