

Relations Between Administration and Fulbright

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 23 — Diplomatic relations between the Nixon Administration and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, long strained by basic policy differences, are showing signs of reaching the breaking point.

The Administration is patently annoyed over the criticism emanating from the committee, which has recently become as critical of the Nixon Administration as it once was of the Johnson Administration. Republican and Democratic Senators, in turn, are exasperated over the way they feel the Administration is avoiding the committee in discussing foreign policy issues with Congress.

Not only are communications breaking down between the two bodies, but there is a danger that the committee will start retaliating by invoking its "privileges" to hold up nominations and treaties or to postpone action on Administration legislation.

Seated around the oval table in the Foreign Relations Committee room yesterday, the Senators spent much of a private meeting grumbling about the deterioration of relations with the executive branch and about the way the Administration seemed to be bypassing the committee. The complaints were reported to be as strenuous from the Republican members as they were from the Democratic majority, headed by Senator J. W. Fulbright, the chairman.

'Snubs' Are Cited

Among the examples of Administration "snubs" reported to have been cited by the committee members were these:

¶ In recent weeks, the committee has repeatedly asked for a briefing on the progress of the strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union. The White House responded by arranging for Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser, to brief the Congressional leadership today in a forum that the Senators did not consider conducive to detailed cross-examination on the Administration's military and arms-control policies.

¶ Upon returning recently from his worldwide trip, Secretary of State William P. Rogers made no effort to brief the committee, as is customary. Then he suggested that the committee come to the State Department, but Senator Fulbright refused. Finally Senators Fulbright and three other committee members went to see the Secretary of State Tuesday but with the understanding that it was only an informal get-together.

¶ Reportedly at White House insistence, the State Department refused to let G. McMurtree Godley, the American Ambassador to Laos, appear Tuesday before a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee unless it was agreed there would be no committee transcript of his testimony. The committee reluctantly agreed, but Senator Mike Mansfield, the majority leader, complained to reporters that the condition raised "grave constitutional questions" about the Senate's right to obtain information.

Not Informed on Cambodia

Initially, the personal relations between Secretary Rogers and the committee members were friendly, going back to days when many of them were golfing partners at the Burning Tree Club. They suffered a serious setback when Mr. Rogers, on an appearance April 27 before the committee, failed to make any mention of the impending military incursion into Cambodia.

It was Mr. Rogers's last appearance before the committee. After that testimony, many committee members felt either that they had been misled or that Mr. Rogers had been uninformed. In either case, the committee was not inclined to hear from Mr. Rogers again—a reaction that has mellowed, however, as the Secretary of State has emerged as a restraining voice in Administration councils.

But now, because of actions attributed more to the White House than to Mr. Rogers, the relations between the committee and the State Department are probably as antagonistic as they were two and more years

ago when Secretary of State Dean Rusk was in a running feud with the committee.

From the committee's perspective, however, there is one important difference between then and now. The Johnson Administration and Secretary Rusk may have fought with the committee. But now the committee members see the Nixon Administration deliberately using tactics that Senator Fulbright told reporters seemed designed "to neutralize if not destroyed the influence of the Committee on Foreign Relations."

Instead of attempting to cooperate with the committee or seek its advice, many of the Senators feel, the Administration is attempting to withhold information or to present it in channels bypassing the committee. The negotiations with the Soviet Union on arms limitation are cited as an example.

In recent weeks, American representatives have briefed the North Atlantic Treaty Council three times on the progress of the negotiations in Vienna, but the Disarmament Agency is reported to have been prohibited by the White House from briefing the Foreign Relations Committee. One Senator observed, "The Icelandic representative to NATO knows more about the arms negotiations than the Foreign Relations Committee, which will have to pass on any treaty."

It was a complaint voiced directly to Mr. Kissinger today by Senator Fulbright, who at one point in the hour-long briefing was overheard asking: "Why is your obligation so much greater to the NATO ministers than it is to the Congress of the United States?"

"Senator, we couldn't have given you this earlier than 10 days ago," Mr. Kissinger replied. The answer did not satisfy Senator Clifford P. Case, Republican of New Jersey, another member of the Foreign Relations Committee, who complained that the Administration was "downgrading the Congress."

When the briefing was arranged the White House stipulated that it would be for some 25 members of the House and Senate—not before the Foreign Relations Committee or its disarmament subcommittee.

To committee members the purpose was transparent. With such a large audience and with many Congressmen not familiar with disarmament affairs,

Committee Near Breaking Point

there will be little opportunity for searching questions and Mr. Kissinger will be able to dominate the meeting.

Similarly, by holding the briefing at the State Department, Mr. Rogers avoided the television cameras and the reporters that record the critical comments of Senators after a meeting in the Foreign Relations Committee room. He also left the committee without any record that it subsequently might make public.

After the Cambodian intervention, the committee, at the suggestion of Senator Jacob K. Javits, Republican of New York, attempted to restore communications with the Administration by requesting a private meeting with the Presi-

dent. It was rebuffed as the White House insisted on including the numerous members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

At the meeting yesterday, Senator Javits once again suggested that the committee make another effort at improving relations and restoring communications.

The committee agreed to the suggestion. But if the attempt fails, both Republican and Democratic members warned privately the committee is likely to respond to the Administration's use of "executive privilege" in withholding information by invoking some of its own "privileges" in controlling the fate of nominations, treaties and legislation.