

Twin Attacks On Nixon's Laos Policy

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Senator Stuart Symington (Dem-Mo.) said yesterday that instead of the \$52 million publicly acknowledged by the administration, the United States is spending "hundreds of millions of dollars" in a clandestine war in northern Laos.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Dem-Mass.), meanwhile, protested that the administration is indulging in "contradictions" and "whitewashes" on the American involvement in the war in northern Laos.

He charged the administration with advancing a logic for the involvement that "justifies new military adventures by the President anywhere in Southeast Asia."

The Kennedy protest was prompted by a State Department contention that the President has constitutional authority to engage in a war in northern Laos as part of his program of withdrawing American forces from South Vietnam.

REVIEW

The dual attack on administration policies on Laos came as the Senate prepared to hold one of its infrequent closed sessions to review the extent of American military involvement in Laos.

The closed-door Senate session will be held this afternoon at the request of Symington, chairman of a Senate foreign relations subcommittee on foreign commitments that over the past two years has been investigating American military activities in northern Laos.

Symington said he had requested the session "in light of the increasingly grave situation in that country, along with the implications of that situation for the United States."

He said he plans to present a report showing that the United States is spending far more for military activities in Laos than has been acknowledged by the administration.

COST

The only publicly announced cost of U.S. activities in Laos, he noted, has

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been \$52 million in economic aid this year to the government of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma.

In the course of the Symington subcommittee hearings, there were also suggestions, in the form of questions by the subcommittee counsel with the answer deleted by the State Department from the transcript, that as of two years ago the United States was providing \$90 million in military aid to the Laotian government.

"In fact, however," Symington said, "the cost of U.S.-supported military operations runs the amount we are actually spending well into the hundreds of millions of dollars."

The Symington statement was based on a still secret report prepared by two Symington subcommittee staff members — James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose — who recently visited Laos.

On the basis of that report, Symington said he would describe to the Senate "the increasing Chinese presence in Laos" as well as how the administration covers American activities in Laos, such as B-52 bombing raids in northern Laos and the introduction of Thai troops into the Laotian war, "with a mantle of secrecy."

Much of the American aid was said by Senate sources to go for support by the Central Intelligence Agency of a semi-autonomous force of mountain tribesmen that according to the Lowenstein-

Moose report has now been supplemented by 4800 Thai soldiers paid in part by the United States.

In addition, the United States, with Air Force planes based in Thailand, has been providing combat air support for several years to the irregular army as well as Royal Laotian forces fighting in northern Laos.

According to Senate sources, the Lowenstein-Moose report suggests that the extent of American military involvement in Laos has deepened in recent years. It was a point also made by Kennedy, who said "the presidential war in northern Laos, contrary to most official statements, has escalated dramatically during the last two years."

Kennedy made the statement in releasing an exchange of correspondence with the executive branch on the administration's constitutional authority to engage in hostilities in northern Laos. He raised the question following testimony in April by William H. Sullivan, deputy assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs, before the Senate judiciary subcommittee on refugees.

In discussing the situation in Laos, where he once was ambassador, Sullivan said, in effect, that there are two wars going on in Laos, one in southern Laos involving operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the other in Northern Laos between Royal government forces and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces. The war in Northern Laos, he said, has "nothing to do with military operations in South Vietnam or Cambodia."

On the basis of that Sullivan statement, Kennedy wrote to President Nixon inquiring as to "the precise authority for continuing U.S. military activities in Northern Laos" in view of earlier administration statements that American activities in Laos are related solely to the protection of American forces as they are withdrawn from Vietnam. The reply came from David M. Abshire, assistant secretary of state for congressional relations.

Noting that the President "has been carrying out a continuing program of withdrawal of U.S. forces from Southeast Asia," Abshire said:

"The President's constitutional powers as commander-in-Chief and in the field of foreign relations provide authority for him to take reasonable measures to carry out these withdrawals, to protect our troops and to bring the hostilities which were under way when he took office to an end in a way that will contribute to a durable peace."