

Atmosphere Readied For Europe Troop Cut

Stage Set
For Possible
Troop Cut

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The Johnson Administration is now laying the psychological groundwork for a sizable cut in United States troop strength in Western Europe.

Defense Department officials are insistently denying that any large reduction is planned or contemplated.

But, according to authoritative sources, barring a major change of attitude on both sides of the Atlantic, the Johnson Administration is now headed toward a large cut in forces.

Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield on Wednesday publicly offered one formulation for how large reductions could be made. He made his proposal after consulting with the Administration's highest officials, at President Johnson's suggestion.

Would Cushion Impact

Mansfield did not expressly say so then, but his proposal would cushion the political impact of a troop cut on the super-sensitivities of West Germany, where the bulk of American forces in Europe are stationed.

Instead of making the
See MANSFIELD, A12, Col. 1

largest troop cut in West Germany, where the United States is now publicly pledged to have 225,000 troops by year's end, the biggest Mansfield-proposed reduction would come from withdrawing troops now in France.

Mansfield said he was talking of "the approximately 75,000 members of the armed services and their dependents" in France, who must be pulled out next year as a result of President de Gaulle's withdrawal from the NATO military system. According to Pentagon figures, the numbers in France, in June, were actually 30,000 military personnel and 37,000 dependents.

As "a good second step," Mansfield proposed "an initial 10 per cent reduction of U.S. troop strength in Germany and elsewhere on the Western European continent."

Removing troops from France to the United States, in terms of both American costs and NATO defense, is almost equivalent to withdrawing them from West Germany, without the same political sting. Most of these French-based forces were earmarked for use in West Germany or elsewhere in the Western European sector of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Reports Denied

For weeks there have been reports, roundly denied, that Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara was planning to withdraw 75,000 U.S. troops from West Germany, if that nation failed to continue to meet the full dollar cost of maintaining American troops there.

A 75,000 figure was mentioned by McNamara to a West German defense correspondent, other sources acknowl-

edged. But these sources said McNamara was not talking about an imminent cut, but a projected reduction of 75,000 men in West Germany that could be accomplished in the 1970s by maintaining combat efficiency but reducing numbers of supply and maintenance personnel.

Mansfield said yesterday he was unaware that there had been any previous public references to a \$75,000-man troop cut. He has publicly advocated a reduction in the present six U.S. divisions in Europe to "one or two."

Mansfield Wrote Johnson

Mansfield said he wrote to the President several weeks ago that the Democratic Policy Committee was "unanimously" concerned that today there are "still just under a million U.S. troops and dependents in Germany and Western Europe."

The committee protested, as Mansfield told the Senate on Wednesday, that Europe is trying to operate on a "double standard": maintaining that Communist aggression in Europe is "wholly unlikely," but failing to fulfill their NATO obligations while assailing the United States for even considering troop reductions.

Mansfield apparently was pressing on an open door on the troop question. After he wrote to the President, Mr. Johnson arranged for a meeting of the whole Policy Committee with McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Treasury Secretary Henry W. Fowler. The meeting was held on July 18. Later, the Democratic Policy Committee held two more meetings, one with Administration specialists on the subject.