

U.S. Hedges On Allied Troop Cuts

Prefers to Seek East-West Action On Europe's Forces

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The United States will resist one-sided cutbacks in the size of Allied forces in Europe, in part to leave open a chance for dual East-West troop reductions.

That position was indicated yesterday following a White House luncheon conference to plan United States policy in the tangle of issues concerning force levels in West Germany.

President Johnson met with Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara to discuss the strategic, political and financial elements at stake.

Immediately at issue is the position the United States will take in the next round of American-British-German talks in London. American officials were still uncertain last night if those delayed talks will resume Monday, but said they will be held during the week.

No Concessions Yet

Many officials believe that, one way or another, the size of American forces in West Germany in time will be reduced anywhere from one to several divisions below their present level of about six divisions, with a resulting change in Allied strategy. Administration forces refuse to concede at present, however, that there will be any change in either numbers or strategy. It is "premature," they maintain, to reach such a conclusion now.

Administration officials, while declining to discuss what President Johnson may decide, maintained that there is no need for the United States to reach any "crash" decision to alter its basic

policy.

Britain and Germany are seriously at odds over the payment of offset costs for Britain's 55,000-man Rhine Army, with a British-set deadline of June 30 on that dispute. Also unresolved is what payments, if any, West Germany will make after July 1 on the \$1.35 billion balance of payments cost to the United States of its 225,000-man army in West Germany.

Since the defection of France from the military structure of the North Atlantic Alliance, any further cut

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Secretary of Defense McNamara insists he and Secretary of State Rusk are "birds of a feather" on issue of bombing North Vietnam.

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in Allied strength in Europe, such as Britain has threatened if the offset issue is unresolved, can doubly undermine the flexibility of Allied strategy to defend Europe.

The United States already has put up \$35 million in purchase commitments to Britain, to head off until June a cut in the Rhine Army.

Both the stop-gap and long-term consequences of the payment-strategy problem are to be re-examined in London by tripartite negotiators: John J. McCloy for the United States, British Minister of State George Thomson, and West German Ambassador Georg Duchwitz.

While Britain is preoccupied by the immediate problem of finances for its strained economy, the United States is preoccupied with the long-term strategic consequences of any one-sided cutback in Allied forces.

Soviet Agreement Needed

President Johnson is reported to be convinced that any reduction of forces should be made only if Soviet agreement can be achieved to reduce troops in Europe on both sides of the East-West divide.

Such an agreement may be attainable, some Administration officials believe, if the Soviet Union shows serious interest in the pending proposal by the President for an antiballistic missile accord. The proposal would limit the deployment of antiballistic

missile systems by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Critical talks on the missile topic, American sources said last night, remain in a very preliminary stage that cannot yet be termed negotiations, while the Russians study the impact of the proposal on their own interests.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, a leader in urging a reduction of U.S. troop strength in Europe, yesterday opposed making such a cut on the basis of dollar costs alone.

Noting a published report that the United States may withdraw one division from Germany by mid-1968 because of the cost-offset dispute, Mansfield said that is "the one consideration which ought not to govern in a situation which involves vital defense needs."

Mansfield's View

"If it is essential to the security of the United States to maintain the present troop deployment in Europe," said Mansfield, "we would be most derelict in cutting that level by even one division on the

grounds that exchange dollars are tight."

"If we really need these forces in Europe," said Mansfield, "by all means let us keep them there regardless of whether or not the Germans are prepared to cover the dollar costs."

But, said Mansfield, "if the present U.S. military deployment in Europe is, in truth, swollen beyond present need, if it exceeds the requirements of the realities of Europe (as Mansfield has argued), then, by all means, let us reduce that deployment."