

## U.S. Troop Withdrawal From Germany: A Grave Threat To International Security

*By Emma Barska*

Global uncertainty caused by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the international socio-political, economic, and military landscapes from continuously transforming in response to decisions undertaken by key leaders. In early June, the Wall Street Journal announced that President Donald Trump signed off on a plan to withdraw almost a third of the 34,500 U.S. troops stationed in Germany by the end of September. This proposed recommendation surprised leaders and officials of both countries. As of today, the details of this plan are relatively vague. Questions such as “Where will the 9,500 troops be withdrawn from?”, “Will these troops be completely removed from the European continent or will they be relocated to another country?”, and “What type of military personnel will be affected by these changes?” remain unanswered. President Trump, who is a champion of the “America First” mentality, has long advocated for the removal of U.S. troops from foreign territories in an effort to focus national spending and attention on domestic matters. President Trump’s unexpected resolution has received mixed reviews that have not aligned themselves according to party lines. The controversial announcement transcends partisan boundaries, with both Republican and Democrat leaders alike urging the President to reconsider following through with this plan. Two contrasting perspectives have emerged either supporting President Trump’s vision or opposing the plan’s obvious global consequences. Statements made by Ian Brzeziński and Dr. Łucja Cannon serve as good representations of each side of this multifaceted debate. Mr. Brzeziński argues that this is a reckless decision, while Dr. Cannon supports the plan in its early stages. While I agree with Mr. Brzeziński’s points, I will also be reviewing, considering, and countering Dr. Cannon’s arguments in order to understand the implications of this proposed action.

According to Mr. Brzeziński, President Trump’s decision is irresponsible as it will have several global repercussions. It is critical to recognize that the purpose of the U.S. troops stationed in Germany is to protect all NATO signatories, not just Germany. NATO in its entirety will feel the impacts of this resolution because countries who are members of NATO all equally benefit from U.S. participation and the associated protection. U.S. forces throughout Germany represent the United States’ contribution to NATO and motivate other NATO countries to maintain their involvement. More specifically, U.S. military forces are in Germany to deter Russia and are a means of projecting power into the Middle East and North Africa if a show of force is required. President Trump’s plan strains U.S. relations with some of its allies, especially those that are associated with NATO, such as Germany and France. However, there is one confirmed party that will benefit from the proposed actions - Russia. President Vladimir Putin would like to see a reduction in U.S. military presence in Europe. He will most definitely be emboldened by this move proposed by the Trump Administration as it will allow him to further the foreign policy goals that he has successfully been reaching since 2012. Contemporary Russian foreign policy is incredibly ambitious in terms of its geographic scope. Additionally, over the course of the last decade, Russia has proved to global onlookers that it is not fazed by taking insurmountable risks and is committed to challenging the current world order. Guided by the action, or sometimes inaction, of global leaders and organizations, Russia has managed to find legal loopholes and outmaneuver international agreements. This nation has taken advantage of global discourse and a fractured alliance system to further its expansionist vision and steadily chip away at the U.S.-led

international hierarchy. If the U.S. lets its guard down, even in a symbolic manner, Russian forces will be enabled to move forward with their objectives. It is important to note that Russia has made no declarations or taken no actionable steps that would indicate that a reduced U.S. military presence in Europe is warranted. If anything, events between 2012 and the present justify increased vigilance and international cooperation. Additionally, the U.S. has invested significant capital into creating military bases and infrastructure in Germany that are designed for the current number of troops. Even if the U.S. could remove all of its targeted military personnel by the end of September to reach its numerical goals, which is rather unrealistic given the global pandemic, the established system could suffer due to staff reductions.

In her article, Dr. Cannon argues that Trump's decision to withdraw troops is one based on fiscal reasons. Acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell has repeatedly stated that the U.S. is providing the bulk of NATO reinforcements, while rich countries like Germany have still not reached the benchmark of dedicating 2% of its GDP towards military spending. Currently, Germany is dedicating 1.3% of its GDP for its defense, however, it will not reach the 2% minimum until at least 2030. Grenell and the Trump Administration expressed that this progression demonstrates Germany's loose commitment to the military cause while the country continues to benefit from U.S. military protection. Although Germany has not yet satisfied the aforementioned benchmark, it has continued to increase its military spending by 10% each year, demonstrating that it is determined to meet the NATO minimum. By withdrawing troops from Germany to punish it for not meeting the NATO spending standard, the U.S. would also hurt European countries that have satisfied this requirement. NATO is an organization based on collective responsibility – when one country makes a radical decision, it will most likely affect other signatories. Dr. Cannon also asserts that these troops can be moved to other locations in Europe that would benefit significantly from their presence, such as Poland. However, the Trump Administration has never stated that the withdrawn troops will be reallocated. While it is true that the socio-political landscape has changed significantly since the establishment of U.S. forces in Germany, direct transfers have not been discussed and thus far must be classified as speculations rather than facts. Dr. Cannon's identification of Trump's decision as a "timely readjustment" is based on wishful thinking instead of confirmed actions. There have indeed been conversations and signed agreements between the U.S. and Poland about increasing U.S. military presence in the eastern front of NATO, however, no commitments have been made that these troops will simply be transferred from Germany to Poland. Furthermore, Dr. Cannon cites energy and natural resource disagreements in Europe as a credible basis for withdrawing troops due to a "major breach in alliance solidarity." However, business between Russia and Germany does not justify the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Europe, as this move could potentially threaten international security.

While these two perspectives differ greatly, they agree on one thing - complete removal of the U.S. military from Europe should not be considered by President Trump. Dr. Cannon maintains that U.S. troops are needed in countries that are currently serving as the first front against possible Russian aggression, such as Poland. However, removing U.S. troops from Germany and permanently placing them in Poland would directly violate the 1997 "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation." Also referred to as the NATO-Russia Founding Act, this document states that "...in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than

by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.” This crucial provision of the Act prohibits the permanent installment of NATO soldiers on the territory of former Warsaw Pact countries that, in 1997, had the potential to become new NATO members. Currently, in order to comply with the NATO-Russia Founding Act, troops from the United States and Western Europe continuously rotate in-and-out of Poland every 90 days, increasing the mobility of NATO forces. Therefore, the establishment of a permanent NATO base in Poland partly manned by U.S. soldiers transferred from Germany would contravene the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Different options can be considered in the future, but for the time being, it is critical that the U.S. continues to bolster NATO rather than clearing the way for President Putin’s ambitions. I fully agree with Mr. Brzeziński’s argument and believe that President Trump should be discouraged from taking further steps in this dangerous direction. Otherwise, the world may face yet another crisis that will leave our societies in a perpetual state of instability.

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