

What Does Moving American Troops Out Of Germany Mean

BERLIN — After more than a year of thinly-veiled threats to start pulling U.S. troops out of Germany unless Berlin increases its defense spending, President Donald Trump appears to be proceeding with a hardball approach, planning to cut the U.S. military contingent by more than 25%. About 34,500 American troops are stationed in Germany — 50,000 including civilian Department of Defense employees — and the plan Trump reportedly signed off on last week envisions reducing active-duty personnel to 25,000 by September, with further cuts possible. But as details of the still-unannounced plan trickle out, there's growing concerns it will do more to harm the U.S.'s own global military readiness and the NATO alliance than punish Germany.

The decision was not discussed with Germany or other NATO members, and Congress was not officially informed — prompting a letter from 22 Republican members of the House Armed Services Committee urging a rethink.

“The threats posed by Russia have not lessened, and we believe that signs of a weakened U.S. commitment to NATO will encourage further Russian aggression and opportunism,” Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas wrote in a letter to Trump with his colleagues. Sen. Jack Reed, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, slammed Trump’s move as “another favor” to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But Richard Grenell, who resigned as U.S. ambassador to Germany two weeks ago, told Germany's Bild newspaper that “nobody should be surprised that Donald Trump is withdrawing troops.” Grenell, who declined to comment for this article, said he and others had been pushing for Germany to increase its defense spending and had talked about troop withdrawals since last summer.

“Donald Trump was very clear we want to bring troops home,” he said, adding: “there’s still going to be 25,000 American troops in Germany.”

*“The suggestion that removing troops **will punish Germany**, however, overlooks the fact that **American troops are no longer primarily there for the country’s defense**,” said retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, who commanded U.S. Army Europe from 2014 until 2017. Gone are the days when hundreds of thousands of American troops were ready to fight in the streets of Berlin or rush into the strategic Fulda Gap, through which Soviet armor was poised to push into West Germany during the Cold War. *“The troops and capabilities that the U.S. has deployed in Europe are not there to specifically defend Germany, they are part of our contribution to overall collective stability and security in Europe,”* said Hodges, now a strategic expert with the Center for European Policy Analysis, a Washington-based institute.*

American facilities include Ramstein Air Base, a critical hub for operations in the Mideast and Africa and headquarters to the U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa; the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, which has saved the lives of countless Americans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan; and the Stuttgart headquarters of both the U.S. European Command and the U.S. Africa Command. There's also the Wiesbaden headquarters of U.S. Army Europe, the Spangdahlem F-16 fighter base and the Grafenwoehr Training Area, NATO's largest training facility in Europe.

Hodges said the facilities are a critical part of America's global military footprint.

“What’s lost in all this is the benefit to the United States of having forward deployed capabilities that we can use not only for deterrence ... but for employment elsewhere,” he said. *“The base in Ramstein is not there for the U.S. to defend Europe. It’s there as a forward base for us to be able to fly into Africa, the Middle East.”*

Trump indicated last summer that he was thinking of **moving some troops from Germany to Poland**, telling Poland's President Andrzej Duda during an Oval Office meeting: *“Germany is not living up to what they’re supposed to be doing with respect to NATO, and Poland is.”* **Duda has been trying to woo more American forces, even suggesting Poland would contribute over \$2 billion to create a permanent U.S. base — which he said could be named “Fort Trump.”** In the current plan, at least some Germany-based troops are expected to be shifted to Poland.

Following Trump's comments last June, U.S. Ambassador to Poland Georgette Mosbacher tweeted Aug. 8 that **"Poland meets its 2% of GDP spending obligation towards NATO. Germany does not. We would welcome American troops in Germany to come to Poland."**

Grenell then tweeted: ***"it is offensive to assume that the U.S. taxpayers will continue to pay for more than 50,000 Americans in #Germany, but the Germans get to spend their surplus on #domestic programs."***

In response, Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated Germany's commitment to "work toward" the 2% NATO defense spending benchmark — *a goal it hopes to meet in 2031.*

"There is a lot invested here, and I think that we, in very friendly talks, will naturally always continue to heartily welcome these American soldiers, and there are also good reasons for them to be stationed here," she said.



In this Dec. 4, 2019, file photo President Donald Trump meets with German Chancellor Angela Merkel during the NATO summit at The Grove in Watford, England. (Evan Vucci/AP)

NATO members agreed at a 2014 summit to "aim to move toward" spending 2% of GDP on defense. Since then, the year Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, overall NATO defense spending has grown annually. Since his election in 2016, Trump has pushed for the 2% as a hard target, and repeatedly singled out Germany as a major offender, though many others are also below the goal.

NATO figures put Germany's estimated defense spending for 2019 at 1.4%, and Poland's at 2%. In dollar terms, however, Germany committed nearly \$54 billion last year — NATO's third-largest budget after the U.S. and Britain — while Poland spent slightly less than \$12 billion.

Germany does need to spend more, Hodges said, but U.S. and NATO interests would be better served if Washington pushed Berlin to spend on broader military needs, like transportation infrastructure, cyber protection and air defense, that would be easier for Merkel's government to justify to a largely pacifist population. *"We don't need more German tanks, we need more German trains,"* he said. *"Why not be a little bit more strategic and think about what the alliance really needs from Germany?"*

More to read underneath:

Trump orders massive cut to US troop numbers in Germany

The U.S. military will reduce its footprint in Germany by nearly one-third after President Donald Trump ordered a dramatic drawdown in force levels from the key NATO ally, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday. The newspaper cited White House officials who said the move was outlined in a memorandum signed White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien in recent days that has still not been made public yet. Under the order, U.S. troop presence in Germany would drop by 9,500 service members, from 34,500 today to about 25,000.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the administration will also cap the number of total troops in the country at 25,000, creating a potential logistics problem for the military. The total personnel presence can swell to

double that number or more as units process through major bases in Germany for deployment across the globe.

Officials from the White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment from Military Times. Officials from U.S. European Command deferred comment to the Pentagon. The Pentagon deferred questions to the National Security Council.

Trump for years has lamented the cost of housing U.S. troops at overseas bases, even as Pentagon leaders have emphasized the strategic value of such arrangements and the costs shouldered by U.S. allies.

No information was released on what units currently stationed in Germany could be affected by the move.

In recent months, Trump has also suggested he wants to dramatically reduce the U.S. footprint in South Korea and insisted that government leaders there pay more for the privilege of housing American military forces.

Trump has long fought with Germany and other NATO allies over their future commitments to defense spending, saying that the United States has unfairly covered too much of the global cost of providing security in Europe.

Plan to pull American troops from Germany worries US lawmakers

A key House ally of President Donald Trump and other congressional lawmakers criticized reported White House plans to withdraw thousands of U.S. service members from Germany, calling it a short-sighted decision which will hurt military readiness.

This is a dangerously misguided policy,” Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., and third-ranking Republican in the House, said in a statement over the weekend. “If the United States abandons allies, withdraws our forces and retreats within our borders, the cause of freedom — on which our nation was founded & our security depends — will be in peril.”

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NATO chief backs Germany’s vow to keep war-ready US nukes

COLOGNE, Germany — NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has waded into Germany’s fiery debate about the decades-old pledge to retain American atomic bombs in the European nation as a way of deterring Russia.

Stoltenberg argued that only sticking to the doctrine of “nuclear sharing” would ensure Berlin’s continued seat at the table of strategic decision-making within the alliance.

“NATO’s nuclear sharing is a multilateral arrangement that ensures the benefits, responsibilities and risks of nuclear deterrence are shared among allies,” he wrote in an op-ed first posted on the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung website. “Politically, this is significant. It means that participating allies, like Germany, make joint decisions on nuclear policy and planning, and maintain appropriate equipment.”

The policy prescribes that a smattering of countries in Europe that don't possess atomic weapons will host such arms on their territory and maintain the means to deploy them. In the case of Germany, there are 20 B61 bombs reportedly stored at Büchel Air Base in western Germany's state of Rhineland-Palatinate. If called upon, German Tornado pilots would fly the weapons into enemy territory and toss them at the targets in a lofting maneuver, releasing them during a sharp upward and backward turn to maximize bomb airtime. Debate has flared up in recent weeks about Germany's nuclear role, following the German Defence Ministry's recommendation to purchase 30 F-18s for the job, as the Tornado fighter jets are expected to reach the end of their useful life by 2030.

Led by Rolf Mützenich, the chairman of the Social Democrats in parliament, a group within the governing coalition's junior party want to exit the NATO atomic arrangement, arguing that deal, too, has outlived its usefulness.

Not so, argues Stoltenberg.

"While NATO views its own nuclear deterrent primarily as a political tool, Russia has firmly integrated its nuclear arsenal into its military strategy," Stoltenberg wrote. "It has placed nuclear-capable missiles in Kaliningrad, just 500 km from Berlin. It has threatened allies such as Denmark, Poland and Romania with nuclear strikes. Russia also forcibly and illegally annexed part of Ukraine, a country whose borders it had previously committed to respect in return for Ukraine giving up its own nuclear protection."

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Germany's defense minister and chief of the Christian Democrats, also cited lingering geopolitical tensions as an argument for keeping U.S. nukes in the country.

"As long as there are nuclear-weapons states who don't want to be part of our community of values, we need a strong negotiating position," she said last week, as reported by Die Zeit. "The deterrence capability of the nuclear-sharing arrangement serves that purpose. Those who want to give it up are weakening our security." To the uninitiated, the mere act of absorbing the nuclear debate here could seem like an acid trip through the various stages of Germany's coming of age since the Cold War. It is easy to get lost in the details. The intricacies to be considered touch on anything from certifying new jets for nuclear missions, the folly of attempting an atomic bomb run with a manned fighter jet in the first place, or the deterrence value of B61 bombs in Europe when other classes of weapons would breathe much more destructive fire over the continent. Perhaps that is why symbolic arguments aimed at preserving NATO cohesion appear to have the upper hand among Germany's decision-makers for now.

Or as Stoltenberg put it: "All allies have agreed that as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance."

With the Germany withdrawal, Poland is set to be hosting a lot more US troops

Meghann Myers, Kyle Rempfer
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The American military's presence in Europe is shifting eastward, the Defense Department has confirmed, as a new agreement with Poland sets up a host of construction projects designed to support more U.S. troops in that country.

In addition to the 4,500 troops that currently rotate from the U.S., "Poland has agreed to fund infrastructure and logistical support to U.S. forces," Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Tom Campbell told Military Times.

[An increase of 1,000 rotational troops](#) is also still on tap.

The plan is part of an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement completed Monday and awaiting signatures. "Alongside the recently announced European strategic force posture changes, the EDCA will enhance deterrence against Russia, strengthen NATO, reassure our Allies, and our forward presence in Poland on NATO's eastern flank will improve our strategic and operational flexibility," Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in a statement.

Infrastructure projects will include

- A V Corps forward command post.

- A forward division headquarters
- Several combat training centers, starting with Drawsko and Pomorskie.
- An Air Force MQ-9 squadron.
- An aerial port of debarkation for loading and unloading troops and equipment.
- An area support group.
- A special operations forces facility to support air, ground and maritime operations.
- Facilities for a armored brigade combat team, a combat aviation brigade and a combat sustainment support battalion.

The Army's V Corps had been deactivated since 2013, but the service announced it would stand the organization back up earlier this year. On Tuesday, that plan fleshed out. About 630 soldiers will be assigned to V Corps, 200 of whom will man the Poland outpost. The rest will remain at Fort Knox, Kentucky. 630 soldiers assigned to its main headquarters at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and another 200 rotating through the Poland outpost.

An Army Europe official told Army Times the service is still "unaware of the exact location" that V Corps will be set up in the country, and could "only confirm that it will be in Poland." V Corps had previously been based in Germany.

The first command post rotation is expected to start in fiscal year 2021. V Corps' primary mission will be operational planning, mission command and oversight of the rotational forces in Europe.

"The activation of an additional Corps headquarters provides the needed level of command and control focused on synchronizing U.S. Army, allied, and partner nation tactical formations operating in Europe," Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said in a statement.

[Army's resurrected V Corps will go to Poland](#)

The plan builds off of talks a year ago about cost-sharing with Poland to fund a greater U.S. troop presence, as it keeps an eye on deterring Russian incursion.

Last June, President Donald Trump announced a 1,000-troop plus-up, largely from a division headquarters rotation and the addition of the MQ-9 Reaper squadron, but stopped short of unveiling a rumored "Fort Trump," or another standalone U.S. base in Poland.

When Esper announced a plan July 29 to [withdraw just under 12,000 troops from Germany](#) and partially redistribute them around Europe, he alluded to co-locating some of those troops in existing European countries' facilities, including in Belgium and Italy. That would include these new projects in Poland, which will house U.S. troops on Polish bases.

Esper presented the plan as a re-balancing, as post-Cold War Europe has shifted NATO's border with Russia eastward.

Trump, meanwhile, has characterized [withdrawing troops from Germany as a direct rebuke](#), in response to the country not meeting its goal of contributing 2 percent of its gross domestic product to NATO, a goal the organizations set for itself by 2024.

"Germany is not paying their bills," Trump told reporters July 29. "They're delinquent. It's simple."

Poland is one of the minority of NATO countries who meets that spending benchmark.

While about 5,600 troops will shift from Germany to other parts of Europe, another 5,300 will head back to the U.S., then potentially move into the pipeline for rotational deployments back to Eastern Europe.

Since 2016, the Army has been rotating an armored brigade combat team to Europe. While much of that deployment includes Poland, exercises and engagements with partner forces have seen American troops moving down to Bulgaria and up to Estonia.

German defense minister: Planned US troop withdrawal 'regrettable'

The Associated Press

Germany's defense minister on Friday described the planned withdrawal of some 12,000 U.S. troops from her country as "regrettable," while suggesting it underlines the need for Europe to do more for its own security. American defense leaders said Wednesday that the U.S. will bring about 6,400 troops home and shift about 5,600 to other countries in Europe. The decision fulfills President Donald Trump's announced desire to withdraw troops from Germany, largely because of what he considers its failure to spend enough on defense. The plan, whose future is uncertain as it requires support and funding from Congress, would leave about 24,000 U.S. troops in Germany.

[AFRICOM ordered to plan move out of Germany, latest pullout from key European ally](#)

It's the latest move by President Donald Trump to pull U.S. troops and resources from a key European ally. German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer emphasized the need for more European integration in her response early Friday, and said she hopes to use Germany's current tenure of the European Union's rotating presidency to help make progress on security and defense policy.

"We are keeping German and European interests in view," she said in a statement. "The truth is that a good life in Germany and Europe depends more and more on how we ensure our security ourselves."

She added that, "as far as the regrettable plans to withdraw U.S. troops are concerned," she will invite the governors of the affected German states after the summer break to discuss how the German military can support their regions.

The German government's reaction so far to the U.S. decision has been restrained. Still, Rolf Muetzenich, a senior figure in the governing coalition's junior party, the center-left Social Democrats, suggested that "armaments cooperations will have to be evaluated in a new light."

Muetzenich, the head of the party's parliamentary group, told the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung that "capriciousness and pressure" could not be "the basis for working together in partnership."

His comments drew criticism from Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right party. Lawmaker Roderich Kiesewetter told news agency dpa that "there is no adequate and affordable replacement so far" in Europe for the U.S. defense industry's high-tech products. He argued that there also are checks and balances on Trump in the U.S.

Another lawmaker, Henning Otte, said the Social Democrats shouldn't talk up "further alienation within the alliance."

[Trump's troop drawdown from Germany will take 'years,' says Inhofe](#)

Part of the plan announced by U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper includes moving the headquarters of U.S. European Command to Mons, Belgium from Stuttgart, Germany. Esper said the Pentagon was also looking into moving U.S. Africa Command out of the German city.

Africa Command said in a statement Friday that it "has been told to plan to move" and has started doing so, though added it would "likely take several months to develop options, consider locations, and come to a decision."

Africa Command, which was established in Stuttgart in 2008 after being unable to find a location in Africa, said it would "first look at options elsewhere in Europe, but will also consider options in the United States" for its new home.