

# Bill for Vietnam Arms Aid Suffers a Double Setback

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WASHINGTON, April 3—Administration efforts to increase military aid to South Vietnam were set back today in both the Senate and the House.

The Senate Armed Services Committee, which normally supports the Administration, approved a \$226-million increase in military aid to South Vietnam in the current fiscal year, which ends June 30. That, however, was only about half the increase the Administration sought. It had requested that the Congressional ceiling on military aid be raised from the present level of \$1.126-billion to \$1.6-billion.

An even smaller increase was approved by the House Appropriations Committee. Congressional sources said that the committee, in an action still to be announced, had voted to increase the ceiling to \$1.3-billion.

## A Financial Bind

Unless the committee actions are reversed—and that appears highly unlikely—the Administration will find itself in a financial bind in providing military assistance to South Vietnam in the final months of this fiscal year.

The Defense Department, because it admittedly overspent in the first half of the fiscal year in the expectation that Congress would approve the requested \$1.6-billion for South Vietnam, now finds itself right up against the Congressional ceiling of \$1.126-billion. As a result, the Administration requested that the ceiling be raised to \$1.6-billion so that funds would be available for the final three months.

Defense Department officials estimate that even for what they describe as an "austere program," \$1.4-billion in spending authority will be needed. Anything less than that, they warn, will force the Pentagon to resort to "some unattractive options" in cutting back the flow of military aid to Saigon.

## Revival of Debate

Particularly in the Senate, the future financing of aid to Saigon has become involved in a revival of debate on Vietnam that faded with the withdrawal of American forces a year ago.

The question as cast by the Administration is whether the United States is going to fulfill an unwritten commitment to the security and self-determination of South Vietnam. But to a group of Senate doves, who are rising again in concerted opposition, the proposed increase in aid represents a continuation of over-involvement in Indochina.

The Administration's task is further complicated by a power struggle between Representa-

tive F. Edward Hébert, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and Representative George H. Mahon, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee—two legislators who normally work in harness in protecting the Administration's military requests.

Mr. Hébert prevailed upon the House Armed Services Committee to agree to the \$1.6-billion ceiling in a bill to be debated in the House in the next few days. But Mr. Mahon felt that as a result the House Armed Services Committee had intruded upon the legislative prerogatives of the House Appropriations Committee.

On the parliamentary points, Mr. Hébert won out today in a session before the House Rules Committee. But as Administration officials glumly acknowledge, the net political effect will probably be to make Mr. Mahon even more reluctant to go along with the Administration's request, if only to show Mr. Hébert that it is the Appropriations Committee and not the Armed Services Committee that will determine spending levels in Vietnam.

The Administration had expected some Congressional difficulty on the aid question although not as much as has materialized. Partly to deal with this difficulty, the Administration had lumped its Vietnam request in with a "readiness supplemental appropriations" for the defense Department growing out of the Middle East war last fall.

## Difficulties in Senate

But even by invoking the "lessons of the Middle East War" as a reason for an emergency increase in the defense budget, the Administration ran into difficulties in the Senate Armed Services Committee. The committee cut \$683-million from the \$1.2-billion the Defense Department had requested in supplementary funds to increase the readiness of the armed forces.

The committee also deferred action until later this year on the Administration's controversial request for \$29-million to start building a naval base on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

Senator Stuart Symington, the acting chairman, said the committee had concluded that most of the funds requested by the Pentagon were not of "sufficient urgency to warrant immediate action." His statement reflected a widespread complaint in Congress that the Defense Department was using the Middle East war as an excuse to overturn Congressional reductions last year in the defense budget and in military aid to South Vietnam.