

# U.S. Suspends GI Pullouts In Thailand

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Further withdrawal of U.S. airmen and planes from Thailand has been suspended for a variety of military, diplomatic and political reasons, according to Pentagon officials.

The Defense Department has made no formal announcement of the action. Rather, it has clamped a quiet—and possibly temporary—halt on some planned withdrawals from Thailand and elsewhere in Asia, with officials privately citing the following factors:

- Concern about the continuing North Vietnamese military build-up inside South Vietnam and about the prospects that Hanoi may launch another major offensive during the dry season next spring.

Though now legally barred from re-entering the war without congressional approval, the administration still clearly believes that the presence of U.S. air power in the area presents Hanoi with a big question mark as to whether it will be used.

- The forthcoming visit to Peking by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger Oct. 28-29.

Officials are vague about why they prefer no withdrawals to be made while talks with the Chinese are pending. The Chinese clearly are interested in a further U.S. pullout from Taiwan. But former Secretary of Defense Elliot L. Richardson has also indicated that the Chinese are probably wary of a speedy U.S. withdrawal elsewhere in Asia—particularly in Korea—for fear of further Soviet inroads in the region.

- Uncertainty over the outcome of legislation calling for mandatory U.S. troops cuts overseas.

An amendment to the military spending bill recently passed by the Senate calls for a 40,000-man cut in U.S. forces abroad by June 30, 1974, and a total of 110,000 men by the end of 1975.

The amendment, initiated by Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), is aimed at forcing troop cuts in Asia rather than in Europe, where the United States and NATO are about to start talks with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European nations on mutual and balanced troop cuts.

Here, too, Pentagon officials are vague about why planned withdrawals should be affected by congressional action on the Humphrey amendment.

Officials say they are not sure whether a final measure—after going through conference with the House—will demand that the 40,000 cut be taken from current troop levels overseas. If so, holding up on the Thailand withdrawals for a while would help meet that demand.

The Humphrey amendment, however, is based on overseas troop levels as of last March 31. Thus, withdrawals already made would be counted toward the 40,000, as would any withdrawals made between now and final passage. Also, the House has not passed a similar amendment, and it appears likely to many congressional observers that some further softening—rather than toughening—of the Humphrey amendment is likely to emerge from the conference.

Pentagon statistics show that as of March 31, 1973, the United States had 169,000

troops—not counting the fleet—in Southeast Asia and in the countries of the western Pacific.

By June 30, some 3,000 airmen had been removed of the 45,000 previously in Thailand. Since the congressionally ordered Aug. 15 bombing halt, another 3,550 men and about 110 of the 720 warplanes based in Thailand also have been ordered home.

Thus, the United States has withdrawn about 6,500 men from Thailand, and officials say that about another 11,000 men were planned to be withdrawn from Asia—mostly from Thailand—before next June.

At present, the United States has about 38,500 men in Thailand, and expectations were that this would go down to 32,000 by next June, unless Congress forces a larger reduction.

Since late in August, however, no withdrawals from Thailand have been announced, and it now appears that no more will be made for an indefinite period.

Similarly, while a cut of about 3,000 men in the 9,000-man U.S. garrison on Taiwan was announced early in September, only a small number of airmen and their C-130 transport planes have actually left.

All told, Pentagon figures show that as of June 30, the Pentagon had 585,000 men stationed outside the United States. Of these, 43,000 were serving on U.S. possessions, 79,000 were on ships, and 463,000 were in foreign countries.

The largest contingent in Asia is the 42,000 troops in South Korea. Aside from Thailand, other sizable contingents are based in Japan (19,000), the Philippines (16,000) and Okinawa (38,000). Some minor cuts in each of these areas had also been planned.

From the military viewpoint, senior administration officials concede that opinion is sharply divided among defense and intelligence analysts as to whether Hanoi is planning a major new offensive in the south.

There is little argument about the dimensions of Hanoi's build-up, however, including the entry into the south of roughly 60,000 fresh troops since January. Of these, 35,000 to 45,000 are said to have been dispatched from Hanoi since the January cease-fire, and some 10,000 to 20,000 dispatched since June. Draft calls have also reportedly gone up in the north.

There is also a major Communist road-building effort on both sides of the mountain chain separating South Vietnam from Laos, with the apparent objective being an all-season route for supplies when monsoon rains hit on either side of the mountains.

Some analysts believe Hanoi is now in the advanced stages of preparing for an attack, convinced that Saigon is too stable politically to be overthrown by non-violent means.

Others believe that Hanoi's build-up is primarily to protect its own forces in the south against an attack by Saigon's armies, and that the Communist leadership wants time to rebuild the north and may be constrained in its long-term military adventures by the Soviet Union or China.