

Military rainmaking: DOD still unresponsive

Ever since rumors began circulating that the United States is using weather modification as a weapon of war in Vietnam, various Senators and Congressmen have been trying to find out whether the reports are well founded or not. Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), after a frustrating exchange of letters with Department of Defense officials, was told that DOD weather modification activities were classified and that only the chairmen of Congressional committees "with primary responsibility for this department's operations" would be informed.

Last week, at hearings held by the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans and International Environment, of which he is chairman, Pell found that he had yet to plumb the depths of frustration. The hearings were on the proposed Senate resolution 281, which would urge the United States to seek an international treaty prohibiting the use of environmental or geophysical modification as a weapon of war. The measure is sponsored by Pell and 15 other Senators.

DOD's sole representative at the hearings, Benjamin Forman, Assistant General Counsel for International Affairs, said that the department's *research* in weather modification is unclassified. Forman took pains to point out that DOD's weather modification research amounts to only 0.0005 percent of its total research and development budget. As had previous DOD spokesmen, Forman emphasized that DOD's interest in weather modification is defensive. He said DOD conducts some weather modification operations, but "we have not . . . ever engaged in weather modification activities over North Vietnam." Defense Secretary Melvin Laird had made the same assertion in previous testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (The assertions conflict directly with a report in the July 3 New York Times that military rainmaking has been used over North Vietnam as well as South Vietnam and Laos, SN: 7/15/72, p. 35.) Weather modification activities need not be conducted over the target area to be effective. Clouds seeded over Laos could blow eastward over North Vietnam, and DOD has refused to say whether it is conducting weather modification over other areas of Southeast Asia.

Pell: "What importance does DOD attach to weather modification as an offensive strategy?"

Forman: "I don't understand the nature of your question."

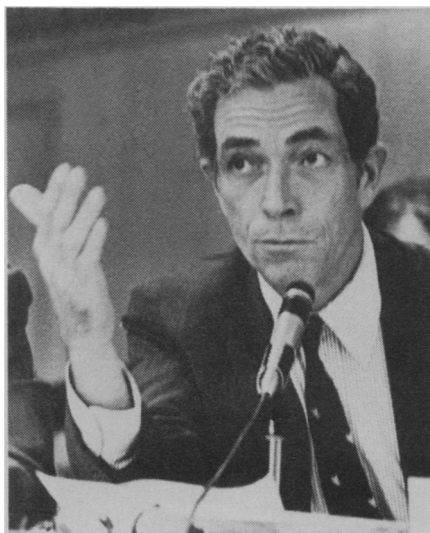
Pell: "Is there *any* importance, and to what degree, attached by DOD to

weather modification as a means of offensive strategy?"

Forman: "The position of the Department of Defense is that they won't comment."

Pell noted that DOD informs the chairmen of the two Congressional armed services committees about its weather modification activities and asked why DOD thinks the Foreign Relations Committee (the parent of Pell's subcommittee) should not also be kept informed. Forman said he was not in a position to answer the question. Sen. Clifford Case (R-N.J.), a member of the international environment subcommittee, demanded at this point to be told "the rationale by which DOD assumes the authority to select which committee they'll talk to."

Pell then asked whether "Intermediary—Compatriot," rumored to be an



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offense-oriented weather modification study, and "Popeye," a cloud-seeding project over Laos mentioned in the Pentagon Papers, were coordinated with the State Department. Forman said that all he knew about these projects was what he'd read in the newspapers. Pell: "That's why we asked Laird to send a competent witness."

Changing tactics, Pell asked Forman if the military can seed clouds to dissipate them and expose targets for bombing. Forman responded that he could speculate on the possible military applications of cloud seeding but preferred not to because he wasn't sure which of his speculations might be incorporated in existing DOD plans and might accidentally reveal something.

"The central point that bothers me," said Pell at one point, "is what is the reason for the secrecy? Why are we denied, in open or closed session, information on these activities and *non*-activities?"

There followed a long series of ques-

tions to which Forman responded either that he did not know or was not free to comment. ("I guess we have to go through this ritual," said Pell.) Forman finally admitted that he had been instructed not to discuss use of weather modification in Indochina.

Visibly angry, Pell said that in all his years on Capitol Hill he'd never heard such an unresponsive series of replies. "I am deeply aggravated, deeply disappointed." Pell adjourned the first day of hearings, instructing Forman either to return with the answers to some of his questions or ask DOD to send a witness who has authority to answer. In a letter to Laird, he again commented on Forman's "non-responsive testimony" and asked why DOD can openly discuss its bombing operations in North Vietnam "and at the same time invoke secrecy in the case of weather modification."

No DOD representative appeared at the second day of hearings, but the Foreign Relations Committee was later notified that DOD will make some response by letter.

Testimony by other witnesses, who included Gordon J. F. MacDonald of the Council on Environmental Quality, Robert M. White, head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, several eminent meteorologists and experts on international law, concentrated on nonmilitary weather modification research and on the present and future capabilities.

The consensus of most of the witnesses was that military uses of weather modification should certainly be prohibited. Two reasons given were that such tactics would cause at least as much harm to civilians as to military targets and that military use of weather modification would poison cooperative environmental programs with other nations. Richard A. Falk of Princeton University pointed out that under international law environmental methods of warfare qualify as war crimes. A Nazi High Commissioner of Holland was prosecuted at Nuremberg for flooding 500,000 acres of land.

Though they supported the spirit of the resolution, almost all the scientists expressed concern about a clause prohibiting *research* on military uses of weather modification. As University of Rhode Island President Werner A. Baum put it: "I do not see how we could effectively distinguish between weather management research which is intended for peaceful application, and research which is intended for weaponry. History has surely taught us that the same research result can be used constructively or destructively." Pell said he would modify the resolution to remove any unnecessary restrictions on research. □