

Aides Say U.S. Will Keep Strong Force in Thailand

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BANGKOK, Thailand, Nov. 24—The United States and Thailand have agreed to the maintenance of a substantial American military presence—mainly air power—on Thai soil for an unspecified period after a Vietnam cease-fire, according to senior officials here.

Precise arrangements will depend on the outcome of negotiations in Paris on a Vietnam settlement, but key elements, said to represent the wishes of both Washington and Bangkok, include the following:

¶A "significant American military presence able to respond in an armed way" throughout Indochina to violations of a peace accord would be continued. This force would include United States Air Force fighter-bombers and B-52 bombers. They would continue to be based in Thailand as insurance against abrogation of an agreement by the other side.

¶The number of men involved in providing air power would be kept at its current level of roughly 40,000 men for a period of months and perhaps longer after a Vietnam settlement. Then, if evidence mounted that the North Vietnamese intended to fulfill the agreement, American air power could be pared down.

¶No American combat troops would be based in Thailand, and American military strength would not exceed the current 45,000 men in Thailand.

¶Some United States Army and counterinsurgency experts would continue to train specialists from Laos, Cambodia and possibly South Vietnam if a peace agreement prohibited the presence of American military men in those countries.

According to the officials, who agreed to be interviewed but did not wish to be identified,

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ified, the disposition of American forces in Thailand is not part of negotiations in Paris between Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, and the North Vietnamese.

United States military strength in Thailand dropped from a peak of 48,000 men in 1969 to 32,200 in late 1971, then grew to 45,000 this year as a result of the North Vietnamese spring offensive and American troop reductions in South Vietnam. Several American air units moved to Thailand from bases in South Vietnam.

There are about 15,000 more American military men in Thailand at present than there are in South Vietnam.

The Thais, worried that Laos and Cambodia may no longer act as buffer states, are anxious for the Americans to stay. Although the members of the ruling National Executive Council were not interviewed, other senior Thai officials said there had been assurances that the Americans would not abandon

Thailand after a settlement in Vietnam.

Ranking Americans support this view, saying that any reduction in American strength in Thailand will result only from North Vietnamese willingness to abide by accords agreed upon in Paris or from legislation by the United States Congress.

The Thais are pleased about the general terms of the proposed agreement on Vietnam but apprehensive about

whether the North Vietnamese want a lasting settlement, one American diplomat said. "They want a cease-fire in Laos and Cambodia too and they are very much concerned about policing this."

According to both Thais and Americans, a United States military reduction in Thailand will depend solely on a successful Vietnam settlement.

If anything goes wrong, an American official said, "all bets are off."