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G.O.P. ACTS TO END CAMBODIA DEBATE

In Shift, Nixon Backers in
Senate Press for Votes

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WASHINGTON, June 23 — Nixon Administration forces acted today to bring to an end the protracted Senate debate on Cambodia in the hope of keeping the Democrats from focusing further political attention on the war issue.

The Republican decision brought an abrupt shift of political positions in the six-week Senate debate, which has centered on an amendment offered by Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, and Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho. Their amendment would restrict future military activities in Cambodia.

For weeks some Republicans, apparently with White House encouragement, have been resisting a vote on the Cooper-Church amendment, provoking protests of a filibuster. But now the Republicans are pressing for a vote, not only on the Cooper-Church amendment but on similar amendments before the Senate.

Dole Move a Surprise

The Republicans unexpectedly took the initiative from the Democratic leadership yesterday when Senator Robert J. Dole, Republican of Kansas, offered an amendment to the foreign military sales bill, which is also the bill involved in the Cooper-Church amendment. The Dole amendment would repeal the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which was used by President Johnson as Congressional authorization for the military involvement in Vietnam.

The Dole amendment is expected to be approved by an overwhelming vote tomorrow, thus permitting the Republicans to claim credit. The Nixon Administration has taken a neutral position on repeal of the Tonkin resolution, contending that the Administration is not relying on the resolution for legal authority in the war. The Tonkin resolution was overwhelmingly adopted after United States reports of an attack on American vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Now the Senate Republican leadership is proposing to take the initiative from the Senate doves, who are largely on the Democratic side, by arranging for an immediate vote on a proposal by Senator George McGovern, Democrat of South Dakota, and Senator Mark Hatfield, Republican of Oregon, and others. That proposal, far more restrictive than the Cooper-Church amendment, would require the President to remove all American forces from Indochina by mid-1971.

'Let's Clean It All Up'

One Republican leader said the current approach is, "Let's clean it all up now. Otherwise the Democrats will keep playing politics with the war by keeping it on the front page for months."

If the McGovern-Hatfield amendment is defeated, as is generally expected, the contingency plan of the doves has been to fall back on a milder amendment that would provide funds only for the number of troops that would be left in the area under the Administration's withdrawal plans. That amendment would attach to the defense appropriations bill, which is not expected to reach the Senate floor until August.

Since the Cambodian debate began May 13, the apparent Republican strategy has been to defer a vote on the Cooper-Church amendment until American ground forces were withdrawn from Cambodia, by July 1. The rationale has been that a vote while the troops were still in Cambodia would be interpreted as a rebuke of the President's decision.

The expectation of Republican leaders is that the debate can be concluded by next Tuesday, the day before President Nixon's deadline—reaffirmed at a White House meeting with Republican congressional leaders today—for withdrawal of all American ground forces from Cambodia.

Apparently Has Backing

At this point, the Cooper-Church amendment still appears to command majority support in the Senate, and the Republican leadership is reconciled to its passage. It was modified yesterday to reaffirm the President's constitutional power as Commander in Chief to take steps to protect the lives of American troops.

With legislation beginning to back up on the Senate calendar, eight of the more conservative Republican senators relayed word to the White House that it was time to wind up debate on the Cooper-Church amendment. The White House response, according to Senate sources, was that the President wanted one more modification of the amendment to make clear that the United States could provide financial assistance to third-country forces going to the military support of the Cambodian Government.