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News Analysis

Vice President Agnew, who is fast becoming the candid man of this administration, yesterday gave the nation and the world a peek at Washington's long-range thinking about American forces now overseas.

Last Sunday, en route to Asia, he candidly let it be known the Nixon administration will "do everything we can" to keep the Lon Nol regime afloat in Cambodia.

Yesterday, en route from Korea to Taiwan, he spoke of pulling all American troops out of South Korea in five years provided the ROK forces by then have been sufficiently modernized to stand alone.

Administration officials both here and at the Western White House in San Clemente, Calif., downplayed the idea of total withdrawal. It was added, too, that if that did occur it did not mean withdrawal of Air Force units as well as ground forces since planes alone can deliver nuclear weapons.

But it is known that the administration is at work on a five-year force plan and Korea is part of that.

The United States is wary of any flat commitment over a five-year period and especially so in South Korea. It has not been forgotten here that the United States pulled all its forces out of South Korea in 1949 (the Soviets had pulled out of North Korea the year before) leaving behind a weak South Korean forces. North Korea invaded the South to start the Korean war in June, 1950.

This time the United States is pledging to "modernize" the South Korean forces so that won't happen again. But, as Agnew made clear in his remarks yesterday, Washington doesn't "want to be in a position where we could be asked not to make a withdrawal on the basis that we had not complied with some particular level of modernization . . ."

Driving Force

The driving force behind the reduction of U.S. forces in Korea is money; the conceptual framework for the

move is called the Nixon Doctrine, the reduction of the American presence abroad. What Agnew was doing was carrying this beyond the initial step of withdrawing 20,000 men by next June 30.

The Vice President's remarks yesterday centered on Korea but he didn't stop there. He went on to declare that "it's not compatible with our philosophy to have large contingents of our forces permanently stationed in any country."

Here, of course, is a rationale for cutting American forces in Western Europe, chiefly in West Germany. After all, the Nixon Doctrine is not confined to Asia in principle. And, finally, there is simply no quick way to save dollars in the Pentagon budget other than to cut manpower—bring home troops and demobilize them.

Asia is the instant problem because of the Indochina war but Europe is not far behind because of budget problems.

Money for Men

In Asia, the administration is trying to substitute money for men, especially for ground troops. That means money for military modernization in South Korea, money for economic help for South Vietnam as U.S. forces come home, money for military equipment and for economic aid and for third country forces to keep Lon Nol afloat in Cambodia.

Some high administration officials have been saying they have been assured at the Capital that the money to substitute for men will be voted by Congress. But others are far from sure and the tone in Congress today backs that skepticism. Hence Agnew's insistence on not tying South Korean modernization to troop withdrawals except in a general sense and with the decision in Washington's hands, not Seoul's.

The Vice President may seem an unlikely administration spokesman for inner administration thinking. But as of now he is the most frank.

Agnew Gives Glimmer Of Policy on Troops