

..... American ground troops in Laos and Thailand. That amendment was in fact drawn up with the active involvement of the White House and Senate Republican leaders. Today some of those same leaders are pushing an amendment that not only removes the teeth from a pending measure to bar troops in Cambodia but extends the de-fanging operation to Laos and Thailand as well. Six months ago President Nixon saw the troop prohibition in Laos and Thailand as Senate support for his Guam doctrine. Today he says that amendment and the pending Cambodian measure would severely restrict his powers in Indochina.

On Capitol Hill the question now being asked is, Why? And the answer one hears from insiders is this: Mr. Nixon wants a free hand, not only in Cambodia but in Laos and Thailand as well. He does not want his powers as Commander in Chief handicapped by any Congressional resolution. Already there are American troops in Laos. At his briefing with Republican senators last week, Presidential assistant Henry Kissinger confirmed this fact. According to reliable sources, Kissinger indicated that, on occasion, American servicemen have crossed over into Laos to check on Communist material moving down the Ho Chih Min Trail. Kissinger supports these moves on the same grounds used by the President for the American incursion in Cambodia, that the action is necessary to protect American troops in South Vietnam.

An aide to Senator Stuart Symington claims that Mr. Nixon now wants a free hand in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand because the situation in South Vietnam has deteriorated. Senator Mark Hatfield points out that since April 16 the American troop levels in South Vietnam have jumped up progressively from 425,000 to nearly 430,000.

The winds that are blowing on Capitol Hill are the winds of suspicion, suspicion that Cambodia is not the end of the line but only the beginning of mounting American combat operations in the rest of Indochina.

Carolyn Lewis on Capitol Hill.