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Another Senate Test

By Anthony Lewis

AT HOME ABROAD

LONDON, July 8 — An American woman who has long been concerned at her country's role in Indochina was told about President Nixon's agreement to stop bombing Cambodia on Aug. 15. "Is that A.M. or P.M.?" she asked.

The ironic question exposed the troubling aspect of the Aug. 15 deadline: the way a great issue of American law was compromised at the expense of other people. For it is the villagers of Cambodia who will pay in death and destruction over the next five weeks for that settlement of the dispute between President and Congress.

But whatever one's moral qualms at any more savaging of that once innocent and beautiful country, the fact is that the compromise was an enormous step in restoring the political health of the United States—in returning our system to law. After Aug. 15, the President promised, he would ask Congress before bombing Cambodia. In other words, he agreed to comply with the Constitution.

It took many years for Congress to work up the determination that forced that result — years of irredeemable tragedy for Indochina and of political trauma for the United States. And the fight is not over by any means. The constitutional and moral questions posed by the war will continue to confront Congress, and all of us, in many ways.

The Senate, for example, will shortly face a new test of its seriousness in opposing brutal and unconstitutional Presidential wars. It is posed by two pending State Department nominations — of William H. Sullivan to be Ambassador to the Philippines and G. McMurtre Godley to be Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. *

Messrs. Sullivan and Godley were successive American Ambassadors in Laos, from 1964 to 1969 and 1969 to this past April. As such they played a decisive part in what must qualify as the most appalling episode of lawless cruelty in American history, the bombing of Laos. Very few Americans have let the story enter their consciousness, but it was even worse than the neighboring horrors in Vietnam.

lization. No American should be able to read that book without weeping at his country's arrogance.

For five years, until 1969, the bombing was kept a secret from the American people. Ambassador Sullivan was directly in charge of all the C.I.A. and mercenary personnel involved, and approved the targets. He concealed the bombing from visiting members of Congress and its committees. When he finally admitted it in 1969, he still falsely denied that civilian targets had been attacked. In fact, villages and towns had been obliterated, as he well knew.

The bombing of Laos mounted under Ambassador Godley, with the regular use of B-52's for the first time. By the time he finished his term in Vientiane, there were 700,000 refugees in Laos—out of a population of three million.

Sullivan and Godley have the blood of more innocent human beings on their hands than just about anyone who has ever served as an American Foreign Service officer. Some would say that they were doing a professional job of what their superiors ordered. But that raises other disturbing questions—questions directly related to the present struggle to bring the war-making process back under the Constitution.

When Sullivan said a while ago that the justification for the bombing of Cambodia was "the re-election of President Nixon," he was thought merely cynical. But the statement in fact reflected his consistent view of Presidential power.

In 1969 when the Laos bombing became known, Senator Symington asked Sullivan whether he thought "the President has the right to put U.S. military troops in airplanes over a foreign country . . . and direct the bombing of that country." Sullivan answered: "Yes, sir."

On May 10, 1973, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on his nomination to Manila, Sullivan was asked by Senator Fulbright whether the United States might intervene militarily in the Philippines if President Marcos asked us to. He replied:

"I think that depends on the decision of the President of the United States. He has the constitutional authority to make that decision."

In Washington, confirmation of these two appointments is still considered likely. That would be the easy way, the way of business as usual. But if the committee and the Senate are serious about restoring the constitutional balance of power, can they really approve nominations that are such symbols of the lawlessness and brutality recorded in Presidential war-making?

Between 1964 and 1973, the Sullivan-Godley years, the United States dropped almost two million tons of bombs on that peasant country. That is two-thirds of a ton for every man, woman and child in Laos.

The human results of being the most heavily bombed country in the history of the world were expectably pitiful. They are described without rancor—almost unbearably so—in a small book that will go down as a classic. It is "Voices From the Plain of Jars," edited by Fred Branfman, in which the villagers of Laos themselves describe what the bombers did to their civi-

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