

FULBRIGHT PLANS HEARINGS ON WAR

Committee Sessions Due on
'How to End' Conflict—
Senate Truce Over

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WASHINGTON, March 30—The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, signaling an end to the truce in the Indo-China debate, decided today to push ahead with public hearings on "how to end the war."

In telling the Senate of the committee's decision, Senator J. W. Fulbright, its chairman, charged that the Nixon Administration was guilty of either "massive deception" or "massive misjudgment"—and perhaps both—in the American-supported South Vietnamese invasion of Laos.

Citing the five principal objectives that he contended the Administration had laid down for the operation in a Feb. 9 briefing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Fulbright suggested that none had been achieved and that the operation had been based on miscalculations about the strength and reaction of North Vietnamese forces.

At the suggestion of Republicans, who cited deference to

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the President, the committee decided not to begin the "end the war" hearings until after Mr. Nixon announced his new troop withdrawal schedule in April. But aside from this accommodation, it was apparent that the Indochina debate was about to resume in the Senate, with perhaps greater vigor than ever being shown in challenging the Nixon Administration's policies.

As Senator Fulbright observed, the Foreign Relations Committee—the center of the Vietnam opposition in the Senate—has been "muted" since the operations in Laos began in early February, partly "because we did not want to anything that might remotely be construed as a cause for failure of an operation already under way but about which we all had most serious and profound doubts."

The committee, for example, put off a series of hearings it planned on how to end the war. At a private meeting on Feb. 9, the committee also entered into an informal pact with Secretary of State William P. Rogers to restrain its criticism and not create a "domestic fuss" over the operation in Laos.

Mr. Rogers reportedly told the committee that "there will be plenty of time to criticize after the operation is over if it is a failure." According to State Department associates, Mr. Rogers feels that the terms of the truce should be extended until there is a clearer evaluation of the results of the operation in Laos.

But now that the operation has ended, Senator Fulbright made clear that he no longer felt bound to maintain his silence. And other members of the committee, such as Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, are preparing to speak out, making the point that, now that the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution has been repealed, the President has no legal or constitutional authority except to withdraw the troops from Vietnam.

Decision Explained

In explaining his decision to speak out, Senator Fulbright told the Senate:

"Were I to remain silent, I would be a partner to what is either a massive deception of the American people or what is a massive misjudgment on the part of our political or military leaders."

He said in a speech that had been prepared for several days that he could not remain silent "when we are being told that the Laos operation went 'according to plan' when I know it did not go according to plan."

In support of his contention, Senator Fulbright noted that on Feb. 9—just as the invasion of Laos was beginning—the committee had been briefed on the objectives of the operation by Secretary of State Rogers and Lieut. Gen. John W. Vogt Jr., director of the Joint Staff in the Pentagon.

Now that the operation is over, Senator Fulbright said, he had asked Mr. Rogers to declassify the briefing, but he obviously set forth the objectives presented the committee in asking the Administration to answer the following questions in "clear and unequivocal language."

¶"Was the concept of the operation in Laos to proceed in and beyond Tchepone and to establish blocking positions on the main intersections of Routes 91, 11, 92 and 23?"

¶"Was it hoped that the operation would prevent the flow of supplies south through the remainder of the dry period by maintaining these blocking points while the good weather period lasted? That is, until May 1?"

¶"Was it believed that the enemy had no capability for providing major reinforcements to threaten seriously the South Vietnamese forces in Laos and that consequently no major threat would develop to the operation?"

¶"Was it planned that South Vietnamese forces would be in the Tchepone area with the first weeks of the operation and would then fan out and establish blocking positions

of the operation. The Administration, however, has avoided committing itself publicly to any specific objective for the operation other than the general goal of disrupting the enemy supply lines.

In a background briefing on Feb. 10, General Vogt told newsmen that South Vietnamese forces might proceed as far westward as Route 23 in order to "disrupt" the enemy supply flow on the highway but not to block it. He also cited Tchepone as a principal target and mentioned the start of the rainy season, about May 1, as a probable date for ending the operation.

Today spokesmen at the State and Defense Departments declined immediate comment on Senator Fulbright's remarks.

On the basis of information given to the committee, Senator Fulbright said, it was clear that the questions he had asked, "can be answered with a simple yes or no."

"There remains only one question to ask, and that is will the Administration answer these questions in a straightforward manner or must the American people be left to believe that the Laos operation went according to plan."

If Administration officials



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Senator J. W. Fulbright

which would be supplied, re-equipped and maintained for an extended period of time?

¶"Was it hoped that the enemy supplies to South Vietnam could be completely cut off so that North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam and Cambodia would die on the vine?"

Most of these objectives have been discussed in the press on the basis of background briefings given by the Pentagon and the military command in Saigon shortly after the start

appear before the committee, at the "end the war" hearings, these questions are certain to be raised. But as conceived by Senator Fulbright and other committee members, the hearings are not so much to criticize the operation in Laos as to put pressure on the Administration to withdraw all forces from Vietnam.

The focal point of the hearings will be the various Vietnam resolutions that have been introduced. These include a bill by Senators George S. McGovern and Mark Hatfield that would require total withdrawal by the end of this year and an amendment by Senators William B. Saxbe and Water E. Mondale that would preclude American support of a South Vietnamese invasion of North Vietnam.

Even among the critics of the Indochina war there is little hope that any of these resolutions, which in various ways would restrict the authority of the President, will be enacted. But through public hearings on the resolution, committee members such as Senator Fulbright hope to focus public attention, and thus political pressure, on the Administration in favor of complete withdrawal.