

## Trump's Troop Move Has Unclear Consequences on U.S. Position in Europe

By Maria Armstrong

President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Germany has brought about varied responses as to the strategic logic and potential impact of the move. Support for the decision has been expressed by Lucja Cannon who sees this as a positive change in strategy aimed at a fairer share of responsibility held by the U.S. in NATO. On the other hand, condemnation of President Trump's decision has been voiced by Ian Brzeziński, who believes this decision will reduce U.S. influence in Europe and increase Europe's vulnerability.

In her article "Troop Pullout from Germany is a Timely Readjustment", Cannon argues that Trump's decision to remove troops from Germany should not be seen as a setback for NATO, rather as a change in strategy. She defends Trump's decision on the reason stated by him, that the U.S. currently carries a "disproportionate share of NATO's burden". Cannon further expresses her support for the decision as there is an expectation that these troops will be relocated to Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, where they are "urgently needed".

In contrast, Brzeziński has denounced the President's decision for troop withdrawal as he feels this move will weaken the security of NATO border states and decrease U.S. influence in Europe yielding space for Russian influence. Brzeziński not only stresses that this move will decrease U.S. influence in Europe, but it will also "weaken US global force posture" (Source: Twitter).

Though at first glance, both Cannon and Brzeziński make convincing arguments for and against President Trump's choice, the questions left unanswered about the impact of the troop withdrawal leave Brzeziński's assessment of the decision as the more pragmatic response. Cannon's response though compelling, takes a very optimistic view on the outcome of the troop withdrawal and the positive outcome of where the troops removed from Germany will be reassigned.

The disapproval that has arisen from Brzeziński and bipartisan congressional opposition against this move can be seen as mostly stemming from two main concerns: vulnerability of Europe's NATO members and a potential for decrease in U.S. influence in the region. It can be seen that concerns brought about by Brzeziński appear valid as the weakening of the strong U.S. presence and base in Germany does not seem to be a strategic move. The downsizing of the key operational bases for Eurasia in Germany does hold a significant threat of decrease of U.S. influence in Europe replaced by increased Russian influence and a security threat to frontline NATO states.

The unclear plan for where the troops withdrawn from Germany will be stationed leaves many concerned. Though optimists such as Cannon feel that the expectation is that a significant number of troops will be sent to the borderline NATO nations in Eastern Europe, there has been little indication given that more than a symbolic number of troops will be sent to countries such as Poland. For example, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, the Wall Street Journal reported that an additional 200 U.S. troops will be sent to Poland on a rotational basis, rather than on a permanent deployment. Though promises have been made by President Trump in regard to deployment of more troops to Poland specifically, there have been few official plans announced made to that effect.

Furthermore, the official reason behind the move referred to by Trump is that it would be a means through which to call out Germany for spending less than the agreed upon 2% GDP on defense as agreed upon by all NATO members. Cannon defends this reasoning in her concurring analysis that the U.S. carries an unequal burden in NATO and in pushing a narrative claiming Germany is shifting more towards Russia and away from the U.S. On top of this, CNN has reported that two countries which are to receive troops from Germany, Italy and Belgium, have spent an even smaller percentage on defense, respectively 1.22% and 0.93%, than Germany. Therefore, the motivation behind Trump's decision could potentially be seen more of a result of him being at increasing odds with German Chancellor Merkel and aimed at sending a message to Germany, rather than an effective strategic move as Cannon suggests.

To conclude, it can be seen that the potential negative impact the withdrawal may have on the U.S. and NATO does not seem to be a proportional risk to take in regard to minor disagreements between Chancellor Merkel and President Trump. As Brzeziński has pointed out, reductions to bases in Germany would reduce U.S. ability to complete military efforts in the Eurasian region. Therefore, though Cannon presents a hopeful picture of the outcome, it is unlikely that either frontline NATO states or the U.S. will benefit from this significant troop withdrawal.

#### Sources:

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