

Opening Wedge

Representative Carl Albert, Speaker of the House and a long-time supporter of the Administration's war policy in Vietnam, has joined the widening band of legislators ready to challenge the President's continuation of the war in Cambodia. A fight on the floor of the House of Representatives looms next week over the requested appropriation of funds to pay for the current military actions that threaten to re-engage this country in the civil wars across Indochina.

At the same time, Republican Senator Mathias of Maryland and Senator Mansfield, the Democratic floor leader, are pressing for debate next week on their resolution advising the President of the Senate's judgment that the Cambodian action is illegal and unconstitutional.

In attempting to justify the Cambodian bombing, Secretary of State Rogers argued that the President has authority under the peace agreement signed in Paris last January to use American military power to enforce the cease-fire. This dubious line of reasoning apparently has now been extended to cover the threat of resumed military action in Vietnam itself unless Hanoi honors the terms of the Paris accords, as interpreted by the United States Government.

It may be that the cease-fire agreement does not rule out military action by one side if the other side fails to comply with its terms. But by no stretch of the imagination can an agreement that has never been submitted to Congress be regarded as a substitute for the Congressional action required under the Constitution to commit this country to war.

Although the conflict in Indochina has never ceased, as Mr. Rogers conceded, the last pretext for Presidential military action there—the necessity for protecting United States troops—became "inoperative," to borrow a White House phrase, when the last American combat soldier came home. This was what turned Speaker Albert around. Now both houses of Congress have the vehicles to assert their constitutional authority against this latest abuse of Presidential power before the country again finds itself enmeshed in endless warfare.