

Bars New Viet Aid

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In a major foreign-policy defeat for President Nixon, the Senate voted 43 to 38 yesterday to kill a proposed \$266 million boost in military aid to South Vietnam this year.

Led by Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), opponents of the boost argued that the added funds might signal a broadening of the U. S. military-aid commitment, allowing the South Vietnamese government to weaken efforts to implement the cease-fire agreement.

"The question remains whether the shipment of more arms to South Vietnam will help strengthen the cease-fire agreement, or will it fan the flames of violence," Kennedy told the Senate.

Pentagon and White House aides worked for hours yesterday trying to round up the votes to turn back Kennedy's amendment. "It's a severe blow," said one after the vote.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John C. Stennis (D-Miss.), looking strong and hardy for the first time since he was shot by a Washington holdup man over a year ago, led the floor fight against Kennedy.

He said South Vietnamese forces "are down to what they call a 90-day inventory" of supplies "and we're not going to let them get too far down on that." He said the supplies would run out "very fast" without the added funds, substantially weakening South Vietnam.

"Don't do it on a supplemental bill on a floor amendment," Stennis begged, urging members to wait until the Fis-

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cal 1975 request comes up before making any decision that could harm the South Vietnamese armed forces.

He said U.S. policy is a "winding down" of participation in Southeast Asia, "not just a turning our back and running out." But the Senate backed Kennedy anyhow, adding his amendment to a routine supplemental bill authorizing \$415 million for various defense programs.

The bill goes to conference with the House, and Nixon administration spokesmen said they will strive to persuade House conferees to reject the Kennedy amendment. This would allow the added \$266 million to be spent.

The dispute involves outlays for arms and ammunition to South Vietnam. The White House had asked a \$1.6 billion ceiling on such shipments in Fiscal 1974, but Congress last year imposed a flat ceiling of \$1.126 billion. The Pentagon came back with a supplemental request for the full amount but the House turned it down and so did the Senate Armed Services Committee.

However, the Senate committee suggested that the Pentagon's problem could be met in part by assigning \$266 million out of this year's actual outlays to ceilings of previous fiscal years, thus freeing a corresponding portion of this year's ceiling for added outlays.

It said the \$266 million previously counted under this year's ceiling was actually to

cover shipments made in previous years. Under this device, the Pentagon, which had already appeared to have reached the \$1.126 billion limit for this year, would have another \$266 million in authority freed.

However, Kennedy protested that this was simply an evasion. The \$1.126 billion ceiling, he said, had been intended to cover both current payments for shipments made in earlier years and ongoing outlays this year.

He also told the Senate that reassignment of some current outlays to previous years' ceilings is probably illegal, since the General Accounting Office believes that earlier ceilings may already be used up.

His amendment sought to close all avenues of escape for the Pentagon by providing that no unused authority—in any year—may be used to obligate further aid funds for South Vietnam. White House spokesmen said this might be interpreted as cutting off funds to search for men missing in action, but Kennedy denied this.

Moreover, he told the Senate his amendment wouldn't cut off all aid or even reduce the \$1.126 billion ceiling or any ceiling that Congress may set for later years; it would merely prevent an escalation of spending this year beyond the ceiling. He said the Pentagon had deliberately gone forward at an accelerated pace in expectation of receiving what Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) called a "bailout" on the funds.