

U.S. Reported Aiding in War

Symington Unit Calls Helms To Explain CIA Role in Laos

A Senate subcommittee has summoned Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, to explain the role of the CIA in the secret war in Laos.

Helms is expected to appear next week. The investigation is being conducted behind closed doors by a Foreign Relations subcommittee on Overseas Commitments under Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.).

Three military attaches from the American embassy in Vientiane will also testify. William Sullivan, ambassador to Laos from 1964 until this year, is scheduled to be the lead-off witness on Monday. Sullivan is now a deputy assistant secretary for East Asia.

Delicate Issue

The investigation is perhaps the most delicate undertaken by the subcommittee in its examination of the consequences of the nation's global involvements. The United States and the Laotian government have never admitted publicly that Washington plays a role in the struggle.

However, American participation is believed to be extensive and on two fronts. United States B-52s are reported to be

flying as many as 200 sorties a day from bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, bombing the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. North Vietnam sends men and supplies down this eastern route to South Vietnam.

In addition, the United States is providing arms, advisers, transportation and bombing support to the Royalist-neutralist government of Laos for its war in the north against the Communist Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies.

American military aid to the Laotian government has been estimated as high as \$200 million a year—four times as much as the economic assistance.

The Symington committee has refused to disclose either its witness list or the line of questions that will be pursued. However, it is likely that Helms will be asked about a reported 300 CIA agents said to be operating in the Laotian war. Many are reported to be former Green Berets, recruited to lead Laotian units on reconnaissance missions and terrorist raids.

Soldiers and supplies for the war are carried by Air Amer-

ica and Continental Air Service. The two airlines are said to be CIA-operated.

The three officers recalled to testify before the Senate unit are Col. Robert L. Tyrell, the air attaché in Vientiane; Lt. Col. Edgar W. Duskin and Major Robert Thomas, both army attachés.

They are expected to describe the tactical bombing and ground operations that the American military in Laos reportedly directs for the Royal government. There have been reports that every operation now mounted by the Royal Lao forces is directed and controlled by the American military establishment there.

The United States Air Force reportedly flies up to 300 sorties a day against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. On the ground, American captains and majors reportedly draw up battle plans in the field and even accompany units into action.

The American engagement in Laos reportedly increased markedly in the past year. Several senators, notably John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.), a member of the subcommittee, have expressed alarm that the United States is slipping into another Vietnam.

The Symington unit will also explore economic aid to Laos, \$51.5 million in the last accounting year. Robert H. Nooter, deputy assistant administrator for East Asia in the AID agency, will be the principal witness.

Among other things, he is expected to testify on Laotian corruption and misuse of aid funds and the prospects for turning over existing programs to the Lao.

The subcommittee will also hear from a young AID official, Loring Waggoner, who has also been brought back from Laos to testify. Waggoner, 28, runs rural development programs in Laos.

Some time after the executive sessions are concluded, the Symington committee plans to release a transcript to the public, censored of classified matter. The committee is currently trying to get agreement of the State Department on a transcript of the first round of hearings which dealt with the Philippines.