

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee made an unhappy error of judgment, we believe, in rejecting 9 to 7 the nomination of G. McMurtrie Godley—a career diplomat who served most recently as ambassador to Laos—to be assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs. The nomination was set aside, Chairman Fulbright, explained, because in Laos Mr. Godley was “so intimately associated with Vietnam policy and such an enthusiastic activist” that he should not serve in a responsible East Asian position under the new conditions emerging now. Yet how could any ambassador to Laos fail to be “intimately associated with Vietnam policy”? Should a bureaucrat whose competence is otherwise acknowledged be penalized because he was “enthusiastic” about the policy he was obligated by his oath to carry out? The President made essentially this point in his strong protest to the committee over its handling of the appointment. By the logic of Mr. Fulbright, Foreign Relations would confirm for new Asian posts only those diplomats who, in their last Asian jobs, had resigned.

It is hard to avoid wondering if the committee took on Mr. Godley not so much out of reservations about his personal fitness but out of its own bitterness over Mr. Nixon's Indochina policy and its own rivalry with the President over policy-making power. The diplomat is in that sense a victim of disputes not of his own making. We say this not because of any admiration for the policy in Laos which Mr. Godley supervised—a policy

we have ourselves repeatedly faulted. The point is, however, that it is much to the nation's interest to keep its career diplomatic service insulated from the policy arguments and institutional power struggles which are inevitably the stuff of politics. No way else can the independence of judgment and the integrity of the foreign service be better protected. One would have thought the point had been adequately made by the purge of the State Department's China hands which the late Senator McCarthy pressed a generation ago. We would not deny Senator Fulbright's contention that the choice of men serving at Mr. Godley's level can affect the shaping of policy. But we would reply that congressional attempts to fine-tune policy by manipulating the career of professional foreign service officers are laden with heavy risk.

There is, after all, no shortage of legitimate ways in which a determined legislature can effectively make its mark on foreign policy. It can legislate. It can use its power of the purse. It can hold hearings, disseminate information and otherwise attempt to influence public and official opinion. It can block confirmation of policy-level presidential appointees, such as the secretary of state. Intervening in the workings of the career foreign service is not only a troubling but also a rather ineffectual way to send a President the message that his foreign policy is not what the Congress thinks it ought to be.