

Why Presidents Worry

Cranston

Senator Alan Cranston said yesterday he will propose legislation to make sure no President can take the United States into nuclear war without first consulting with other national leaders.

The one exception to that policy, Cranston said, would be to give the President power to act if the United States were being subjected to a nuclear attack and an immediate response was necessary.

Cranston said he had become deeply concerned about the problem when two congressmen told him President Nixon had brought up the nuclear threat while he was attempting to persuade them to discontinue impeachment proceedings.

The California Democrat quoted the two unnamed congressmen as reporting Mr. Nixon had said, "At any moment I could go into the next room, push a button and 20 minutes later 60 million people would be dead."

After that, Cranston said, he warned then-Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger he was concerned about "the need for keeping a berserk President from plunging us into a holocaust."

The problem was solved for the moment, Cranston

continued, when Schlesinger issued an order five days before Mr. Nixon's departure from the White House saying that no unusual military command should be

acted on without first checking with the secretary of defense.

"Now is a good time to come to grips with the problem when the situation is calm," Cranston said.

"I received a briefing from the Pentagon that reassured me somewhat, but I am not convinced the controls are foolproof."

Cranston said he was especially concerned about the dangers involved in any decision to use tactical nuclear weapons for "limited" warfare.

"I think once you start using tactical nuclear weapons the odds are very high that there will be escalation into total nuclear war," Cranston said.

The senator said he had not yet completed his research but expected to propose some decision-making process "that would involve Congress without going into full-scale nuclear debate."

"Obviously a full-scale debate by Congress at a time of crisis would not be possible," Cranston said.

The senator discussed his plan in an interview on a brief visit to San Francisco.

See transcript, KCBS Radio News, 6 Feb 76.

See transcript, excerpt of Colson intv, 26 Feb 76.

See WXP 9 Feb 76, Murray Marder.

See KPFA Evening News 9 Feb 76.

See Chronology entry 24 Aug 74,

Nixon (possibility of rash action). Includes other refs.

✓ " WXP 11 Feb 76 [LATimes]

" WXP 2 Apr 76, Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, who quote from secret minutes of a strategy session 8 Mar 74 at which Nixon made a remark about "pushing a button, etc.

" WXP 28 Mar 76, Phil Stanford (description of strict controls on the launching of nuclear weapons, chain of command, etc.)