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Saigon Senator to Widen Panel's Songmy Inquiry

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 8 — The chairman of the Defense Committee of the South Vietnamese Senate said today that he intended to widen his panel's inquiry into the massacre at Songmy to examine the entire issue of the American-Vietnamese relationship in the conduct of the war.

The Senator, Tran Van Don, charged in an interview that in some zones in South Vietnam the United States was conducting its own war, failing to coordinate its military actions with the Vietnamese authorities. The Senator said that coordination was poor in some areas and nonexistent in many others.

Senator Don is a retired lieutenant general and former Defense Minister and Chief of Staff who is a critic of President Nguyen Van Thieu. He said that he had been struck in the investigation in Quangngai, the province that includes Songmy, by how little information had been passed by the American command to the regional military and civil authorities about the action in progress at the time of the massacre.

Senator Don made his comments in the Senate corridor after his committee had approved a statement on its investigation. The committee said that the inquiry, which it termed preliminary, had confirmed that an event such as had been reported by the world press had indeed taken place.

Senator Don said that a massacre had occurred, but the committee document avoided

any characterization. The document will be published tomorrow.

The Senator said that his inquiry had raised a number of broader questions and that he was determined to pursue them to help prevent further harm to what he called the silent majority of Vietnamese.

Senator Don said that he thought the majority of the people of South Vietnam were caught between the enemy and their Government, with neither protecting them.

The committee's document declared that the investigation should be broadened. To carry out this intentionally vague mandate, Senator Don will leave tomorrow for the north of the country.

His first stop will be Hue, where he said the coordination between American and Vietnamese forces had been excellent. The Senator intends to concentrate on regional and divisional commanders before pursuing his inquiry on the level of the corps commanders and the joint general staff.

He plans to stop again in Quangngai. In contrast to his four-day visit last week, however, Senator Don will confer not with survivors of Songmy but mainly with officers of the Second Army Division, whose headquarters are in Quangngai.

The Senator is expected to discuss with the Vietnamese commanders the use of "free fire zones" in military operations. Depending on the circumstances, such zones may be free of any limitations on what weapons may be employed at any time.