

The Senate Reasserts Itself

The Senate took a reassuring step toward reasserting its constitutional checks over the war-making powers of the President yesterday in rejecting an effort to transform the Cooper-Church amendment into a virtual blank check for future military operations in Cambodia.

In turning back the proposal of Senator Byrd of West Virginia to give the President authority to take whatever action he found necessary to protect United States forces in Vietnam, the Senators wisely discounted the eleventh-hour report of a carefully selected Presidential commission which generally endorsed Mr. Nixon's own optimistic assessment of his initial Cambodian "incursion." After only two days each in Cambodia and Vietnam, that "fact-finding" group delivered its verdict, totally lacking in credibility and drafted by a White House aide, that termed the Cambodian operation a military success and raised the possibility that the United States could now accelerate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam.

A majority of Senators appears to share the more somber conclusions reached by the group's lone dissenter, Senator McIntyre of New Hampshire, who noted that none of the American officials he talked to was prepared to recommend a speedup of troop withdrawals. The withdrawals, in fact, ground to a halt in the wake of the Cambodian crisis and the new withdrawals announced by President Nixon on June 3 represent a slowdown in the earlier rate.

Senator McIntyre added: "Despite our hopes that the incursion will be only a temporary, limited tactical sortie, I am deeply troubled that the war has been expanded." Already the United States is intervening by proxy, using South Vietnamese and Thai forces, financed by the United States and receiving unspecified additional American support. The implications are far-reaching in view of the political and military ineptitude of the Cambodians, the uncertain strength of the South Vietnamese and the Thais—both traditional enemies of the people they are now supposed to defend—and the speed with which the Communists have secured new base areas and supply routes.

Any untoward, hasty temptation to intervene further in a disintegrating situation in Cambodia could be checked by swift passage of the Cooper-Church amendment, which simply makes future American military intervention in Cambodia subject to Congressional approval, in accordance with the Constitution of the United States.