

Chairman Pike's Pique

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30—The statements on Capitol Hill these days sound more and more like communiqués from a battlefield. In its zeal to restore the balance of power with the executive branch, the Congress seems in danger of losing its own balance.

This was predictable. After years of deception by the White House, the intelligence agencies, and the State and Defense Departments, dramatized by the tragedies of Vietnam and Watergate, the counterattack from Congress was unavoidable and essential, but some of the latest attacks on the intelligence agencies and the State Department border on the ridiculous.

"If an attack were to be launched on America in the very near future," said Representative Otis G. Pike, Democratic chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, "it is my belief that America would not know that attack was about to be launched." This is only one example of Pike's pique.

Thereupon, the Pike committee voted 10 to 3 to seek a resolution from the full House of Representatives supporting its demand for unimpeded access to classified documents and other materials the committee has subpoenaed from the Central Intelligence Agency.

An argument can be made in this case, for the executive branch not only over-classifies documents but often regards itself as the sole reliable custodian of sensitive security information; but Mr. Pike's committee does not stop at demanding such information from the responsible political officers of the agencies and departments.

It wants to know not only the facts of a given situation, which is fair enough, but summons junior staff offi-

WASHINGTON

cers to testify under oath about what recommendations they made to the policy officials. This, of course, is the procedure that almost wrecked the U.S. Foreign Service during the McCarthy period, when Secretary of State Dulles allowed his junior aides to be riddled and drummed out of office.

These distinctions between who is responsible and who is not responsible, and between policy decisions by top officials and policy recommendations by junior staff members are generally respected by the major committees dealing with foreign and security affairs; but the Pike committee apparently does not see the difference.

There can be no effective diplomatic reporting from abroad or analysis within the State Department, for example, if every ambassador or staff officer knows that his personal recommendations are subject to Congressional investigation months or years after. A few bold souls may take their chances but the rest will probably play it cosy and avoid recommending anything that may be subject to question later on.

Mr. Kissinger is the responsible official at State, together with the Assistant Secretaries and others appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. In Representative Pike's present inquiry into the Cyprus war, for example, Mr. Kissinger offered to testify and to take responsibility for the policy, which couldn't have been easy considering how dubious the policy was.

Also, he sent Arthur A. Hartman, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, and William G. Hyland, State Department Director of Intelligence and Research, to the Pike committee to answer their questions. But the committee summoned Thomas D. Boyatt, a junior officer who was reported to have taken a different view on Cyprus policy, interrogated him in secret session and kept Messrs. Hartman and Hyland, the responsible policy officials, out of the room.

This is a little like insisting on the right to compel testimony from a junior Central Intelligence agent on whether he ever disagreed with his boss, or a staff sergeant in the Army on whether he liked the search and destroy missions in Vietnam. It violates the principle of responsibility, ignores the principle of the separation of powers, and threatens to make the orderly conduct of Government even worse than it now is.

Mr. Pike is not an irresponsible man. Like many of his colleagues on the Hill, he is furious about misuses of executive privilege and appeals to national security in the past, and is determined to impose accountability on the intelligence community and the State Department.

Thus, it is right of Congress, as Mr. Kissinger has acknowledged, to hold the Secretary of State accountable and even to try to hold him in contempt or get him fired if he withholds information essential to the performance of Congress' duties. But raiding the staff members and interfering with the legitimate private executive analysis of different options is a totally different and destructive procedure.

If Mr. Pike wants a confrontation with the Secretary of State on this issue, he will get it, for Mr. Kissinger will not follow John Foster Dulles's example of throwing staff officers to his critics. The idea of giving Congress everything it needs to be an effective partner in the conduct of foreign and intelligence policy is long overdue, but it is not necessary to wreck the Foreign Service to do it.