

U.S. Training
Aid Abroad
Is Outlined

By Michael Getler
Washington Post
Staff Writer

The Pentagon yesterday provided the first official glimpse into the dimensions of U.S. military training programs overseas, disclosing that there are now some 9,535 persons, mostly civilians working under commercial Pentagon contracts, providing technical training and assistance in 34 countries.

These figures do not include roughly 1,800 active-duty military men and Defense Department civilian employees assigned to official Military Assistance and Advisory Groups (MAAGs) in some 50 countries.

Nor does the total include other workers from U.S. armament companies who go abroad under contracts negotiated directly between a foreign country and a U.S. company.

The State Department oversees that type of contract. But State Department spokesmen yesterday said they had not as yet figured out the total number of workers involved.

Forty per cent of the 9,535 contractor personnel—not all of whom are overseas at any one time—work in South Vietnam.

But 24 per cent—some 2,200 people—are now in Iran and another 24 per cent are in Saudi Arabia, reflecting the vast increase in arms sales to the oil-rich Persian Gulf in the past two years. The remaining personnel are scattered among more than 30 other countries.

Interest in the scope of U.S. military training overseas has expanded in Congress recently, in part because of the booming \$8 billion-a-year sales of U.S. weapons and support services abroad.

Responding to press in-
See CONTRACTS, A7, Col. 1

CONTRACTS, From A1

inquiries, the Pentagon yesterday provided details on the size of the entire overseas training operations. Spokesmen also defended the use of civilian contractors as necessary to prevent the U.S. military from being overburdened with requests from foreign countries to supply scarce and skilled technicians from its own ranks.

Similarly, Pentagon officials said a congressional amendment to the Foreign Military Sales Act of 1974 requires that the Defense Department turn as much of this technical training and support work as possible over to commercial contractors.

The principal controversy raised by the recent \$77 million contract to Vinnell Corp. for training the Saudi Arabian national guard is that it marks the first time civilians are being hired to actually train sizeable military combat units. And the contract announcement was handled secretly in that the public statement did not identify what country the civilians would be working in or what they would be doing.

At the Pentagon yesterday, Amos A. Jordan, a deputy assistant secretary of defense, was asked if he thought it was good policy to allow some 1,000 U.S. civilians working for Vinnell to train the troops of another country under a vague contract which the foreign country apparently can request be kept secret.

"It seems to me that it is a good idea that this information be made available to the public and to the people's representatives" in Congress, Jordan said. He went on to say that both the House and Senate Armed Services committees were informed about the Vinnell contract and the Congress thus had the opportunity to inform the public.

Under further questioning, however, Pentagon spokesman William Beecher acknowledged that the information was given to Congress on a classified basis.

Despite the claim that the Senate Armed Services Committee was informed of the details, the committee's chairman, Sen. John C. Stennis (D-

Miss.), was among those who called for an inquiry into the Vinnell contract when it was reported in the press.

Asked if it was Saudi Arabia that had asked to keep its involvement secret in the contract, Beecher said he was not sure and that it was a question the State Department should answer. A State Department spokesman said he was "pretty sure" the Saudis asked not to be identified, but couldn't say so authoritatively.

Asked under what authority a foreign country has the right to impose secrecy on a contract of this sort, the Pentagon's chief arms sale negotiator, Richard R. Violette, said: "I'm not sure it's a law, but more the respecting of the desires of another country" for secrecy over matters that may be regarded by them as sensitive military intelligence or foreign policy information.

When asked how such contracts could legally be kept secret from the public here, Violette said "It's a good question."

Asked if training foreign military units could not get out of control because there was no public disclosure in many cases under existing procedures of secrecy in using civilian contractors, Jordan claimed there was no chance of it because the people in the Pentagon and State Department watch it closely.

The practice of sending U.S. military advisers overseas has been going on for 20 years, but until very recently this has always been done by the military MAAG groups. As arms purchases expanded around the world and the weapons became more complex, more civilian contractors were brought in, especially to handle the huge increase in demand for military support by oil-rich Persian Gulf countries.

Normally, these contractors simply teach foreigners how to operate and maintain the equipment they sell. But the new Vinnell contract goes well beyond that.

The Pentagon statistics released yesterday show that of the 9,535 persons now under contract, all but 782 are civilian contracted personnel.