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The Fulbright Critique

Nothing frightens the United States Senate like thoughtful debate; the mere appearance on the Senate floor of a member armed with an important speech will send his colleagues dashing away for a long smoke, leaving only a handful of loyal friends to hear him out. The member who regards the Senate as a forum for true debate pays the price of too many filibusters and long-winded tirades.

That is unfortunate, for it demeans the Senate and diminishes the impact of speeches such as that delivered on the Senate floor Wednesday by J. William Fulbright of Arkansas. It was an address that merited the closest attention.

Senator Fulbright's subject was the American role in last spring's Dominican crisis; his approach was critical—at times even caustic—but the spirit of his remarks was constructive, not vindictive. "The tragedy of Santo Domingo," he said, "is that a policy that purported to defeat communism in the short run is more likely to have the effect of promoting it in the long run." His indictment of President Johnson's advisers—only W. Tapley Bennett, ambassador to Santo Domingo, was actually mentioned—was severe. He said:

Underlying the bad advice and unwise actions of the United States was the fear of "another Cuba." The specter of a second Communist state in the Western Hemisphere, and its probable political repercussions within the United

States and possible effects on the careers of those who might be held responsible—seems to have been the most important single factor in distorting the judgment of otherwise sensible and competent men.

That there were "no easy choices available to the United States," Senator Fulbright conceded. But, in his view, the failure of the administration to make "wise decisions" was abundantly clear.

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The Fulbright charges are not without merit. As the United States has slowly withdrawn from the Dominican Republic its argument for getting in to begin with has been challenged by other thoughtful observers. The much-discussed CIA list of purported Communist participants in the Dominican revolt, for example, exaggerated the threat.

What was most important about the speech, however, was its serious purpose. As he did in March, 1964—when he rose on the Senate floor to discuss the "old myths and new realities" of American foreign policy—Senator Fulbright directed himself to the uncertainties and ambiguities in our relations with the rest of the world.

Mr. Fulbright is not a gentle critic, but he is fair and his great determination is to keep his country on a path consistent with its best principles. His speeches are valuable, and it is unfortunate that his fellow senators receive them so lightly.