

SENATE REJECTS RISE IN ARMS AID TO SOUTH VIETNAM

NYTimes

Action, Led by Kennedy, Is
Setback to Administration
—Vote Is 43 to 38

MAY 7 1974

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 6—The Senate rejected today an Administration request for \$266-million in additional military aid for South Vietnam. The vote was 43 to 38.

The action was a serious Congressional setback to the Administration's foreign policy. The attack on the Administration's plan was led by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, and supported by Democrats.

Ostensibly the battle in the Senate was over an accounting procedure that might have given the Defense Department authority to provide the \$266-million. But the debate and the vote actually centered on continuing American military aid support for the Saigon Government.

Active Lobbying

The Administration, according to Congressional sources, lobbied actively over the weekend to defeat the Kennedy amendment. Indicative of the importance the Administration attached to the vote was the presence of Vice President Ford, who is seldom seen in the Senate chamber, in the presiding officer's chair, ready to cast the deciding vote in case of a tie.

In material supplied to Senators, the Defense Department had warned that refusal to grant the additional aid would have "grave consequences" for South Vietnam. This warning was repeated by Administration supporters on the Senate floor.

As a result of the Senate's action, the Defense Department will be held in the current fiscal year to the \$1.126-billion ceiling on military aid to South Vietnam that Congress imposed last year. With less than two months to go in the fiscal year, the Defense Department is almost up to the ceiling.

Refusal by House

As part of a supplementary weapons request for the Defense Department, the Administration had asked Congress to raise the ceiling to \$1.6-billion from \$1.126-billion. The House, which in the past has generally supported the Administration's Vietnam policies, refused on April 4 to raise the ceiling; the vote was 177 to 154.

Faced with this rebuff, the Administration tried a different approach in the Senate. Rather than try to raise the ceiling, the Administration went along with a suggestion from the Senate Armed Services Committee for an accounting change that the panel said

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would permit the increased aid.

With the concurrence of the Defense Department, the Senate committee concluded that the Pentagon had mistakenly applied \$266-million in ammunition delivered in 1972 and 1973 against the ceiling for this fiscal year. In its report on the bill, therefore, the committee argued that the department could provide \$266-million in additional aid and still stay within the ceiling.

Senator Kennedy's amendment to the supplementary defense bill would prevent additional funds for military aid to South Vietnam in this fiscal year.

With the House refusal to raise the ceiling and the Senate refusal to accept the accounting procedure, no legislative seemed open to the Administration to increase the aid this fiscal year.

The Administration also appeared to be running into Congressional difficulty on its proposed military aid program for South Vietnam in the coming fiscal year, which will begin July 1. The House Armed Services Committee has already voted to cut the \$1.6-billion ceiling requested by the Admin-

istration to \$1.4-billion, and further reductions seem likely in the Senate.

Today's Senate vote was generally interpreted by Senators as indicative of a diminishing Congressional interest in supporting the Saigon Government now that American troops have been withdrawn.

Senator Kennedy attacked the proposed accounting procedure as a "bookkeeper's sleight of hand" that would reward a "Pentagon mistake" by giving "back-door authority" to spend additional money in South Vietnam. But the main Kennedy attack was that with the military aid request the Administration was continuing the war and "perpetuating old relationships and policies" in Indochina.

Comments by Stennis

Leading the defense of the Administration's case, Senator John C. Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "We came out of there with our flags flying" and "I am not willing to turn my back" on the American soldiers killed or wounded in Vietnam. He described the increased aid as "an obligation to an ally" and "part of the process of

winding down and getting out as fast as we reasonably can."

"How long are we going to hear that argument?" Senator Kennedy shot back from his back-room seat. "We have heard it long enough."

With the Kennedy amendment adopted, the Senate went on by voice vote to pass legislation authorizing \$415-million more for weapons procurement by the Defense Department in this fiscal year. The Senate Armed Services Committee cut \$842-million from the Pentagon's request, originally presented as an urgent supplement growing out of last fall's war in the Middle East.

Among the items deleted by the Senate committee was \$29-million to expand a naval base on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. However, many of the deleted items, including perhaps the Diego Garcia base, are expected to be included in the regular Defense Department authorization bill for the new fiscal year.