

U.S. Reviewing Its World Military Posture

By DREW MIDDLETON

The United States, according to senior Defense Department officials, has begun a review of its military position in the world after the defeat of South Vietnam's government forces.

The officials emphasized that the review would deal more with the deployment of military units that support the nation's treaty commitments than with the political commitments themselves. They said that they did not expect any change in the nation's treaty commitments in the western Pacific and Europe but that they did expect lively discussion on questions such as how much strategic air power should be maintained in southern Asia and whether the United States should concentrate more men, ships and aircraft in the troubled Mediterranean.

"This is a time, once again, for America to choose," Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger said in an interview recently. "We will have to decide whether, even with our disappointments of the Vietnam war, we are going to maintain our position in the world and provide the necessary strength for a worldwide military equilibrium."

Beyond the problem of how best to deploy men, ships and aircraft, Mr. Schlesinger indicated, lies the greater problem of national psychological preparedness, of "ideology versus common sense."

"A decade ago," the Defense Secretary noted, "the United States was held in such awe that it did not have to exercise diplomatic pressures and, if it did, it had a high hope that the diplomatic pressures would be successful. It did not have to have recourse to force."

"That has changed because the awe in which the United States previously was held has sharply diminished, and I think that this is what's reflected in the drift that you perceive in the Mediterranean basin and elsewhere," Mr. Schlesinger said.

Discussing the review of America's military posture, the Secretary noted that it is "very hard for a great power to reconsider its commitments" unless such reconsiderations would result in very large financial savings.

41 Commitments

The outlook, then, is for discussion—but little more—of United States military commitments. After the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia these commitments number 41, ranging in extent from the North Atlantic Treaty to a security-assistance agreement with Tunisia.

Public discussion, Defense Department officials expect, may center on the military commitment to South Korea, where there are 30,000 American troops. Some politicians, it was conceded, may consider a change in that deployment to be urgently needed.

But, officials warned, any such change would have grave psychological impact upon the South Koreans, already shaken by the fall of South Vietnam. And any American military review must consider its effect on allies.

The principal change in deployment, Mr. Schlesinger feels, is likely to occur in the strategic orientation of the services.

Since the end of World War II, the Navy and the Marine

Corps have been looking westward at Asia while the Army and the Air Force, except for the Vietnam interval, have focused their planning on north-west Europe and the Mediterranean.

Now, senior Defense Department officials believe, the Navy and the Marine Corps must give more attention to the military problems of the Middle East and Europe, but not to the extent that the remaining United States commitments in Asia are compromised.

Sweeping changes in deployments appear to be ruled out, and Mr. Schlesinger noted that sudden changes could be dangerous.

The review is likely to take into account primarily the changing situation in the Mediterranean area from the Iberian Peninsula eastward.

Portugal, Mr. Schlesinger said, "is a serious problem." Defense Department authorities with access to intelligence reports are not reassured by the gains registered by non-Communist parties in the elections last month. Some analysts believe the gains will spur the Communists to tighten their grip on the centers of power—the armed forces and the police.

After Saigon's Fall

Spain and Yugoslavia

In Spain "a succession crisis" is likely after the death of General Franco. In Yugoslavia a similar crisis is likely after the death of Marshal Tito.

The Defense Department's assessment of Soviet attitudes toward Yugoslavia is that Moscow would like to restore its ideological hegemony. While Marshal Tito, the symbol of Yugoslav national independence, lives, a move toward such restoration could entail a major operation that might be offensive to other Communist parties in Europe.

The situation at the eastern end of the Mediterranean has created the gravest apprehension. Some Defense Department officials regard United States actions that have alienated the Turkish Government as the greatest blunder by American diplomacy since Secretary of State John Foster Dulles threw the Egyptians into Moscow's lap by refusing financing of the Aswan High Dam in 1956.

Mr. Schlesinger's more moderate comment was that "we are in a position, which is a very peculiar one, of bearing down very hard on what has been one of our most faithful allies, namely Turkey."

He characterized the general strategic position in the Mediterranean as "poor."

To some Defense Department officers, the American attitude toward Turkey flies in the face of military realities. One said that withholding military aid to Turkey, "the only strong ally in the area," is "sheer military lunacy."

The Middle East, in the view of senior Defense Department officials, is "liable to blow up at any time."

Military, as well as political, opinion within the Defense Department argues that Israel, in Mr. Schlesinger's words, "is stronger in every way than she was in 1973" at the time of the October war.

The tendency is to discount the urgency of Israel's demands for F-15 Eagle fighters. The Americans believe that the Israeli fighter command, with its qualitative and quantitative

advantage in pilots, remains superior in its F-4 Phantoms to the Arab air forces even if they fly Soviet MIG-23's.

Beyond the evident concern about the Middle East lies the problem of Iran. The situation there is "satisfactory," Mr. Schlesinger said, but everything depends on the Shah.

The death of Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlevi, Defense Department officials say, would throw the entire Iran-Pakistan area into turmoil and might tempt the Soviet Union to undertake political or military adventures aimed at gaining a port on the Indian Ocean.

Regarding northern Europe, Mr. Schlesinger does not expect

any trouble in what is "still the most critical and vulnerable area of the free world" as long as the American deployment in northwest Europe remains at approximately its present strength—300,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen.

He does feel, however, that America's European allies tend to discount the strength of the Soviet forces deployed against NATO.

"Ultimately, the security of the free nations depends upon the existence of military power," Mr. Schlesinger noted.

His major concern is not about the Soviet Union's superiority in conventional forces—in manpower 4 million, compared with 2 million for the

United States—or on the prospects for "essential equivalence" in nuclear forces.

Rather it rests on the question of America's willingness to maintain a defense posture sufficient to deter Soviet adventures. At the moment he feels that "events are moving so well for the Soviet Union" that its leaders would be reluctant to test American determination.

The major issue, Mr. Schlesinger believes, is how far the American people will allow the international situation to deteriorate before they rouse themselves for a national effort.

It may take, he said pessimistically, "something like Korea" to alter present attitudes.