
Defense Report

AUSA



The Western Pacific—A Forgotten Frontier

It is difficult to say which came first, the ascendancy of United States' concern over European affairs and the accompanying shift of U.S. military effort in that direction or the decline in the size of the U.S. armed forces which forced a decision to favor one geographical area at the expense of the other. But whatever the scenario may have been, the statistics speak for themselves: There are six United States Army divisions or equivalents deployed in Europe and just two in the Pacific; there are seven U.S. Navy aircraft carriers and 77 surface combatant ships deployed in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean while only two carriers and 19 surface combatants are deployed in the far Pacific, and; there are 28 Air Force fighter squadrons deployed in Europe while just 10 are dotted at bases in the Philippines, Okinawa, Japan and Korea.

This imbalance has recently been accentuated by statements from the U. S. Pacific Command that if a war were to break out in Europe and existing plans were carried out to strip Pacific forces even further to bolster those in Europe, there would be no way to safeguard vital supply lines across the Pacific. Those trans-Pacific supply lines would be critical to the United States if a European war blocked the lines across the Atlantic.

It is inconceivable that the Soviet Union, our potential adversary in Europe, would launch an attack there then give the United States and its allies free rein in the Pacific. This conclusion is bolstered by the growth of the Soviet Pacific fleet which now has 70 major surface combatant ships and 75 attack submarines (almost as many as the entire United States Navy). This is a force designed specifically to cut the shipping lanes across the Pacific. And, contrary to the situation that exists in the Atlantic, the United States could expect very little in the way of help from allies in a campaign to keep supplies flowing across the Pacific. Britain and France now maintain only token forces there and the navies of the Republic of China (Taiwan), Japan and Korea cannot range much beyond their coastal waters.

The recent political unrest in Korea has slowed Carter Administration plans to proceed with the next increment of U.S. troop withdrawals from that threatened country. Also, the growing truculence and burgeoning war-making strength of Communist North Korea, indicates a need to strengthen our presence in Northeast Asia, not weaken it.

The security of Western Europe is unquestionably vital to the United States but, in its own way, control of the Pacific will contribute immeasurably to our successful defense of Europe. We must provide for a better balance of effort between the two areas.