

Editorial

The Fall-Back Plan.....

Those of us on Guam who depend upon the U.S. military, either for our jobs, or in our businesses, or in tax support (GovGuam for instance) can be pretty well assured that the U.S. military forces in East Asia and the Pacific will remain at pretty much the same level for the next three years--barring, of course, some unforeseen circumstance.

An unnamed Senior Pentagon official recently disclosed that present U.S. forces in Asia and the Pacific total about 185,000, excluding those on Guam. The distribution breaks down as follows: 35,000 in Thailand, 56,000 in Japan (and Okinawa), 14,000 in the Philippines, 42,000 in South Korea, 8,000 in Taiwan, and 29,000 on ships afloat. It might be interesting to note that this is about the same total for this area as at the beginning of 1965, before the American build-up began in Vietnam.

This does not mean that there won't be a distribution of some of these forces within the area. Some Pentagon officials indicated that most of the American troops that would be withdrawn from Thailand or Taiwan would be located in the Philippines or Guam, and possibly, towards the end of that three year period, on Tinian. Some forces will be sent back to the mainland and disbanded.

The troop figure of roughly over 200,000 total represents to the Nixon administration as a balance point between the Nixon Doctrine (the Guam Doctrine) 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, the experts says, is that since nuclear equality between the Soviet Union and 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.

This is not to say that Guam might not be a recipient of more military forces than we now have. The Pentagon officials admit that some withdrawals are likely from Taiwan and Thailand, and say that their likely destination is Guam or the Philippines. Rear Admiral G. Steve Morrison told a Guam economic conference not long ago that he anticipated an eight percent average increase in men. There are more military houses being planned for Guam than any spot in the world, according to an article in the Congressional Record.

From the standpoint of pure economics, all of this can't hurt Guam, what with the Department of Defense spending in excess of \$200,000,000 on this island last year. It seems likely that level will be fairly constant, or expanded. The cost of building the planned 1,100 homes alone would be in the \$25,000,000 to \$40,000,000 area.

Not all of the governments in Asia are so enthusiastic about retaining the American troop level. Periodically, the Japanese, or officials of the Philippines, or Thailand will make public statements about wanting the withdrawals of American forces, while privately conceding that the policy is acceptable.

Testifying several weeks ago 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."

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

Actually, there is a considerable difference of opinion in the Pentagon as to why U.S. troops are being kept in Asia, and the Pacific. Beyond that, there is a vast difference among the countries themselves, as to why U.S. troops are stationed there. Both in South Korea and Taiwan, the presence of American troops is a symbolic thing, insuring them against an attack by their natural enemies. In Thailand and the Philippines the presence of American troops isn't heralded that way at all, but instead, as a necessary economic blessing, and secondly as a safeguard against internal strife.

Japan is still different. Some Pentagon officials hope that Japan would increase her military spending. One senior official 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." He said that the Japanese have had the best of two worlds for a long time, with the U.S. nuclear umbrella giving them a sense of security without their having to pay the price--and they diverted the difference into their private sector and became prosperous.

But on the other hand there remain many military strategists that, as a result of the last war, still don't trust the Japanese, and aren't eager to see them re-arm. Most of the Japanese see no current threat from either China or Russia; their defense plan is geared to internal control and to air and naval defense of their homeland. The Japanese government sees cooperation with Washington as the best answer to meet its military vulnerability.

The only really significant statement coming out of the Pentagon 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."

So, the end result is plain. There is still a fall-back plan. Fall-back from Taiwan, Thailand, and to a lesser degree from South Korea, and Okinawa. Quite obviously, Guam, and perhaps some of the islands of the Trust Territory, such as Tinian, will become more important militarily in the future, instead of less. JCM.

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