

Fulbright Says McNamara Deceives Public on Tonkin

He Accuses Secretary of Offering a One-Sided Account of Raids

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 21 — Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, accused Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara today of deceiving the American public by presenting a one-sided story of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents.

The Senator suggested that the Defense Secretary was suppressing information that

Fulbright text, excerpts from Morse speech, Page 14.

cast doubt on whether two American destroyers came under North Vietnamese attack in August, 1964.

At the same time, the Arkansas Democrat challenged the reliability of what Mr. McNamara called "highly classified and unimpeachable" intelligence information demonstrating beyond doubt that the destroyers had been attacked.

Mr. McNamara told of the intelligence report yesterday as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee began hearings on the Administration's

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handling of the Tonkin incidents.

The incidents, involving North Vietnamese attacks on Aug. 2 and Aug. 4 against American destroyers, marked a turning point in American involvement in Vietnam and led to the decision to carry the war to North Vietnam.

Now, three and a half years later, the Senate committee wants to know whether the Administration had sufficient proof of the second PT boat attack on the destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy to warrant its decision to bomb North Vietnam and get Congressional approval for "all necessary measures" to repel aggression.

Instead of resolving committee doubts with his testimony, Mr. McNamara has apparently precipitated what was expected to be a brief investigation into an angry political confrontation.

In their indignation, committee members began throwing angry personal charges at the outgoing Secretary of Defense and disclosing secret information about the Tonkin incidents that could prove politically embarrassing to the Administration in an election year.

In part, the indignation of the Senators was provoked by Mr. McNamara's action in making public his testimony without the approval of the committee. But beyond this point of protocol, some committee members were irate over what they regarded as the one-sided, self-serving nature of Mr. McNamara's testimony.

Mr. Fulbright charged that the Defense Secretary had presented "only one side of the story" and had suppressed information that did not serve his case. The Senator declared: "Secretary McNamara's statement is a classic example of selective declassification of security material. Everything related to the Tonkin incidents is 'secret' except that which the Pentagon deems should be made public. This, I believe, deceives the American public."

For example, the Senator said, the Defense Secretary has refused to release information that raises questions about the detection of torpedoes by sonar on the Maddox and task force messages that indicated doubts about the second attack.

But at the same time, Mr. Fulbright went on, the Defense Secretary saw fit to discuss secret intelligence information apparently obtained by monitoring North Vietnamese radio circuits.

In reply to Senator Fulbright, the Defense Department issued a statement tonight saying: "The charge the Defense Department has suppressed information suggesting no attacks were made on the destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy in the Gulf of Tonkin is totally without foundation."

In the course of a day of statements to reporters, Senator Fulbright had not made such a specific charge. Rather, he repeatedly suggested that

the Administration was withholding information raising doubts about the reliability of the evidence available to the Administration when it decided upon retaliation against North Vietnam.

In his statement yesterday, Mr. McNamara based his case largely on this intelligence information, which he described as being of "a highly classified and unimpeachable nature."

This information, he said, showed that North Vietnamese naval forces had been ordered to attack the two destroyers and then that the North Vietnamese PT boats reported they were involved in an engagement and had lost two boats.

On the basis of their reading of the intelligence reports, both Senator Fulbright and Senator Albert Gore, Democrat of Tennessee challenged whether the intelligence information provided "unimpeachable" proof of an attack.

On three different points, Senator Gore said, the intelligence reports obtained from intercepted North Vietnamese radio messages contained information that "was completely in error." He said this fact was not disclosed by the Secretary of Defense.

Senator Gore declined to elaborate. But Senator Fulbright suggested that the North Vietnamese PT boat commanders might have engaged in "a little puffery" such as reporting they had inflicted damage on the destroyers.

As an example of what he said was the misleading nature of the McNamara testimony, Senator Gore noted how the Defense Secretary had testified that Lieut. Gen. David A. Burchinal, director of the Joint Staff, had analyzed the incoming messages and had given the evaluation: "The actuality of the attack is confirmed."