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CONFEREES ALTER BAN ON TROOP USE

Grant Leeway if Pullout in
Vietnam Is Imperiled

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 15—A House-Senate conference committee introduced a possible loophole today in the proposed legislative restraints on President Nixon's power to send combat ground troops to Cambodia.

The committee, which was convened to reconcile House and Senate differences on the \$66-billion defense appropriations bill, modified a restriction added in the Senate. The Senate version specified that none of the funds could be used by the President to send ground combat troops to Cambodia, Laos or Thailand.

But at the insistence of the House conferees and reportedly with Nixon Administration support, that provision was modified to make clear that it would not prevent the President from taking action in Cambodia, Laos or Thailand "designed to promote the safe and orderly withdrawal or disengagement of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia or to aid in the release of Americans held as prisoners of war."

Incursion in Cambodia

After American ground troops were sent into Cambodia last May 1, the Administration said that one reason for the campaign had been to protect the withdrawal program by striking at suspected Communist supply bases. In view of this position, the reaction of some Senators, such as Senator Mike Mansfield, the majority leader, was that the conference committee modification had "vitiating" the effectiveness of the restraints that the Senate has been seeking to impose on future military involvement in Cambodia.

While the conference committee was modifying the prohibition in the defense appropriations bill, the Senate was moving toward passage of a \$1-billion foreign aid authorization bill. This contains an amendment, voted yesterday by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee specifying that the President could not use aid funds to send American ground troops or military advisers to Cambodia.

The Senate was prepared to accept the amendment, which the Administration was not opposing. Immediate Senate action on the legislation was blocked, however, by Senator J. W. Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, a major foe of the Vietnam war. He protested that the Senate was moving with "undue haste" to endorse an "open-ended commitment" to the Cambodian Government.

Stennis in Exchange

By arrangement with the Administration, Senator John C. Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi, sought to clarify the intent of the amendment in a floor exchange with Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, and a sponsor of the restrictions.

Senator Stennis asked if the amendment would prohibit the President, as Commander in Chief, from again sending in troops against suspected sanctuaries in Cambodia. Senator Church replied that the amendment would not prevent the President from undertaking "precautionary actions," such as "raids" or "lunge" across the Cambodian border to protect American troops. But, he continued, it would prevent the President from committing a substantial number of troops for an extended period in "a war in Cambodia" without obtaining Congressional approval.

Senator Stennis interpreted this to mean that the amendment "does not take away the responsibilities or power of the President to do what he thinks necessary to destroy armies, arsenals or anything else."