

FULBRIGHT FIGHTS SECRECY ON LAOS

Links Arms Money Bill to
Discussion of U.S. Role

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 12— Senator J. W. Fulbright threatened today to delay a vote on the defense appropriations bill in an attempt to force the relaxation of the Nixon Administration's secrecy regarding the American military involvement in Laos.

Protesting that the Administration's "cloak of secrecy" was making a "mockery of the power of Congress" over military appropriations, the Arkansas Democrat, who is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposed that there be "extended discussion" of the American role in Laos when the defense bill reached the Senate floor next week.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved today a \$69.3-billion budget for the Pentagon for the current fiscal year, a reduction of \$5.9-billion from the Administration's request and \$627-million less than approved by the House last week.

By a voice vote, the committee defeated a motion by Senator Margaret Chase Smith, Republican of Maine, to delete \$769-million in funds for development and deployment of the Administration's Safeguard antiballistic missile (ABM) system. Mrs. Smith plans, however, to reintroduce her amendment on the floor, thus reviving a debate over the ABM that has been quiescent since the Senate last August authorized deployment of the Safeguard system by a one-vote margin.

Focus on Labs

In view of the earlier decision, the ABM debate is expected to be relatively brief, and critics of the Safeguard system profess little optimism that they will prevail on a second try. Rather the focus of the debate on the defense appropriations bill is expected to shift to the American military role in the largely secret war in Laos between Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces on one side and the Royal Laotian forces supported by the United States on the other.

Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, will join the issue by offering an amendment providing that none of the funds in the military budget can be used for American troops in support of "local forces" in Laos of Thai-

land. A similar Cooper amendment was adopted in the military authorization bill last summer but was dropped in the Senate-House conference on the legislation that authorizes the military budget.

The Cooper amendment would not prevent continuation of military aid to the Royal Laotian Government. But presumably it would force the re-

examination of present policies under which United States Air Force planes reportedly are flying missions in support of Royal Laotian troops and a private 36,000-man army that is advised and supported by the United States Army Special Forces and the Central Intelligence Agency.