

U.S. to Keep Many Civilians in Vietnam

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 25—Even as the United States military is packing up for its expected exit from Vietnam, American officials here are secretly planning a major postwar presence of United States civilians in Vietnam, with many of them doing jobs formerly done by the military.

About 10,000 American civilian advisers and technicians, most of them under Defense Department contract, will stay

on in South Vietnam after a cease-fire according to well-informed sources. Three civilians will do everything from running the South Vietnamese military's personnel and logistics computers to teaching the Vietnamese Air Force how to fly and maintain newly provided planes and repairing the complex military communications network left behind by the United States Army.

About half of these civilian workers are already in Vietnam, with others beginning to arrive almost daily at Saigon's

Tan Son Nhut Airport under new contracts signed confidentially in the last few weeks.

Senior American officials insist that such a continued American presence following a cease-fire period would violate "neither the letter nor the spirit of the peace settlement," as one diplomat said today. But these officials, both civilian and military, have repeatedly refused to provide any details about American planning for the postwar period.

"It might upset the Paris

Continued on Page 9, Column 1

U.S. PLANS TO KEEP GROUP IN VIETNAM

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

negotiations," a spokesman for the United States military command explained, "and it's just not in the national interest to have these things known."

A few Americans and some foreign diplomats here have expressed doubts about the wisdom of such a postwar policy.

It's like 1961 or 1965 all over again," said one Western official who has served several tours of duty in Indochina. "The Americans are full of optimism again, and once more they are proceeding as if the Vietnamese aren't even around. They're just bringing in Americans to do the job."

Companies Were to Go

Until the events of the last month, the number of American civilian contract employees had been declining, falling from a high of more than 10,000 in 1970 to the present 5,000.

Many of the 125 American companies that held Defense Department contracts up through last month were scheduled to be phased out, knowledgeable sources say. Their contracts last month were worth just under \$100-million.

Although officials have refused to divulge anything about the new contracts, two companies that are reported to have received them are Lear Siegler, Inc., and NHA, Inc.

Lear Siegler, based in Santa Monica, Calif., is a diversified manufacturer that has had a number of contracts with the Air Force for aircraft and aerospace systems maintenance. NHA, Inc., with headquarters

in Dallas, was incorporated in 1968 as Norman Harwell Associates, Inc. Its name was changed to NHA soon after incorporation, and it is now engaged in land development; engineering and planning technical data services; government contract maintenance and heavy construction.

Lear Siegler is said to have been given at least 300 new jobs servicing the 120 F-105 fighter planes that the United States rushed to South Vietnam earlier this month, and NHA is reported to have been awarded more than 200 other aircraft maintenance jobs for the South Vietnamese Air Force.

Companies Are Silent

Both companies have been advertising in The Saigon Post, an English-language newspaper, for new workers over the last two weeks. But spokesmen for the companies said they were not free to comment on their newly awarded contracts.

"The Defense Department won't let us talk about our work, so I'm not going to tell you anything," said a man who described himself as the manager at Lear Siegler. He would not give his name.

According to some critical United States officials, the contractors are being given cost-plus contracts, which fix the companies' profits as a percentage of the total cost. Thus the higher the cost of a project the higher a company's profit. Such contracts, the opposite of the usual low-bid contract, tend to lead contractors to bring in excess personnel, since the more workers they have, the higher their profit, these officials say.

Problem of Control Seen

One problem that has apparently not been resolved is who will control these civilian contractors after the United States military command pulls out. Heretofore the United States

Army Procurement Agency, under the military command, has been in charge of the contractors.

Embassy officials are known to think that the embassy, as the ranking civilian authority, should now exercise control. But there are indications that the Defense Department will try to keep its own control.

Last week, for example, a civilian dispatched by the Pentagon, Wilfred J. Curley, arrived in Saigon to take over the Army Procurement Agency from its military commander. Mr. Curley will reportedly convert the agency into a putative civilian organization.

The military command turned down all requests for an interview with Mr. Curley, on the ground that he was too busy "working out new contracts."

A.I.D. to Stay on Job

In addition to the civilian contractors, there will also be about 1,000 members of the Agency for International Development, known here as USAID, and perhaps several hundred military attachés left in Vietnam after the peace accord is signed, knowledgeable sources say.

USAID has 997 American employes in South Vietnam today, down from a high of 2,700 four years ago.

The quasi-military agency in charge of the pacification program—known as CORDS for Civil Operations and Rural Development Support—will have to be phased out in its present form, since a majority of its 1,500 members are army personnel. But CORDS officials say they will probably preserve province advisory teams minus their army members.

The commissary, with its American food and liquor, will be kept open by turning it over to a civilian contractor, officials say. But the post exchange, long the chief supplier of Vietnam's flourishing black market, may have to go.