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027-093

President Nixon's Military Reappraisal

By JAMES RESTON

The really important thing in Washington today is not what President Nixon has said on television about his European tour, but what he has done privately to bring about a fundamental reappraisal of America's military expenditures, manpower and bases overseas.

Before he went to Europe, President Nixon ordered a review of the nation's world strategy, its security policies and priorities—and this is now going forward quietly under the direction of Secretary of State Rogers, Deputy Secretary of Defense David R. Packard, and Mr. Nixon's White House security aide, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger.

The questions before these men and their aides make the present publicity about the European trip sound like a series of diplomatic and social notes.

Nixon's Questions

How, Mr. Nixon is asking his aides, can the nation get enough funds to deal with its social and economic problems at home unless it can get an accommodation on Vietnam, a safe reduction in the military budget, and an arms control arrange-

ment with the Soviet Union?

Even if it cannot get an honorable peace in Vietnam and a military arms agreement with Moscow, can it not make substantial savings on military men and bases overseas without taking unacceptable military risks?

Difference of Opinion

There has been a fundamental difference of opinion about these questions for years—the argument over the vast costs of the antiballistic missile system is only the latest case in point—and it still exists under President Nixon. The new point is that Mr. Nixon is forcing a major review of the big questions, and insisting that, even if those questions about ending the Vietnam war and reaching an agreement with the Soviets on the control of military arms cannot be resolved, it is still important to eliminate unnecessary overseas military manpower and bases.

This has been obvious for a long time. The United States now has about 3,450,000 men under arms. About half of them—a little more than 1.5 million—are overseas: in the Vietnam war area, about 616,000; in the support-areas of Okinawa, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Guam and the

other Pacific Islands, about 280,000 men; and in Europe, more than 320,000, about 250,000 of them in Germany.

But outside these critical areas, including the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, there are literally hundreds of bases which were important and even essential ten or fifteen years ago and go on using men and money though the reasons for their existence no longer exist.

A great many of these bases were created to deal with international political problems and technological requirements of 20 years ago, most of them connected with the limitations of airplanes of that period. For example, Washington needed the Azores as a ferry base in the last war for aircraft of limited range; it needs the Azores no longer, but the old arrangements go on.

Technological Changes

The U.S. needed the nuclear submarine and aircraft bases in the Iberian peninsula when it had missiles of a range limited to about 1,200 miles, but as it brought in new and longer-range missiles, the problem of the Spanish bases changed.

Similarly, Washington has a communications system today based on the technology of a

decade or two ago. Now, for its open propaganda and its sophisticated secret communications with their codes and "scramblers," it can send stronger signals on more modern equipment much farther than before. It no longer needs the same network of bases, all of which, incidentally, create political problems.

The Obsolete Bases

Yet most of these obsolete or obsolescent bases go on, costing money and in many places creating resentment. The most dramatic of these now are in Spain, where the Franco Government is trying to prove that U.S. bases there are not only essential but more valuable to us than ever before, whereas modern submarine, missile and communications technology has reduced their former utility.

This is the sort of thing the European and Asian Ambassadors in Washington are really interested in this week. No doubt they watched President Nixon's report on the European trip, but it is the movement of American policy and power and technology that really commands their attention, for they are interested in what he will do with power in the future, rather than in what he did with words in Europe last week.