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# MANSFIELD WARNS ON DRIVE IN LAOS

Fears It May Broaden War — Scott Hails Incursion

By JOHN W. FINNEY  
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 19 — Senator Mike Mansfield, the Senate Democratic leader, said today that South Vietnam's operation in Laos represented "a military gamble" that could lead to an extended, broadened war in Indochina.

Senator Hugh Scott, the Republican leader, replied that the Laotian operation, if successful, would "severely cripple the enemy's ability" to undertake an offensive in South Vietnam and would "greatly strengthen" Vietnamization and thus the withdrawal of American troops.

The two exchanged views in a brief debate on the Senate floor.

Senator Mansfield started the exchange with a prepared statement questioning the justifications offered by the Administration for the South Vietnamese incursion in Laos with American air support.

## Longer War Feared

Rather than shortening the war and reducing casualties, Senator Mansfield said, "The consequences of this air-ground invasion may be to lengthen the war and increase the casualties."

"This recent thrust of all-out conflict into still another region of Southeast Asia represents a gamble which may not be worth the risks involved," he said.

Senator Mansfield did not directly criticize President Nixon's decision to support the South Vietnamese drive into Laos. His statement raised what he said were questions designed to "put in balance the military gamble which is now taking place in Laos."

It was evident, however, that the Mansfield statement was designed as a reply to President Nixon's defense of the Laotian operation at an informal White House news conference Wednesday. Without identifying the President as the source, Senator Mansfield took issue with Mr. Nixon's statement that as a result of the move against the enemy supply lines in Laos the North Vietnamese will have to fight in Laos "or give up the struggle."

## 'The Option Is Theirs'

Contending that it was not at all certain that the operation would have the consequences described by the President, Senator Mansfield said:

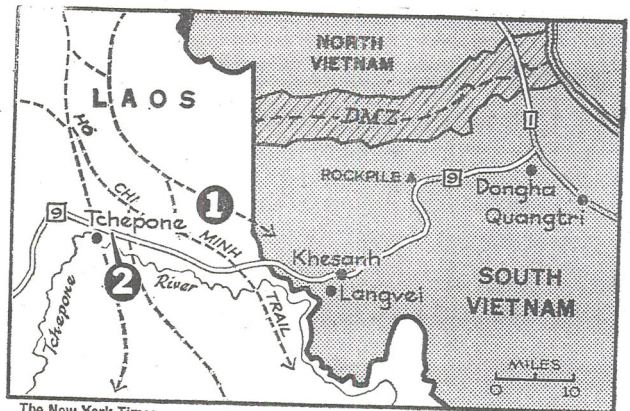
"The option is theirs as it has been from the outset. The fact is that they still have many cards in Cambodia, elsewhere in Laos, in South Vietnam and in North Vietnam.

"What if the present penetration prompts them to move further west on the approaches to Thailand, even as the incursion into the Cambodia border areas last spring prompted them to move westward throughout Cambodia?"

"In short, we must ask ourselves whether a temporary invasion of Laos, and I emphasize the word temporary, will have any real effect on the capabilities of North Vietnam to wage a continuing war in Southeast Asia. According to North Vietnamese calculations, they have already been at war at least 25 years and additional 25 years of conflict may well be anticipated."

Replying to Senator Mans-

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Heavy enemy attacks were reported on South Vietnamese fire base in Laos (1). Saigon drive was said to be at standstill, with some units 22 miles from border (2).

field, Senator Scott said that the attack on enemy supply lines in Laos — "something that should have been done four years ago" — was "not a widening but a constriction of the war."

As reflected in the Mansfield statement, there are deep misgivings among the Senate critics of the war about the military and political conse-

quences of the Laotian operation. But they find themselves handicapped in challenging an operation that President Nixon insists will lead to further withdrawal of American troops — a program applauded today by Senator Mansfield. As one Senate dove summed up the situation, "We are marking time to see the results of the operation."