

# ROGERS AND LAIRD ASKED TO TESTIFY ON NEW OFFENSIVE

**Fulbright Committee Seeks  
to Penetrate Blackout of  
News on Allied Drive**

**PUBLIC SESSION URGED**

**Administration Maintaining  
Silence but Senator Scott  
Confirms Major Attack**

**FEB 3 1971**

**By TERENCE SMITH**

*Special to The New York Times*

**WASHINGTON, Feb. 2 —**

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, frustrated by the continuing news blackout on a major new allied offensive in Indochina, asked the Nixon Administration today to provide an authoritative report as soon as possible.

After an hour-long executive session this morning, the committee agreed to petition Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird to discuss the new action in public session "as soon as security considerations permit."

The Foreign Relations Committee chairman, Senator J. W. Fulbright, told reporters that the Secretaries were being asked to appear in open session "if they will, in the near future, and if not, in private sessions to clarify what our policies are."

Spokesmen at the State and Defense Departments continued the official silence on military operations for the fifth consecutive day but the Senate Republican leader, Hugh Scott, confirmed that a major allied assault was under way in northwestern South Vietnam.

## **7-to-10-Day Estimate**

"The operation will run from seven to 10 days from the time it started, which was a couple of days ago," the Pennsylvania Republican told newsmen at a briefing in the Senate. "When it is over, information can be released on it." Senator Scott added that his estimate of the duration of the operation was based on news reports from Vietnam.

The minority leader said he was not at liberty to provide further details, but other Congressional sources reported that about 25,000 South Vietnamese and 9,000 United States troops were engaged in the operation which is aimed initially at enemy troop and supply concentrations in the extreme northwestern corner of South Vietnam.

These sources said a decision remained to be made as to whether the South Vietnamese units would cross the border into Laos in an effort to sever the Communist supply lines that run through the Laotian panhandle.

Heavy American bombing of the North Vietnamese infiltration and supply routes in Laos known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail was reported for the 117th consecutive day. The raids were carried out by B-52's and by smaller tactical

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fighter-bombers.

Early today the Japanese Kyodo news agency reported from Saigon that 4,000 to 5,000 South Vietnamese airborne troops had already been airlifted into the Boloven Plateau in southern Laos.

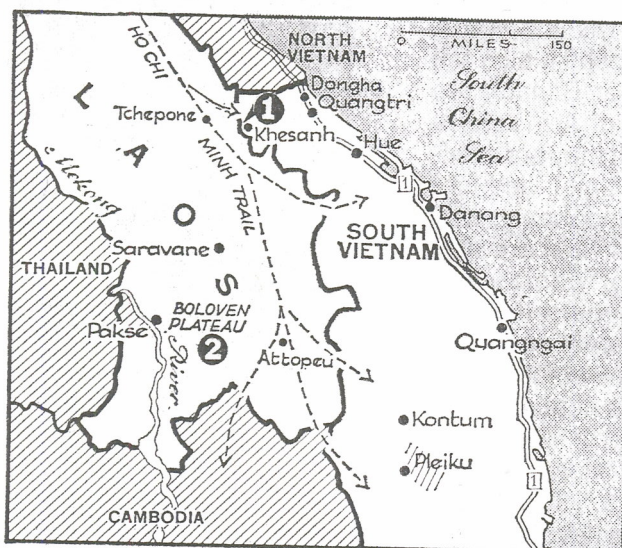
This report was echoed by the Soviet Government newspaper Izvestia, which charged that a major force of South Vietnamese troops "under the direct command of American officers" had invaded Laos from northern South Vietnam. This followed similar charges by Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin.

Alarmed by these reports, several senators, including John Sherman Cooper, the Kentucky Republican who has been a persistent critic of the war, asked the Administration about them and were told that as of today, no troops—South Vietnamese or American—had entered Laos.

**Rogers Assures Aiken**

"I was told authoritatively that no troops of any kind had yet gone into Laos and that reports to the contrary were incorrect," Senator Cooper said in a telephone conversation. He insisted that he had no idea whether there were plans for South Vietnamese units to cross into Laos at a later stage.

Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont, who is the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he had been assured by Secretary Roger's office twice in the last three days that the Congressional ban against the use of American ground troops in Laos would be respected. Such a ban has been part of an amendment to the defense appropriations bill for the last two years. It prohibits the use



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Allied assault was said to be continuing near Khesanh (1). Washington officials denied reports that Saigon troops were airlifted to Boloven Plateau in Laos (2).

of American ground combat units in Laos and Thailand.

"But I still don't know what is going on," Senator Aiken said.

"They said nothing about whether South Vietnamese troops would go into Laos," he said of the Administration. "There is no way of telling as long as they keep this embargo on. The worst may have happened already. The enemy certainly knows what is happening, I think the American people should have the same privilege."

#### Laird Bars Troop Use

Later, Secretary Laird confirmed that no American troops would be used in Laos. In a snappish exchange with reporters who stopped him in a hallway after he testified before the Senate Armed Forces Committee on the draft, Mr.

Laird brushed aside questions about the nature of the new operation.

He denied the substance of the Izvestia report and added: "We are proceeding fully in accord with restrictions approved by Congress on the use of American troops. We will not open any credibility gap. There will be and there are no American ground combat forces operating in Laos."

Although both Mr. Laird and Mr. Rogers have stated publicly in recent days that the Administration has no intention of violating the Congressional restrictions, they have point-

edly refused to foreclose the possibility of a South Vietnamese thrust supported by American aircraft. In the minds of many observers here, including Senators Cooper and Aiken, this remains a distinct possibility.

#### Japanese Report Invasion On

Special to The New York Times

TOKYO, Feb. 2 — The oft-rumored invasion of Laos by South Vietnamese troops has begun, the Kyodo news agency reported today in a dispatch from its Saigon correspondent. Though all major Japanese newspapers here have correspondents in Saigon, none of them matched the Kyodo report. In the absence of any confirmation, sources here tended to evaluate the report with caution.

Quoting "reliable sources," the Kyodo dispatch said that "before daybreak Feb. 1, 4,000 to 5,000 South Vietnamese troops spearheaded by paratroopers" had commenced operations in the Boloven Plateau of southern Laos. This is considerably south of the Khesanh area where concentrations of South Vietnamese and American troops were reported earlier.

The operation had American air support, including helicopters, but did not involve American ground troops, Kyodo said.

"There is also a report here in Saigon that 1,000 Thai troops have been sent to the Boloven area," the dispatch added.