

INSIDE REPORT

'Kiss and Tell' Senators Hurt U.S. in Laos

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON — G. McMurtrie (Mac) Godley, U.S. Ambassador to Laos, has been summoned to face the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for a continuation of the Senate's dogged undermining of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.

Godley's appearance, tentatively scheduled for July 21, has been dreaded and delayed for months by the State Department. It will expand last October's damaging hearings by a Foreign Relations subcommittee, headed by Sen. Stuart Symington of Missouri, baring previously covert U.S. military operations in Laos.

Like the October hearings, Godley's testimony will be behind closed doors and, theoretically, not for publication. In fact, most of what secret information that was not leaked was officially released to the public later, and the ambassador will not be immune.

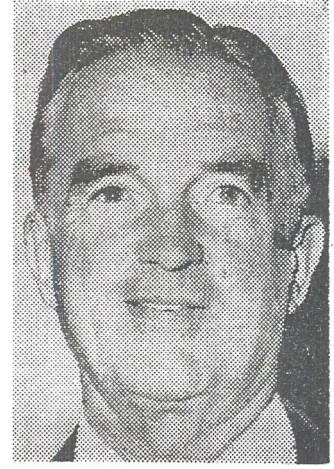
With senators set to give Godley the third degree on alleged U.S. bombing of Laotian civilians, his testimony likely will have the same impact as the October hearings: Poisoning both U.S.-Lao relations and U.S. public support for policy in Laos.

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THE IMPACT IS NEITHER accidental nor limited to Laos. Rather, the Foreign Relations Committee, under the determined chairmanship of Sen. J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, is embarked on a systematic assault of U.S. foreign commitments through use of the Senate investigative arm. The Fulbright-Symington in-



SENATOR FULBRIGHT
Doggedly determined . . .



SENATOR SYMINGTON
. . . to undermine

vestigations influence foreign policy far more than largely futile attempts to hamstring the President by Senate resolution.

Fulbright's cutting edge has been the Symington subcommittee on foreign commitments. And nowhere has the cutting edge dug deeper than in Laos, where five years of covert U.S. military support for the regime of Prince Souvanna Phouma has maintained a shaky status quo at a low cost in American dollars and, more important, American lives.

Hostile questioning in last October's hearings ignored all such benefits. When the transcripts were made public in April, the Laotian government was appalled that secret agreements made in good faith with Washington had been revealed to the world.

Indeed, U.S. officials in Laos were disappointed that the Nixon Administration could not resist Fulbright's demands to declassify testimony.

One demand resisted was the call for Ambassador Godley to testify. The Symington subcommittee, told Godley could not be spared from Vientiane, had to be satisfied with the preceding ambassador, William H. Sullivan (now a deputy assistant Secretary of State). But Fulbright insisted on Godley's eventual return, and the State Department finally gave in.

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THE RESULTING PROBLEM is twofold: First, Godley, a blunt-spoken bear of a man, lacks Sullivan's delicate touch with senators. Second, the subcommittee will charge bombing directed by Godley has murdered Lao civilians, further undermining the U.S. position at home and abroad.

Those charges were previewed when the Senate Refugees subcommittee headed by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts courteously questioned Sullivan about his bombing policy in Vientiane. The State Department assumption, denied by Kennedy aides, is that the Senate wants to compare careful bombing under Ambassador Sullivan in a Democratic Administration with indiscriminate bombing under Ambassador Godley in a Republican Administration.

That State Department suspicion may be ill-founded, but diplomacy Senate-style is not without hypocrisy.

Fulbright and Symington were aware of U.S. operations in Laos years before their investigation. During the October hearings, Symington occasionally went off-the-record to inform government witnesses he would back them enthusiastically if they really decided to fight the war all-out.

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BEYOND LAOS, Fulbright-Symington investigators have cut a wide swath through Asia. Difficult relations between the U.S. and the Philippines were worsened by Senate exposures of secret agreements to send Filipino troops to Vietnam at U.S. expense. Previously warm relations between the U.S. and Thailand have been chilled by similar revelations.

This kiss-and-tell diplomacy, say Democratic senators, is fully justified in order to keep the American public informed of overseas commitments that could produce new Vietnams.

A rebuttal is found in "The Public Philosophy" (1954) by Walter Lippmann, a frequent source for Senate doves. Arguing against "derangement of powers" in liberal democracies, Lippman wrote:

"In the final acts of the state the issues are war and peace, security and solvency, order and insurrection. In these final acts the executive power cannot be exercised by the representative assembly."