

NO CUT NOW SEEN IN U.S. ASIAN UNITS

Present Strength of 185,000
Expected to Hold to '77

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WASHINGTON, March 1 — United States forces in East Asia and the Pacific will remain near their present size of about 185,000 troops over the next three years, according to a senior Pentagon official and senior foreign-policy officials.

This figure represents to the Nixon Administration a balance point between the Nixon doctrine position that other nations should do more to help themselves, and the necessity in an age of nuclear parity to maintain nonnuclear force levels and military preparedness.

The theory behind this policy is that since nuclear equality between the Soviet Union and the United States makes nuclear war unlikely, the chance is increased that some nation might try to take advantage of its military superiority to launch a conventional attack.

In interviews these officials said that while the governments of Thailand and Japan understand this policy and agree with it, often they hint publicly about wanting withdrawals of American forces.

"What these governments sometimes say to their own people about wanting American forces out and what they say to us in private communications tell a very different story," one official said.

Testifying yesterday before the House Appropriations Committee, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger said that the major reason for keeping American forces in Asia at about their present size "lies under the heading of political rather than military considerations."

Mr. Schlesinger suggested, as have other officials in the past, that the Chinese were no longer interested in seeing United States troops leave the region, viewing them as a counterpoise to the Soviet presence in the area.

Different Views on Asia

Beyond a common position on these points, there seems to be little agreement between the Pentagon and the State Department on what Washington should be doing in Asia.

The senior Pentagon official implied that he hoped and said that he expected Japan to increase her military spending and join with China in opposing the Soviet Union in Asia. He said:

"Japan is the key to American interests in Asia and the key alternative to more American forces in the area. You will see the Japanese rethink their entire self-defense program—not only in the highest political levels, but throughout their whole political sector."

"Japan is under pressures little understood in the United States. The Middle East war and the oil embargo have affected her in an economic sense significantly. The Japanese found suddenly and unexpectedly that they were bitten in a vulnerable place—in their lines of communication."

'Had Best of Both Worlds'

He was referring to the fact that Japan imported almost all her oil from the Middle East and her raw materials from other nations. The bulk of these imports come by ship. This exposes Japanese shipping, he explained, to interception by China or the Soviet Union. Japan, he suggested, cannot afford to accept this dependence and is trying to protect herself.

"They've had the best of both worlds for a long time," he continued. "The United States

nuclear umbrella has given them a sense of security without their having to pay the price, and they diverted the difference into their private sector and became prosperous."

He added: "Japan will have to carry a bigger load in defense. What form it will take and what rationale will be given will depend on their own governmental processes."

Responding to a question about the reaction in Seoul to any Japanese military build-up, he said: "the relationship between Japan and South Korea will evolve and take natural roots. 'And we will stay in Korea, too.'" He added:

"Japan will have to make an accommodation with China, which is building up its naval and submarine forces. For both China and Japan, the Soviets are the real threat."

A Very Different View

Ranking American foreign-policy officials saw these issues very differently. In interviews, they argued that Japan's reaction to the Middle East war was not panicky, and that the Japanese impulse in reacting to an economic shock is to opt for international cooperation.

One official said: "Just look at the role they played at the energy conference in Washing-

ton; they see the problem the way we do, not in military terms."

The foreign-policy officials went on to say that there was no evidence that Japan was rethinking her defense posture. One official explained that "Japan's new defense plan even cuts back slightly on military spending."

The Japanese, he continued, "see no current major threat from China or Russia; their defense plan is geared to internal control and to air and naval defense of their homeland."

This, another official said, "is the only politically viable approach Tokyo feels it can take at the present time, and the Japanese Government sees cooperation with Washington as the best answer to meet its military vulnerability."

These officials do not believe that South Korea would look kindly on a Japanese force build-up, or that Japan and China would jointly move in opposition to the Soviet Union.

On American forces in Asia and the western Pacific, the senior Pentagon official said: "We will draw down more forces from Thailand as part of an over-all redistribution in the area, but the net effect will not significantly change from where we are now."