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## Ludicrous, Serious Aspects to Fulbright Blast

Senator J. William Fulbright's latest blast at the administration's Asian policies — this time directed against our involvement in Thailand — has both a ludicrous and a serious side.

The ludicrous side is his feigned ignorance of the reasons for the American military buildup in Thailand and the implication that 30,000 American troops have been somehow smuggled into the country behind the backs of Congress and the American people.

In calling for a public investigation of what is going on, Fulbright declaims piously on the right of the people "to know to what extent their sons and their fortunes are being committed to Thailand." He complains that "we are given no alternative but to rely on the press for our information on Thailand because the officials are reluctant to speak."

This is ridiculous. No secret has been made of the extent of our buildup in Thailand or of the reasons that have made

it necessary. No one has pretended, as the senator implies, that our 30,000 troops are there to cope with new subversive war on the model of the Viet Nam conflict. Fulbright himself makes it clear that he is perfectly well aware that at least 80 percent of these forces are directly engaged in fighting in Viet Nam.

It has all been reported, as he says, in the newspapers. Any American who can read has had the answers to the senator's questions for many months. And anything that a newspaperman can learn, a senator can too.

In fact, a good many senators — not including Fulbright — have taken the trouble of going to Thailand and finding out what is happening there for themselves. And for those who cannot find the time, officials of the State Department and the Pentagon are ready and willing to answer any questions that Fulbright's committee wants to ask.

All this is perfectly evident. But what particularly arouses the senator — and incidentally provides him with a pretext to

embarrass the administration — is the request of the Thai government that no official public recognition of Thailand's role in the war be given at this point. He would very much like to know, says Fulbright darkly, why this should be so.

Yet this request is neither very mysterious nor very sinister. For one thing, Hanoi has never admitted its own involvement in the war in South Viet Nam. An official admission by Thailand would simply serve to hand the Communists a free propaganda motif, which they would be quick to exploit.

For another thing, the Thais are going to have to live in Southeast Asia after American forces are withdrawn from the area. They are helping us to win in Viet Nam today to avoid the risk of becoming the next battleground in a continuing Communist expansion. But resounding declarations would do nothing to improve their future relations with neutralist nations of the area, including their immediate neighbors in Laos, Burma and Cambodia.

This perfectly understandable, if somewhat Oriental, line of reasoning does not commend itself to Fulbright. Instead, in answer to his own questions about Thailand's motives, he launches into an utterly gratuitous attack on the Thai government, suggesting among other things that it is not confident of its public support and that it has become the tool of the United States.

This attack, which is on a par with the senator's assertion that Philippine President Marcos was "well paid off" for his services during his recent visit to Washington, is by far the more serious side of the matter. It provoked a predictably violent reaction in Bangkok and an unusually indignant retort from the Thai foreign minister, in effect inviting Fulbright to pull American troops out of Thailand whenever he feels like it.

The Thais, however, have more sense than to play into the hands of a minority of dissident senators. The storm has quickly subsided and no permanent damage seems to have been done.

Fulbright's own motives, however, are somewhat harder to explain. It is clear enough that he disapproves of any country that supports our effort in Viet Nam. But it is hard to accept this as an excuse for deliberately trying to alienate the millions of proud and sensitive people in Asia who have declared themselves our friends. Unless, of course, it is the ambition of the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee to play as disruptive a role as possible in the foreign relations of the United States.